

Environmental Commission

# Declaration

Notes and Reflections

Anglican Diocese of British Columbia

*January, 2004*

## Preamble to the Declaration Diocese of BC Environmental Commission

The purpose of this declaration is to:

1. Provide an outline of a theological basis for the fulfilling of the Diocese of BC Environmental Commission mission statement which states that:

The Diocesan Environmental Commission exists to ensure that people, beginning with Anglicans in our Diocese, recognize that their relationship to God's Creation is a spiritual issue and to help them change their attitude and behaviour toward Creation.

2. Provide an opening for conversation with the Church that encourages us all to reflect more deeply upon how God calls us to live in responsible relationship with all of Creation.
3. To bear witness to the wider church and to others beyond the Christian faith that the Christian Church is attempting to take seriously God's call to live in responsible, life-giving relationship to all dimensions of God's Creation.

## DIOCESE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION DECLARATION

1. God created all life forms, those perceptible to the five human senses and those beyond normal human perception.
2. God saw Creation and declared that it was all good and God entrusted each part of Creation with a unique role within the whole.
3. The presence of God can be discerned throughout the entirety of Creation.
4. God breathed life into all creatures, making them instruments of praise to their Creator.
5. Humans are uniquely created in God's image with the ability to choose to live consciously in relation to their Creator.
6. God provides for all Creation, entrusting humans with divine responsibility for protecting and nurturing God's gifts for the good of all.
7. Unwilling to acknowledge their dependence upon God and their interconnectedness with all Creation, humans have fail in their responsibility and introduce disorder into God's Creation

8. Since the beginning of time, God has called human beings to embrace the original design of order and perfection of Creation which was distorted when humans placed themselves at the centre of Creation.
  
9. In Christ, the perfection of God's Creation, God restores the cosmic order and purpose of Creation and enables all to live in restored harmony with God, with one another and with all of Creation.
  
10. Humans are empowered by God's Spirit to love and worship God reflecting God's original love and harmony in relation to all orders of Creation

January, 2004



**Declaration # 1:**

**God created all life forms, those perceptible  
to the five human senses and those beyond  
normal human perception .**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

*All things that are, are good, just because they have being. Their being is a gift, and it is therefore a sign of love: God so loves all things that He creates them.*

Thomas Merton, 1941

*The whole creation exists eternally in God; when God, the infinite being, expresses himself, manifests himself, speaks his word, the whole creation comes into being in that one word.*

Bede Griffiths, 1982

*The universe exists because it is a creation of God.*

Thomas Clarke, 1991

**Thoughts and Questions:**

Since God created all that is, Creation provides a window into God. Abundant, varied, colourful flowers, majestic trees, birds - from fragile hummingbirds to powerful eagles - and delicate multi-hued butterflies all testify to God's incredible creativity and artistry. As we come to understand the marvellous inter-relatedness of organisms in various ecosystems, we are left in awe of the God who created such complex, fully functioning systems.

How aware am I of God's presence in Creation?

What might I/we do to nurture and encourage our awareness that God is the source and the in-dwelling presence of all Creation?

How does my relationship with Creation change when I remain aware that God has created all that is?

**Declaration # 2:**

**God saw Creation and declared that it was all good  
and God entrusted each part of Creation with  
a unique role within the whole.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.  
*And God saw that it was good.*

The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.  
*And God saw that it was good.*

God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night and to separate the light from the darkness.  
*And God saw that it was good.*

God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind.  
And God saw that it was good.

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*  
Genesis 1:10,12,18, 25, 31

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 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 – you of little faith

Matthew 6:28-30

*The goodness proper to the deity permeates everything that exists,  
... so that it illumines every creature and gives it life... and is its  
height and breadth, its cause and its purpose.*

Dionysius the Areopagite, 6<sup>th</sup> Century

## Thoughts and Questions:

In Genesis 1:28 the word “subdue” must be understood in the context of a pre-industrialised culture in which human beings lived in a much more intimate and dependent relationship with creation than is generally characteristic today. The Hebrew word “*kabash*” conveys the idea of getting rid of chaos, not subjugating. When the human occupants of this planet have attempted to subjugate Creation, we have tended to create chaos in contradiction to this Genesis directive.

