

Storm of hope

ChristianEcologyLink

2013

Tell the new story with
Christian Ecology Link



He launches his promises
earthward - how swift and
sure they come!
Psalm 147, The Message

Whether from television, advertising or journalism, we are constantly soaking up the messages the world wants us to hear. Our attitudes, expectations, ambitions and imaginations are formed by them, whether we are aware of it or not.

These messages – urging us to look after ‘number one’ through consumption, self-defence and profit – affect what we say, how we live, what we desire and what is possible through us. They can cloud our vision and our hope for a better world, tame our passion for change, and neutralise our creativity.

CEL is a community of people who take back their power to hear, think and do, for the sake of the earth. Together we listen for a different set of values, tell different stories and challenge the messages to which our daily lives are exposed. We seek to do this through our publications, on our shared journey of discipleship, and whenever we meet together and pray for each other.

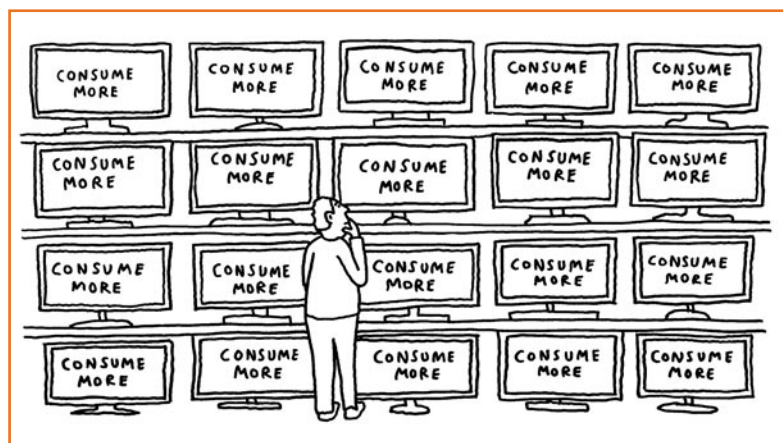
All cartoons: Dave Walker / www.cartoonchurch.com

Getting the message across

The gospel is ‘good news’ not just for humankind but for the earth. In this issue of Storm of Hope we explore how can we make its counter-cultural message heard in our Churches.

Drawing on the Bible and Christian tradition, we offer six messages to help you to confront the ‘powers and principalities’ of our times. They help us in CEL to find a position on the many challenges we face, whether it's climate change, the accelerating extinction of species, the dangerous push to extract fuels through ‘fracking’ or biofuels, or the pursuit of cheap food at any cost.

If you find yourself writing an article in your Church magazine or local newspaper, a sermon or a blog, we hope you find these few pages help you clear your mind, think for yourself, and announce some good news for a culture that has given up on a better way to live.



Getting the message: A Cross

CEL is a green salad of traditions and stories. We look variously to Scripture, inspiration, community and the natural world. But we all believe the world is a revelation of God and is valued by God, and we seek to be moved by the things that move God. In Christ, God sends a message that he is for the material world. Jesus himself brought a message: a ‘new normal’ in the way we live, and by the Cross he restores the material world. As we soak up his love, mercy, justice and shalom, that message, we hope, becomes our own.



Julie says

'Nature surrounds us and God is everywhere. Knowing the divine presence in nature and the urgent need for environmental justice is what keeps me motivated. How privileged we are to have such a beautiful planet as our home. Jesus reconciled the earth and all that is in it to himself, even the smallest creature. Let's pray that the Church shows a greater commitment to the integrity of creation and joins other faiths around the world in promoting a healthier planet for the future.'

1 Love is...

If we live out the commandment 'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13.34) we are drawn into the life of God, who is a community of Love. This love is revealed in all things created, and lavished upon all things created, and it is through the medium of creation that we love God and each other. If we treat the earth with disdain we contradict the faith and commitment to Love which we profess.

