



The Earth is the Lord's...

So says the Psalmist, but what lies behind this affirmation? Some looking in on the church might assume that its understanding of God as creator is constrained by a literal interpretation of the creation story. If that is found wanting by credible theories such as evolution then it can leave people feeling that God the creator has little of value to offer our world. But the creation narratives can also be understood as outlining the relationship that God's people are called to have with God, with each other and with the whole created order.

I have come to appreciate that the affirmation 'The Earth is the Lord's', has a message of great relevance for our world, especially in the context of major environmental concerns.

The 'Earth belongs to the Lord' reflects the ancient Hebrew understanding of the Earth floating on the depths, anchored by God's subduing of the powers of chaos. Though the imagery is dated, the affirmation makes a strong challenge to the principle of ownership that has developed, particularly through western economies. Understanding the Earth as belonging to the Lord informs us that our role is more akin to that of a tenant, with the privilege of living in a place and the responsibility to care for it.

This perspective was brought home to me during a self-catering family holiday. The owner of the cottage that we rented sent us a letter outlining the facilities, which we were welcome to use during our stay, and requesting that we left it in the condition that we found it, for the next occupiers. If individuals can do that willingly for a rented cottage, why can't the same principle apply to the earth?

From 1st April 2004 the management of Eco-Congregation in England will be taken on by The Arthur Rank Centre. As I pass the baton of co-ordinating Eco-Congregation to my successor, Jo Rathbone, who will be working for two half days per week, I do so with confidence that the project will continue to help growing numbers of churches weave environmental stewardship into their life. In doing so, they will act and witness as if the Earth really does belong to the Lord.

Thank you for your support and enjoy greening the church.

David

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Eco-Congregation Co-ordinator (until 31.3.04)
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Nailing their green colours to the mast

At first sight St. Peter's Church of England in Claybrooke Parva, Leicestershire looks an unlikely church to engage in some radical environmental action, but preconceptions can be deceptive. Drawing on their tradition of living in harmony with the environment (they have played host to a swarm of rare bees throughout living memory!), they drew on the resources of Eco-Congregation to green their life and mission.

Creation care has featured in a number of inspiring services, the refurbishment of their listed building included installing a pair of highly efficient gas condensing boilers, decorating with environmentally friendly paint and after extensive negotiations with English Heritage, installing low-energy lighting.

The church also engaged with a campaign opposed to the development of a new East Midlands airport. The church flew a banner from their church tower opposing the airport. At a protest meeting held in the church (the only local premises that could seat 500), the vicar welcomed the masses, spoke about their church's commitment to good environmental stewardship and indicated that for the campaign to be credible those present should oppose low-cost flights as well as the airport. An uneasy silence ensured, but later many visitors remarked that the challenge had made them think. In truth, the church had nailed their green colours firmly to their mast!

How could your church demonstrate their concern and commitment for God's creation?

Eco-Congregation News

Under new management

Eco-Congregation in England passes from ENCAMS, the environmental charity who developed the project, to the Arthur Rank Centre with effect from 1st April 2004. The Arthur Rank Centre is a collaborative unit supported by the national churches, the Royal Agricultural Society of England and the Rank Foundation and includes within its remit service to the rural community and its churches, and work on agricultural and environmental issues. As a part of it's work ARC will now manage Eco-Congregation in England and support participating churches in Wales alongside it's existing Living Churchyard Project www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk . The established Eco-Congregation in Scotland will offer support to churches in Ireland.

Funding

Following the conclusion of the time-limited support from Defra, The Arthur Rank Centre and Eco-Congregation are delighted to report that core funding has been given by the **Methodist Relief and Development Fund** which enables the project to continue. Further funding is sought to enable the project to operate more effectively.

Web site

A new web site address: www.ecocongregation.org is now operational with full information about the project. Additionally, Eco-Congregation has a web site for Scottish churches: www.ecocongregation.org/scotland

Resource modules

Designed to spread good practice and inspire churches, a revised edition of the resource modules is being prepared. The edition will feature stories and material from churches and will be downloadable from the web and available in a photocopied text form, to be launched on 1st May 04.

Eco-Congregation Logo Competition

Now that Eco-Congregation is being supported and managed by a number of organisations working in partnership it is right to recognise this with a new logo. It is proposed that a small competition (the prize is the glory) is held. If you have a creative idea check out details at www.ecocongregation.org

New contact details:

Post: Eco-Congregation, The Arthur Rank Centre,
National Agricultural Centre,
Stoneleigh Park,
Warwickshire CV8 2LZ

Tel: 02476 853061

Email: ecocongregation@rase.org.uk

PS ENCAMS will operate a forwarding service to ARC for all enquires relating to Eco-Congregation.

Christian Environmental News

A Rocha produce material for the annual Environment Sunday (formerly Conservation Sunday) which is on the first Sunday in June. This years pack is entitled 'Jesus and the Earth' and includes material based on the book of the same title by Bishop James Jones (see below). Tel: 0208 574 5935 Web: www.arocha.org

The annual **Christian Ecology Link** Conference takes place on Saturday 9th October 2004 in Coventry. Entitled '[Operation Noah](#) – 'The Rainbow Pilgrimage' the event features a conference, procession and service on climate change with children's activities. Web www.christian-ecology.org.uk

'**Jesus and the Earth**' is a new book by the Bishop of Liverpool, Rt. Rev'd James Jones, that explores Jesus' attitude to the earth. The book includes study material. Publ. SPCK 2003

Tearfund have launched **Whose Earth?**, a major campaign which encourages Christians to make lifestyle choices for the benefit of people and planet - and to encourage politicians to act to eradicate poverty in a way that protects the environment. There are some great resources - and now Good Energy have endorsed the campaign by offering a donation to Tearfund for every church or individual that switches to their renewable energy supply. For more information call 0845 355 8355 or visit www.tearfund.org/whoseearth?