

# Enough is Enough

**Paul Ballard** means Enough in the sense of Stop!

## Enough is enough

Today's topic is about 'enough'. This may sound odd until we look more closely to the demands being put on our planet by human economic and cultural activity. There are two images that I want to ask you to take away today. The first is the (perhaps familiar) fact that in order to support the present way of life we enjoy in Western Europe we need the resources of three planet earths. The Americans need four. And what we presently enjoy is the envy of the world; so they too strive to catch up. Look at the huge growing economies of Brazil, China and India. All this is remorselessly driven forward by the global market economy whose mantra is 'ever greater growth, more trade and greater consumption.'

Of course it is difficult to be unaware of what is going on. There are reports regularly from the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change of the United Nations, calling for radical diminution of the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that cause global warming. We have begun to experience the consequent changes in weather patterns of monsoon conditions coupled with periods of drought, stronger storms and higher sea levels. However this is but one of a whole complex of environmental challenges, from deforestation to desertification, from loss of bio-diversity, to massive mineral exploitation and dead oceans. For me this is driven home by a photo taken from space of the world at night. The bright lights of the city regions are clear. But, fascinatingly, there are such lights in the desert of north-western Australia. These are mines stripping the earth. All this to supply the demands of an increasingly urbanised world. Only slowly and tentatively we are beginning to take this seriously, and the way ahead is unclear as we play around with technologies, try to

become more efficient and wrestle with the pitfalls of politics, with economic powers, and sheer inertia and nimbyism.

This is the context for the growing demand to call: 'Enough!'. Enough in the sense of, 'Stop! Before we fall over the precipice!'. Enough in the sense of only wanting to meet our needs and not to indulge our desires. Enough in the sense of using the planet's resources in a sustainable and responsible way that secures our future. This, however, requires a massive change in the way we order our lives. There is no future in tinkering around at the edges. It demands a shift in the way society understands itself, our relation to the world in which we are set, indeed, what it means to be human, inculcating different values, and seeking satisfaction in the quality of relationships, in beauty and creativity, rather than power and possessions. It seeks a new 'mind set'.

**...the Church has to be prophetic witnessing to the seriousness and challenges of the times**

It is here perhaps that the Christian community can make a significant contribution. There is a wisdom to be found in the Bible and the great theological teachers that can be, and increasingly are, called to witness, to illuminate and provide a richer understanding of humanity and its place in the creation. What I want to offer are four Christian themes as to how this may be so.

### The time of opportunity

First, like John Bunyan's Pilgrim, we face a crucial choice: to continue to go down the road that leads to destruction



*Wednesdays at One is a regular weekly series in Peterborough Cathedral, and the Eco-faith Group had a series of five around the annual Green Festival in the city.*

*They were entitled Creation, Enough is Enough, Justice and Ecology, and Responsibility with and for Nature and Christ the meaning of Creation.*

or to take the uphill path to safety and responsibility. The Biblical term for this is *kairos*, the time of decision, the time that is ripe for change. The Old Testament prophets constantly called the people to change direction from greed and oppression to justice and peace.

Seek good and not evil,  
That you may live;  
And so the Lord, the God of Hosts  
will be with you  
Hate evil and love good,  
And establish justice in the gate.  
(Amos 5.14-15)

We have had our own *kairos*. For a moment it seemed, in the financial crisis, while the tents of Occupy crowded the steps of St Paul's and Wall Street was filled with protest, that something might give; but it was not to be so. Recovery, we are told, is more of the same, growth at any cost. And God sends many such *kairoi*, all offering a chance for change: each UN report or international conference, each natural disaster, each survey of species decline. Hopefully, cumulatively, the juggernaut that is our society is indeed being turned towards another course – if there is time. So

the first point is that the Church has to be prophetic, witnessing to the seriousness of the situation, pointing to the challenges of the times.

**Tending the garden**

The second point to make is that there is at the heart of the Christian perspective a responsibility to care for nature. The two creation narratives in Genesis set the scene. In the later and more ritualistic first account the man and woman (it is always together) are given 'dominion' over the natural world (Gen. 27-30) and encouraged to multiply. This has, unfortunately, too often been understood as a mandate for exploitation, but a careful reading suggests differently. To have 'dominion' means not to own but, on the contrary, to manage, to take responsibility for the world as God's vicegerent or viceroy. Thus humanity is given the task of seeing that the creation retains the goodness with which it is endowed by God, that it functions properly. The other command to 'fill the earth' made more sense when it was written, when even great empires covered large tracts of emptiness, cities were far and few between and the wilderness was all around. Yet it does not mean 'stuff full'. Rather it has the meaning of bringing to fullness, bring to full potential. So what we have here is the blessing of God on the creation, which itself is bidden to flourish, and where humanity is given responsibility to work with the creative process.

The second story, the myth of Eden, has a similar emphasis. Adam is taken, as his name suggests, from the ground and set with all the other creatures in a garden. There he has the responsibility of being the gardener (Gen. 2.15). Why else would he need an assistant? He exercises authority over the animals (this is the significance of naming them) (Gen. 2.19). Adam's need, however, is met by the presentation of a colleague, so that together they can make a working unit (Gen. 2.23-4). Nor is Adam made redundant after the fall. It is that the job gets more difficult (Gen. 3.17-18). The land and its inhabitants still have to be cared for if it is to bring forth its

fruits. Adam and Eve, humanity, are the gardeners, husbanding the resources of the earth.

