

HOPE FOR ALL CREATION



A theological
response to the
environmental crises

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND



DIOCESE of
WINCHESTER

“Restoring our relationship to the rest of creation is part and parcel of God’s saving work and of his coming kingdom. To care for creation in partnership with others, to show solidarity with the vulnerable, to be prophetic in speech and action on these issues – locally, nationally and globally – is to live out this faith and hope. It is an essential part of following Jesus and sharing the Gospel today.”

ARCHBISHOPS OF CANTERBURY AND YORK

“We have been gifted a world of breath-taking beauty, astounding abundance and intricate interconnection. It is a world God declared good and loves.”

That world is now in crisis. The damage generated by human activity to the climate and ecosystems on which we depend is widespread and intensifying. Biodiversity loss is escalating. The impact on vulnerable human communities is increasingly severe, and the prospects for the future grow bleak. Meanwhile, the response of nations with the power and resources to limit and mitigate this damage is seeming to falter.

Yet God has not forsaken the Earth, the precious life it supports, nor the human beings who inhabit it. God continues to sustain the interconnected webs of life in which we have our being. God has acted, coming in Jesus Christ, to dwell in our creaturely home, and to reconcile us to our Creator and to our fellow creatures. In raising Christ from the dead, God has pledged the coming of his reign and the renewal and liberation of all creation. And in sending the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ accompanies, enables and guides the Church to live out this reconciliation and this hope, and goes ahead of it in the world over which he is Lord.



PART ONE SEE

- We’re invited to consider our contemporary environmental situation
- A key characteristic of God’s creation is the interrelatedness of earth’s organisms, ecosystems and processes, which are increasingly being disrupted by human endeavour
- Using the planetary boundaries framework, we can see that human activity has breached safe limits for the Earth’s system – potentially leading to irreversible risks for both nature and people



PART TWO REFLECT

- Scripture and Christian tradition can give us hope for all creation, showing us that God is intimately present in His creation, sustaining creatures through the Earth’s processes and relationships
- As human beings, we belong to this web of life, but are also endowed with a distinctive responsibility under God for other creatures and the connections and conditions in which they flourish
- The environmental crisis we face is ultimately an expression of humanity’s rejection of this responsibility
- We have hope in God’s action to restore the integrity of creation in Jesus Christ, reconciling all creatures, including human beings, to Himself
- Through the Spirit and in solidarity with others, we must act in light of this faith and hope



PART THREE RESPOND

- In light of God’s saving commitment to all creation and the hope of his kingdom, what should we do?
- in response to what God has done and has promised to do, how can we carry out faithful, hopeful action, locally, nationally and globally?
- Christians can use this theological vision to think, reflect and act in accordance with our faith, as we face this global ecological crisis
- Christians, as they must always do, must look to the Lord who ‘gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless’ (Isaiah 40.29)



EARTH – DIVERSE, INTERCONNECTED AND IN CRISIS

The Earth and all living things are God's creation. God continually sustains, orders and provides for them. Life on the Earth is wonderfully rich, complex and interconnected. Living creatures play a vital part not only in their own ecological niches, but also in the larger, interconnected processes which support life and keep the planet in dynamic balance. Through our choices and behaviours, humans are increasingly disturbing that balance.

Passages like Psalm 104.11–17 describe the world as wonderfully diverse and interdependent. This is the creation that God provides for, delights in, and sees as good.

Different organisms in particular places relate to one another and to the local climate and landscape to form interdependent webs of life, which we call ecosystems. They may vary in scale from a tidal pool to an area of fenland. Human beings are part of this interconnectedness. We have an exceptional capacity to shape our environment in multiple ways and to develop, and pass on knowledge about, the forms of social exchange, organisation, tools and techniques needed to do so.

Human populations have long been transforming their surroundings through hunting, the use of fire, agriculture, the redistribution of species and the building of towns and cities. The transition to fossil fuel energy and the huge expansion of human population, food production, material consumption and waste greatly increased that impact. Scientists have named the era we're now living in the Anthropocene, the period during which humanity is the dominant force acting on the climate and natural systems. And we are disrupting the Earth's system in dangerous and unsustainable ways.

PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

The Earth's connected processes risk crossing critical thresholds – potentially leading to irreversible risks for both nature and people. The idea of planetary boundaries offers a helpful way of gauging the impacts of human activity on the Earth system and when they are so high as to threaten the conditions hospitable to human life and the wider biosphere. On the most recent assessment of our impact, relative to the safe boundaries for life, we have exceeded seven out of nine of these boundaries, with devastating consequences around the globe.

Human impacts upon the Earth are disrupting the planetary conditions which have prevailed since the last Ice Age, conditions which have been hospitable to the ecosystems we now have and the wellbeing of the life they harbour, including human life.

This disruption threatens significant and unpredictable changes that will likely prove inhospitable to human society as we now understand it, along with a great variety of other species. So, if we care about the future of life on this planet, we need to know the extent of human impact on the environment in relation to what the Earth system can sustain. We can do this by looking at planetary boundaries, nine interdependent processes that are critical to the stability and resilience of the Earth system:

- Climate change
- Freshwater change
- Atmospheric aerosol loading
- Novel entities
- Land-system change
- Ocean acidification
- Stratospheric ozone depletion
- Biosphere integrity
- Biogeochemical flows

As of September 2025, seven of nine planetary boundaries have now been exceeded. Humanity's activity remains within safe limits with respect to only two of the nine boundaries: stratospheric ozone depletion (which allows more dangerous UV radiation to reach the Earth's surface) and atmospheric aerosol loading (change in microscopic particles in the atmosphere, which affects the climate).

TURNING TO FACE CREATION

Our current environmental situation can be seen as a consequence of how many human societies have lived in defiance of the delicate balance of the Earth's interconnected processes and relationships. The Christian faith offers resources and a hopeful vision to help us address this situation.

Thinking about the Earth as a system and applying a planetary boundaries lens, while helpful, has its limits. It risks feeling 'abstract'. Perhaps it does not adequately express the intrinsic value of each part of creation, and its relationship to God and other parts of creation. Yet thinking about the Earth's connected processes helps us appreciate the interconnected nature of life on Earth. It also helps us understand the environmental problems we face and our responsibility for them. Christians can reflect on how our faith relates to these important insights.

However, we are not without hope. The Christian faith offers resources to address this problem, offering ways of understanding our relationship with the Earth and helping to promote ways of life that are sustainable and responsible towards the world around us. Christian faith invites us to consider how humans have become disconnected from other living beings and the Earth. It frames this rupture within a wider story of our disconnection from God and his purposes for creation. But it also reveals God's plan to restore the Earth in its wholeness through Jesus Christ.



AN INTERCONNECTED CREATION SUSTAINED BY GOD

Throughout Scripture, we find deep reflection on the interconnectedness of creation and on God's involvement in maintaining creation in a continuous way. All creatures and all elements of creation have a direct relationship to their Creator and matter to God in their own right. Human beings are part of this interdependent creation.

A Christian understanding of our present situation begins with understanding the Earth and all its life as God's creation. Within this, we need to reflect on the special role of humanity within creation.

Christian reflection on our interconnected planet and humanity's place within it is informed by many sources, but above all by Scripture. The Psalms and Wisdom literature depict our world and everything in it as God's creation, brought into being and sustained by divine craft and care. According to such texts, God's wisdom is the source of the patterns and relationships that structure creaturely life. We also see that God is not a distant creator who sets the world in motion and then simply leaves it to function, but one who actively upholds and sustains all things. The Psalmist invites us to recognise God's creative action working through the cycles and processes of the Earth to sustain creatures in their contexts, with creatures thanking and praising God in return. In theological language, this divine provision is sometimes called *creatio continua* (continuous creation). This is the idea that creation (in its fullest sense) should be understood not merely as a one-time and finished event, but as an ongoing process in which God continually orders all things and gives them existence.

