

## **Chainsaws, Planes and Komodo Dragons GLOBALISATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ruth Valerio

**["Occasional tractor sound apart, the countryside was silent, if in this silence you include, as I do, the irregular calling of farm animals, the singing of the birds and the hum of insects. It was unimaginable then that I was to witness the end of quiet and the dimming of the starry firmament. Half a century later, millions of cars, lawn-mowers, strimmers, chain saws and aeroplanes have seen off the silence, just as street lights have become the enemy of the stars". (Gerard Morgan-Grenville)]**

A few years ago I went to Indonesia to visit my brother who was living there. We went travelling across the Indonesian islands; a wonderful adventure seeing Komodo dragons, riding on horse-drawn carts, snorkelling off untourised islands, watching dolphins jump... . One of my most vivid memories was crossing from one island to another on a local boat. There were quite a few bins which people diligently used. As we drew near to the shore, I leant over the side of the boat to take in the view: stunning white beach, clear blue coralled sea, coconut palms lining the beach and watched as, to my horror, the crew took all the bins and one-by-one tipped their contents into the sea!

Similar stories could be told by every reader of this book, no matter what country we come from: stories of both careless and deliberate abuse of the world in which we live. However, stories also abound of people and communities with a deep respect for God's world: stories of beauty, joy, wonder and hard work. Listen to one man's understanding:

Upon our land, our island, we are caretakers and stewards between a thousand generations. Our footprints are slow to disappear. The view of our wake, the vision back down the trail of our history, gives us a sense of where we have been and are are going. Changing conditions demand our attention or teach us hard lessons. We respond individually or as teams, all on this life raft we call Earth, our Mother. A ferry captain steers a half-mile off course so as not to frighten a flock of seabirds. A gardener takes better care of her compost pile than her jewelry. A commuter rides a bicycle, rather than foul forest-filtered breezes. We adopt streams, roads, beaches, animals, children, the less fortunate, a new attitude.<sup>1</sup>

As I write this, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development is drawing to a close and it is clear that 'a new attitude' is what is desperately needed. In this chapter we want to look at some of the negative and the positive stories that are happening today and, through those, look at the affects that globalisation is having on God's creation and what new attitude this requires of us: how this impinges on our lives and our mission as we seek to worship him.

**[Hunched over, his wiry muscles bunches on his shoulders, Nur Mohammed points out to sea, to where his house used to be – a half a mile from the shore. He sits outside the tiny shack that is now his home, on the beach at the north end of Hatiya Island, in the Bay of Bengal. "We had to move fast", he says, "It was the rainy season and the sea was rough – worse than before. There was a flood and it came quickly. We managed to save some of our things and come here".<sup>2</sup>]**

Climate change is now recognised as being the biggest threat to our world today. This is caused by the releasing of harmful gases into the atmosphere (predominantly Carbon Dioxide) when fossil fuels are burned. These greenhouse gases trap the sun's heat in the atmosphere, leading to global warming, which results in the climate changing. This is having a devastating affect on our world with floods, droughts, storms and heatwaves trebling over the last thirty years, wreaking havoc the world over. In 1998, for example, 26 million people were made homeless through flooding in Bangladesh. As temperatures rise

---

<sup>1</sup> From an interview with Gerald Elfendahl in In Praise of Island Stewards--Portraits and Views in Passing by Joel Sackett and the Association of Bainbridge Communities.

<sup>2</sup> Teartimes (Spring 2002), 4-5.

and glaciers melt, sea levels are rising around the world, threatening low-lying coastal areas. The Maldives, for example, are likely to disappear altogether.

Global warming is directly related to the high consumption of fossil fuels on the part of the richer industrial nations. Nearly everything I have done today has been reliant on fossil fuels, from having a shower to boiling a kettle, to cooking my lunch, to working here on my computer and this says nothing for that used by businesses around the world. One particular problem, directly linked to globalisation, is that of global trade and the energy used in transporting goods all around the world. For example, each kilogramme of apples from New Zealand that is imported into the UK produces its own weight in carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>3</sup> Nearly three-quarters of the energy that is used globally comes from fossil fuels (oil, coal and gas) and the rest is from nuclear, hydro and biomass. In the UK, nearly 90% of energy is from fossil fuels.

Central to the issue of climate change is oil because it is essential to agriculture, petro-chemicals and to the production of the petrol and electricity that we use. Its extraction causes environmental degradation and this only looks set to worsen as new reserves become harder to find and are opened in such fragile and beautiful places as Alaska, officially a National Wildlife Refuge.

