

# STORM CLOUDS AND MISSION: CREATION CARE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

**Margot R. Hodson**

## **Introduction**

The 1910 missionary conference would have expected mission to include medical care, education and agriculture. Care for the environment, however, would not have been seen as a focus of mission. In 2010 there is still a mixed reaction to the place of environment within a mission agenda, but there are now significant voices speaking for environmental mission and many examples of good practice. This chapter traces the development of care for the environment as a focus of holistic mission worldwide. It considers contemporary environmental challenges and Christian responses to them. Christian organisations such as A Rocha, Au Sable and the John Ray Initiative (JRI) are examined, and the rise of environmental concern amongst American evangelicals. The interaction between environment and development is investigated, leading to a consideration of the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation. Finally the chapter considers environmental missiology and its importance for the twenty-first century.

## **Four major environmental challenges**

As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century it has become clear that we face four major environmental challenges: climate change, biodiversity loss, human population and resource depletion.

Copyrighted Material

### *Climate change*

Despite the very ambivalent coverage in the popular media, there is a firm consensus among serious climate scientists that our global climate is changing as a result of human activity.<sup>1</sup> The projections for change this century are very serious and have significant implications for mission. Globally there is an

---

<sup>1</sup> The Royal Society, 'Climate Change Controversies', <http://royalsociety.org/Policy-Publications> (accessed 24.2.2010). The Society is currently reviewing their coverage of climate change and will publish their conclusions on the Royal Society website.

increase in frequency and severity of weather events. A warmer atmosphere is more vigorous and provides conditions for more extreme weather events. Examples of floods have been Jakarta in February 2007, and Burma in 2008 following hurricane Nargis. Bangladesh has seven million people living below one metre above sea level and annual floods are already making many environmental refugees. Other regions are affected by severe drought – northern Kenya is experiencing an ongoing drought that is leading to famine, and Australia has had ten years of drought and this has had a severe impact on agriculture in some areas.

Global warming causes ice melt and the warming of seas. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted a 0.4 metre rise in sea level this century from thermal expansion. They did not give figures for ice melt as it is too unpredictable. In terms of temperature change there will be uneven impacts across the globe with very high latitudes and low latitudes being the worst affected. These latitudes contain some of the poorest people of the world and for low latitudes some of the richest biodiversity.

Overall the impact of climate change will mean less land available for agriculture and a need to adopt new farming practices in many areas. There are likely to be a significant number of environmental refugees – possibly as many as 200 million by the middle of the century.<sup>2</sup> These pressures could well lead to conflict and war.

### *Biodiversity loss*

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment concluded that “Changes in biodiversity due to human activities were more rapid in the past 50 years than at any time in human history.”<sup>3</sup> Though individuals have benefited from the loss of biodiversity to create human dominated ecosystems, the cost to society has often been far greater than any benefit. In tropical areas, benefit from clearing forest may also be short term as the soils are not suitable for agriculture after a few bumper years. One of the problems is that current economic measures do not give a value to natural resources. A country could clear its forests and heavily over-fish its inland seas leaving very degraded environments, but the GDP would show a net benefit as the ‘environmental capital’ loss would not be recorded. Biodiversity loss also impacts on climate, and the carbon emitted from the burning of tropical forest is a significant component of global carbon output.<sup>4</sup> This pattern is being repeated in many

---

<sup>2</sup> N. Myers, ‘Environmental Refugees: A Growing Phenomenon of the 21st Century’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B*, 357 (2002), 609-613.