- ▶ *In the early church the eucharist was a 'love feast' which represented the believers' belonging to Jesus and to each other. When we choose food that is locally grown, organically produced, animal friendly and fairly traded, even dinner for one can be a love feast with creation in Christ.*

Oli says

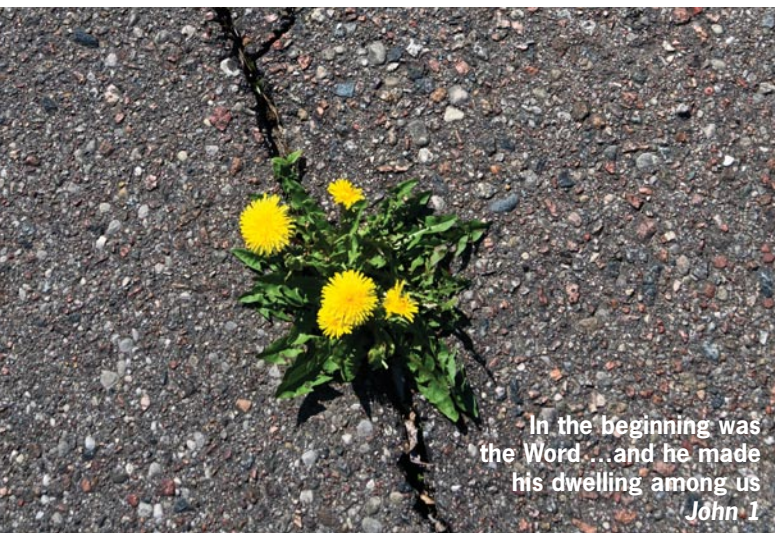
I'm a marketer and know that corporates, and even oil companies, are run by clever, focused and often Church-going people trying to fulfil our desires for nice things. Being part of CEL helps me to focus on what I need not what I want. It's a liberation movement for the soul, and by changing our behaviour we can save our world.



2 It's a small world

We don't have to look far to be reminded that God made the earth – it is in the first line of the Bible. God saw what he had made and said that it was very good (Genesis 1.31). But this message of the earth's goodness is not being taken to heart. Our impact on the planet far exceeds its 'carrying capacity': it is estimated that if everybody lived as we do in the UK three earths would be required. With every trip or transaction we declare that when God made the world he did not know what he was doing: that he should have said that it was quite good but ideally should be bigger, quicker and more vivid.

- ▶ *The main reasons for 'global overshoot' are human population, energy consumption and diet. There is no single, simple solution. Governments must do more than 'pass the buck' to individuals. They must work together to find solutions which meet humans' deepest needs and those of the earth. They need citizens like us to lobby for the rights not just of today's poor but for all future generations and species.*



In the beginning was the Word... and he made his dwelling among us
John 1

3 Whose world is it anyway?

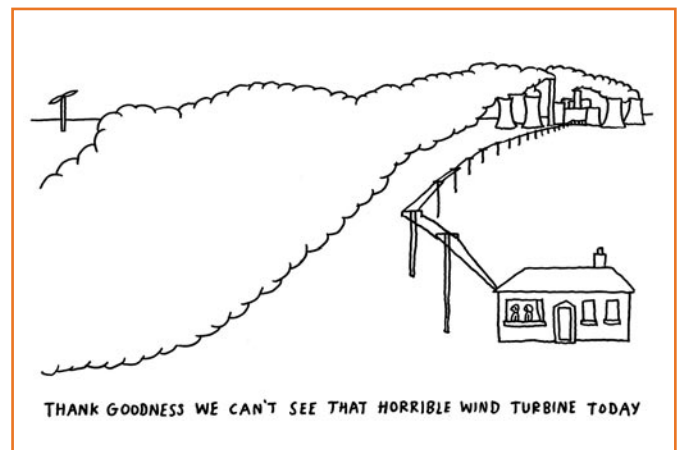
As Psalm 24 says, 'the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it.' If we care for someone, we care for what belongs to them. But with a "three planet" lifestyle we are treating the world like a sponge to be squeezed to the last drop: the world is ours to do with as we please, and if it does belong to God that's of little concern to us. In this way the wealthiest and most powerful members of one or two generations show disdain for everything God cares about.

- ▶ *Just by monitoring our energy use, by taking care over where we source our food or how (and, indeed, whether) we travel, we reaffirm that it is God's world and concede that he was right all along in the way he put the world together.*

4 What's the big deal?

The earth's weather system has already been altered and we could already be seeing the beginnings of climate chaos. In this context a preoccupation with keeping our line of sight free of wind turbines seems out of scale. The alternative to embracing renewable energy will ultimately have a much greater impact on our scenery – and not just our scenery: it is estimated that one in four of all mammals are heading for extinction.