In these biblical texts, all creatures have a direct and ongoing relationship to their Creator, and matter to God in their own right. Their worth and significance are not measured by their utility or aesthetic value to human beings. 'God values creation for its own sake and is still at work in the processes of nature.'

CREATION AND THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF HUMANITY

While human beings are part of creation, we also have a unique responsibility within it. Christian reflection on our role within an interconnected planet begins with the creation accounts of the book of Genesis. Here, as well as being depicted as part of the wider creation, humans are also described as having a distinctive vocation, since we are created in the image of God. Crucially, this suggests not the idea of selfish rule or domination, but of caring responsibility for living creatures and the planet.

The Bible begins with two complementary stories of the creation of the Earth - a world made by God to be full of life, with its own processes and with its own productive agency. It's a world whose inhabitants and systems are deeply interconnected, including human beings. And yet humans, who alone are described as being made in God's 'image' and 'likeness', also have particular responsibilities towards it.

In the first creation story, we see distinct spheres in creation - the land, the waters, the sky - with multiple organised forms of life occupying each. But crucially, these are described as deeply connected and interdependent. In this context, humans are given a specific role and task by God towards their fellow creatures - to nurture the world that God has already ordered and the life He's established within it. We're called to imitate God in exhibiting qualities of care, service and responsibility for other living beings, contemplating the wonder of how they are made and organised, and what it means for them to flourish.

In the second creation story, human beings are made before any other life form, but on an Earth which already has a water cycle and a garden. The natural world precedes their arrival, suggesting that it's humans who must find a way to live in synchronisation with its processes, and not the other way round. In both creation accounts there's an emphasis on human beings coming from and living in close dependence on the fertile soil, and on the plants and fruit it yields. Humans are not set apart from nature, but are tasked with working with and for the Earth, observing its ways and respecting its limits. The Earth, in the form of the garden, in turn provides fruit for all living creatures to eat.

SIN DISRUPTS THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF CREATION

Sin is always understood in terms of a rupture between humanity and God. But it must also be understood in terms of a rupture between humanity and the Earth. Through its narratives and teaching, the biblical storyline shows that sin is comprehensive in scope - affecting not just humans, but ecosystems, animals, climate and indeed our 'planetary health' as a whole.

On a Christian understanding of the environmental crises of our time, the human causes of those crises, and the resistance and inertia to mitigate them, must be seen as expressions of humanity's attempt to break with God their Creator. In light of the goodness of creation, the value of creatures to God, and their manifestation of the divine glory, the disruption of nature is a terrible rejection of our responsibility to imitate God in our care for our fellow creatures and the interconnectedness of all creation.

Sinful defiance of God is therefore closely linked to unjust treatment of other human beings, especially the poor. It was for this reason that Pope Francis called us to heed both the 'cry of the earth' and the 'cry of the poor', highlighting how environmental sin is interconnected with global injustice. But ecological sin is also enabled and aggravated by social structures and by the subversion of social institutions. This alerts us to the significance of what theologians call 'structural sin' - systems which distribute most of the benefits, power and wealth in society to certain groups, in defiance of our interconnectedness and the dignity and worth of all human beings before God. Structural sin is also shaped and maintained, among other things, by harmful cultural practices: those which subtly or not so subtly persuade and incentivise us to participate in this status quo and make it seem normal and acceptable.

GOD'S PLAN TO RESTORE THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

God is committed to healing these broken relationships and restoring the integrity of creation. We see this plan being enacted in God's interactions with the people of Israel, in the Law and in the Prophets.

Sin, however, is not the last word about the predicament of our planet and our own responsibility. God's intention is always to reconnect that which has been detached and separated, restoring the relations between living beings and their environment that have been broken and lost through sin. We see reminders of this intention throughout the narratives of the Old Testament. After the flood, God establishes a covenant not only with Noah and his human descendants, but also 'with every living creature that is with you' (Genesis 9.10). This act shows God's commitment to the entire ecosystem, highlighting that all creatures, not just humans, are recipients of God's own covenantal promise. The rainbow is the sign of this covenant, symbolising the hope that peace and interrelationship between God, humans, and other living entities might be realised once again.