<sup>3</sup> Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, *Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Biodiversity Synthesis* (Washington DC: World Resources Institute, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> A. Campbell, V. Kapos, I. Lysenko, J.P.W. Scharlemann, B. Dickson, H.K. Gibbs, M. Hansen, and L. Miles, *Carbon Emissions from Forest Loss in Protected Areas* (UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, 2008).

parts of the developing world and the long term implications for those nations and global environmental stability are severe.<sup>5</sup>

### *Human population*

In 1910 global human population was approximately 1.7 billion. By 2010 it is four times this size at 6.8 billion. The rate of increase is now slowing and population is predicted to stabilise at 9 billion by the middle of this century. This is a major cause of our current global problems.<sup>6</sup> Increased population has placed strain on finite resources and caused direct competition between human needs for food and other resources and space for biodiversity. It is a well-established trend that population increase is associated with poverty, and family size decreases as people move out of subsistence. The challenge for this century is to see whether the rate of stabilisation of world population happens fast enough to slow the increasing rate of destruction of our global environment. What is the upper 'carrying capacity' of human population for our planet? Given the current level of human poverty and environmental degradation, have we reached it already?

### *Resource depletion*

Finally resource depletion is the fourth major factor with water and oil being key resources.

**Water:** Of the world's water 97% is salty and 2% of fresh water is locked in snow and ice. Humanity survives on the 1% left and the changes in biodiversity and climate change are likely to reduce the availability of fresh water. For example, the Himalayan glaciers are melting, and although it is difficult to assess the rate of change, 40% are predicted to be gone by 2050.<sup>7</sup> The loss of these glaciers will be devastating for water supply to the Indian subcontinent. Globally, by 2025, 1.8 billion people are likely to be living in areas of water scarcity.<sup>8</sup>

**Oil:** Popular thinking about fossil fuels has been to believe that there are many decades of these resources left to us. The question, however, is not to ask how long it will be until these resources run out, but to ask when will demand outstrip supply? With finite reserves of oil and gas we are likely to reach peak production levels in the near future.<sup>9</sup> Once we are past 'peak oil' the price will

<sup>5</sup> L.M. Curran, S.N. Trigg, A.K. McDonald, D. Astiani, Y.M. Hardiono, P. Siregar, I. Caniago, and E. Kasischke, 'Lowland Forest Loss in Protected Areas of Indonesian Borneo', *Science* 13, vol. 303. no. 5660 (February 2004), 1000-1003.

<sup>6</sup> J. Collodi and F. M'Cormack, 'Population Growth, Environment and Food Security: What Does the Future Hold?', *Horizon: Future Issues for Development*, pilot issue (July 2009).

<sup>7</sup> B. Larmer, 'The big melt', *National Geographic* 217:4 (April 2010), 68.

<sup>8</sup> C. Johns, 'Editorial', *National Geographic* 217:4 (April 2010), 2.

<sup>9</sup> S. Sorrell, J. Speirs, R. Bentley, A. Brandt, R. Miller, 'UK Energy Research Centre,

increase dramatically. When this is combined with the fact that our economy and culture is oil based, we face a very uncertain future. Oil is not simply used for fuel: most aspects of our modern culture require oil, from clothing to computers. Furthermore, nitrogen fertilizers require fossil fuels for their production and so our current methods of food production for our large global population depends on this rapidly disappearing resource. As economic development comes to countries of high populations, the impact of peak oil will be even more severe. One might hope that at least this will reduce carbon output – however, it is possible to produce oil by a very expensive and inefficient processing of coal, which remains abundant. So peak oil may ironically mean increased carbon emissions.

There are many other resources, including valuable rare metals, which are equally under pressure with our fast developing world. During this century we will need to learn to live with the impact of resource depletion and this is likely to have the greatest impact on the poorest populations of the world.

### *Conclusion on environmental factors*

From this brief summary of environmental challenges facing humanity in 2010, it is clear that the overall situation is very serious indeed and the rate of change is unprecedented in human history. If the church has neglected creation care in the past, the current rate of change demands a fresh look at our responsibility. Any society without leadership is vulnerable to anarchy. Humanity has been given leadership over creation (Gen. 1:28).<sup>10</sup> This is the first command from God to humankind and it has been demonstrably ignored. At this time of crisis, it should be a foundational mission call for all who take God's commands seriously.