The story of the Ogoni people in Nigeria, where Shell and others have been involved in oil extraction, is telling. Protests from the Ogoni people that their land has been ruined and their livelihoods destroyed have been met by violence from the Nigerian government. Since 1993, the Nigerian Internal Security forces have killed over a thousand Ogonis.<sup>4</sup> Oil now accounts for 80% of the country's GDP and 90% of government revenues, yet the industry only employs 2% of all Nigerians and deep corruption means that the nation as a whole does not feel the benefit of the oil money.

Because of its central place in the global economy, because we cannot survive without it, oil ("black gold") is a major factor in world politics. The Gulf War was waged mainly because of the need for the West to access Kuwait's oil<sup>5</sup> and the Global Climate Coalition has been formed by the fossil fuel companies to protect their profits and lobby against any action taken to prevent further climate change.<sup>6</sup>

**[Ruwi lives in the forests of Sumatra. Here, thousands of trees are being clear-cut by multinational forestry corporations. This ruthless exploitation is destroying the forests and the livelihoods of the forest dwellers. Ruwi is only ten, but he can still remember the awful polluting fog caused by the corporations setting fire to the forests a few years back.]<sup>7</sup>**

Deforestation is the second highest contributor to climate change, behind that of burning fossil fuels and is responsible for 20 – 30% of all carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.<sup>8</sup> Deforestation contributes to climate change through the carbon the trees absorb through photosynthesis. Infact, scientists describe rainforests as 'carbon sinks'. Thus they are one of the main ways in which carbon is absorbed out of the atmosphere. However, because they absorb so much, when forests are felled and burned, the carbon is then released back into the atmosphere (as also is nitrous oxide and ozone). Recent calculations suggest that 'frontier forests' (original forest remaining in large, relatively natural ecosystems) store more carbon than is likely to be released by burning fossil fuels and manufacturing cement over the next seventy years or so.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Go M.A.D!, 60.

<sup>4</sup> Tomorrow's World, 86.

<sup>5</sup> "New Internationalist" (335, June 2001), 12.

<sup>6</sup> One of the positive outcomes of the WSSD is that the Kyoto Protocol (the only international agreement on climate change) could be made law. By this time you read this book you will know whether or not that has happened!

<sup>7</sup> Taken from Friends of the Earth, "Earth Summit Briefing", July 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the information on the rainforests comes from Rainforest Action Network factsheets.

<sup>9</sup> World Resources Program, "Fragmenting Forests: the Loss of Large Frontier Forests", [www.earthtrends.wri.org](http://www.earthtrends.wri.org).

Rainforests are incredibly precious.<sup>10</sup> They are the earth's oldest living ecosystems: forests in Southeast Asia have existed for 70 to 100 million years. Whilst they cover a relatively small amount of land area, they house half of all the plant and animal species in the world. Still, scientists estimate that there could be as many as 30 thousand plant species yet to be discovered. They are amazingly rich in both medical and food stuffs. A quarter of the medicine we use today comes from the rainforest plants and much of our food originated in the rainforests. However, less than 1% of rainforest plants have been examined thoroughly for their chemical compounds and the genetic material from the wild strains of food is needed to keep the modern stock strong and healthy.

Despite this, they are facing intense pressure and the figures on how they are disappearing are staggering. All the primary (ie original) rainforests in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Haiti have been destroyed. 2.4 acres is destroyed every second; 149 acres every minute; 214,000 acres each day (larger than New York City) and 78 million acres each year (larger than Poland). The rainforests of the Ivory Coast have almost been completely destroyed. The Philippines lost 55% of its forests between 1960 and 1985 and, by 1985, Thailand had lost 45%.

There are five primary causes of deforestation: the demand for goods made from wood (including paper products)<sup>11</sup>; farming for beef for richer countries<sup>12</sup>; mineral and oil extraction<sup>13</sup>; hydro-electric dams (built to provide the energy for the extraction)<sup>14</sup> and subsistence farming. These have strong links to globalisation. Two things are of particular note. Firstly is the fact that all the corporations' activities in the rainforests depend on having enormous amounts of money and the World Bank and many of our national banks are involved in providing the necessary capital. Secondly, deforestation is clearly linked with issues of poverty as the uneven distribution of land and money are both caused by, and a cause of, the forests' destruction. There is a direct link between deforestation and the global structures that we saw in my chapter on globalisation and economics. David Gosling cites the example of Brazil where repayment of international debt takes place primarily through the exporting of cash crops which then leads to the inevitable clear-cutting of the forests.<sup>15</sup>

**[“Extinction is a loss of our knowledge of God – erasing his fingerprints”.  
Metropolitan Archbishop Daniel of Moldova]**

Alongside climate change, one of the most pressing concerns over deforestation is the loss of biodiversity which is resulting in an alarming rate of species extinction. There are incredibly complex systems of relationships existing in the rainforest. If just one part of that network is disrupted, the whole ecosystem is harmed and one extinction leads to another, which leads to another and so on. It is thought that 10% of the world's species could disappear within twenty-five years because of the breakdown of rainforest ecosystems.

