



Christian Conference of Asia

CCA 15th General Assembly

Theme Study Document



‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation’





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**God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and
Restore the Creation**



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Assembly Theme Study Document

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Preface

God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation

The all-encompassing vision of the creation, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for He has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers” (Psalm 24:1–2) is the fundamental value of Christian faith. This vision signifies the cardinal principle of Christian faith that God’s love extends to all creatures in the *oikoumene*. The Creator God who is responsible for creation, and who designs life and destiny, calls for our Christian commitment to care for God’s creation.

The world is passing through a unique time in human history. We have experienced massive progress in many areas over the past decades; this progress has come at a cost, giving rise to serious threats in the world today that strike at the very foundations of the creation that God created. The manifold crises, all severe in magnitude, are manifested extensively in every region. They are mostly caused by anthropogenic rather than natural phenomena. Our contemporary lifestyles confirm how technological advancement could change the world in unimaginable ways, both positive and negative. Technology has become increasingly entangled with human life. It

cannot be denied that technology is a vital economic driver; however, the pitfalls of technological development also pose anxiety—evident in the race for new weapons, avenues for competition, or even bio-ethical concerns of artificial intelligence and post-humanism. Although economic development has in some nations led to improved standards of living, increased life expectancy, and reduced infant mortality, it is nevertheless the case that poverty and inequality remain broad and entrenched problems. While we are hopeful of eventually being able to eradicate extreme poverty, we are also on target to increase the Earth's temperature to irreversible levels that are anticipated to have far-reaching long-term consequences on the well-being of people and the planet. The senseless embracing and promotion of consumerism, and the fostering and endorsing of economic growth, are compounding destructive effects on nature and the entire creation. When the desire and thirst for profit-maximisation intensify in every sphere of life in the contemporary world, the doctrine of economic growth becomes instrumental in dictating environmental policies and shaping environmental ethics. The alarming trend of environmental degradation is leading the planet to destruction. Although it is from the environment that we derive everything we need, we neglect the fact that we are, in fact, wholly dependent on the environment for our continued survival. Degeneration of the environment; depletion of natural resources; poor quality of air, water, and soil; devastation of ecosystems; ecological imbalances; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife, animal species, and plants; pollution through toxic chemical waste; acidification of oceans; reduced access to drinking water; deforestation; and increased global warming are serious concerns of the day. Never before has humanity had



such a great capacity to influence the ecosystem, the basis for the sustainability of all life on earth, yet the fears and anxieties concerning the future of creation have never been greater. We will soon reach planetary boundaries and tipping points for the earth's capacity to sustain life, and if we do not heed God's call of renewal and restoration, the impending catastrophe will be impossible to avert.

Scientific research has predicted that the global temperature will rise in the coming years, affecting the climate to an alarming degree of severity. Population growth, environmental degradation, and climate change are interconnected. The earth's population has exponentially increased, more than tripling in size since 1950. In 2020, it reached 7.8 billion and is estimated to grow to over 8.5 billion by the end of this decade. As the human population expands rapidly, our insatiable appetite for resources is also increasing, resulting in the disruption of the planet's ecological equilibrium. It is generally assumed that rapid population growth will increase the strain on low-income and lower-middle-income countries to provide much-needed public health and education services and weaken their abilities to respond to emerging threats, such as those caused by climate change. The depletion of natural resources and the resulting loss of livelihoods has left a large section of people in poverty and hunger. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) found that biodiversity loss and degraded lands and ecosystems in rural areas were placing a heavier burden on women and girls. The depletion and contamination of freshwater have led to severe scarcity and health problems. Women's and girls' lives and livelihoods, health, nutrition, food security, access to energy, and coping abilities are all disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Environmental pressures and shocks, particularly in rural areas, force women to deal with the aftermath, greatly increasing their load of unpaid care work. This implies, for example, increased efforts to meet primary necessities and higher risks of human trafficking, rape, and sexual violence. The implications of such losses for human livelihoods and well-being have raised serious concerns. All these challenges are extremely important and need to be addressed.