### **The Rise of Environmental Concern in the Twentieth Century**

During the first half of the twentieth century there was a rise in concern for local and regional conservation and a growth in the understanding of the historical impact humans have had on changing the face of the Earth. In 1949 Aldo Leopold proposed a 'Land Ethic' that considered the needs of the non-human elements of an ecosystem, and this formed the beginnings of environmental ethics as a discipline.<sup>11</sup> In 1962, Rachel Carson wrote her iconic book *Silent Spring* and raised the profile of the damage that humans were inflicting on the natural world.<sup>12</sup>

---

Global Oil Depletion, An assessment of the evidence for a near-term peak in global oil production', <http://www.ukerc.ac.uk/support/Global%20Oil%20Depletion> (August 2009, accessed 28.5.10).

<sup>10</sup> *Rada*, the Hebrew word to rule in Gen. 1:28, is also used in connection with Solomon in his command to rule wisely over the Israelite people.

<sup>11</sup> A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949).

<sup>12</sup> R. Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

During the second half of the century the emphasis shifted from seeking to combat local and regional pollution to understanding the global problems that were resulting from human development. It was within this context that the Gaia hypothesis was developed by James Lovelock. In 1972 Lovelock proposed that the Earth could be understood in a similar way to a living organism and that there were feed back mechanisms that kept the Earth's processes in balance.<sup>13</sup> Environmental ethics developed as a discipline during the second part of the twentieth century, with theories such as Deep Ecology, proposed by Arne Næss.<sup>14</sup>

The global understanding of the negative human impact on the world also led to the development of bodies such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1961, and the IPCC which was formed in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme. The IPCC issued reports in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007.

In 1992, 1,500 scientists, including several Nobel Prize winners, issued a 'Warning to Humanity' that the planet was in environmental crisis. Later that year the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held an 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, which marked the beginnings of global action on climate change. This led to the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, which aimed to bring carbon emissions to 5% below 1990 levels by 2012. The developing world including China was not included in this agreement and this led to opposition by the United States. The Protocol finally came into force in 2005. In 2009 world leaders again met in Copenhagen. By this time the 2007 IPCC report and the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment provided evidence for the size of environmental crisis. Sadly, world economic recession, the rise of the Chinese economy and the relatively new Obama administration all led to a very disappointing result. This was possibly also fuelled by a campaign to undermine the scientific consensus by those whose economic interests were tied to continued exploitation of fossil fuels.

### *Christianity challenged for being the cause of the problem*

In 1967, Lynn White published a paper in *Science* entitled "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis".<sup>15</sup> In this paper he described Christianity as the "most anthropocentric religion the world has seen." He found the roots to the contemporary environmental crisis in medieval Christian Europe and an aggressive interpretation of 'dominion' in Gen. 1. In seeing a spiritual cause to the problem, he also proposed a spiritual solution and believed that for western

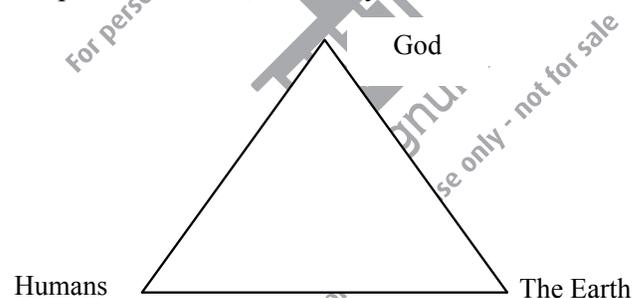
---

<sup>13</sup> J.E. Lovelock, 'Gaia as Seen through the Atmosphere', *Atmospheric Environment* 6 (1972), 579-580.

<sup>14</sup> A. Næss, 'The Basics of Deep Ecology', *The Trumpeter Journal of Ecosophy* 21:1 (2005). This paper is a revised version of one given in a lecture in Canberra, Australia, in 1986.