Despite the way we treat the earth, God gives us freedom in the way we choose to live: we tend to live as though heaven and earth have nothing to do with each other, and that God doesn't care what we do, like some sort of absentee landlord. Jesus tells a story about the consequences of this attitude (Matthew 24). A man goes away, leaving his property in the care of one of his servants, who decides to abuse his position. But the master returns and holds the servant accountable. When Jesus returns to gather in creation, if we persist in exploiting it, it will be from us that he will be rescuing it.



- ▶ *With established sources of fossil fuels becoming depleted, there is now a drive to exploit 'unconventional' sources, such as shale gas and tar sands, causing immense geological and environmental damage. But the greatest damage will be from the carbon emissions they create. The NASA scientist Dr James Hansen has said that, "Burning all fossil fuels would create a very different planet than the one that humanity knows... setting in motion irreversible changes, including ice sheet disintegration with a continually adjusting shoreline, extermination of a substantial fraction of species on the planet, and increasingly devastating regional climate extremes."*

5 Whatever

Once we've recognised that there is a better way to live, we can still be misled and discouraged by the messages in which we are soaked from day to day. Sometimes we can feel that we are entirely alone in our concern and that our efforts are pointless and our cause is hopeless.

This sense of isolation and futility is portrayed throughout Scripture. Elijah complained that he was alone, exhausted and ready to give up but the Lord gave him rest and sustenance, spoke to him gently and led him to Elisha who would be his helper and would carry on his work (1 Kings 19). We too grow tired and feel alone but can be encouraged by the fact God longs for us to be faithful to him. That is why community matters to us in CEL: somebody else reached us when we were unconcerned, taught us to expect something different and allowed us to imagine alternatives.

Our aim is not ultimately success, if we measure that in political influence, recognition or the organisation's balance sheet. It was success like that which Jesus was offered when he was led up a



*As an ordained minister I find it increasingly difficult to break away from the prevailing culture and mindset. The grip of materialism, careless use of resources and unconcern for the other than human creation is as prevalent in my congregations as it is outside the Church. Someone in my walking group stated quite forcefully that provided the human race was OK for her grandchildren's lifetime she wasn't bothered after that. I should join **ecocell** to help sustain me in a simpler lifestyle, but as with so much it slips into second place to my ministry, when it is of course part of ministry and calling.*

6 Breaking Free

We have been given a ministry of reconciliation. We are called to be peacemakers, the children of God that creation has been waiting for. The world we have been born into savours violence: from birth we are encouraged to carve out our own territories, recreating the world in our own image and disrupting relationships, personal, social and environmental. When we enter our true freedom, all these relationships will be restored.

For now, this great, hungry engine of rebellion and self destruction is in our bones. The restoration of our ecosystems is no more or less than the liberation of our own selves. We face an energy crisis, a food crisis and a financial crisis, but most of all we face a crisis of the imagination. It feels like a risk to imagine living a life of peace on earth but it is a risk that Jesus has taken before us and a life he lives with us.

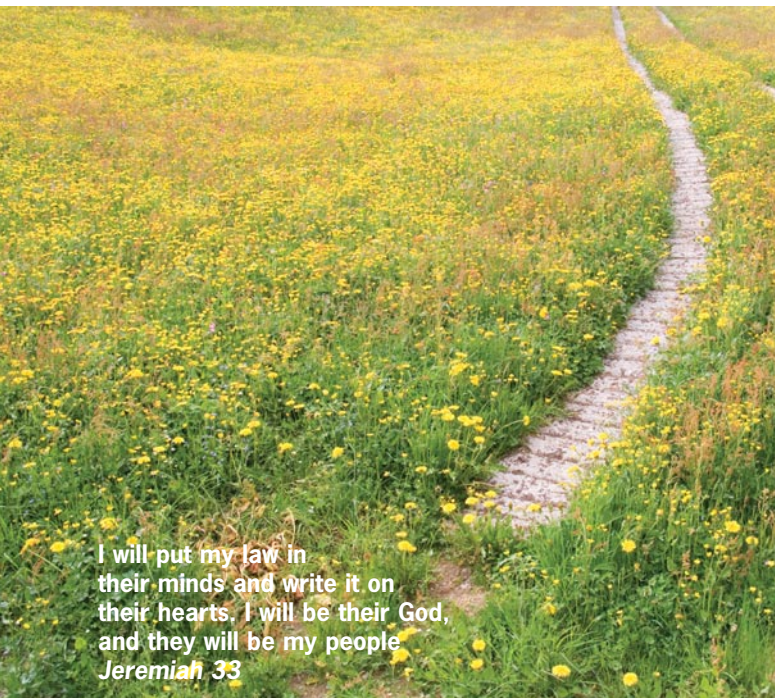
► *The call, from God and the earth, is not just to change our lives but to be changed ourselves. The struggle for peace is played out in prayer and conversion. This inward work is as important as outward works of activism and change of lifestyle. As we are changed, the world will change around us, as the story below reminds us.*



