



Attendees at the symposium conducted by the Uniting Church SA Environment Action Group earlier this year. For a full report on the symposium, please visit sa.uca.org.au/across

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In the February edition of New Times, Rev Brian Polkinghorne shared his thoughts on eco-theology as it related to the Old Testament and to his own life. In this edition, Brian addresses the New Testament.

Earth's crowded with heaven,
And every bush aflame with God,
But only those who see take off their shoes,
And know they are standing on holy ground.

- Elizabeth Browning-Barrett

The first three gospel writers begin their accounts by describing the birth and early life of Jesus; beyond this, John and Paul start at a deeper level by analysing the meaning of this brand new beginning. They discern that this new beginning is the bringing together of the spirit and the flesh, the introduction of the sacred into the secular, the superseding of law with love on a cosmic scale.

John's gospel tells us that in the very beginning the Word was with God and was God, and that "nothing in all creation was made without him." Nothing? So then, if all things visible and invisible were made by this Word, the Logos, then everything belongs to this mysterious Word. John unlocks this intriguing mystery by telling us that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth". This brings us to the understanding that he is talking about Jesus – not just a human being like us, but one in whom the Word, the eternal Christ, dwelt.

This is one of the most powerful cornerstones of eco-theology. The eternal Christ, dwelling in the man Jesus, is the maker and owner of all things visible and invisible. According to eco-theology, if we claim Jesus, the Christ, to be our Lord and Saviour, then it is sinful to harm or destroy any of his property.

This idea is further affirmed by Paul in the opening chapters of his letters to the Colossians (1:15-20) and Ephesians (1:10, 21-23), and the writer of Hebrews claims “he is the one through whom God created the universe.”

It is no easy task to step out of our anthropocentric (human-centred) thinking and lifestyle into a Christocentric one. The commercial world and our egos distort our Christocentric attitudes as we hang onto our personal security blankets, piling possessions upon possessions. In stark contrast, Jesus models the way of simplicity, giving and servant-love as the pathways to the Kingdom of God.

Personally, I find it deeply distressing to see other Christians acting similarly to worldly people – paying little heed to the effect of their actions and consumerism on the environment and on other people. Many seem to act in ways that ignore that these actions have a negative impact on the world God created, and on the people within it, who suffer through our actions.

As Christians, I believe that before we turn on a tap or a power switch, drive a car or visit the shops, we must consider the impact this will have on God’s created world. I urge you to think about the environment and ask yourself what effect your actions may have on God’s people or on his gift of land, air or water – those things which nurture us. Once we start doing that, we are beginning to give shape and form to eco-theology.

This is the last in a series of articles submitted by the Uniting Church SA Environment Action Group. Feedback about articles in this series should be sent to justice@sa.uca.org.au

Published in *New Times*, December 2015