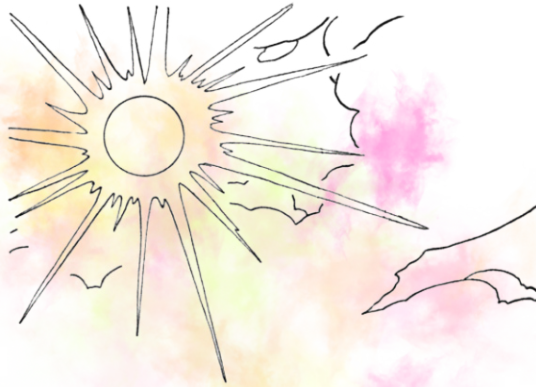
Christian spirituality and our Biblical theological teachings often tend to focus only on humans, without considering or acknowledging the significance of God's wider creation. Our predicament concerning God and creation is due to a lack of understanding about God the Creator, who owns the *oikoumene*. (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 48:13; Job 38:1–41). The biblical theology of creation helps us to see the patterns of creation, fall, redemption, renewal, restoration, and new creation that are repeated throughout the creation narratives, from which we understand how God ultimately redeems, renews, and restores His creation. From the very beginning, we understand that God created the world out of nothing (Genesis 1:1); God is the giver and sustainer of all life (Psalm 104:24–32); all visible beings are of God's creation (Genesis 1:3–5); God established order out of chaos and formed the sea and the dry land, and made the earth fruitful (Genesis 1:9–13; Isaiah 45:18); the existence of all things was owing to the will of God, as also was the creation of all things (Revelations 4:11) and the harmonious co-existence of all God's creatures (Psalm 104:10–23); God provides abundant and diverse resources to cater to the natural needs of humankind and all other creatures (Psalm 104:10, 18, 21, 27, 28); God created humans to be partners with God in caring for creation (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8:6); and everything God created was interconnected (Genesis 1; 5-35).

The biblical theology of creation recognises God's rule and intent in God's creation. The presence of sin introduces chaos and eventual judgment, but God remains committed to redeeming His creation. Throughout the narrative of redemption, there are notable instances of "new creation" emerging following significant events

such as the flood, the Tower of Babel, the exodus, and the exile. Through the commission of Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the Mosaic law, and the promises of the new covenant, God initiates a renewed creative work. God looks to creation in an effort to care for and save the world from its chaos. While this work is ongoing, the ultimate culmination will occur at the end of the age when God brings forth a complete renewal, dwelling among His people in the new creation. Even the new covenant through Jesus Christ concerns unequivocally the whole of creation. Christ is the fulfilment of the promise to Noah and all created beings on the earth. This is what St Paul makes more clear: “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:20–21).

Although we experience a widespread sense of uneasiness and uncertainty due to manifold crises that affect God’s creation, we are still lagging when it comes to better stewardship in caring for, protecting, and upholding the integrity of God’s creation. We tend to forget the fact that God created the entire universe, and the vision that the “earth is the Lord’s” calls for a just and sustainable social and economic order, free from greed, domination, misuse, and exploitation. We often disregard the reality that the land, its means of production, and its resources belong to God who created them for all, God who cares for the well-being of all creatures. We





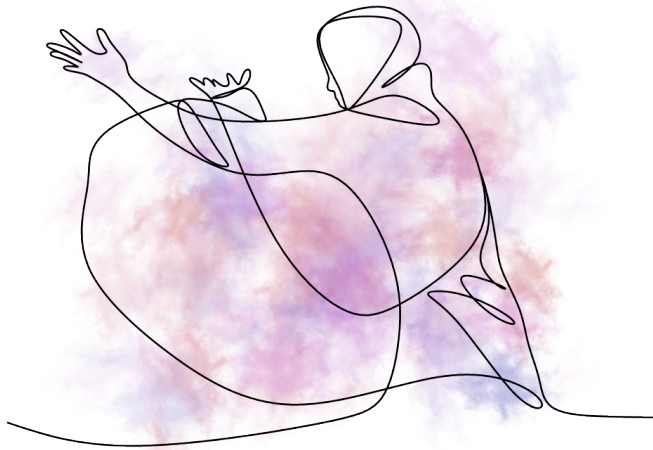
are called to remember constantly as Psalmist continues to remind us: “How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures” (Psalm 104:24).