<sup>15</sup> L. White, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-1207.

cultures it would need to come from a rethinking of the Christian faith. Subsequent writers have firmly refuted White's view of Christianity as the primary source of the crisis and have provided more positive examples of Christian approaches to the environment, including Celtic Christians, Benedictines, Franciscans and the natural theology of English Protestants in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.<sup>16</sup> If there are examples of positive approaches to the Earth, the church still has to grapple with a very mixed and, at times, ambivalent approach to nature. Paul Santmire identified a Spiritual Motive and an Ecological Motive that he traced through Christian history.<sup>17</sup> The Spiritual Motive was especially influenced by Greek philosophical ideas of a good spiritual world contrasted with a perception of an evil physical world. In this view God is transcendent and our aim is to escape this world. This outlook contrasts strongly with the Ecological Motive, which took a more Hebraic approach to the Earth seeing it described in Genesis as fundamentally good. In this model God is immanent and is actively involved in the world he has created. The Spiritual Motive leads to a 'proclamation only' approach to mission, whereas the ecological motive provides theological underpinning for a holistic approach where the whole of life is seen as God's concern. This does not undermine the call for a proclamation of the gospel but gives a fuller understanding of the scope of the gospel for our world. Wright proposes the true relationship between God, humanity and the Earth as an ethical triangle.<sup>18</sup>



All too often the church has concentrated on the relationships between humanity and God, and humans with each other in the light of faith. The relationships between humans and the Earth and God's concern for his creation have often been ignored. It is as we regain a positive theology of our material world that we will regain our true call to holistic mission to our whole Earth.

If Lynn White gave a biased picture of the Christian approach to the environment, sadly, Christians have frequently ignored the environment and this has significant implications for mission and for the future direction of holistic mission.

<sup>16</sup> M.J. Hodson and M.R. Hodson, *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008), 93.

<sup>17</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> C.J.H. Wright, *Living as the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), 19.

## Christian Responses to Contemporary Environmental Challenges

### *Church councils*

As concern for the environment began to rise in the secular world, so the number of voices within the church gradually increased. In 1986 WWF held a conference in Assisi leading to the 'Assisi Declaration'.<sup>19</sup> This called on world religions to make a response to the current environmental crisis. The conference was called by Prince Phillip who also founded the Alliance of Ecology and Religions in 1995. In the mission world, the World Council of Churches (WCC) at their 1983 Vancouver conference, added the 'Integrity of Creation' to the remit of the Peace and Justice group. This group held a World Convention in Seoul, in 1990. A dispute arose because the conference document did not distinguish humanity from the rest of creation as uniquely created in God's image. Ronald Sider suggested an amendment, which was voted down. This led to a meeting of evangelicals with ecological concern at the Au Sable Institute in Michigan in 1992. The conference report, 'Evangelical Christianity and the Environment' led to the formation of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN). One of its first publications was 'An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation', released in 1994.<sup>20</sup>

### *Church mission statements*

As WCC began to debate environment as part of mission, so denominations began to include an environmental strand in their mission statements. In 1984 the Anglican Consultative Council met in Nigeria and defined Four Marks of Mission, which did not include environment.<sup>21</sup> In 1990 the Council met in Cardiff and agreed a fifth mark: "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth."<sup>22</sup> In 1993, the Methodist Church of Ireland had as one of its four core features: "wholeness – God's creative purpose and active compassion inspire concern for the whole of human life and the environment." Significantly in the current vision statement, environment

<sup>19</sup> L. Serrini, 'The Assisi Declarations', <http://www.nyo.unep.org/eaf/eafadec.pdf> (accessed 30.4.10).

<sup>20</sup> R.J. Berry, *The Care of Creation* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Anglican Consultative Council, *Bonds of Affection: Proceedings of ACC-6, Badagry, Nigeria, 1984* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1984), 49.