The goodness of God’s Creation is intrinsic not extrinsic. All parts of Creation are good because they are created by God. Each part of Creation is good regardless of any usefulness or perceived value it may have to any other part of Creation. The goodness of one part of Creation does not depend upon its goodness or usefulness to any other part of Creation. And yet, each part is interdependent with all parts of Creation. Human beings, as much as any other dimension of Creation, are dependent upon all other parts of the created order for health and survival. God created all and provided every part with unique rights, roles and responsibilities in service to the whole.

Since God declared that everything in Creation is good, humans are called to respect all life forms, and to value each life form’s role in the whole of Creation. Humans are responsible to think carefully before embarking on projects that will serve human needs alone.

What impact will a particular decision, choice, action I make have upon the other organisms with whom we share the gift of life?

Have we explored the long-term effects of our plans upon the rest of Creation?

Can we acknowledge that at times, in an attempt to meet our own needs or to protect our own health, we have destroyed other parts of God’s Creation? How might our behaviour change if we come to a greater awareness of our impact upon the rest of Creation?

Are we willing to hear God’s call to repentance for actions we have taken which have damaged God’s Creation? Are we willing to pay the price of making necessary changes in our lives to reduce our negative impact upon Creation?

**Declaration # 3:**

**The presence of God can be discerned  
throughout the entirety of Creation.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

The heavens are telling the glory of God and their firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

Psalm 19:1-6

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

Romans 1:20

*The universe itself is the temple of God. This visible world contains teaching about the invisible world.*

Origen, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century

*Open your spiritual eye to the contemplation of God and recognize  
the delightfulness of the Lord from the beauty of creation.*

Nikitas Stithatos, 11<sup>th</sup> Century

*God talks in the trees.*

Thomas Merton, 1948

God is everything that is good, it seems to me, and the goodness that is in everything is God.

*Julian of Norwich, 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Century*

*Grasp the Creator through His creation, seeing Him reflected in  
created things as the sun is reflected in water, since in their inner  
beings they are in varying degrees images of the primal cause of  
all.*

St. Theodoros the Great Ascetic, 14<sup>th</sup> Century?

*We do not know God from His essence. We know Him rather from  
the grandeur of His creation and from His providential care for all*

*creatures. For through these, as though they were mirrors, we may attain insight into His infinite goodness, wisdom and power.*

St. Maximos the Confessor, 7<sup>th</sup> Century

*Everything around me appeared to be enchanted and inspired me with love for and gratitude to God. People, trees, plants, and animals – I felt kinship with them all and discovered how each bore the seal of the Name of Jesus Christ.*

The Way of a Pilgrim, 19<sup>th</sup> Century

*The Holy Spirit is not absent from any created being.*

St. Maximos the Confessor, 7<sup>th</sup> Century

*He is also clearly perceived in the grandeur of the things that he has created.*

John Cassian, 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Century

## **Thoughts and Questions:**

The Christian faith has always believed that every dimension of Creation, in its original state untarnished by human interference, bears witness to the presence of the Creator. God's greatness and blessing are evident in the whole of Creation for those who are willing to see. The more we open ourselves in quiet contemplation in natural settings, the more we will increase our understanding and awareness of God's presence throughout all of Creation.

What spiritual disciplines help me to open my eyes to the deeper dimensions of life that exist beneath the surface?

How might I/we help others to grow in their ability to discern God's presence "throughout the entirety of Creation"?

**Declaration # 4:**

**God breathed life into all creatures, making them instruments of praise to their Creator.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Genesis 2:7

*All creation rests then for a moment in order to praise the Lord. The stars, the trees, the rivers stop for an instant and, together with the choir of angels and the souls of the righteous, sing the praises of God.*

Apostolic Tradition, 4<sup>th</sup> Century

*Thy creation shall keep watch to sing psalms with the angels.*

Gregory Nazianzen, 4<sup>th</sup> Century

*All creation prays to God and sings His praises.*

The Way of a Pilgrim, 19<sup>th</sup> Century

*The glory, the strength, the grace, the suppleness, the life of all things came into being as a command from God and praised Him. It was not because they praised Him that He looked at them: they praised Him because they were seen by Him.*

Thomas Merton, 1962

*Today, Father, this blue sky lauds you. The delicate green and orange flowers of the tulip poplar tree praise you. The distant blue hills praise you, together with the sweet-smelling air that is full of brilliant light. The bickering flycatchers praise you with the lowing cattle and the quails that whistle over there. I too, Father, praise you, with all these my brothers, and they give voice to my own heart and to my own silence. We are all one silence, and a diversity of voices. You have made us together, you have made us one and many, you have placed me here in the midst as witness, as awareness, as joy. Here I am. In me the world is present and you are present. I am a link in the chain of light and of presence.*