Likewise, through the prophet Hosea, God promises a future day of covenanted peace for 'the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the the ground' (Hosea 2.18), and in Psalm 148, we see all creation functioning together as a kind of orchestra sharing in the worship of God. In this way, we can see God's plan to bring about a restoration of the relationships that have been broken by sin, as well as a transformation of the whole creation.

CREATION IS REDEEMED AND RECONCILED IN JESUS CHRIST

God's commitment to healing broken relationships and restoring the Earth in its wholeness comes to its culmination in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life and mission was closely associated with the non-human world, including animals and nature. But more importantly, the fact of the Incarnation shows God's commitment to creation and to its restoration. This commitment is revealed above all in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus himself enacts and embodies humanity's reconciliation to other creatures. Christians believe that, in the person of Christ, God fully entered this world as a human being, as part of the community of all living beings, in order to participate in it and ultimately redeem it. As Pope Francis put it: 'By the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every part of creation. [...] The very soil, water, mountains – everything – is now caught up in the mystery of redemption.' Through Christ, God is bringing about a reestablishment of the intended harmony between creatures that was disrupted due to sin.

God's intention to reconcile all creation is supremely revealed in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus rose bodily, not as a spirit; this validates the material world, while also anticipating its ultimate transformation. For the Apostle Paul, the risen Christ can be seen as 'the first fruits', implying that his resurrection is a glimpse or a foretaste of what is still to come for flesh and blood. And if all creation will share in the freedom of the glory of the children of God and the redemption of their bodies, then Christ's risen body is also a foretaste of the whole redeemed creation. God is not discarding creation, nor the complex and interlocking relationships he instituted between living beings. On the contrary, God is renewing the world from the inside out – with Jesus himself as the first fruits.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH HAS HOPE FOR THE EARTH AND ALL LIFE

The Christian faith is hopeful about the restoration of all things by God, including living beings and the harmony of all the Earth. The Bible's storyline ends with a vision of creation restored. The ultimate destiny of humanity lies with other animals, plants and forms of life in a reconciled, renewed and liberated creation, saturated with God's presence and united in the praise of God.

In the book of Revelation we see the final and complete reversal of cosmic disconnection. The seer of Revelation envisaged 'every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them,' worshipping God and Jesus Christ. The reconciliation brought about for God's people here is envisaged as multi-ethnic, healing divisions between social groups caused by racism, war, pride and greed, and uniting diverse human cultures in praise and worship of God. But this inclusivity extends not just to relationships between human groups, but to all creation: God's plan is 'for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth' (Ephesians 1.10). The ultimate destiny of humanity lies with the whole created order in a reconciled, renewed and liberated creation, saturated with God's presence and united in the praise of God.

The final vision of Revelation completes the book's depiction of the restoration of creation to the rule of God and the orientation of all creatures to the worship of God. The passing away of the first heaven and first Earth, which had fled from God's presence, and the absence of the sea, show God's commitment to destroying the forces of evil and death, the forces which destroy the Earth. This commitment suggests the author does not envisage the annihilation of the Earth. Instead, it signifies the transformation from the kingdom of the world to the reign of God and his Messiah.

CHRISTIANS ARE TO LIVE IN LIGHT OF THE COMING RENEWAL OF ALL CREATION

It can be hard to hold onto our hope in the present time as we wait for the restoration of all things. As we pray for the coming of God's reign on Earth, we should seek to live in a way that reflects God's healing purposes for all things and the petition that God's 'will be done'. In particular, Christians are called to care for the Earth in all its wholeness, to model the coming restoration of creation in our relationships with each other, and to pay attention to the poorest and most vulnerable in our world.

In our present time, the experience of the Church is one of longing and anticipation, waiting for our redemption as we experience the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. But this does not imply that Christians have nothing to do now – Jesus calls his disciples to follow in the Way of reconciliation with all creation and, through the Holy Spirit, we're empowered to do so. This responsibility includes the vocation to bear witness that the Earth and all its habitats and forms of life are God's good creation and the object of His redeeming love.

