

The Church of England view

The following statement is drawn from the Introduction to the report *Sharing God's Planet - a Christian vision for a sustainable future*:

The earth is ailing, and every creature in it, including humankind, is affected. The evidence suggests that human activity, particularly in the last 100 years, has contributed significantly to the suffering. Humans treat the earth according to their perceptions of it. If people see each other as alien and the earth as inert matter, their behaviour will reflect that perception. If people see each other as part of the same family, and the earth as connected to them because of its sacred origin in the same God who made them, they may be motivated to live in harmony under God.

Nothing stands still, and earthly environmental change is as old as the planet itself. Change is not necessarily bad. It happens, and all that happens is within the gaze of the creator. A global perspective that puts God, not human beings, at the centre of everything would not necessarily assume that floods or hurricanes are bad events in and of themselves. They become bad in people's minds because of the consequent loss of human life and livelihood that can be counted and should be mourned. There may once have been floods in the place that is now called Bangladesh when there were no people living there, floods which, from the point of view of the overall balance of the earth's environment, were positively good.

Humanity is part of the environment too, however, and it would be as much of a mistake to ignore human claims to existence and thriving as it would for humans to ruin the environment for selfish gain. Both matter, because both come from the same divine source and exist by virtue of the one God's gracious love. The earth is ailing because anthropology and ecology are not treated holistically, and both are suffering the consequences.

The unitary, sacred origin of all that is informs the Church of England's view, which is that it is possible and desirable for people to live and work within their environments, not as enemies, nor even as uneasy bedfellows, but harmoniously under God. If humanity can understand that all creatures, including humans, are under God, it might then use its God-given intelligence to find out how to 'safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth' (the fifth mark of mission of the Anglican

Communion) rather than thinking of the earth as an adversary and using human intelligence to dominate and control it.

The idea of nature as alien and frightening, needing to be commanded and controlled, has governed many human actions in the past and people still live under that legacy. We need to understand the size and magnificence of the world, and how well humans can live in it if they so choose. We need too to acknowledge human failure to live well, something for which, historically, Christians have been partly to blame because of the way they have interpreted their tradition. Within Christian teaching, however, there are insights that can undo some of the damage of the past.