Thomas Merton, 1965

## **Thoughts and Questions:**

If all aspects of Creation are good and bear witness to the presence of the Creator, then all aspects of Creation give praise and honour to God. It may be easier for us to appreciate the reality of Creation giving praise to God when we see a gentle doe and her fawn pausing by a woodland trail, or when we hear a loon calling on a lake at dusk. But are we also able to see that mice, rats, worms, centipedes, and bacteria call also be instruments of praise to God? Creation is a whole. No part of God's Creation is excluded. When we honour one part of Creation, we are bound to honour the whole.

How have we noticed other aspects of Creation being "instruments of praise to their Creator"?

How do we praise the Creator in our daily lives and actions?

**Declaration # 5:**

**Humans are uniquely created in God's image with the ability to choose to live consciously in relation to their Creator.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

“Let us make human kind in our image, according to our likeness  
God created human kind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them,

Genesis 1:27

*Each person is basically good, having been created by God, in the image of God, with the desire for God.*

Isaac of Nineveh, 7<sup>th</sup> Century

*His image may be obscured by neglect, but never destroyed by evil. The image of God remains in you always.*

Origen, 3<sup>rd</sup> Century

**Thoughts and Questions:**

There is a dimensional difference between human beings and the rest of Creation. Of no part of Creation other than the human is it said that it was created in God's image.

This does not mean that human beings are free to do as they please in relation to the rest of Creation. Rather it means that human beings bear the greater responsibility to care for, protect and nurture all aspects of Creation. Human beings have the intelligence and the will to act in ways that have far greater implications for the rest of Creation than the actions of other creatures.

In what way are humans “uniquely created in God's image”? What are the implications of being “uniquely created in God's image”?

How can we acknowledge the greater responsibility for the well-being of Creation that accompanies our greater impact upon Creation? How can we live responsibly towards the rest of the created order?

**Declaration # 6:**

**God provides for all Creation, entrusting humans with divine responsibility for protecting and nurturing God's gifts for the good of all.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the cattle, and over the birds of the air, and over the all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

God blessed them, and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

Genesis 1:26,28

*We have to live on the planet, on the planet's terms and not on our terms.*

Thomas Berry, 1991

*God made the world as a garden in which He himself took delight. He made man and gave to man the task of sharing in His own divine care of created things.*

Thomas Merton, 1961

*We must work with a sense of responsibility towards living growing things and towards the men we live with...our work ought to be a dialogue with reality, and therefore a conversation with God.*

Thomas Merton, 1961

*Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience to God today concerns the responsibility of the Christian in technological society toward God's creation and God's will for His creation. Obedience to God's will for nature.*

Thomas Merton, 1965

**nb:** In *Genesis 1:26* the role of “dominion” entrusted to human beings is understood within the context of the fact that human beings are created in the “image” and “likeness” of God. Human “dominion”, therefore, is similar to God’s “dominion.” God’s “dominion” is not domination. God’s “dominion” always aims for life-giving benefits for all creation. For Jesus “dominion” meant self-sacrificial service *Mark 19:43-45*. In *Genesis 1:28* the word “subdue” must be understood in the context of a pre-industrialised culture in which human beings lived in a much more intimate and dependent relationship with creation than is generally characteristic today. The Hebrew word “*kabash*” conveys the idea of getting rid of chaos, not subjugating. When the human occupants of this planet have attempted to subjugate Creation, we have tended to create chaos in contradiction to this Genesis directive.

### **Thoughts and Questions:**

Humans, having been given the most complex and powerful of God’s gifts, bear in turn, the greatest obligation to the rest of Creation. Dominion and subduing point to the reality of human responsibility. They do not permit reckless violence. It is tempting as human beings for us to use our powers to insulate us from our awareness of God’s provision for us. We have a tendency to fail to draw appropriate boundaries around our use of power, failing to accept limitations, refusing to discern how much is enough and how much is too much.

How can we learn to live within appropriate boundaries as human occupants of this earth?

