

About Us - Resolutions from Lambeth 1998

From the Lambeth Conference of 1998:

Resolution I.8

Creation

This Conference:

- a. reaffirms the Biblical vision of Creation according to which:

Creation is a web of inter-dependent relationships bound together in the Covenant which God, the Holy Trinity has established with the whole earth and every living being.

- i. the divine Spirit is sacramentally present in Creation, which is therefore to be treated with reverence, respect, and gratitude;
 - ii. human beings are both co-partners with the rest of Creation and living bridges between heaven and earth, with responsibility to make personal and corporate sacrifices for the common good of all Creation;
 - iii. the redemptive purpose of God in Jesus Christ extends to the whole of Creation.
- b. recognises:
 - i. that unless human beings take responsibility for caring for the earth, the consequences will be catastrophic because of:
overpopulation
unsustainable levels of consumption by the rich
poor quality and shortage of water
air pollution
eroded and impoverished soil
forest destruction
plant and animal extinction;
 - ii. that the loss of natural habitats is a direct cause of genocide amongst millions of indigenous peoples and is causing the extinction of thousands of plant and animal species. Unbridled capitalism, selfishness and greed cannot continue to be allowed to pollute, exploit and destroy what remains of the earth's indigenous habitats;
 - iii. that the future of human beings and all life on earth hangs in balance as a consequence of the present unjust economic structures, the injustice existing between the rich and the poor, the continuing exploitation of the natural environment and the threat of nuclear self-destruction;
 - iv. that the servant-hood to God's creation is becoming the most important responsibility facing humankind and that we should work together with people of all faiths in the implementation of our responsibilities;

- v. that we as Christians have a God given mandate to care for, look after and protect God's creation.
- c. prays in the Spirit of Jesus Christ:
- i. for widespread conversion and spiritual renewal in order that human beings will be restored to a relationship of harmony with the rest of Creation and that this relationship may be informed by the principles of justice and the integrity of every living being, so that self centred greed is overcome; and
 - ii. for the recovery of the Sabbath principle, as part of the redemption of time and the restoration of the divinely intended rhythms of life.

Resolution I.9

Ecology

This Conference:

- a. calls upon all ecumenical partners and other faith communities, governments and transnational companies:
 - i. to work for sustainable society in a sustainable world;
 - ii. to recognise the dignity and rights of all people and the sanctity of all life, especially the rights of future generations;
 - iii. to ensure the responsible use and re-cycling of natural resources;
 - iv. to bring about economic reforms which will establish a just and fair trading system both for people and for the environment.
- b. calls upon the United Nations to incorporate the right of future generations to a sustainable future in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- c. asks the Joint Standing Committee of the ACC and the Primates to consider the appointment of a co-ordinator of an inter-national ecological network within the Anglican Communion, who would:
 - i. work in co-operation with other ecumenical and interfaith agencies;
 - ii. be funded through and responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council;
 - iii. support those engaged in grass-roots environmental initiatives;
 - iv. gather and disseminate data and information on environmental issues so that the Church can play an informed role in lobbying for ecological justice in both the public and private sectors; and
 - v. contribute to the development of environmental educational programmes for use in the training of Christian leaders.

The Report of Section One of the conference addressed a range of ethical issues including: Human Rights and Human Dignity, The Environment, Human Sexuality, Modern Technology, Euthanasia, and International Debt and Economic Justice. Theme 2 of the report dealt with the Environment. It read as follows:

Theme 2: The Environment

The Situation

34. There is a growing realisation in many parts of the world that environmental issues are amongst the most important ethical concerns facing humankind at the end of the second millennium. Gradually we are realising that if we are to sustain God-given life on this planet then we will need to change our attitudes and behaviour. A combination of factors, industrial pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, mineral and fossil fuel depletion, species extinction, over-population, over-consumption, and even unregulated tourism and development, are having devastating global effects.
35. Many are convinced that the growing evidence of global warming, and with it the enlarging of deserts, raising of ocean levels and erosion of the polar regions, is a sign and warning which we must take seriously before it is too late. Since it is the poor of the world who often live closest to the results of environmental degradation, and since it is the youth of the world who will inherit the results of the present degradation, a concern for the environment is closely linked to a concern for justice.
36. One of the greatest challenges in this area is to find a way of sustainable development, that is to say, a way that sustains the environment and matches the calls for justice by the poor. At present in many parts of the world there is a tension between the need for conservation and the need for employment, as is evident, for example, in the tension between employment in the logging industry and concern about deforestation. Environmental issues are global issues and should be of concern to both North and South.
37. It is clear from the regional responses that environmental concerns are high on the agenda in many parts of the Anglican Communion and especially in Africa. This reaffirms strongly the position taken at Lambeth 1988 that "Christians must recognise that concern for the environment is concern for God's world." From Southern Africa it is noted that "war, poverty and apartheid have had devastating effects on the environment of Southern Africa. These effects are interlinked and multiple and range from the deforestation and overgrazing of the 'homelands', to population growth, the dumping of toxic waste and hazardous pollution." In Madagascar the destruction of the environment by fire, as the result of disputes, arson and poor farming practices, is seen as a major issue of concern: "the result is that the country has in recent decades lost over 85 per cent of its natural forest cover."
38. In West Africa "both deforestation and the dumping of toxic waste are typical examples of the squandering and abuse of natural resources" and need to be addressed. In Uganda a specific link is identified between environmental concern and poverty: "Poverty has bad consequences for the environment. People who are poor or who are struggling to survive may not be so concerned about the environment, even though it affects them as well in the long term." A deep concern about both deforestation and the increase of desert is firmly on the agenda of Sudan: "We encourage the protection of the environment from encroachment of the desert by

means of afforestation. We advise against the destruction of the environment by wildfire and pollution." In the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand there are also strong voices of concern about present over-consumption of scarce resources and sustainability. Within all of these countries, environmental groups are emerging both within and outside the churches.