The all-encompassing vision of the care for creation calls for nurturing sustainable communities in the *oikoumene*, living in harmony and with the hope of fullness of life. The foundation of our hope is deeply rooted in our trust in God who loved creation into being, who endowed humans with the ability to choose between good and the forces of destruction, and who incarnated Godself to give us the fullness of life. The enduring vision implies the need for a healthy ecosystem which should guarantee humanity its proper place and role within nature, ensuring mutual enhancement of sustainability rather than asserting domination and exploitation.

The Bible has rich narratives related to the diversity and ingenuity of God’s creation, which illustrates how people, and all aspects of nature, are in close relationship between God and God’s creation. The cosmos in all its facets, is sacred, designed and created by God, and the creation is continuously evolving. Christian faith teaches that the cosmos was created from God’s own being: “For from him and through him and for him are all things” (Romans 11:36). The Church, which is called to carry the vision of God as the ultimate creator, has potentials and capacities to make contributions towards a just and sustainable ecosystem and to maintain the integrity of

creation. The Biblical roots, theological undergirding, and patristical wisdom and teachings are examples to be shared relentlessly in contemporary contexts in order to articulate the vision of renewal and restoration of God's creation. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, and all things have been created through him and for him; in him, all things hold together through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. The Church, as the body of Jesus Christ, is the starting point and goal of creation, the kingdom of heaven on earth, uniting creation with its creator (Colossians 1:15–18).

The hope of the renewal and restoration of the creation had been a long-cherished vision, and the prophetic theology envisioned such hope. The prophetic traditions in the Old Testament provide a rich tapestry for the implicit nature of prophetic interventions when God's creation undergoes turmoil, and God's care, concerns, assurances and expectations, and processes of renewal and restoration of creation are needed. In prophetic traditions, creation is not understood as one among many other topics, but it reminds



us that care for creation is paramount in God's priorities. Creation as the starting point, human beings consider everything about God and his relation to the universe. The broader lines of creation established in prophetic literature become obvious, and they indicate



“how creation is progressively anchored in history, theologically made relevant in salvation, and paradigmatically centred in the introduction of the triad of creation–de-creation–re-creation”. For example, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi focus on reforming a de-created world. Zephaniah is depicting the progressive loss of dominion over creation by humanity and its resulting de-creation. The narrative of Jonah reflects his progressive dissent away from creation, from life towards death, and obedient creation against disobedient humanity (Jonah 4:6–11). Jonah defines himself as a follower of the Creator God and states “I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:9). Amos eloquently states how creation becomes a de-creation and re-creation as well as the correct understanding of creation as a prerequisite for recreation. For Hosea, the reversal of creation order portrays anti-creation. Prophet Micah shows the involvement of the earth in salvation and judgment. As the life of humanity is inseparably linked to the earth, the earth is affected by God’s judgment on humanity, and by humanity’s salvation. Isaiah’s creation metaphors like ‘maker,’ ‘potter,’ establish a personal relationship. Nahum describes God’s sovereignty as creator.

Creation in Nahum is connected to the ‘day of the Lord’ and the description of its characteristics reminiscent of creation: “He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it” (Nahum 1:4–5). The voices of the Old Testament prophets who affirm their convictions on God’s creation speak about God who listens and cares about the complaints, worries, concerns, and anxieties of God’s people, who answers them (Isaiah 64:1–12). When they pray, their voices are echoed: “We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.” The answer of God to the prayers of God’s people is now given with a promise that new heavens and new earth will be created. The blueprint God designed for a new creation is made known, the design for a transformation of nature to be in harmony with a renewed humanity (Isaiah 65:17–23).