The destruction of the rainforest is the biggest cause of species extinction, but not the only one. Intensive agriculture, commercial fishing, the car and its roads and the effects of industrial activity in general all combine to contribute to a devastating loss of the planet's ecosystems. The authoritative 2002 Red List of Threatened Species says that 11,167 creatures face extinction: this is already 121 more

---

<sup>10</sup> There are a number of different types of forest in the world: temperate forests (in northern Russia, North America, Chile and Australia), boreal forests (in the cold north of Europe and North America) and temperate rainforests (on the west coast of North America).<sup>10</sup> All of these contain huge varieties of wildlife and all are increasingly under threat from our demand for timber and the resources these forests hold. However, it is the tropical rainforests that are particularly significant.

<sup>11</sup> Britain is the fifth highest paper user in the world, despite being so small.

<sup>12</sup> In 1993 and 1994, America imported over 200 million pounds of fresh and frozen beef from Central American countries. Whether the forest is cleared for cattle grazing or for crop farming, the thin rainforest soil can only grow pasture for a few years, then forcing the cattle ranchers and farmers to move on, cutting down yet more forest.

<sup>13</sup> Mining for minerals such as aluminium and tin and oil extraction threatens large areas. BP, Chevron, Shell, Exxon, Conoco Inc and Occidental are all involved in 'exploring' different rainforest areas. The extraction leads to massive degradation and pollution, as well as effecting human rights as tribal territories are invaded.

<sup>14</sup> These dams flood big areas of forest and displace the people that lived there.

<sup>15</sup> Development Matters, 54.

species since the 2000 edition.<sup>16</sup> Incredibly, a third of the world's primate species face a serious risk of extinction.<sup>17</sup>

We will consider a fuller theological response to these issues later, but it is worth pausing now to consider the spiritual nature of species extinction. Romans 1:20 makes it clear that creation reveals the character of God.<sup>18</sup> The story of Noah is about God's saving and loving care for all living things and the purpose of including two of every living thing in the Ark was "to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth" (Gen. 7:3). Looked at it from this perspective, then, Stott is right to say that "extinction is blasphemy".

**[Arby Nia Souwailou lives in the village of Ngorfuhondu, six hours from Timbuktu, the capital of Mali. Mother to three children she has a plot of land but says that water is a real problem: "the soil is just sand. We have to buy water to cultivate it. Often the whole harvest goes on paying back the debts we've taken on to grow it. It's a vicious circle: cultivation, harvest, famine. Hunger is our daily lot".<sup>19</sup>**

**"Our most precious resources are clean air, clean water and clean soil. These are our birthright and yet they are all under threat. Those who contaminate them are our certain enemies and it is the duty of every citizen to fight them" (Gerard Morgan-Grenville)]**

One of the most devastating affects of climate change is that of drought and water is becoming one of the biggest problems facing our world and its people. Global water consumption rose sixfold between 1900 and 1995 (more than double the rate of population growth) and is continuing to grow rapidly as agricultural, industrial and domestic demand increases. Currently, 41% of the world's population (2.3 billion people) live in areas of water scarcity. Of these 2.3 billion, 1.7 people do not have the resources to tackle the shortage and the affects become severe, leading to problems with local food production and economic development. It is thought that by 2050 nearly half of the world's population (48%: 3.5 billion people) will face severe shortages.<sup>20</sup> The health implications are catastrophic while armed conflict over dwindling water resources, particularly in the Middle East, will become an increasing threat.<sup>21</sup>

As with so many environmental issues, it is the poor who suffer most, but who are least responsible for the problems.<sup>22</sup> As competition for water increases, the rich and powerful are the ones who have the most influence. One major cause of water shortages is the migration of people to the cities, leading to a demand that far outstrips supply as people desperately try to survive in slums and shanty towns. As the economic demands placed on poorer countries by the rich nations include the privatisation of public amenities, so water prices are hiked up in the cities and the needs of those in urban areas are ignored. Water problems are growing, too, because of the increasing consumption of water due to economic development and growing standards of living. The tourism industry, for example, can worsen shortages as hotels and golf-courses take the majority of water away from the local community.<sup>23</sup> Industry and agriculture consume huge amounts of water (agriculture uses 70% of the world's water). They lead to deforestation, soil erosion and water pollution, all of which exacerbate water problems.

Climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and clean water shortages are the main environmental problems facing our world today. As consumer demands increase and the volume of world trade rises so untold pressure is being put on the planet and its resources. What may not be quite so obvious is that it is the economic global structures maintained by the wealthy countries that keeps this situation as it is. Northcott makes it clear that, "the system of resource extraction in the South and capital accumulation in the North is still the basic economic context for relations between North and South" and so, "the

---

<sup>16</sup> 2002 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species ([www.redlist.org](http://www.redlist.org)).

<sup>17</sup> Conservation International and the Primate Specialist Group of the IUCN ([www.conservation.org](http://www.conservation.org)).

<sup>18</sup> See also Ps. 104 and Job 38-42.

<sup>19</sup> Teartimes (Autumn 2000), 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> C. Revenga, "Will There be Enough Water" (October 2000), [www.earthtrends.wri.org](http://www.earthtrends.wri.org).

<sup>21</sup> M. Townsend, "Who will save the world?", The Observer (18.8.02).

<sup>22</sup> The material in this paragraph is taken from Tearfund's "Water Matters" campaign material.

<sup>23</sup> On a similar note, the Sheraton hotel in Addis Ababa consumes a quarter of the entire city's electricity.

environment of indebted countries is being raided to meet payments to Western bankers under structural adjustment programmes imposed by the World Bank and the IMF".<sup>24</sup>

## Deep Magic

**["In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful that he could hardly bear it. The blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn't come out gently one by one, as they do on a summer evening. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of bright leaped out. Far away, the sky began to turn grey. A light wind, very fresh, began to stir. All the time the Voice went on singing. The eastern sky changed from white to pink and from pink to gold. The Voice rose and rose, till all the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose. And as its beams shot across the land the travellers could see for the first time what sort of place they were in. The earth was of many colours: they were fresh, hot and vivid. They made you feel excited; until you saw the Singer himself, and then you forgot everything else".<sup>25</sup>]**

Any theological reflection on the subject matter of this chapter must, inevitably, start with the story of creation because, whatever may have happened to it subsequently, Christians believe in a trinitarian God who has made the universe and the world we live in and who has declared that it is "very good".

In the chapter on economics and globalisation ("A World Gone Bananas"), we saw that our mission is defined by our being created 'in the image of God', emphasising the relationality involved in that: our relationships with God and with his creation. As I looked previously at our relationship with God's human creation, so now I want to focus on our relationship with the rest of creation. A false understanding of the word 'dominion' in Gen. 1:26<sup>26</sup>, Enlightenment values that viewed the environment as a 'resource for man' and eschatological beliefs that see the destruction of this world as part of God's end-time plans have all contributed to us missing this vital element of our identity. The reality is that we are a part of creation. Yes, we have been given a special role within that creation which is a part of our calling as the only creatures made in the image of God. But, it is an inescapable fact that we are part of the same ecosystems and structures that are formed with the rest of creation. This is readily apparent in the creation narrative of Gen. 1: 1 – 2:3 in which, contrary to popular thought, humanity is not the pinnacle of creation (although clearly a special part of it): that honour lies on the seventh day with the establishment of the Sabbath rest.

Nature, represented by the garden of Eden, was then the first place where humanity met with God<sup>27</sup> and this is something that surely resonates loudly with us today. The people of Israel certainly recognised that as they filled their temple with "reminders of the natural world"<sup>28</sup> and the Psalms are full of the praises of creation: Ps. 104 being the most obvious example. Not only are they simply reminders, however. Gunton makes the point that "the enabling of creation's praise of the creator becomes a central part of the human offering of thanks to God for his creating and redeeming love"<sup>29</sup>

However, our ability to image God perfectly was marred by the Fall in which humanity turned away from God and chose to go their own way. The Fall broke humanity's relationship with God, with each another and with the rest of creation, which would now carry within itself the curse of God as well as his

---

<sup>24</sup> Northcott, The Environment and Christian Ethics, 31, 30.

<sup>25</sup> Taken from CS Lewis, The Magician's Nephew. 'Deep magic' is what Lewis calls the mystery of the Gospel in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.

<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere in the Old Testament the idea of dominion is used of the Hebrew kings and embodies within it the idea of 'servant kingship' rather than of domination (L. Osborn, Guardians of Creation, 29).

<sup>27</sup> L. Osborn, Guardians of Creation, 92.

<sup>28</sup> Eg. Exodus 25: 31-33. Osborn, Guardians, 92.

<sup>29</sup> Gunton, Christ and Creation, 98.

blessing. The rest of the Bible tells the story of the unfolding plan of God for salvation. Israel is called to be his people and model his purposes for the land.

