

Global Warming and the New Theology: a business viewpoint

by John Lovatt



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For a long time a sea-change in our thinking about work and business has been required to prevent Christianity being marginalised in debates on most issues, including climate change. John Lovatt detects a revival of a theology grounded in the basics of early Christian thought, and suggests it is applicable to global warming.

The New Theology

What do I mean by the new theology? It is a rediscovery of traditional Christian thinking which applies the work of Christ on the cross to the whole of the natural creation, and not just to the salvation of individual human beings. In the field of climate change it was pioneered, so far as I know, by Sir John Houghton in a seminal paper for the John Ray Initiative entitled *The Christian Challenge of Caring for the Earth*.¹ It has appeared in this journal in an article directed at human work by Siew Li Wong,² and more recently in Darrell Cosden's books, the latest of which was reviewed in a previous issue.³

Houghton wrote in his article: "We need a theology of creation which includes as central themes both Incarnation and Resurrection".

The point he makes is that whereas many Christians think that there is no future for the physical earth, the good news is that God does have a plan for the material creation. He quotes Archbishop William Temple: "Christianity's most central saying is, 'The Word was made flesh' (John 1,14). By the very nature of its central doctrine Christianity is committed to a belief in the reality of matter and its place in the divine scheme".

The need for the New Theology

Many Christians believe that only the spiritual and immaterial has any eternal significance. Such a belief implies that the material creation is so much rubbish, to be discarded at the end of time. Perhaps this stems from people regarding their 'soul' as the only important part, their bodies discardable, with no need or

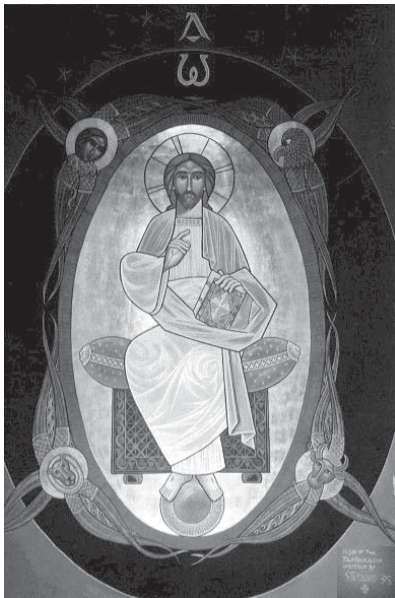
prospect of physical resurrection. In an earlier article in *Faith in Business*⁴ I drew attention to the grave dangers of this thinking to our working lives: the result can be that we see our daily work as important to God only for its 'spiritual' effects, the material work itself not being of any eternal value.

This 'spiritual' religion has for a long time caused serious problems in our understanding of God and our mission in the world, contributing to the notorious division between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. It appears that the 'sacred' is usually associated with personal relationships and pastoral care. The 'secular', on the other hand, is apparently to do with the material and physical part of our lives, and is usually associated with 'getting and spending', and our work.

But the truth is - as Paul Pearce pointed out in his article on climate change in a previous issue⁵ - that the earth is the Lord's. Our bodies are also the Lord's, and so is our work, the fruit of our labours.

The practical consequences

Given our history of belief, however, it is not so easy for us in practice to discard the sacred-



'Behold, I make all things new'
Christ Pantocrator (Stephanos, 1995)

secular divide and spiritual religion. On the subject of our bodies, it would mean abandoning the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, an ancient Greek idea incidentally long since discredited by most theologians, for the doctrine of resurrection of the body.⁶ On the subject of our work, we would have to change direction from viewing our work as a means of pastoral care and instead do it all to the best of our ability as an act of worship to God. On

the subject of the creation it would mean avoiding using the climate change debate as a means of imposing our moral authority and turning it into a call for repentance. Instead, we should find ourselves proclaiming the good news that whatever the causes of climate change - human sin, sunspots, normal ice-age cycles - God as creator and sustainer is heavily involved.

Further, we can proclaim that all the human, animal and inanimate suffering, damage and frustration, are drawn up into the cross, where Christ is reconciling the whole of the creation to God. Part of this work is to give us grace to use our creative talents to restore the creation to the glory God envisaged, and Christ will eventually transform our efforts to make a new heaven and a new earth⁷ - not from nothing, but out of what he has redeemed. How this is done is the subject of the rest of this article.

Continuity

Continuity is important. Christ's own resurrected body is not a brand new one, but is in continuity with the crucified one. The scars are still there. So will our resurrected bodies be - not brand new, but in continuity with the old. Christ's body, and ours, may be difficult to recognise. St. Paul insisted that our resurrected body will be as different from the old one as the eventual wheat plant is different from a grain of wheat,⁸ but the continuity is there. So our work, the things we make or create, will be made new - not easily recognisable, and yet continuous with the ones we

made. In the same way, the new creation has to have continuity with the old.