The prophetic voice of Ezekiel, like that of Jeremiah, is also about pulling down and building up, judgement and mercy, destruction,

and restoration, and God who is magnanimous and powerful, who gathers and restores. This is what we see in the case of when the forlorn and desperate condition to which the whole nation of Israel was reduced; they desperately said: “Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely”. (Ezekiel 37:11). When they were in the most desperate situation, and there was not much hope left of them being retrieved, God asked Ezekiel to inform the poor, dejected, and desponding Israelites of their mistakes, and revive their hope with a new promise and declaration of God’s resolve of mercy toward them. The final answer of God to the prayers of God’s people is the promise that the prevailing conditions will be changed positively. God promises and reveals God’s plans to create new heavens and a new earth. The blueprint God designed for restoring the whole creation, “I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:1–5) is the hope that sustains humanity always.

Created in the image of God, human beings were given the task of ‘dominion’ (to be understood always as stewardship) over creation, often expressed as the household of God, *oikonomia*. To be made in the image of God is to be a caretaker or steward of creation. The caretaker does not own the earth but is always reminded of the fact that “the earth is the LORD’s”. The caretaker has a unique position in creation, having received the distinctive and enormous responsibility of handling the creation with care and better stewardship, using earth’s resources in a just way, avoiding greater depletion of ecological systems, and preserving nature’s resources for future generations.





With its distinctive role and with its commitment to participate in God's mission, the Church and the ecumenical movement can make

unique contributions at various levels for developing appropriate responses to address emerging challenges and be partakers in God's mission of restoring the creation with a new vision and hope. The enduring vision of the creation that sustains the Church is the hope that the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and God will ultimately restore the creation.

The accompanying pages in this study document contain a modest contribution, helpful to animate reflection on the theme of the 15th General Assembly of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation", and three sub-themes: 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God'; 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony'; and 'Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Towards Attaining Life in its Fullness'. We are thankful to the members of the working group who laboured to prepare this study document. It is hoped that this document will be widely used in Asia and beyond.

As we prepare for the successful deliberations at the forthcoming CCA Assembly, let us pray together, 'God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation'.

Dr. Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA

God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation

Introduction

When we reflect on the creator and creation, we are primarily reminded of the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed, which are still standards of belief for many Christian churches pronouncing their faith in one God, the Father, the Almighty, the Creator, Maker of heaven and earth. Each time we pronounce the Nicene or the Apostles' Creed, we accept and affirm our faith in the Creator of the whole universe and our relationship with the Creator. Our faith and affirmation is that the earth (*oikoumene*) and all the creatures who inhabit it were created in the beginning (Genesis 1): God created the heaven and the earth; the light and the darkness; the firmament; God separated the water from the earth; created the sun, the moon, and the stars; God created the fish, birds; God created humans and gave them authority to rule over all creatures; God made the beasts of the earth and cattle, and everything that creeps upon the earth; God gave every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth and every tree in which the fruit of a tree yields seed. The whole world with its bounteous environment was created by God for sustaining the future. Nature sustains us. Human greed, with no respect for the rights of other species or for our fellow human beings, is at the root of ecological degradation and climate crises.





The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us in a devastating way of the interconnected nature of the economy, environment, and human health. The interconnectedness of everything on earth extends to us as well, and we are an integral component within this complex equation. The message for humanity derived from this global health crisis is not to fear nature, but rather to restore it, embrace it, and develop a better and deeper understanding of how to coexist with it. We need to develop a new and changed connection with nature and the earth. If we fail to make the required changes once this crisis is over, there might not be another chance, as we would have turned into the earth's adversaries. Consequently, the earth may no longer tolerate our presence. The intelligent path ahead involves dedicating resources to conservation and scientific research, while also wholeheartedly embracing nature and the diverse array of life we coexist with on this planet. The well-being of humanity and the preservation of biodiversity are interconnected and mutually dependent.