In the Biblical narrative the theme continues. Noah, after the flood (Gen. 8.20-9.19), starts the process again, though now the horizons are the whole world. Above all, however, it is embedded in the Torah, in the commandments to care for the land and for the beasts, domestic and wild. There are commandments concerning the health of the land, caring for domestic beasts (eg Deut. 22.1f; 25.4), and even for the nests of the birds, which is as the justice and hospitality that extends to neighbour and stranger (Lev. 19.18). God himself cares for all the creatures. As our reading said:

You open your hand,  
Satisfying the desire of every living thing.  
(Psalm 145.16)

Remember, too, the Jesus sayings:

Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. .... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin .... but if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you? (Matt. 6.26, 28, 30).

**...the struggle towards restoration is a longing and yearning; a hope to which God himself is drawing us**

**The virtue of temperance**  
Thirdly, when I was a small boy, I remember my grandmother always refused a second helping by claiming she had had 'an elegant sufficiency'. In that phrase my Victorian Nonconformist grandmother was unwittingly putting her finger on a vital dimension of Christian moral teaching. Compared to her greedy grandson, she recognised that we only need enough.

In classical Christian terms we are talking about the virtue of temperance, by which is meant, not total abstinence but the ability to control the will to desire sufficiency. Drawing on a long tradition that goes back to the great ancient Greek philosophers, notably Aristotle, the cardinal virtues ask us to pick a middle way between excess and abstinence, here between inordinate self-denial and greed. A balanced life-style accepts the need to meet the necessary demands of living responsibly, caring for oneself, for the family and other dependents and in the community. For my grandmother this was, as we say, second nature, because she had learnt it from her youth. It was normal to live modestly and to treat others with care and respect. Perhaps growing up in a station master's tied house and being the village post-mistress, married to the baker, she could do little else. But it is still a virtue that an age of affluence, where we are encouraged to satisfy wants rather than needs, has been largely lost, even despised. The world is crying out for individuals and groups to embody the virtue of temperance, resisting our consumerist, growth society with courage and joy. It is, perhaps, here that the Christian tradition can most directly and creatively enter into the public square by enabling the rediscovery of that tradition of moral discourse that is part of our common cultural heritage.

Such a model for living clearly chimes in with the New Testament portrayal of the Christian life, both personally and communally. Indeed Paul's list of qualities that mark the fruit of the Spirit includes temperance (Gal. 5.23). Jesus again, in that same passage in the Sermon on the Mount, offers us, at the heart of our faith, the signature prayer that he taught his disciples. In it we ask, 'give us this day our daily bread'. The word used suggests the daily ration allowed for a soldier; that is, we ask for enough for the task of life and no more. He goes on, 'Your heavenly Father knows that you need these things. Strive for the kingdom of God

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and his righteousness, and all these things (our daily necessities) will be given to you as well' (Matt. 6. 11, 33). Would that we could live by this wisdom!

**Living in hope**

The fourth point is this: the Apostle Paul has an astonishing passage in Romans 8, about the glory that is to be revealed (Rom. 8.10).

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of God.

It is not possible here to unpack all that

this might mean but one thing stands out. The future of creation, at least that bit in which we have been placed, as Paul sees it, looking back to Genesis, is bound up with, indeed is dependent on the future of mankind. Here we are brought back to the earlier point: that we are gardeners, co-creators, in creation. This is the core of that mind-set that is needed if we are to secure our future. But here that thought is related to the whole drama of creation and salvation. The vision is of a full restoration. In other words the struggle in which we are engaged is not simply an up-hill battle of attrition but an assertion of hope that this longing and yearning is to be true to the very grain of the universe, a hope to which God himself is drawing us. We are being encouraged here to get in line with our true nature and destiny.

It was suggested that there were two images that I want you to take away with you. The first was the destruction

of our greed. The second is found in the Apocalypse.

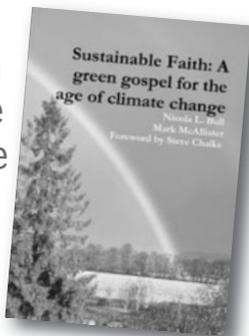
[He] showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God .... [and] he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing .... through the middle of the street. .... On either side of the river is the tree of life .... and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 21.10; 22.1-2).

Here again is that vision, of humanity, in the city, being healed by and living in harmony with the natural world. Let us keep that in our sights. ■

Paul Ballard is Professor Emeritus of Cardiff University in Practical Theology, now living in Peterborough. He is Secretary to the Peterborough Eco-faith Network which has been in existence for just two years.

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environmentalism to their communities. Hospitality, love for our neighbours and care for the poor are central themes in the gospel message, and the 'green' gospel for today acknowledges that we cannot practise these fully and fulfil the mandate of Micah 6:8 – acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly with God – unless we demonstrate our love and care for all creation.

Humanity is part of a delicate web of life, all of which is loved by our Creator God.

Available from [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com)

In the last issue of *Green Christian*, GC77 we mentioned mention four of Mary Grey's books: the last mentioned is incorrect: we printed *The Advent of Peace* but advertised *The Resurrection of Peace*.

Here are the facts: *The Advent of Peace*, SPCK 2010; *The Resurrection of Peace*, SPCK 2012. *The Spirit of Peace* forthcoming – I hope 2015 (or maybe December 2014). The Editor apologises to Mary Grey and we wish her well in the publication of the new book.