Space does not permit a full consideration of the attitudes towards nature contained in the Old Testament.<sup>30</sup> However, one aspect that is relevant to the discussion of this chapter is that the two dimensions of social justice and ecological harmony are inextricably linked and they are linked together by the concept of the true worship of Yahweh, Israel's God. We have seen already in "A World Gone Bananas" how significant it is that the primary command of Exodus 20 is against idolatry and this has relevance here too. Deut. 30 picks up on this and explicitly relates faithfulness to God with social and ecological prosperity (vs. 15 – 16). The Prophets emphasise this particularly: where disobedience to God leads to social injustice, there the land will fail and become desolate and fruitless.<sup>31</sup> The importance of this for today can hardly be denied as the greed and idolatry of globalisation tramples over human beings and destroys the rest of creation. It is now almost universally acknowledged that environmental and social issues, far from being in competition, have to be tackled together<sup>32</sup>.

### **[Diamonds that Leap**

**When the leaf fell and brushed my hand  
I began to reverse the world. I asked:  
What if this warped willow leaf, yellow,**

**scaled with age, could smooth  
to a green blade and flicker into  
the knot of a spring twig, like**

**a grass snake's tail disappearing, slick  
and chill, into his home? That one question –  
it was a whirlpool, pulling in**

**others: What about a river?  
Mights its waters rush up these indigo  
hills of Shenandoah and split into a scatter**

**of diamonds that leap to their rain  
clouds, homing? Can a love  
shrink back and back to like,**

**and the crack of a small, investigative  
smile? Could God ever suck away creation  
into his mouth, like a word regretted,**

**and start us over?  
(Luci Shaw)]**

If any consideration of our relationship with the rest of creation inevitably starts with the story of creation itself, it must also find its centre in the coming of Jesus to live on earth as a human being, to die and to be raised to life again. If we see human beings as part of creation, rather than separate from it, then the incarnation affirms the goodness and intrinsic worth of the whole of creation. When Jesus died on the cross, he brought about not only the means of reconciliation between God and humanity and between humans one to another, but that reconciliation is extended to include the whole of the cosmos. Rom. 8: 18-25 and Col. 1:15-20 demonstrate that Jesus is Lord over *all* things and *all* things will be involved in the final act of consummation. However, that consummation is only guaranteed because of

---

<sup>30</sup> For more on this see Northcott, Environment and Christian Ethics, chapter 5 and L. Osborn, Guardians, chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>31</sup> Eg. Jer. 5: 23 – 25; Isa. 5: 8-10; 24: 1-6.

<sup>32</sup> The difficulty of doing this, however, was amply demonstrated at Johannesburg.

the resurrection; the pivotal point for Christianity and, indeed, for the history of the world. As Northcott says,

The relational alienation ... which issues from the Fall is transformed and redeemed by the restoration of created order which is presaged in the resurrection of Jesus Christ who, Christians came to see, was indeed God incarnate, God in a human body, transforming from within the disorder of a fallen creation.<sup>33</sup>

Revelation 4 gives us a glimpse of the future to which all of God's creation is oriented: the future that is begun with the 'first fruits' of the resurrection. This is the end for which we have been made; to worship God completely and enable the rest of creation to be made perfect in order to praise its Creator. In this way, we understand "the new creation itself not as a replacement for the present world but as the eschatological future of this world"<sup>34</sup> This is a wonderful privilege, but also an awesome responsibility. As Gunton says, "we human creatures are the centre of the world's problems, and only by our redirection will the whole creation be set free"<sup>35</sup>

Clearly, then, our mission work bears immense significance. Ultimately, it is only as people come to recognise the lordship of Jesus, trust in his saving power and be filled with his Holy Spirit that the rest of creation will also be liberated. However, as both history and the present demonstrate, eschatology is too often used as an excuse for inaction regarding the environment; focussing solely on saving human beings whilst ignoring the land around them.

Biblically, the opposite is true: we live as children of the future; living our lives now in the light of what we know the future holds; guaranteed by the working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> Bauckham and Hart argue forcibly for this understanding of the Christian life as motivated by the vision of the future, saying, "Christianity is a faith which is essentially forward looking and forward moving, orientated towards and living now ever in the light cast backwards by God's promised future"<sup>37</sup> If the promised future involves all of creation, then our mission today must do likewise. Let me quote at length from Bauckham and Hart, who express it far better than I can:

"it is a vital part of a Christian perspective on this world to identify within it scattered acts of recreative anticipation of God's promised future... . Such anticipations are to be found *in* this world, but they are not *of* this world in the sense of having identifiable and sufficient natural antecedents in it. They belong to God's future of which they are heralds and towards which they direct our hopeful gaze. In such happenings the power of the future-made-present is manifest, the lustre of the new creation shines provocatively from behind the heavy clouds of history. In the meanwhile, Christians are called to identify and to become involved with God's Spirit in all that he is doing to fashion a genuine presence of the new within the midst of the old, drawing it into self-transcendent albeit partial anticipations of what it will ultimately be".<sup>38</sup>

What might some of these anticipations look like?