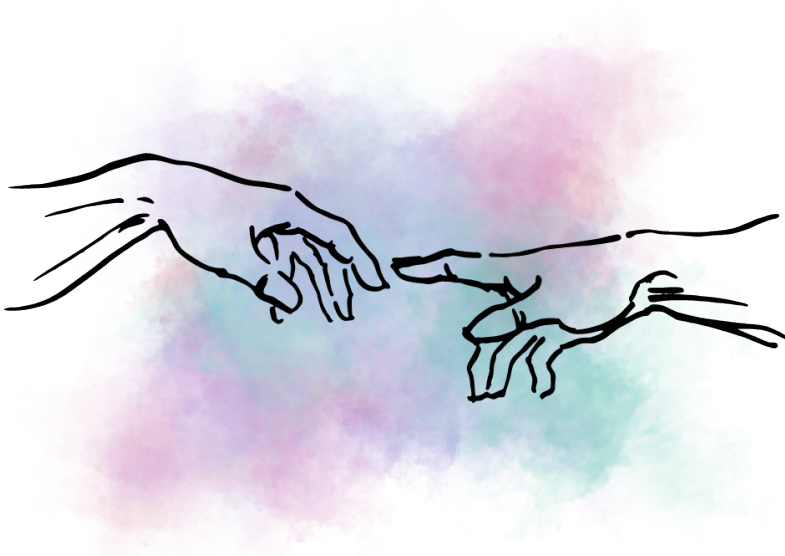
We cannot continue to hold on to the dangerous illusion of human mastery over nature, which will become the reason for the next pandemic, and ultimately, will lead to our extinction. The range of activities encompassed within the techno-managerial portfolio, including climate geoengineering, desalination, de-extinction, and off-planet colonisation, aligns with the prevalent societal framework that emphasises human uniqueness. The pandemic has not only changed the course of human life but also raises some important questions about the emergence of a new human being in the post-COVID-19 world.

The planet is currently experiencing a widespread extinction event and significant disruptions caused by climate change, and thus any attempt to signify 'God', 'justice', '*ekklesia*', 'authority', 'stewardship', 'fullness of life', 'restoration', and 'humanity' must take as its vantage point the set of issues that include planetary shifts, the stark reminders of ecological predicament and the possible environmental measures to be taken to avert any disasters. Like all other fatal emergencies in the past, COVID-19 has also undeniably proved human beings' Promethean impulse, to be masters of nature and to manipulate,

exploit, and control other species as objects for profit. Human beings are not separate from nature. The earth will persist in this existence and evolution, regardless of our presence or absence. This compels the faith community (church) to reimagine a human that no longer identifies with speciesism.

Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Affirming the Will of God

God is the author of life and creation. Hence, the will of God is not just a plan of action in the past or a 'fixed' blueprint for the entire ecosystem. Very often the Bible defines God as realising God's will in time and space. In this, we glimpse how God accomplishes God's redemptive plans over the whole creation as well as the steadfast love that characterises God's own being and will. God's will can also be understood as God's intentional and deliberate action of deciding, choosing, and actively carrying out something. Both Old Testament and New Testament writers can thus refer to God's will as real in the same sense as God's being. The nature of God's being and that of God's will are inseparable from each other: "God is what he wills." The will of God not only defines and describes God's being but also embodies God's very self.