Theological Reflection

39. Environmental issues raise key theological issues about dominion, land and the created order. This is also an area in which there has been considerable theological controversy. Lynn White's 1967 article for the journal *Science*, "The Roots of our Ecological Crisis", has been widely used in the environmental movement and is often seen as a criticism of Christian theology. White claimed that "especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric [i.e. human-entered] religion the world has seen." He argued that this resulted from its dual inheritance from Judaism of a linear concept of time and a story of creation which gave to humans "dominion over all animals (Gen. 1.26).
40. White wrote as a Christian historian, believing that Christians should be more conscious of the negative effects of the notion of "dominion", while secular environmentalists have often viewed him simply as a critic of Christian faith. Recently, Christian theologians writing about the environment have usually heeded his warning and have argued that "dominion" should not be equated with "domination". It has also been stressed that God's dominion in the Bible is to be seen more as that of a shepherd, or even a mother eagle, that is, caring and nurturing images rather than as one who dominates.
41. Many theologians have explored the concept of "stewardship", humans are "stewards" of the created order not dominators of it. However some argue that even the notion of "stewardship" is too anthropocentric. There is a real theological tension here. Environmental ethics increasingly stresses that we should be world-centred not human-centred, yet Christian ethics does have a central concern about the call to full humanity. An incarnational approach based upon the Logos theology of John's gospel offers one important way of balancing these two demands, since the Logos of God is involved in creation itself and the Logos of God comes to dwell amongst us as a full human being.
42. For many theologians the notion of "gift" is also important: land and the created order is a "gift" given by a generous God (Deuteronomy 26), completed in the "gift" of his Son, and should be received with gratitude and responsibility. Augustine of Hippo recognised that there were parts of this "gift" which flow from God's abundant generosity and are not simply there for the benefit of human beings. Biodiversity and God's generosity are thus linked. Environmental theology has also been influenced by eschatology, that is by destroying God's gift and by risking global destruction humans are usurping the will of God. It is for God alone to bring about the eschaton.

Putting into Context

45. The issues raised by the question of the environment are essentially global. Nevertheless, different parts of the world will perceive their effects in local forms. For many parts of Africa and South America, deforestation is a major issue, albeit one that

appears to affect the climate of the whole world. Here the concept of land as "gift" is particularly important.

46. Within some parts of Asia, over-population is a matter of major concern, albeit again one that affects the rest of the world. Within the West, over-consumption, with its effects upon pollution, species extinction and resource exhaustion, is a central issue as it is also to the rest of the world. The implications of both over population and over-consumption, both of which are manifestly unsustainable into the future, are important. In both instances, we are shaping a world with immensely destructive features for future generations.
47. There are also cross-links between these issues which serve to remind us that we only have the one world that God has given us and redeemed in Jesus Christ. For example, one way that is sometimes suggested to reduce the pressure towards over-population in Asia is to raise living standards so that the poor no longer feel a need to ensure their own security through having more children. Yet raising living standards in the South, without reducing those enjoyed in the North, will put even greater pressure on an already fragile ecology.
48. The serious issues and tensions here are illustrated vividly with a story from Papua New Guinea. Villagers in southern Papua needed to raise cash in order to send some of their young people away for tertiary education in Port Moresby. So they decided to sell a piece of unwanted land, part of the rain forest, to developers. Although this did enable them to help their young people, it also caused local and international problems. There was soon a dispute about who really "owned" the land before it was sold, and there was international anxiety because the developers took all the timber from the land and left it devastated. It became evident that there was a serious conflict here between a need for human justice and a concern about the environment; a conflict that was not to be easily resolved.

Practical Application

47. There is an urgent need to search for positive ways of engaging in the debate about the environment and seeking methods to reverse environmental degradation. It is perhaps a sign of hope that many young people in different parts of the world are becoming increasingly aware of and active in environmental issues. Television, too, has played an important role in alerting people to these issues. >>> Churches could become much more active in seeking to raise environmental awareness in their liturgies, in their preaching and in their teaching and mission to the world. In which ways is this already being done in your diocese and Province and how could it be done further?

There are already a number of local initiatives sponsored by churches around the world. Do you have information about these and plans to develop more?

There is a need for churches to engage more deeply in the environmental debate. This is already taking place in India, where the theologian K.C. Abraham, is linking the liberation/justice debate with the environmental debate. He argues that the two are linked in the daily lives of the poor in India. In Europe, the theologian Michael Northcott argues that a notion of "created order" provides a firmer basis than does secularism for belief and action concerning the environment: for those who believe in God, the world is created and given and should be treated responsibly.

Can inter-faith dialogue help in this area? The theologian Hans Kung argues that such dialogue can be important, since global issues must be approached globally and across national and religious boundaries. One feature of this dialogue is a realisation that some forms of Eastern as well as indigenous and traditional religions have strong roots in the environment.

Together we need to find effective ways, as well as practical steps, to convince those in both the North and the South to act beyond their immediate self-interest. A Christian theology of the incarnation is based upon a Saviour who acted beyond self-interest and upon our behalf. In this important area we are being called to act likewise.