**[A Rocha was established in Portugal in 1983 by Peter and Miranda Harris and it now has centres in Lebanon, Kenya, France, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Canada, the USA and Finland. "5 Cs" characterise A Rocha's approach:**

**• CHRISTIAN**

**We are motivated by our biblical faith, particularly in God the Creator.**

**• CONSERVATION**

**We focus on scientific studies of important habitats and species.**

**• COMMUNITY**

---

<sup>33</sup> Northcott, Environment and Christian Ethics, 199-200.

<sup>34</sup> R. Bauckham and T. Hart, Hope Against Hope, 137.

<sup>35</sup> Gunton, Christ and Creation, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Eph. 1:13-14. Paul provides us with a clear example of such an eschatological orientation (eg. Eph. 5:8, Phil. 3:20); so much so that Fee says that "it seems impossible to understand Paul without beginning with eschatology as the essential framework of all his theological reflection" (G. Fee, God's Empowering Presence, 13)

<sup>37</sup> Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, 82.

<sup>38</sup> Bauckham and Hart, Hope Against Hope, 71.

**We bring people together for environmental education and action, with special emphasis on students and school children.**

- **CROSS-CULTURAL**

**We involve staff and volunteers internationally and give priority to parts of the world where resources for conservation and Christian witness are limited.**

- **CAMPAIGNING**

**We work with local and international agencies for the protection of key areas and environments.**

**A Rocha is an example of a Christian organisation that is not mere words but has attempted to express its theology in practical projects. A Rocha, however imperfectly, gives a view of Christian mission in the world, where common humanity forms the basis for community, where care for creation forms part of one great commission along with care for people. It is not theories and ideas which change people in their attitudes to the environment, but relationships in community, shared experiences in story form, and working together in practical tasks at a local level.**

**For more information, visit [www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org).**

**In 1997 a two-week Christian environmental workshop took place at the Orthodox Cultural-Pastoral Centre at Durau, in Romania's Carpathian mountains. The event was organised by Youth With a Mission and the Metropolitan's Department of Protocol and Pilgrimage in Iasi. It brought together Romanian and western European students to study environmental problems and their management from a Christian perspective. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the theology of creation and Christian responsibility towards the environment, to compare different worldviews and to present a model for conflict resolution in environmental management. The workshop provided the experience of working on a simple practical project and gave an opportunity for cultural and spiritual exchange between western European and Romanian participants.**

These are just two examples of the way people are attempting to realise "God's promised future" today. One key response that many people are making is choosing a lifestyle of simplicity. Indeed, once we recognise that it is primarily the greed and idolatry of the wealthier nations that are causing ecological destruction in the first place, it could be argued that there is no excuse, for those of us who have the choice, *not* to simplify our lives. Lane recognises this when he writes that one reason "why people are choosing to live more frugally arises out of their heart-felt concern at the devastating consequences of what capitalist exploitation and technology are doing to the natural world, and the consequences for their children and grandchildren. Gandhi expresses this as a basic law: if you want to change society, you must change yourself at the same time".<sup>39</sup>

For many people, the idea of simplicity makes their toes curl, carrying connotations of woolly jumpers and mungbean stew, living in poverty in a draughty hut...! However, simplicity is actually about something far more exciting. Henry Thoreau, one of the pioneers of the simplicity movement, said, "a person is rich in proportion to the things they can leave alone". Simplicity is not about scarcity and misery, but about discovering what it really means to be rich. It is about having true life in abundance: "life to the full", as Jesus said.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen in this chapter and in 'a World Gone Bananas', true life is found not in the accumulation of money and possessions, but in our relationships: with God, with one another and with the rest of his creation. Simplicity, therefore, is about getting rid of all the clutter that stands in the way of the development of those relationships.<sup>41</sup>

One underlying theme that comes through many approaches to simplicity is our attitude towards food. Seemingly innocuous, actually food connects us to all three of the relationships we have looked at. Food has a profoundly spiritual dimension to it. It is one of the main ways by which we nourish ourselves and

---

<sup>39</sup> J. Lane, Timeless Simplicity, 19.