Healing and the Kingdom of God

Christ's work before his crucifixion was a development and a building of God's kingdom on earth. We could also reflect that his body, as it grew in stature⁹ was also giving glory to God through the process of physical development. In the same way, our work, whether it involves development and building of physical things or of intangible creations, is intended by God to bring the kingdom. This is not only by our creating these good and beautiful things, but also by our repairing and improving the damaged creation, and indeed by the healing of our bodies in case of injury or illness. Christians have no trouble in accepting that healing of the mind and restoring us by forgiveness of our sins is the continuing work now of Christ. But his healing miracles demonstrate his desire to heal the physical body too, and surely this work continues today.

In the same way, with the natural creation, Christ's work is to repair the damaged and restore the frustrated creation to the glory designed for it and we are privileged to be asked to act as ministers in this work. Christ suffers on the cross for all the natural creation, and his resurrection and ascension restore and reconcile it to God. This work also continues today. Some parts of the natural creation have a natural inbuilt mechanism for repair - wounded

animals, ozone layers - and this is part of Christ's direct ministry to the creation made through him. A large part however is arranged by God to be done through human beings, and this is the exciting part for us business people.

So in what way is Christ suffering and redeeming the Creation now in the face of global warming? And what is the biblical justification for this?

The biblical justification

The Old Testament basis for the new theology is very solid: God's involvement with his Creation appears frequently, perhaps most inspiring, in the 35 verses of Psalm 104. But in terms of the 'saving history', the involvement of God as saviour, the covenant with Noah is the theological foundation. The total destruction of the earth is precluded by this covenant, whether by climate change or any other means. The covenant is not just with Noah, it is with the whole of creation.¹⁰

A theology of redemption, or more correctly salvation,¹¹ of the creation through the cross itself comes to us from St. Paul. Houghton quotes Romans 8:20-21. I suggest that we should look carefully at verses 19-22 as a whole¹². Paul is saying that the whole of creation was made the victim of frustration, is groaning as if in childbirth and will be freed from its bondage to mortality. Paul here puts the whole of creation in the context of salvation. An even more direct inclusion of the creation in the work of salvation is set out by Paul in Colossians 1:15-20.¹³ The blood of the cross reconciles the

whole created universe to God. We should also add Ephesians 1:10,¹⁴ where all things in heaven and on earth are summed up in Christ.

So in fact it is a very old theology, but it is new to us, having been largely lost for some 200 years. It was alive and well in the 18th century, for example in Isaac Watts' carol *Joy to the world*¹⁵ and his hymn *Come, let us join our cheerful songs*,¹⁶ both of which refer to Jesus as redeemer of the natural world as well as human beings, and most obviously in Christopher Smart's poem *On the Nativity*, where birds sing 'we too



have a saviour born'.¹⁷ John Wesley's Sermon 60 on *The General Deliverance* includes the whole of Creation in God's eternal plan.¹⁸

Why was it submerged for 200 years? It is notable that the Enlightenment movement was growing during the 18th century.

Its Rationalism emphasised the power of the human mind to solve all problems and bring about a just society. This anthropocentric philosophy had little place for God's relationship with the inanimate creation. Why was it not recovered in the 19th century, during the religious revival? In 1859 Darwin's thesis was published, with the message that nature was red in tooth and claw¹⁹, and that the fittest survived. The natural creation and the material world might therefore appear as alien to God. Under such pressures, Christians might understandably feel their only refuge was a 'spiritual' religion, based on the human mind and good works, rejecting the material world.

Christ is suffering today for the damaged and frustrated creation as the One through whom it was made.²⁰ An analogy we can draw from our business experience is that if we have manufactured something which has gone wrong, something of ourselves has gone into that manufacture, and we suffer. This is whether or not we caused it to go wrong. In the same way, Christ as 'manufacturer of the world' is suffering if our extravagance has resulted in heavy carbon emissions that contribute to global warming, and the resulting climate change is causing starvation to polar bears, or floods destroying crops and homes in Bangladesh. Christ is also suffering if the climate change was caused not by human sin but by sunspots or other natural causes. Whatever the reason, human sin or simply the 'fallenness' of the creation, Christ

as manufacturer suffers because the world he made is not how he intended it to be. The groaning, frustration and bondage to mortality which Paul refers to is not what God intends for his creation. It falls short of the glory of God.

So how is Christ redeeming his creation now? To me, there are two aspects to this. The first I call priestly, the second kingly.



