

See, grieve, hope, act

An invitation to liberation by **Paul Bodenham**, chair of Christian Ecology Link

“By being baptised into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead we might set out on a new life” Romans 6:4

“Developing resistance to consumerism is an essential spiritual practice today” Society of Friends, Britain Yearly Meeting 1997

Heaven knows we have a long way to go. John Bunyan’s hymn paints a picture of a pilgrim so resolutely cheerful that “no discouragement would make him once relent”. But back then they did not have to cope with domineering multinationals, institutionalised denial and looming ecological tipping-points, did they?

Certainly Christian spirituality has some catching up to do in this “period of consequences”. Members of CEL are ordinary Christians living in extraordinary times, and is only gradually becoming clear just how extraordinary they are. Our society is piling up the mistakes of history and crushing creation. The eternal, ever-renewing pattern of our faith – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – is the release the world needs.

That gospel life is more vital than ever. It is we, ordinary Christians for extraordinary times, who are called to make it real, by prayer, conversion and unrelenting hope. CEL is an experiment in this lived theology. This article suggests one way to be part of it.

A Passion lived

Back in the 1960s, liberation theologians pioneered the Pastoral Cycle, often summarised as “See, Judge, Act”. As a pastoral worker, you’d immerse yourself in a pastoral situation, and analyse what was wrong with it; you’d search the word of the Gospel and judge where Christ’s transforming potential was to be found; and you’d act with the community to bring in signs of the Kingdom.

The Pastoral Cycle sustained a ferment of

evangelism and social change, and it still does so today. But in the ecological crisis it has one crucial weakness. It leaves me unchanged by the process in which I am involved. ‘Eco-praxis’ must engage the heart. So what might it look like?

If you are reading this magazine, the chances are that you profess to believe, like St Paul, that creation is groaning because it is we, humanity, who need to be set free. As Jesus shows us, the way of liberation, for ourselves and creation, is the way of the cross.

This is a journey all Christians enact, whether in baptism, or by tracing the events of Holy Week and Easter in bible or liturgy, or

both. Truly it is a daunting journey to make. Christians, whether in CEL or the wider church, do not just travel together for fun, but also for each other’s safety. Here is a route we might take.

See

We live in a beautiful world, and it is easy to take it for granted. In fact it can sometimes be hard to believe that there is a problem at all. We rely on scientists who observe the melting ice caps, journalists who write in newspapers, researchers who trace supply chains to their source. It is their ministry to be our eyes.

It seems that the experience of gaining an environmental conscience is invariably a memorable one. People often describe a sort of awakening. It may be gradual or sudden, but our paradigms shift, and we find ourselves adrift from the world we thought we inhabited. We find that there exists potential for a new kind of generosity. This is a generosity which serves those who will never thank us – future generations, other species and people in far countries. It is their world that we learn to see, and with their eyes.

Such seeing is not uncommon. It is not only possible for humans to surrender their own perspective, it is something each of us is called to do. Another word for it is Love.

“Lord, help me to see”

- ▶ **Spend** a while with nature every day, even if it’s just a window box
- ▶ **Subscribe** to CEL’s Prayer Guide, which offers environmental news as material for prayer
- ▶ **Talk** to someone about climate change and ask how they see it.

