

# Care for God's Creation Central to Christian Discipleship

My awareness of climate change as an important issue developed through my reflections on the dialogue between science and the Christian faith in the 1990s.

Encouraged by Keith Ward and Paul Fiddes in the Faculty of Theology at Oxford University, I wrote a masters course on Christianity and science, which was recognized by the Templeton Foundation with an award in 1998.

One aspect of these explorations was a theological reflection on the scientific aspects of the environment: climate, ecosystems, the exhaustion of natural resources and pollution.

It was at this time that I was first introduced to the then newly established John Ray Initiative ([JRI](#)) and the work of Sir John Houghton.

My interest in the dialogue between science and Christianity developed out of my teaching on Christian mission, which often foundered on the excuse that science had done away with the need for religion.

I have been concerned to demonstrate that while science presents challenging facts about the universe, it is theology that makes sense of the universe's and our existence. Words such as relationship, purpose and personhood in creation are central in this exploration.

Through my studies and reflection, the issue of the environment and especially climate change grew as an important aspect of the debate, and I became a board member of JRI some 15 years ago and chair from 2009.

Through my writing and JRI involvement, I frequently was given opportunity to speak on and discuss various aspects of theological reflection on environmental issues.

I strongly believe that care for God's creation is a central part of our Christian discipleship, following Christ who came to redeem the whole of creation (John 3:16).

God created us for relationships - with God, with each other and with creation. This is the message of Genesis 2.

But, sadly human self-centeredness with its lust for power and control leads to broken relationships with the creator, our human neighbors and with the environment, which is the message of Genesis 3, the "fall."

This is no primitive superstitious text but is something borne out by history and by scientific discovery.

For example, psychology has proposed that human beings are biologically wired for spiritual-relationship encounters.

If this is the case, we can observe that individualism and secularism are contradictory social constructions, which suppress our innate relationships and substitute a model of self-in-isolation, which leads to depression, loneliness, anxiety and suicide.

Individualism separates us from others, from God and from God's creation.

The problem for Western humans is that we focus almost exclusively on reason, rationality and facts, and in so doing miss the primal sense of awe, wonder and connectedness - the inherent relational nature of creation.

Consciousness is always relational: self with other people, self with the environment, self with God (compare Genesis 2 and 3). This is at the heart of our spirituality.

Broken relationships, a lack of trust and reconciliation are seen in every conflict, be it individual or between ethnic, religious or national groupings.

Broken relationships with creation are seen in treating the environment as a commodity rather than being in ecological communion with creation.

I believe that we are helped by Pope Francis' call to care for the environment in his 2015 encyclical, "[Laudato Si, Mi' Signor.](#)"

He suggests that we need to develop an "ecological citizenship" expressing an "ecological conversion," whereby the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in our relationship with the world around us.

But the fundamental problem is our broken relationship with God, which fails to look for God's wisdom and, in its place, puts a human wisdom based on power and control, which develops fear and violence when such control and power is threatened.

Beyond the scientific facts are the order, beauty and wonder of the natural world, which causes the observer, scientist or not, to consider purpose, personhood and relationships.

The exploration of the natural world is an act of discovery that often leads to wonder and awe. Faith encourages humility, integrity, respect and wonder in the scientist, which may lead to praise and worship.

Science is based on two elements of faith: the universe can be understood by rational enquiry, and knowledge of it from science is preferable to ignorance.

Science develops understanding through reason and explanation, whereas for religion understanding develops through revelation and our relationship with God, which provide meaning.

Our God-given call to care for creation is a central aspect of our Christian discipleship, and for me this has become a central theme of my writing and speaking.

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