The national Church recognises that the Fifth Mark of Mission (MoM) is 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth'. This recognises that our calling to creation care is closely linked to our proclamation of the good news (First MoM) and our teaching and nurturing of new believers (Second MoM). Via creation care, we can respond to human needs, both locally and in places distant from us (Third MoM). And because the causes of ecological devastation lie in structures that encourage greed and cause injustice, safeguarding creation and renewing the Earth are closely linked to transforming unjust social structures and pursuing peace and reconciliation (Fourth MoM).



WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

So how are we to respond to the damage humanity has done to God's creation? The story of Pentecost suggests that our response should be rooted in the repentance and hope that marks Christian discipleship: repentance and lament for our destructive ways of inhabiting creation, and hope based on God's work of redeeming it. Such penitent and hopeful discipleship will take many forms, involving us both collectively and individually.

At this time of human-made impact on and damage to this planet, what is required of us – as disciples of Christ? This question echoes the question the crowd put to Peter and his fellow apostles on Pentecost morning. Having listened to Peter's speech, explaining the miraculous events they'd just witnessed, they ask: 'What should we do?' Peter calls on them to repent, but also to 'be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' (Acts 2.38) Peter's words are an invitation to us, too, to repent: to confess, lament and turn away from the ways in which we have collectively inhabited and used God's creation, and to re-orient ourselves to God's unwavering faithfulness to it. To repent involves careful examination of our attitudes and motivations as we commit ourselves to the work of healing our relations with fellow creatures. Indeed, in the Christian life repentance is not just a one-off event but a daily practice, in recognition of the fact that old habits die hard. And as we learn to repent and lament, we need to stay focused on God's redemption. This is important because, in view of the scale of the planetary crisis, we can easily feel overwhelmed, in despair or paralysed. We may have hope because this broken planet is, and remains, God's creation.

RESPONDING LOCALLY

We're called to make creation care integral to everything we say and do. Though we're each individually called to respond to the environmental crisis, we do not face this responsibility in isolation from others: the local communities and contexts in which we are placed, and in particular the churches where we join in the practices of discipleship.

Worship: For us as the Church of England to play our role in this process of economic transformation, we need changes in practice that are rooted in the renewal of faith and formation. That means our efforts will have to begin with our worship, using resources like *A Time for Creation*, published to help churches include creation and environment in their worship.

Christian Spiritual Traditions: Spiritual practices involving prayer, contemplation or self-examination not only train us to become more aware of God, our neighbour and the world around us; they also prompt us to interrogate the desires, dispositions and habits that shape the way we relate to the world, including the consumption patterns we've grown accustomed to.

Church Buildings: An ever-growing number of churches have started to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels through structural changes, such as improved insulation and the harnessing of renewable energy from heat pumps and solar panels. When sharing food, we can also showcase how the responsible sourcing of ingredients need not compromise the quality and enjoyability of the food. Similarly, we can encourage each other to travel in more environmentally friendly ways, where possible.

Local Communities: We should join forces with local communities such as schools, clubs and charities, as well as churches and congregations from other denominations and other religious communities in our areas, as they respond to the call to make creation care integral to their mission.

Parochial Structure: Parish clergy are given a share in the 'cure of souls', a responsibility that applies to an entire local community. We may consider this care as extending to all creatures within a parish: not just our human neighbours but also the animals and plants in our neighbourhood, the land we inhabit and the water we depend upon. Furthermore, parishes are often responsible for the care of churchyards and other land holdings, which means they're in a position to model better ways of stewarding the Earth.

Individual Households: What we do as church communities should also inform how we each live throughout the week: what we buy, use and consume, and how and where we invest our money, at home, at work, at school, when shopping or travelling. Yet we can't ignore the significant differences in wealth and power, within our church communities and within society more broadly. We don't all have the same levels of economic choice in what we consume, where it's sourced or how it's produced. We need to campaign, therefore, for the resources to be made available so that everyone can decarbonise and have access to sustainable products.