The Four Marks of Mission agreed were:

- 1) To proclaim the Good News of the kingdom
- 2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- 3) To respond to human need by loving service
- 4) To seek to transform unjust structures of society.

<sup>22</sup> Anglican Consultative Council, *Mission in a Broken World: Report of ACC-8, Wales 1990* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1990), 101.

has been moved from 'wholeness' to the 'witness' section, 'caring for the Earth its people and its resources'.<sup>23</sup>

The Church of North India also included care of creation in its mission statement, which has a focus on justice and restoring the integrity of God's creation by: "breaking down the barriers of caste, class, gender, economic inequality and exploitation of nature."<sup>24</sup> In the last 10 years many more denominations have added an environmental strand to their mission statement. There has been a shift toward seeing environmental care as mission and an increasing urgency in the resolutions on action.

### *Missions and movements*

As environment became a more visible issue, Christian organisations responded. Some specialist Christian environmental organisations began to emerge and missions and denominations have implemented environmental programmes.

#### *A Rocha: conservation, education and lifestyle*

In 1983, Peter and Miranda Harris, mission partners with Crosslinks, set up an environmental field station 'Cruzinha', on the Alvor estuary in the Algarve, Portugal. This was the starting point of the environmental mission 'A Rocha'. Cruzinha developed to become an important ecological centre in Portugal and has made a significant contribution to conservation in that country. In the 1990s A Rocha began to found centres in other countries and now has field centres or teams in 18 countries including: Lebanon, Kenya, France, Czech Republic, USA, Canada, India and the UK. A Rocha works in partnership with other Christian organisations, environmental agencies and local authorities. It has had a major environmental influence on Christian mission.

#### *The John Ray Initiative: education, advocacy and research*

JRI was founded in 1997 by Sir John Houghton, former co-chair of the IPCC. He sought to gather scientists, policy makers, theologians and church leaders to create a think-tank style of organisation that could provide the research base for the education and advocacy that was needed to tackle global environmental problems. JRI provides a specialist knowledge base for other Christian organisations and has been particularly known for its high quality conferences, courses and publications.<sup>25</sup> Its current projects include a distance learning

<sup>23</sup> The Methodist Church in Ireland, 'Witness', <http://www.irishmethodist.org/about/witness.php> (accessed 30.4.10).

<sup>24</sup> The Church of North India, 'CNI Mission Statement', <http://www.cnisynod.org> (accessed 30.4.10).

<sup>25</sup> JRI authors include R.J. Berry, P. Carruthers, M.J and M.R. Hodson, J.T. Houghton,

course, Christian Rural and Environmental Studies (CRES); and a research initiative, the Agriculture and Theology Project (ATP). JRI members provide consultancy and education to other organisations and are increasingly being called on by mission agencies to advise on the environmental dimension of holistic mission.

#### *Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies*

In 1979 the Au Sable Institute was established in Michigan by Calvin DeWitt, to provide Christian environmental education for college and high school students. The overall aim is, “the integration of knowledge of the Creation with biblical principles for the purpose of bringing the Christian community and the general public to a better understanding of the creator and the stewardship of God’s Creation.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to Au Sable’s original campus in the Great Lakes it now has locations in the Pacific Rim, south Florida and Tamil Nadu in south India.

#### *The Church of south India, Seven Year Plan to Protect the Living Planet*

In 2008 the The Church of South India (CSI) Synod Ecological Concerns Committee held a conference on environment and eco-leadership. From this the province has adopted a seven year plan, which was approved to protect the living planet as part of the mission strategy of CSI. The programme promotes inclusion of creation care in management structures, awards for good practice, integration into worship and biblical study, practical projects and work in schools. Bishop Thomas Samuel<sup>27</sup> in his presidential address at the 2008 conference, called upon all Christians to work in this world as God’s partner.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Rural Extension with Africa’s Poor*

In Kenya, Rural Extension with Africa’s Poor (REAP) works to provide practical, accessible technology for the rural poor. Their stewardship of the environment programme teaches sustainable agriculture and promotes tree planting.<sup>29</sup>

Copyrighted Material

---

H. Marlow, C. Russell, J. Weaver and R. S. White.

<sup>26</sup> Au Sable, ‘Our Mission’, <http://www.ausable.org/au.ourmission.cfm> (accessed 15.4.10).

