

The Integrity of Creation: an Ecumenical Overview

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*“How can the church call itself ecumenical, if the universe, itself, is left out?”
(Simone Weil)*

Ecumenism is about taking an overall view of the church, and ecology is about taking an overall view of creation. The present condition of the natural world is of concern to all human beings, and can only be dealt with by them all working together. The breadth of vision we need to restore unity to the church is also needed to restore the integrity of creation. It is Christ, who brings unity to the church, His body, and Christ, who unites the whole of creation to Himself.

The words “ecumenism”, “ecology”, and “economy” all begin with the Greek word, οἶκος = *oikos*, meaning “home”. Economy – οἰκονομία = *oikonomia* – literally means housekeeping, or stewardship. So, ecology and ecumenism both have to do with being at home, in a greater, God-given whole, to which we belong, and both involve housekeeping, or stewardship. They are words, which speak of the diversity of the particular members of a home, and the unity of the home, to which they belong. The “home”, which was given to us by God in creation, was restored to us by Jesus Christ, when He, Himself, dwelt within that home. As human beings consciously accept the presence of Christ dwelling among them today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in word and sacrament, so they become His body, His temple, His home, and make His presence available to the whole of creation. They recognise that, by the Holy Spirit, God has already gone ahead of them, and is only waiting for His creatures to respond to Him, so that He can be effective in their lives. If we are to recognise, and respond, to the Holy Spirit, we must be sensitive to His presence. To be sensitive in that way will require prayer and meditation, to be open to God, and poetry and prophecy to make Him known to others. Yet poetry is not just a subjective matter of feelings. It also needs an objective basis, in reality, and so must be allied to science. Both poetry and science, like prayer and effective action, come from loving attention to the world as it really is.

As we recognise that God is present for, and involved with, His creation, we also recognise that creation is not yet perfect, and so God is sharing in the suffering that results from the brokenness of creation. God's share in the suffering of creation was revealed by the cross of Jesus Christ. Yet, by sharing in the suffering of creation, God acts to heal it, and that healing is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a foretaste of the renewal of the whole of creation. By the Holy Spirit, that renewal is being made present now, and all human beings are called to respond to it, and cooperate with it. By the renewal of creation, its brokenness is healed, and the barriers that divide and estrange human beings from God, human beings from human beings, and human beings from nature, are overcome. The way in which barriers are broken down is Christ's way of humble love. Only by humility can we remove the high barriers that human pride has erected. So it is this way of humble love that unites the divided church, and heals the broken integrity of creation.

If we take the way of humility, we will not need to wait for big solutions to be imposed from the top, but can begin at the grass roots level by loving our neighbour, and caring for our environment.