RESPONDING NATIONALLY

Speaking and acting publicly into the environmental crisis is integral to the Church of England communicating the gospel afresh in our time. An important aspect of this work is engaging with the political dimension of the environmental crisis. For Christians, political engagement involves prophetic speech and action. As the established church, the Church of England has unique opportunities for mission and evangelism in this area, given the various constitutional and financial means it has at its disposal for shaping public policy and modelling alternative ways of stewarding resources.

Prayer: We are to pray for the scientists researching the environmental crisis in all its complexity, and informing the public and public policy accordingly; for the engineers developing new technologies needed for a transition to a more sustainable economy; and for the politicians tasked with creating the policy and legislative frameworks necessary for effective environmental transformation, including the wise use of new technologies.

Prophetic Ministry: We must speak the truth about the planetary crisis and challenge the various forms of injustice that are involved, both near and far. As long as it's rooted in honesty and humility, our prophetic ministry may be one of reminding our fellow citizens of the urgency of the crisis, supporting those already persuaded and challenging those in power – political, economic or financial – to choose justice rather than expedience and self-interest.

Public Policy: The Church of England can draw on historical resources and privileges that allow the Church to shape public policy – for example, through the work of the bishops in the House of Lords. Meanwhile, its management of historical assets, through the Church Commissioners, allow it to model good practice and thus shape policy indirectly.

Resources: It's vital that the Church of England uses its institutional voice and spending power well: to remind politicians of the urgency to take action; to call out denial and disinformation; to adopt and model better ways of investing and managing resources; and so to encourage corporations and investors likewise to move away from harmful industries.

RESPONDING GLOBALLY

The global nature of the environmental crisis is the strongest reminder to the Church of England today that it is part of a worldwide Church, connected with and affecting the lives of communities across the globe. Through participation in the Anglican Communion and other international church networks, the Church of England can learn about how other parts of the world are affected by the environmental crises, and play its part in working for international climate justice. In all these ways, the Church of England is adding its voice to the ecumenical call to 'ecological conversion'.

Christian Charities: We can learn from the way international Christian charities, such as A Rocha International, Christian Aid and Tearfund, have listened to and worked with local grassroots partners. Together with them, these charities have often led the way in recognising how the planetary crisis is integral to the humanitarian causes they pursue.

The Anglican Communion: The Communion has been supporting and coordinating environmental action for many years, such as helping to establish the Season of Creation, providing valuable resources for preaching, being significantly involved in advocacy and establishing groups like Green Anglicans. The Communion's Companion Links network also enables individual Anglican dioceses across the world to support each other directly through prayer, mutual visits, the sharing of expertise and resources and much else.

The World Council of Churches: Another key international forum is the World Council of Churches (WCC), of which the Church of England is a key member. The WCC has its own programmes of addressing the climate crisis and ecological justice at a global level.

International Church Leaders: Within this worldwide ecumenical context, key international church leaders have led the way. Pope Francis, for instance, has spoken powerfully into the planetary crisis – chiefly through his *Laudato Si'*, which has drawn widespread attention for the way it connects the ecological crisis with the plight of the global poor, and its analysis of economic structures as causes of ecological destruction, drawing on experience and wisdom from Roman Catholic dioceses across the world.



CONCLUSION

"Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." Acts 2.46-47

Responding to Peter's sermon on that Pentecost morning, the community of first disciples learned to live simply, share together and pray sincerely. By these means they would go on to change the world as those around them began to experience the quality of their faith and lives. As Christians, we should not underestimate the evangelistic, missional, social and political impact we can have as we respond to God's call to act at this time of climate and ecological crisis.

The journey we face will bring us closer together, strengthen our relationships with the global Church and deepen our solidarity with communities throughout the world. Participating in the flourishing of nature will deepen our appreciation of God's creation and our spiritual lives. As we respond to the call of the poorest in the world and to the cry of creation, we remember that 'God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Colossians 1.20).