<sup>40</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>41</sup> Focussing on our time is often therefore central to developing a life of simplicity (see further, R. Valerio, Simplicity: living life to the full, 4 – 6).

our relationships with each other.<sup>42</sup> It is no coincidence that the Bible so often links food/eating with central biblical concepts (communion, water of life, fasting, “taste and see that the Lord is good”, the eschatological banquet and so on). Indeed, Mike Schut sees food as a sacrament and talks of “the spirituality embodied in our personal and cultural relationship to food”.<sup>43</sup>

Food also stands at the heart of many of our environmental problems. Consider, for example, the fact that people in the richer countries now eat more beef, pork, poultry, eggs and dairy products, which in turn means a greater demand for grain to feed animals. More grain means more water is needed for irrigation. A US diet annually requires 800kg of grain per person compared to just 200kg for an Indian diet.<sup>44</sup> Or, consider the fact that on organic farms in the UK there are five times as many wild plants in arable fields and 57% more species as on those that are intensively farmed. Some endangered species are found only on organic farms.<sup>45</sup>

The factors involved in the food we eat are many and there is no doubt that it is a political issue involving, amongst other things, the vital question of freedom.<sup>46</sup> Sticking to the brief of this chapter, though, if we are to realise our calling in relation to the rest of God’s creation then it is vital that we consider the food that passes our lips; rediscovering the connection between it and the land it came from.

From all that we have seen above it is clear that the salvation of humanity is closely intertwined with the redemption of the rest of creation.<sup>47</sup> On this understanding, an important mark of a saved person is that they are in a right relationship with all of God’s creation so that to be a disciple and neglect creation is a contradiction in terms. For so much mission work this is a lost dimension that needs to be recovered. In a similar way to that of social concerns over previous decades, environmental concerns now must be integrated into all that we do.

We need to do this, not least, because a neglect of creation can stand against the integrity of the Gospel we preach. Peter Harris cites the example of an Australian who sees the complete lack of concern for the land demonstrated by missionaries as being a large part of the long term failure of Christian missions in reaching aboriginal people, for whom the land is a fundamental aspect of their culture.<sup>48</sup> We have seen how globalisation can lead to the exporting of American/Western values in all areas of life. Those missionaries/agencies coming from the predominantly wealthy countries must ensure that they do not bring with them the attitudes towards God’s creation that are embedded in the culture of consumerism. In contrast, as we recover an understanding that includes the whole of creation, our mission work will be enhanced, demonstrating through our words and our actions what life is like when it experiences relational redemption on all levels.

Whether we are planting churches, drilling teeth, discipling new converts or building schools, then, one of the questions at the front of our minds will be, how can we anticipate the new creation in our present work? For missionaries both to ask the question in the first place, and then be equipped to find an answer, teaching on God’s creation and its significance for mission must be included in missionary training. For example, Redcliffe College in the UK has a lecture on “Development and the Environment” in their Development Studies course and it is included as an important ongoing

---

<sup>42</sup> Issues relating to trade and working/producing conditions mean that the food we eat affects our relationships with other people, even if those people live thousands of miles away.

<sup>43</sup> M. Schut, “Food as Sacrament”, in *Earth Letter* (Nov. 2001), 11.

<sup>44</sup> Tearfund Water Matters campaign.

<sup>45</sup> There were also 44% more birds in fields outside the breeding season and, again, endangered birds such as the song thrush were significantly more numerous on organic farms. In particular, there were more than twice as many breeding skylarks (The Soil Association, “The Truth About Food”).

<sup>46</sup> As Wendell Berry says, “We still (sometimes) remember that we cannot be free if our minds and voices are controlled by someone else. But we have neglected to understand that we cannot be free if our food and our sources are controlled by someone else. The condition of the passive consumer of food is not a democratic condition. One reason to eat responsibly is to eat free” (W. Berry, “The Pleasures of Eating”, in M. Schut, *Simpler Living*, 106).

<sup>47</sup> Rom. 8:19ff.

<sup>48</sup> In a personal email.

theme in their Globalisation and Mission Course. They also have an annual lecture from A Rocha as part of their missionary speaker programme. Redcliffe is not, of course, alone in doing this.

One important area is gaining a knowledge of local environmental issues. Any missionary worth their salt would ensure that they knew the language and culture of any area in which they worked. The same should be true of the area's ecology.<sup>49</sup> For many missionaries it is second nature to attempt to live in the same way as local people do and this can now be extended to consider living sustainably. So, for example, a friend moving to Tanzania wanted to have a nice garden and so water it. Her first thought, though, was to consider the water situation in the area and find out if that would be taking valuable water away from land and people who needed it more. Whatever work we do we will be touching creation somehow. As Peter Harris writes,

We all turn on taps or fetch water, we all switch on or off lights or light fires, we all breathe and eat. All of these things involve us in choices, and responses to God's good gift of creation. They may well also involve us in the suffering that has been brought into the world through the Fall. The water may be polluted, the light comes at a high cost to creation... So, whether we live in a mega-city or a tiny hut in the rainforest, we live in Creation and its care is our concern.<sup>50</sup>