<sup>27</sup> Rt. Rev. Thomas Samuel, Bishop of CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese.

<sup>28</sup> Church of South India, ‘A Seven Year Plan to Protect the Living Planet’, <http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/Christian-CSI-7YP.pdf> (accessed 30.4.10).

<sup>29</sup> REAP, ‘A Biblical teaching to motivate farmers to maintain a living soil’, <http://reap-estafrica.org/> (accessed 30.4.10).

*The American evangelical story: concern and opposition*

In July 2002 JRI and Au Sable Institute jointly held a symposium in Oxford entitled 'Climate Forum 2002'. They invited scientists, church leaders and climate policy makers with the aim of raising the profile of climate change among evangelical Christians. One of the delegates was Richard Cizik, then Vice-President of the National Association of Evangelicals in America. Cizik responded to the conference by changing his lifestyle and convening a series of conferences in the States to bring this cause before the leaders of the evangelical movement there. This culminated in 86 US evangelical leaders signing an 'Evangelical Call to Action' on climate change, which challenged the Bush administration.<sup>30</sup> American Christians with a concern to take action on climate change have faced considerable opposition. The 'Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation' and 'Focus on the Family' have both opposed taking action on climate change.

*Mission education*

As churches and missions have begun to address the need to have environment as a focus for mission, a need has grown for education in this area and especially for an integration of environment, theology and mission. Overall colleges have been a little slow in responding.<sup>31</sup> Four approaches have been identified: ignore the environment altogether; have a few lectures on environmental theology within a whole course; have one or more whole modules included in a course; or, integrate environmental theology across the whole syllabus.

Given that vocational courses are becoming increasingly packed, an integration of environmental thinking is a productive approach to encourage, though specialist modules are also essential if environment is to become established as a legitimate Christian concern. The International Baptist Theological College in Prague and Redcliffe College, Gloucester UK, both have environmental modules in their masters programmes and an overall priority for environment. Ripon College Cuddesdon, Oxford UK, offers a complete distance learning course (Christian Rural and Environmental Studies, CRES). Both Regent College in Vancouver and Wheaton College, Illinois integrate an environmental perspective into a number of their theological courses as do Trinity College, Bristol, UK and South Wales Baptist College, Cardiff UK. In the US, Au Sable offers a wide range of courses and modules

---

<sup>30</sup> J.A. Wardekker, A.C.Petersen, J.P.van der Sluijs, 'Ethics and public perception of climate change: Exploring the Christian voices in the US public debate', *Global Environmental Change* 19 (2009), 512-521.

<sup>31</sup> M.J. Hodson, 'Environmental Theology Courses in Europe: Where are we now?', in J. Weaver, and M.R. Hodson, (eds.), *The Place of Environmental Theology: A Guide for Seminaries, Colleges and Universities* (Oxford, Whitley Trust and Prague, International Baptist Seminary 2007), 107-120.

with a large number of participating colleges. By being flexible in approach they can provide an ecological element to many US students from Christian colleges and universities. For specifically mission education, Au Sable teach courses on 'Tropical Agriculture and Missions' at their Florida Campus, and 'Global Development and Ecological Sustainability' at their Great Lakes Campus.

The Asian Rural Institute in Tochigi-ken, Japan runs practical courses on sustainable agriculture, leadership and community development.<sup>32</sup> Their courses are aimed at rural leaders from Asia and Africa, with an emphasis on poor and oppressed peoples who wish to return to their own communities when they have completed training. In India CSI Madras and Medak Dioceses are running pastors programmes on creation care. In Trichy Tanjavore Diocese, Bishop Heber College has become the base for Heber Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies.