A peaceful revolution

The early Christian community in Ephesus had undermined the authority of the goddess Artemis. According to Acts (19.23-41) the town's metal-smiths were losing business and a riot was brewing. The Church had not signed petitions or painted placards: they had merely recognised that the god who oversaw and undergirded the economy was no God at all. When the Christians found freedom from the idols around them, an economy that catered for and facilitated idolatry simply collapsed.

In Ephesus the industrial-religious complex of idolatry did not go quietly. When the town was in uproar Paul wanted to address the crowd but his friends dissuaded him. We are not told what Paul's message would have been. Could it be our task to bring such a crisis about and to make our own decision about whether, and what, we speak into it?



*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people
Jeremiah 33*

mountain in the wilderness. He deferred to the messages he found in Scripture (Matthew 4.1-11) and the affirmation which his Father gave when the Spirit came on him (Matthew 3.17). Then when he led his disciples up a mountain to discuss success in the Kingdom of heaven, he spoke not of influence and power but of poverty of spirit, meekness, mercy and then persecution (Matthew 5.1-11). Our task is not to be "successful". Our task is to be faithful. As the predictions of our scientists are borne out, let us be people of peace in violent times. Will we be generous? Will we remember justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and help others do the same?

► *For this issue of Storm of Hope we asked three CEL members to share how they resist apathy and keep faith – often a struggle as Toni describes above. Our **ecocell** programme is an invitation to a journey in low-carbon discipleship. It provides not only practical support in reducing your environmental impact, but the companionship and support of fellow travellers.*

Join us

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, Churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £18 a year, or £10 if you are on a low income (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.greenchristian.org.uk, sign up for our free monthly news e-mail or contact us for a free introductory pack.

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Please notify CEL if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force. You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying CEL. It will then not apply to payments you make after that date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.

Key CEL events in 2013 –

see www.greenchristian.org.uk or call us for more details.

The Stream of Life

Tributaries and trails of thanksgiving, vulnerability and radical choice

Saturday 16 March, Leeds

This year's annual CEL conference will nourish the roots of our environmental action. We will deepen our relationship with what sustains us, in creation and in our care for it.

During the morning Philip Roderick will lead us in exploring with body, mind and spirit the profound relationship between God, nature and the human. He will draw from the Scriptures and from the deep insights of Eastern Orthodox theologians and practitioners. The afternoon will feature a choice of interactive workshops, led by people who have been inspired to take action themselves and help others to do the same. To book, call 0845 459 8460 or visit www.greenchristian.org.uk/stream

“... and a little child shall lead them”

Experiencing the sacred through connection with the natural world

Friday 18 - Sunday 20 October, Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk

Using Ringsfield's experience of enabling children to reconnect with the natural world we will enjoy a primarily outdoor retreat following and reconstructing some of their activities, from demonstrating interconnection to the favourite 'activity' for very many of the children: solitude. We will discover how the children really do lead us and so we can engage in making our own meaning. Come and enjoy CEL community in Retreat together with all the space, quiet and good food at Ringsfield. To book contact Chris on 07881 941296 or email GreenEditor@aol.com

CEL's Annual Members' Meeting and workshop.

Saturday 16 November, London, close to Euston Station

An opportunity to contribute to the work of CEL, and gain inspiration for your own.

CEL brings together some 900 people in the UK and beyond who are seeking to tell a different story for our times. We offer:

Gatherings: Members meet in at least two conferences, retreats or workshops each year.

Local groups: 17 groups are directly affiliated to CEL, and we are pleased to offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: Each month we publish a daily *Prayer Guide* available by e-mail, on our website or by post.

Campaigns: Our LOAF campaign promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. We also support the climate change campaign Operation Noah.

Green Christian magazine:

Published twice a year, *Green Christian* is packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews and resources.

Exhibition materials: We can provide a range of leaflets, banners and posters for events and displays giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics.

CELINK: Members can join a discussion forum and social network to exchange news and advice.

E-news: We publish regular e-mails for members and non-members on events and resources from CEL and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: You can find further details of all the above at www.greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.

