

# Creation study group

James Currall

## Prayer at the start of sessions

Eternal God,  
We thank you for the glory of your creation  
a mystery that surpasses our knowledge and understanding.  
Eternal God,  
We thank you for the earth and water, sun and wind,  
creatures and peoples – cultures – nations:  
Guide us as we gather to confess that we have violated the gift of life given to us.  
Strengthen us as we seek to affirm that the earth and all therein is yours.  
Enable us as we seek to recall your covenant and make it our own. **Amen.**

*(Source: World Council of Churches)*

## Sessions One - What is Creation?

**Scripture** – Genesis 1 – 2:4a

### Questions

- What did you notice that you haven't noticed before?
- What do you think the significance of the order of events is?
- What are the different parts to the narrative and how do they interact?
- Verse 1:28 talks about 'dominion' over everything – how has this been interpreted?

### Discussion

Creation is it a past event, the result of a past event or continuing revelation?

We looked at the case of the peppered moth as an example of natural selection in 'real time'.

### Supporting material

Slides in attached pdf.

## Session Two - How has the Church viewed Creation Theologically?

(over the course of it's history)

**Scripture** – Psalm 19

### Questions

- What strikes you about this Psalm?

- Do you notice two or more different parts, dealing with different things?
- How do you think the heavens tell the glory of God without using words?
- Are there any particular images in Psalm 19 that capture your imagination?

Verses 1-6 talk about Creation, verses 7-11 talk about God's Law and verses 12-15 talk about human beings.

**Scripture** – Psalm 148

### **Questions**

- Why do you think the psalmist lists so many different beings praising God?
- Humanity comes last in the list – why do you think this is and what does it mean for us?

### **Discussion**

How the Church (East and West, RC and reformed, etc.) have viewed the relationship between God, Creation and Humanity (mirroring Psalm 19's three parts)

### **Supporting material**

Slides in attached pdf.

## **Session Three – Climate Injustice**

**Scripture** – Amos 5

### **Questions**

- What does God look like/who is God/what is God doing in this chapter of Amos?
- What does holiness/salvation look like in this text?
- How does an encounter with this story shape who we are and what we might strive to become?

### **Discussion**

Various aspects of Justice in environmental issues including the massive over-consumption in the developed world.

### **Supporting material**

The Conclusion from James's paper "*From Climate Crisis to Climate Justice*" in the SEI Journal vol 5.3 (autumn 2021)<sup>1</sup> – reproduced below.

## **Session Four – What is an appropriate Christian response to the Climate Crisis?**

**Scripture** – Jeremiah 4:1-28

### **Questions**

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1 James Currall, 'From Climate Crisis to Climate Justice', SEI Journal, 5.3 (2021), 37–55.

- How does this passage make you feel?
- Where do you find hope in this passage?
- Where do you find hope in times of trouble?
- How does your hope affect how you feel about the natural world?

### **Discussion**

- Prayer, Lament, Grief and Remorse and our complicity in the loss
- Repentance – turning away from excessive consumption and back towards God
- Justice and the Reduction of Inequality
- Being a Prophetic voice
- Salvation of community, humanity and the whole of creation

### **Supporting material**

The Conclusion from James’s paper “*From Climate Crisis to Climate Justice*” in the SEI Journal vol 5.3 (autumn 2021) – reproduced below.

### **Conclusion to James’s Paper**

Responding to the climate crisis and the injustice inherent in both its causes and effects, it is much easier to make on one or two minor lifestyle changes, and thereby feel better about it all, than to engage with the real problem. The former is simply a mechanism to ‘greenwash’ our consciences and is, as we have seen, likely to have little or no effect and may actually do a great deal of harm. What is actually needed is repentance, a turning away from excessive consumption and back to God. Rowan Williams put it very simply when he wrote:

*“we need to regain a sense that our relationship to the earth is about ‘communion not consumption’”.*<sup>2</sup>

What is needed is nothing short of salvation, and not just a narrow salvation of self, but a salvation of humanity and the whole of God’s Creation. The enormous challenge we face is described rather neatly by George Newlands when he wrote:

*“Salvation is a work of love. Where there is salvation there is love, and perhaps even where there is love there is salvation. Salvation is an idea, a vision, and an at least partly embodied reality. It encompasses forgiveness and reconciliation, and at the same time it cannot ignore evil and injustice. It is accomplished through agonizing conflict at many levels, intellectual, physical, political, spiritual. It relates to specific historical events in the past, to present reality, and to eschatological promise and expectation.”*<sup>3</sup>

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2 Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square*, Reprint Edition (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), chap. 14: Changing the Myths We Live By.

3 George Newlands, ‘Salvation—Personal and Political’, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elizabeth Jay (Oxford University Press, 2009)

If this all seems too vast, too difficult and rather overwhelming, then the first step should perhaps be to turn to God in prayer as Christians have done for two millennia in:

- Lament for what has happened, what is happening and what will happen to God's earth
- Expression of our grief for the state of God's earth as an expression of our love of God, creation and humanity
- Expression of remorse for our complicity in what is happening and seek forgiveness
- Acknowledgment of the injustice of the causes and effects of climate change
- and in the light of these reflect on all aspects of our lifestyles and as a result renew our relationship with God, with humanity and with the whole of creation.