This survey of mission education is far from comprehensive, but it is clear that environment is not yet established in the mission curriculum of many colleges. Modern mission demands a holistic curriculum with current affairs, economics, globalisation, poverty, development and environment as core subjects taught within a biblical theological framework.

### Environment and Development

Environment and development have been seen as competing issues. The reality is that human poverty cannot be alleviated without taking environmental care seriously and care of the environment is ineffective if human concerns are not also addressed. There is a direct relationship between poverty and environmental degradation, and both need to be improved together if a future is to be found for the poorest of the world and for the planet. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) seeks to: "provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations."<sup>33</sup>

One positive example of a joint environment and development project is the tree planting scheme in the Diocese of Mara, Tanzania. The Bishop of Mara saw the suffering that had been brought about by deforestation. Women were having to walk increasing distances to fetch water and firewood. He decided to promote tree planting around homesteads, where the women would protect the trees and benefit from them.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> ARI, 'ARI: that we may live together', <http://www.ari-edu.org> (accessed 30.4.10).

<sup>33</sup> UNEP, 'United Nations Environment Programme, environment for development', <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=43> (accessed on 7.5.10).

<sup>34</sup> M.J. Hodson and M.R. Hodson, *Cherishing the Earth: How to Care for God's Creation* (Oxford: Monarch, 2008), 157.

### *Tearfund*

Tearfund became involved in environmental mission as they saw the impacts of climate change and other environmental problems on the poorest in the world. They are involved in campaigning and advocacy to raise awareness, especially of the interaction between environmental problems and human suffering. They seek to have an integrated approach to their practical projects to take account of the environmental dimension alongside human needs. One project they partner with is 'Goodwill for Development' in Lahore, Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> This project is seeking to integrate environment and development programmes as it works at grass roots to provide sustainable development for the poorest in society. An example is the promotion of low cost fuel efficient smokeless stoves for local women. Black carbon from open stoves contributes to global warming both from the carbon released and from the soot that absorbs the sun's rays. The introduction of smokeless stoves therefore reduces global warming and significantly benefits human health.

Tearfund also has extensive education programmes. The Hope for Planet Earth tour ran in the UK for seven weeks in the spring of 2008 and 2009 to raise awareness of climate change. It was a collaborative project with A Rocha, JRI and Share Jesus International, and was attended by thousands of school children and adults.

### *Africa Inland Mission*

The work of Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in Lesotho has expanded to include environment and development.<sup>36</sup> Mission partners who arrived 'to preach' discovered food shortages caused by unsustainable farming practices. Part of the problem has been the poor status of farmers and farming in the country. AIM staff are working to teach sustainable farming practices alongside a biblical understanding of God's heart for the land.

### *Interserve*

Interserve has an operating principle that all their ministries should be integrated and lead towards wholeness. Interserve take a stewardship approach to the environment and are involved in training and practical environmental projects, including A Rocha Lebanon.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> 'Activities', <http://www.goodwill4humandevlopment.org> (accessed 7.5.10).

<sup>36</sup> M. Delorenzo, 'God is a Farmer', [http://www.aimint.org/usa/stories/god\\_is\\_a\\_farmer.html](http://www.aimint.org/usa/stories/god_is_a_farmer.html) (accessed 8.5.10).

<sup>37</sup> Interserve, 'Christian missions in Asia, the Middle East and the UK', <http://www.interserve.org.uk> (accessed on 15.4.10).