We do, indeed, live in creation: more than that, we *are* creation and, as such, we owe our very beings to our Creator God. That Creator God has made us to be like him and to reflect the relationality that is at the very heart of the Trinity. Our calling is to be his ambassadors: working to see the restoration of the broken relationships that came as a result of the Fall. As we do that - through our Gospel proclamation, our social concern and our caring for the rest of creation - so we will begin to experience the new creation, inaugurated by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Perhaps no one expresses this better than GK Chesterton:

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realised the new wonder; but even they hardly realised that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in the semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening, but the dawn.<sup>51</sup>

### **[The song of the inexhaustible sun**

**Can I ever repay my gratitude to the sea  
whose quiet waves come out to seek me  
as I am led astray, day after day? –  
and to the sun  
for not spurning me, its journey done,  
and for keeping evening and dawn  
not far apart?**

**What can I give you for the nearness which  
you kindle in this immensity  
like fire,  
like hearts poised on their equanimity?**

**What can I give you for that familiarity  
which you start in a child's eye  
and complete in the glory, untouched  
by shadows of sorrow?**

**And for defencelessness what reward?  
It gives me day in abundance.  
Am I so strong that I can last?**

---

<sup>49</sup> Thanks to Peter Harris for this point.

<sup>50</sup> P. Harris, "Creation Care and Everyday Cross-cultural Mission".

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Gunton, Christ and Creation, 63.

**A creature such as I, my Lord,  
you should not trust.**

**Can I ever replay my gratitude to the sea  
whose quiet waves come out to seek me  
as I am led astray, day after day?  
and to the sun  
for not spurning me, its journey done,  
and for keeping evening and dawn  
not far apart?**

**Forgive my thought, Lord, for not loving enough.  
My love is so mind-manacled, forgive that, Lord;  
it subtracts You from thought, leaving it cool as a stream,  
where you want an embrace of fire.**

**But accept, Lord the wonder that leaps from my heart –  
as a brook leaps up from its source –  
a sign that heat may yet burn.  
So, Lord, do not spurn  
even that cool wonderment.  
One day You will nourish it with a burning stone:  
a flame in my mouth  
(Pope John Paul II)]**

## **Bibliography**

- R. Bauckham and T. Hart, Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology in Contemporary Context (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd) 1999
- R.J. Berry (ed.), The Care of Creation: Focusing concern and action (Leicester: IVP) 2000
- J. Bruges, The Little Earth Book (Bristol: Alistair Sawday Publishing) 2000
- G. Cootsona, Creation and Last Things: At the Intersection of Theology and Science (Kentucky: Geneva Press) 2002
- Sr. A. Dent (ed.), Ecology and Faith: the Writings of Pope John Paul II (Berkhamsted: Arthur James) 1997
- Department for International Development UK: literature on environment, poverty and development
- The Ecologist, Go M.A.D! 365 Daily Ways to Save the Planet (Think Publishing) 2001
- G. Fee, God's Empowering Presence (Peabody: Hendrickson) 1994
- C Gunton, Christ and Creation (Carlisle: Paternoster) 1992
- P. Harris, , "Creation Care and Everyday Cross-cultural Mission", in W. Dayton (ed.), Down-to-earth Christianity (Aerdo) 2002
- D. Hughes, God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God's Present Rule (Carlisle: OM Publishing) 1998
- J. Lane, Timeless Simplicity: Creative living in a consumer society (Totnes: Green Books) 2001
- D. Lawrence, Heaven... It's Not the End of the World! (Reading: Cox and Wyman Ltd) 1995
- G. Morgan-Grenville, Breaking Free (Bridport: Milton Mill Publishing) 2001
- M. Northcott, The Environment and Christian Ethics (Cambridge: CUP) 1996
- M. Northcott, Life After Debt: Christianity and Global Justice (London: SPCK) 1999
- L. Osborn, Guardians of Creation: Nature in theology and the Christian life (Leicester: Apollos) 1993
- G. Prance, The Earth Under Threat: A Christian Perspective (Glasgow: Wild Goose) 1996
- C. Reed (ed.) Development Matters: Christian perspectives on globalisation (London: Church House Publishing) 2001
- M. Schut (ed.), Simpler Living Compassionate Life (Denver: Living the Good News) 1999
- The Soil Association, The Truth About Food 2001
- R. Valerio, Simplicity: living life to the full (Cred Papers) 2002
- T. Wright, New Heavens. New Earth: the Biblical Picture of Christian Hope (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd) 1999