■ Soufriere Hills volcano, Montserrat, 1997 ■

The priestly way

The priestly way is first by being present in the suffering. To put it in business persons' terms, if something is going wrong on the shop floor, you don't sit in the warmth of your office and blame others. You take responsibility yourself and go down there. You are present in the middle of all the mess. The very fact that you are there, and take the burden on yourself, is reconciling people and the damaged creation to one another, to you and to the situation. You bring peace. In the same way, Christ's hanging on the cross represents God not sitting in heaven blaming human beings, but taking responsibility for his creation; coming down and taking material flesh; becoming part of

the created as well as being the creator; being present. His simply being present is a redeeming act, and brings peace and reconciliation. Christ is working his redemption through us when we are simply present among the suffering and worry to do with climate change.

The second priestly way is by offering the damaged creation to God. In our business lives, we are familiar with the

concept of corporate responsibility. We ourselves may be doing our best individually to live a small carbon footprint lifestyle. However, we are part of a business community which is causing damage to the environment. As Christians in business we are in a good

position to offer our penitence for the sins of the world to God. We represent the world in front of God. We offer the damaged creation and our business community up to God. This is a priestly function of all believers.

However, the creation is damaged not only by human activity but also by itself. Human sin does indeed contribute to climate change by profligate use of the earth's resources, but major climate change is also caused by purely natural activity. Meteor strikes, particularly the one which wiped out the dinosaurs, and indeed volcanic activity throughout the world (though this may have a global cooling effect), are examples. These also cause climate change, and bring

suffering with them. This is surely not how God would wish it to be. The creation appears to be in a state of unruliness before God. The new theology views the unruliness of the creation as an aspect of its fallenness, or simply of its corruption by evil. St. Paul states it is a victim of frustration by the will of him who made it.²¹ Jesus states 'an enemy has done this', when tares are found among the wheat.²²

This fallenness is shown not only in such natural aspects as wolves (and dogs) killing sheep or snakes attacking humans, whereas God's vision is of them playing and resting together.²³ It is also there in the computer chip that fails early in its life due to the natural materials used in it, which causes your computer to crash.

So we share a fallenness with the creation around us. Our priestly function is part of Christ's priestly function: we are not aliens offering an alien world to God but are integrated with the creation, just as Christ did not come as an alien being but took flesh. The climate change debate has drawn our attention to the fact that we are dependent on the natural world and are actually integrated with it. We are beginning to understand that if we damage it or exploit it, we damage ourselves and exploit ourselves. We are indeed dust of the earth. As St. Francis put it, this is our brotherly and sisterly relationship with the natural creation. To express it another way, our fellow creatureliness before the Creator means that we have a solidarity and community with the earth. To extend John Donne's phrase, we are all *involved* in the earth.²⁴

So when the earth suffers, we suffer, and this suffering is part of that priestly offering which is lifted up on the cross, and Christ through us is thereby redeeming the world. It will issue in a new heaven and a new earth, and is part of the cosmic salvation, so it is never wasted. Our prayer is valid if we simply offer up our damaged creation to God.

The kingly way

The kingly way is to do as Christ did, and lay hands on the situation, such that the apparently impossible happens. When I bring hope to people, I bring the good news. I bring the kingdom of God on earth. This is the business entrepreneur's function in society. To people like me, it is depressing that too many Christians appear to have recognised in the 'doomwatchers' a churchy function of wagging the moral finger. The call to repentance, to tell everyone that they should change lifestyle such that carbon emissions are reduced, is something we feel very comfortable in doing. However, we should beware of Jesus' warning about piling heavy loads on the shoulders of others, without lifting a finger to ease the burden.²⁵

Christ's kingly way of salvation is to bring healing and restoration, and as business people we participate in this by our innovation and inventiveness in the face of climate change. Responding to the challenge of rising energy costs by finding new ways of saving energy and putting this into practice is one way.

However, carbon emission control and even elimination is also part of our mission. Processes can be modified so that, for example, we can generate the same amount of electricity from fossil fuel with zero carbon emission to the atmosphere. Carbon can be extracted for example from processes before or after combustion. This is called 'carbon sequestration'. The carbon can then be liquefied and injected underground.

There are many technical solutions to reduce carbon emissions in the generation of energy. Readers may be familiar with the majority of these, but most do still require careful and painstaking development to make them more effective. They also require entrepreneurs to take



Carbon sequestration project at Lancaster University

them into commercial production and so reduce their cost. Solutions are being developed using onshore wind, offshore wind and hydro-electricity as well as photovoltaic (solar cells), solar energy, solar thermal (mirrors), geothermal (using geysers, as in Iceland), and marine (tidal and wave generation of electricity).

One emerging technology is that based on micro- and mini-solutions: 'CHP' (Combined Heat and Power) is the use of gas to generate electricity within flats and housing estates. This is being extended to include 'micro-wind' (windmills on top of tall buildings), 'micro-hydro' (small local generation from a stream or river), ground source and air source heat pumps (pipes buried in a field next to your house, using underground heat difference), and methane digesters (sealed tanks of manure on farms naturally generate methane). All these can be designed to feed any surplus into the national grid.