### Toward an Environmental Missiology

In 2007, the UK Environment Agency asked a panel of 25 experts to give the most important things needed to save the planet. Of their priorities the second highest was that, “Religious leaders need to make the planet their priority.”<sup>38</sup> While being wise about responding to secular appeals, Christians need to take seriously this call to provide a spiritual and moral lead. A firm basis of the doctrines of creation, salvation and eschatological hope should make caring for the Earth a mission priority. One of the important issues is to understand their inter-relationship. Creation is not simply a stage on which the missiological drama of human salvation is worked out. God’s creation and his care for it is an expression of his character. Christ, in becoming human, hallowed our material world and his death and resurrection were in response to the sin of the world. All creation groans, waiting for the glory of God to be revealed and for a liberation from its bondage to decay (Rom. 8:18-25). This indicates that the salvation won by Christ has an impact on the whole cosmos. As we look toward the renewed heaven and Earth in Revelation 21 and 22, we see God, humanity and creation reconciled and freed from the negative forces of sin and death. Therefore the work of the cross has cosmic implications and our gospel is greater than some of previous generations may have imagined.

Alongside an environmental missiology, we need a strong global ecclesiology. Internationally, churches have well developed communities at grass roots in both rich and poor nations. In many places there is also high level influence with governments and institutions. Humanity needs to make a transition from living or aspiring to live a high carbon lifestyle to a sustainable pattern of low carbon usage; and from living at the expense of the rest of biodiversity to living sustainably within the limits of our Earth. This shift can only happen as governments change direction and as local communities work together to live in a different way. Churches therefore could play a strategic role at different levels of society across large parts of the world. This action finds a biblical foundation in the salvation narratives of Romans 8:18-21 and the Christology of Colossians 1:15-20. Inspiration can also be found in the Old Testament teaching on the relationship between God, people and land found in books such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Sustainable Christian communities could thus model what being ‘in Christ’ means for both people and planet.

Holistic sustainable missiology does not have to have a static ‘hands-off’ model of the natural world. God placed Adam in the garden to work it and give life to it (Gen. 2:15). In many places in the Old Testament the people of God were encouraged to farm and adapt the natural ecology (Deut. 28, Is. 65:21). The imperative is not to preserve nature untouched but to enable nature to flourish alongside human flourishing. This is an expression of resurrection hope and is beautifully illustrated in the resurrection scene in John’s gospel where

---

<sup>38</sup> The UK Environment Agency, ‘The 50 Things that will Save the Planet’, *Your Environment Extra* 17 (2007), 17.

Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener (Jn. 20:15).<sup>39</sup> How can we authentically preach the resurrection if we live lives that indirectly bring suffering to the poor and death to many of our global ecosystems? To be a gospel people we need to seek to be life giving to all. Table 1 gives a broad summary of the biblical underpinnings for environmental holistic mission.

Genesis and Isaiah	Interactive: not afraid to use technology but in a sensitive way to benefit both people and planet
Leviticus and Deuteronomy	Rooted in communities
Colossians	Holistic in approach seeing human and environmental needs as interconnected
Gospels	Seeking to be life-giving to all. Demonstrating the intrinsic value of creation and our respect for all that God has made.
Revelation and Isaiah	Bringing hope for the future

### Conclusion

We face a very difficult century for humanity's relationship with the environment. If there is an Edinburgh conference in 2110, it is likely that the major focus will be environment as the impacts of our over-use of the world's resources will by then have impacted so severely that all people will have environmental care as their highest concern for human survival.

As a church we have a responsibility to respond to the needs of God's creation and this provides us with a mission opportunity. We need to have a strong biblical and theological basis for this by connecting our biblical understanding of creation to mission. We need to make holistic mission work and this will only come as we connect human and environmental concerns. Our mission involvement needs to lead to a positive transformation of human living conditions but also provide sensitive management of nature and protect the natural world. Overall our gospel message must provide hope in an effective way for both people and planet. We are partners with Christ in revealing his

<sup>39</sup> P. Carruthers, 'Creation and the Gospels', in S. Tillett (ed.), *Caring for Creation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2005), 75-76.

salvation to the cosmos, and we have a crucial task to bring good news to all creation (Mk. 16:15).