The two creation narratives found in the first book of the Bible articulate that the world belongs to God. The will of God is that humanity is empowered to become co-creators in order to preserve and sustain this world. However, when the narratives of Genesis 3:1–24 and 4:1–16 are read carefully, it is found that the creation tends to be recalcitrant and resistant to God’s good intentions for the world. This elemental disorder is human disobedience or violence against the will of God. A comprehensive reading of the opening chapters of the book of Genesis demonstrates that the ‘flood narratives’ are placed as the serious disruption of creation. However, the ‘chaotic waters’ are not opposed to the will of the Creator, but actually are instruments of the will of the Creator. While judgement and rescue form the focal points for God’s presence and activity in the world God created and found ‘good’, it is also clear that the affirmation of the goodness of creation by God operates amidst world-denying and life-annihilating ways of humanity.

The confessional assertion that there exists with the God of Israel/creation a purposive will that is firm and bears on God’s salvific actions and the life of God’s people is explicit throughout the Old Testament. A key biblical text for defining the will of God is Deuteronomy 29:29. It states, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” This verse captures the words of the covenant that God gave Israel at the end of Moses’ life and ministry (Deuteronomy 29:1). It also provides a biblical-theological framework for understanding the divine will.

Accordingly, the will of God, as manifested in the Old Testament, reveals that God discloses God’s redemptive will and that this may comprise the events that make up human history and the history of ‘creation other than human’. God’s will serves as a guiding template for the conduct of God’s people. Therefore, both the community of Israel and individuals are called to synchronise their lives with God’s will and actively pursue it. Psalm 40:8 becomes a programmatic statement in this respect: “I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”; and God desires mercy: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6).

There are two vital elements in describing the ideal life of affirming and participating in God's will. God requires certain patterns of behaviour in response to his covenant. The Law is the pronouncement and enunciation of the ethical foundations of God's will. This pattern is also taken up in the 'new covenant' passage of Jeremiah 31:31–34: practising God's law (will) is the crux of the apposite life of rejoinder to God's covenant. For God's will to be done, it had first to be known and understood by his people: "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God" (Psalm 143:10). Through Moses, the judges, prophets, kings, and the priests of God unveiled God's will and led the people in their endeavour of following it in everyday conditions.

The life and teachings of Jesus, as documented in the gospels, testify to the significance of God's will in shaping his understanding of his own role and that of his followers, in the story of redemption. Jesus exemplified to his disciples a life lived in complete alignment with God's will. John's Gospel especially characterises the whole of Jesus' ministry in terms of conformity with the will of God. At one point Jesus said to his disciples, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34). His ministry is described as the outworking of God's will: "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (5:30 NRSV; cf. 6:38–40).

Just as Jesus was committed to fulfilling God's will, his disciples were also called to do the same. The prayer that Jesus taught them emphasised the importance of God's will in the life of discipleship. They were encouraged to pray for the coming of God's kingdom and the fulfilment of God's will on earth, mirroring its reality in heaven (Matthew 6:10). This petition encompassed not only the divine manifestation of the kingdom through Christ and the Holy Spirit in the church but also had implications for the disciples' behaviour, as evidenced in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the concept of God's will were intertwined. Obeying God's will implies going beyond mere adherence to religious regulations and rituals, as these had lost meaning and could even hinder the pursuit of the true knowledge of God (John 9:31).



Discerning and affirming the will of God is not an isolated experience. Rather, it is a lifelong, day-by-day journey. We need to affirm and act on what we already know about God's will (the revealed will of God) through our understanding of God's nature and character, as embodied in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Affirming the will of God will certainly help us take our first steps in discovering and acting on God's will for our life. St. Paul emphasises and suggests the need to turn from the speculative, or doctrinal, portion of his Epistle, and begins a series of practical exhortations as Christians: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). To discern that, humans need to go through a process of transformation that helps them not only to see the possibility of a 're-creation' but also for them to become co-creators with the Creator-God. It is a new way of being in the world, a way that begins with the work of compassion, solidarity, and inclusivity.

Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Dwelling in Harmony

The book of Isaiah presents a juxtaposition of geographical turmoil and promising opportunities on the horizon. The key question is whether the promissory possibilities of God have a chance in the face of entrenched geopolitical and social realities. The book of Isaiah believes profoundly that God's promises will prevail in, with, and through historical reality. A peaceable creation is promised! A peaceable creation is imagined! A peaceable creation is proposed! The book of Isaiah moves from "not learn war anymore" in chapter 2 to "not hurt or destroy" in chapter 65, a sweep of well-being that contradicts the facts on the ground. For this reason, we can say, the vision for peaceful coexistence with creation is not totally a new thing but rather it is something that the creation has already experienced once before. The vision for harmonious living with creation is about restoring God's original plan in creation.

The vision for a new community dwelling in harmony with creation as recorded in Isaiah 65:25 reminds us of the perfect peaceful life before the fall as described in the book of Genesis. The prophet

Isaiah points to what has been called the discords in the harmony of Nature, the pain and death involved, of necessity, in the relation of one whole class of animals to another: “‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain’, says the Lord” (Isaiah 65:25). In the new heaven and the new earth of the prophet’s vision there would be no such discord. The flesh-eating beasts should change their nature; even the serpent, named probably with special reference to Genesis 3, as the starting point of the discord, shall find food in the dust in which it crawls, and shall no longer be a destroyer. The condition of the ideal Paradise should be restored.



In each pairing, there is a clear distinction between aggressive predators and vulnerable subjects who are potential prey. Nevertheless, the prophet envisions a reconciled creation where strength and weakness, predator, and prey, harmoniously coexist. The presence of the conjunction “and” signifies a rejection of a world where predators dominate, and vulnerable beings live in



perpetual fear of being devoured. Instead, the poet anticipates a future governed by righteousness, equity, and faithfulness, leading to a world free from harm. This insistence on the conjunction “and” ensures that the predator/prey dynamic is not accepted as normal, but rather recognised as abnormal and unsustainable.

The words of Isaiah are poetic and carry the weight of God’s promise. In other words, God’s speech serves as a catalyst for new beginnings. This bold and imaginative form of expression rhetoric, along with every interpretation and application of it, becomes a provocative and politically charged act. Isaiah’s prophecy about the new and perfect order of community life is yet to come. The prophecy gives us three signs of that new life order: first, the absence of violence as the proverbial opposites of a ‘wolf and a lamb’ come into harmony, a lion changing his habit of being carnivorous, a snake having no more greed in life; second, the establishment of peace by ending the propensity to harm or destroy others; and third, the presence of God where God’s peace and joy are experienced. The end of the old-life order and the beginning of new life with peace and joy with creation is the theme of Isaiah 65:25—natural predator with natural prey, a relationship transformed by time and experience and perspective. If kids and leopards, wolves and lambs will coexist, why can’t we? These imaginative visions point to God’s original and ultimate plan for humanity in a totally nonviolent and innocent creation.

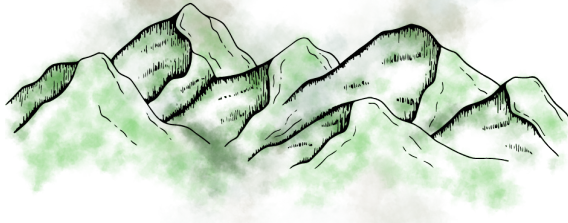
The poem anticipates the child. When he is born, we should not be preoccupied with memos and logic and brief and critical thought. Because the child and the poem evoke a leap beyond our control. It is a leap to another world that requires prophetic obedience. The poem ends this way: “They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (v.9). The former hostilities, the instincts of the food chain, and beliefs in survival based on aggression are being challenged. The untamed nature will no longer remain vicious, as a new area characterised by righteousness and justice will prioritise transformative potential over brute force. In the end, the young child will play fearlessly with dangerous snakes, and no harm will come to anyone, as all traces of poison will be eliminated

from the world. This transformation will occur as a result of a new order prevailing over the ordinary ways of doing things. All will be well, and all manner of things will be well; the conclusion of the poem marks the start of our journey, a beginning that transcends mere memories, brevity, and logical reasoning. It is a world that began in the Jerusalem temple, ran through Bethlehem, and breaks open among us.



