

Exploring Theology for Today

One of the Evenings @ St Columba Wednesday sessions has been looking at the way Christian ideas – theology – have influenced attitudes towards the environment. We have noted that much of the environmental damage and climate-changing pollution of the last 200 years has come from so-called “Christian” countries. What part does theology play? How might it be re-thought?

We began by considering “creation”. Shifts have taken place to understand human’s relationship with the rest of creation as one of “responsible stewardship for” or “kaitiaki”, rather than the old understanding of “dominion over”. Creation itself is seen as good, and something to be co-operated with.

Contemporary view sees creation as an inter-connected system, of which humans are but one part. We are not separate from other animals or other parts of the natural world, and we are not better or more important than the rest. This is quite a different view from the one that sees humans as somehow special in the eyes of God. Instead, humans are seen to have developed gifts and abilities that enable us to make a difference, and that puts on us ethical responsibilities to take care of creation.

In this approach, God is understood as also inter-woven in the whole of creation, and may be thought of as “creative energy”, rather than as some separate being that acts from outside. Again, if God is part of all things, then there is a sacredness to all parts of creation so they demand our respect and care, and are not ours to deal with simply for our own benefit. One approach sees the world as “God’s body”.

This is a form of “incarnation” – becoming “flesh” – which is usually reserved for a Christian understanding of Jesus. Christians concerned about climate change and related environmental issues have recognised that if we think of God becoming human in Jesus (and only human) in order to save humans (and only humans) this privileges humans over all else in creation. Such a view validates us doing what we want to the air, the land, the sea, all other creatures. So views today are turning more to the sense that Jesus was a person who pointed us to new values, and that God was present in him in the same way that is present in us and all things. The idea of “Christ” then refers to all those points where we see divine activity in our world.

The response for us as Christians is then to work together with this divine energy (God) to save endangered species and polluted streams as much as to save ourselves. Some new ideas to think about! Christian thinking is changing and needs to change: what do *you* think?