Out of that lament, grieving and repentance springs hope, so elegantly described by Hannah Malcolm in the conclusion of *“Words for a Dying World”*, entitled *“World Without End”*:

*“So much of the death around us springs from gainful dishonesty, dishonesty about the sanctity of each creature, dishonesty about the likely consequences of our actions, and covering up those consequences when they happen. If we cannot bring ourselves to be truthful about our broken histories, or the current trauma we face and perpetuate, we cannot begin to heal.*

*Survival, compassion, honesty. These are all good reasons to grieve. But the conviction that Christ's resurrection marked the death of death also contains the hope that our works of love in the present are not consigned to destruction. They participate in a transformed future.”<sup>4</sup>*

Christians have a responsibility not only to take action to contribute less to the problem, but to be prophetic voices in the world. In the words of Walter Brueggemann they have a threefold prophetic task:

*“The prophetic tasks of the Church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair.”<sup>5</sup>*

## Other Quotes

We should acknowledge our individual and collective responsibility to act and to change, as Gandhi said:

*“If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do.”<sup>6</sup>*

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4 Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church, ed. by Hannah Malcolm (London: SCM Press Ltd, 2020), p. 208.

5 Walter Brueggemann, *Reality, Grief, Hope: Three Urgent Prophetic Tasks* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).

6 In Vol. 13, Ch. 153, page 241 of the Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, published in 1913, often misquoted as *“Be the change that you want to see”* – available at: <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-13.pdf>.

What Hannah Malcolm had to say in her 2019 presentation on “*Climate Chaos and Collective Grief*” showed that she was well able to think theologically about the world and provide a Christian understanding of the Climate Crisis.

*“Much of the Western Church is finally catching up to the idea of caring for this planet we call home. But, along with this responsibility to defend what remains, we cannot ignore those already lost, and those we are now powerless to save.”*

*“For once, I am not going to ask you to respond to climate breakdown with a list of things to do. Instead, I am going to ask you to sit amid the grief that you may already feel about our dying planet; and to mourn the brilliant, beautiful lives — both human and non-human — now extinguished by our violence and greed.”<sup>7</sup>*

In the preface to her report on the “*Injustice of Climate Change*” for Christian Aid, Paula Clifford begins:

*“The starting point of this report is the fact that climate change is above all a justice issue. The people who are already suffering most from global warming are those who have done the least to cause it, and have the least resources to do anything about it. So the basic question underlying the theological statements made here is not ‘why should Christians care about the environment?’ It is ‘why do Christians care about injustice?’”<sup>8</sup>*

As David Rhodes says at the start of his book “*Climate Crisis: the challenge to the church*”:

*“The world is in serious trouble. The lives of millions of people are blighted by poverty, injustice and racism. But, overshadowing all this, the emerging crisis of climate change is rapidly destroying God’s creation and threatening our survival as a species. Our poorest neighbours are already suffering acutely but it will be our children and their children, who will bear the full impact of the disaster”<sup>9</sup>*

The need to see the climate crisis as a people issue is emphasised by Christian Aid:

*“Climate change makes a double demand on us: first to recognise the link between human-induced global warming and poverty; and secondly to formulate a just response. The first has been hindered for years by a reluctance to view climate change as a ‘people’ issue rather than a purely environmental one, while the second raises ethical issues that have barely begun to be considered.”<sup>10</sup>*

During the UN General Assembly’s High-level Meeting on the Protection of the Global Climate for Present and Future Generations in March 2019, Mary Robinson, the former President of Ireland spoke about climate justice.

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7 A video of “*Climate Chaos and Collective Grief*” can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GknXxsvqToU> and the text was published in the Church Times at:

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2019/15-march/comment/opinion/climate-chaos-and-collective-grief>

8 Paula Clifford, *All Creation Groaning - a Theological Approach to Climate Change and Development* (London: Christian Aid, 2007), p. 2 <<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/about-us/all-creation-groaning-theological-approach-climate-change>>

9 David Rhodes, *Climate Crisis - The Challenge to the Church* (Stowmarket, Suffolk: Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2020), p. 5.

10 Clifford, p. 5.

*“Climate justice insists on a shift from a discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into a civil rights movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart,”*

*“Now, thanks to the recent marches, strikes and protests by hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren, we have begun to understand the intergenerational injustice of climate change,”<sup>11</sup>*

Rowan Williams hinted at the distinctiveness of a ‘Christian’ response when he commented:

*“The most immediate concern is very simple: who is actually paying the price of our global crisis? The answer is painfully clear: it is the poorest in the human family, those with least resource to meet the appalling demands that a warming world places on all of us. And this is where the question of justice most plainly arises, and where any Christian perspective will tell us that we cannot let this go unchallenged. As Christians we believe that anyone’s suffering or danger is everyone’s challenge – and potentially everyone’s loss.”<sup>12</sup>*

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11 The full interview is at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/climate-justice/>

12 Quoted in by Susan Durber in the Christian Aid Report: “*Song of the Prophets: a global theology of climate change*” at: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/song-of-the-prophets-theology-climate-change-report-May2020.pdf>