Finally, there are the cutting edge emerging technologies. Nuclear power stations can use their electricity to separate the hydrogen from the oxygen in seawater by hydrolysis (you stick two live wires into the water). The hydrogen is then stored in fuel cells, compressed and ready for transport and use in cars. Another emerging technology is to use wind to compress air, and store it in compressed form underground in disused mines. It can then be used to power

generators in response to demand. And there is the prospect still of nuclear fusion as the ultimate solution.

The new technologies are characterised by opportunism: using whatever energy source is available near you, and using a multi-faceted approach, with a choice of several technologies in

any one location. If you are interested, the newly formed Energy Technologies Institute (ETI) has a website (<http://www.energytechnologies.co.uk>) with details. The UK Government and some of the world's biggest energy and engineering companies are involved. For details see the government website <http://www.dti.gov.uk/science/science-funding/eti/index.html>

All this development is the job of business. We come with hope for people, with the message that we are not doomed. To me, being Christ-like means not coming into the world to condemn the world, but to bring new life and hope. So as a businessman, I am excited at the prospect of being part of positive solutions that result in a slowing down of global warming, a reduction in human and animal suffering, and an earth closer to how God would like to see it. ■

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Notes

- ¹ John Ray Initiative. The JRI Briefing Papers No.1: *The Christian Challenge of Caring for the Earth*, by Sir John Houghton. Based on the Drawbridge Lecture given in 1996 for the Christian Evidence Society. Obtainable on line at www.jri.org.uk.
- ² Siew Li Wong, *The intrinsic value of work, in the light of the Doctrines of Creation, Redemption and Eschatology*, FiBQ 7.1 pp. 12-16
- ³ Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, Paternoster, 2006 reviewed in FiBQ 11.1 pp. 29-30
- ⁴ John Lovatt, *Must the Soul go - for the sake of our work?* FiBQ 7.2, pp 29-33.
- ⁵ Paul Pearce and Dave Hampton, *The Earth is the Lord's: climate change - an imperative for Christians in business*, FiBQ 11.1, pp. 19-25.
- ⁶ I would recommend Tom Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, SPCK 2003, for waverers.
- ⁷ Revelation 21:1.
- ⁸ 1 Corinthians 15: 35 - 38.
- ⁹ Luke 1:80; 2:52.
- ¹⁰ Genesis 9:10.
- ¹¹ Redemption strictly applies to the buying back of people who are in bondage to sin. Salvation may be a better way to describe Christ's saving work with non-human creation.
- ¹² Romans 8:19-22: The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons to be revealed. It was made subject to frustration, not of its own choice but by the will of him who subjected it, yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and is to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God. Up to the present, as we know, the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth. (REB)
- ¹³ Colossians 1:15-20: 'He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all creation. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him. He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him. He is the head of the body, the church. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, to become in all things supreme. For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross - all things, whether on earth or in heaven.'
- ¹⁴ Ephesians 1:10: 'a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.' (NRSV)
- ¹⁵ Note especially verses 2 & 3 in Watts' original version:
'2. Joy to the earth! the Saviour reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills,
and plains,
Repeat the sounding joy.
3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.'
- ¹⁶ Last verse:
'Let all creation join in one
To bless the sacred name
Of him who sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb.'
- ¹⁷ Penultimate verse:
'Spinks and ouzels sing sublimely
"We too have a saviour born"
(Spinks & ouzels are chaffinches & blackbirds)
- ¹⁸ 'The whole brute creation will then, undoubtedly, be restored, not only to the vigour, strength, and swiftness which they had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed.' *The General Deliverance*, John Wesley, Sermon 60 (text from the 1872 edition - Thomas Jackson, editor), Part III, Section 3.
- ¹⁹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, Canto 56 (1849). The poem came out before Charles Darwin made his theory public in 1859. However, the phrase "Nature, red in tooth and claw" in canto 56 quickly was adopted by others as a phrase that evokes the process of natural selection. It was and is used by both those opposed to the theory of evolution, and those in favour of it.
- ²⁰ John 1:3: 'Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.' (NIV)
- ²¹ Romans 8:20. For the full quotation, see above, note 10.
- ²² Matthew 13:28. My own opinion is that this parable has wider implications than human sin, and addresses the whole of the problem of evil, including natural disasters and the 'fallenness' of the natural world.
- ²³ Isaiah 11:6: 'The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.'
- ²⁴ 'Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.'
- ²⁵ Matthew 23:4: 'They make up heavy loads and pile them on the shoulders of others, but will not themselves lift a finger to ease the burden.'