**Declaration # 7:**

**Unwilling to acknowledge their dependence upon God and their interconnectedness with all Creation, humans have fail in their responsibility and introduce disorder into God's Creation.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

<sup>17</sup> And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

<sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Genesis 3:17-19

*We are in the world and part of it and we are destroying everything because we are destroying ourselves, spiritually, morally and in every way. It is all part of the same sickness, and it all hangs together.*

Thomas Merton, 1962

*We have broken the great conversation. By breaking the conversation, we have shattered the universe.*

Thomas Berry, 1991

*How absolutely true, and how central a truth, that we are purely and simply part of nature, though we are the part which recognizes God.*

Thomas Merton, 1963

*The beauty of God's creativity is manifest when each flower, rock, tree, and person shines with its own vitality, yet depends upon all and contributes to all in an ecology of life.*

Richard Cartwright Austin, 1987

*Our isolation from nature inhibits the development of the image of God within us.*

Richard Cartwright Austin, 1987

*By not accepting a responsibility for the fate of the earth, there is a failure of religious responsibility for the fate of the earth, there is a failure of religious responsibility to the divine, as well as to the human. We seem not to realize that as the outer world becomes damaged, our sense of the divine is degraded in a corresponding manner.*

Thomas Berry, 1991

### **Thoughts and Questions:**

Scripture places the responsibility for the disorder that exists in the human relationship to creation clearly at the feet of human beings. This does not mean that human beings are responsible for natural disasters. It does, however, mean that the devastating effects of natural disasters on human beings are always worse when human beings have failed to take seriously the realities of the Creation with which we must coexist.

Can we cultivate the humility that says that we do not know everything about the workings of the planet we occupy and that therefore, we must proceed with caution, gentleness, and great care?

Are we willing to see how human greed contributes to the disorder of Creation?

**Declaration # 8:**

**Since the beginning of time, God has called human beings back to embrace the original design of order and perfection of Creation which was distorted when humans placed themselves at the centre of Creation.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:48

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body.

Colossians 3:15

*The world is a sacred vessel which must not be tampered with or grabbed after.*

Thomas Merton, 1961

*When we go with the flow of the cosmic process, when we are obedient to what we hear coming to us through the earth, ultimately we are being obedient to God who is mediating the will of God and our human call through all the earth's processes.*

Thomas Clarke, 1991

**Thoughts and Questions:**

Human beings are called, not to dominate or abuse Creation, but to assist in the work of restoration of Creation. The work of "reconciliation" is the work of assisting in the process of returning Creation as much as possible to God's original intention.

How do we hear God's call individually/collectively to work towards God's vision of restoration and healing for all of Creation? How might the church interpret God's call to the wider society?

**Declaration # 9:**

**In Christ, the perfection of God's Creation, God restores the cosmic order and purpose of Creation and enables all to live in restored harmony with God, with one another and with all of Creation.**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.  
Colossians 1:17

He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

Hebrews 1:3

*The mysterious vitality of trees, the silent magic of the forest, the strange and steady cycle of its life, possess in a peculiar degree this power of unleashing the human soul: are curiously friendly to its cravings, minister to its inarticulate needs.*

Evelyn Underhill, 1911

*Here I see my task is to get rid of the last vestiges of a pharisaical division between the sacred and secular; and to see that the whole world is reconciled to God in Christ.*

Thomas Merton, 1965

*Redemption must also bring back balance, harmony and beauty to what has been destroyed in the world.*

Sean McDonagh, 1986

*Christian liberation reflection extended to the natural world sees human and natural salvation as inextricably linked.*

Sallie McFague, 1997

**Thoughts and Questions:**

God has provided a model of compassion and love in Jesus Christ. By following Jesus' example, we can move back towards the harmony that God originally intended. Our work must be grounded in prayer and our personal relationship with Christ.

How does the model of Jesus' life inform our relationship to all life forms?

**Declaration # 10:**

**Humans are empowered by God's Spirit  
to love and worship God, reflecting God's  
original love and harmony in relation to all  
orders of Creation**

Quotes from Scripture & Christian Tradition:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup> So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

*I am once again made clean by frost and morning air, here in the presence  
of the moon.*

Thomas Merton, 1951

**Thoughts and Questions:**

The gift of the Holy Spirit empowers humans to develop a healthy, life-giving relationship within Creation. We are called to live in love and respect for all of Creation, as God does. We need to make opportunities to consciously acknowledge God's presence in Creation and to offer worship to God in nature.

How do we express love towards God in God's Creation?  
What opportunities might we make for worship in a natural setting?