In the new order of life, the presence of God or Immanuel (God with us) is the reason for transformation because it is the presence of God that demands a lifestyle of peace and joy. Thus, the root of peace-making is a theological and socioeconomic possibility. That is, the chance for peace rests in the trustworthiness of God and the issue of God keeping faith with God's promises. In other words, creation-centred spirituality is grounded and guided by the awareness of God's presence in all things. And since God is present everywhere (Jeremiah 23:23–33), the demand for peace and joy is extended to the whole of creation. The concept of cosmic salvation in and through Jesus Christ is explicit in Paul's letter to Romans 8:21–23 wherein the creation is said to have been affected by the fall, waiting for the final liberation in Christ. Much as Isaiah calls for a time when differing animals will be joined together and a little child will lead them, can we join our hopes for the future and the present through the love of Jesus Christ?

This brings us a fresh understanding of Christian spirituality as dwelling in harmony with God, human beings, and the rest of creation, including the unseen beings. This inclusive spirituality is



about living out Isaiah’s vision in the context of increasing conflicts between humans, as well as between humans and nature, humans and God, and humans and unseen beings in the present day. From this perspective, “heaven” in the Bible is not solely a future destination, but rather an unseen dimension intertwined with our everyday existence—a divine realm, so to speak. God created both heaven and earth in the beginning, and in the end, God will restore and unite them eternally. The book of Revelation depicts not souls being transported to a faraway heaven, but rather the new Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth, bringing together the two realms in an enduring union.

In the building of a peaceful community, we also need to include a place for unseen beings, the ones that we have no knowledge about so far. The question of invisible nature is not about superstition but rather it is about an honest acceptance of the limitations and finitude of human beings and about leaving room for God to reveal Godself afresh. The inclusion of unseen beings in community life will make us humble and become more careful in claiming space in creation. This is because the human ability to know is limited and it is unspiritual to claim that we know everything.

Related to the question of spirituality is the responsibility to build a peaceful community not only with human beings but also with the entire creation. It is a shift from an anthropocentric to a creation-centric worldview, accepting the fact that we all are created by God, belonging to the same community, and that there is no hierarchical structure in creation. We are equal in creation. We are not above nature because nature can do without us!

The tradition of Sabbath and Sabbath year (Leviticus 25) gives us the biblical mandate for dwelling in harmony with creation. Based on

God's concerns for the wellness of nature, God demanded humans rest on Sabbath and in the Sabbath year so that nature too gets rest and is renewed. A jubilee is a holy occasion for recollection, renewal, revival, and celebration. For indigenous Christians, there is a cultural mandate for dwelling in harmony with creation. Many indigenous communities have a tradition in which the head of the clan or the king announces a particular day of rest in a year for the villages across his entire realm, including cattle and the land itself.

Unlike those who subscribe to the dominant anthropocentric worldview, indigenous people consider nature as something that they depend upon for their survival. A group of indigenous communities in India have a common story of origin. In that story, they say that their ancestors came out of a cave with the help of a small bird. One version of the story goes, "When the people were about to emerge to the surface of the ground, there was a big tiger at the gate of the cave which killed all those who went before. Seeing the threat, the people made a deal with small and noisy birds, who would disturb and distract the tiger by flying around its face as the people emerged into the surface of the ground. In return, the people would grow rice for the birds once they safely passed through the cave." This story is passed orally from generation to generation. The story indicates not only the peaceful coexistence of humans and nature but also the fact that they are interdependent for their survival.

Myths should not be interpreted literally but rather explored for the deeper meanings they hold. Myths possess a profound level of significance similar to that of poetry and offer insights into the spiritual potentials of human existence. Consequently, the absence of powerful myths in today's society contributes to the prevalence of violence, as they no longer provide young people with a framework to connect with and comprehend the world beyond its surface. However, for indigenous communities, myths serve as markers of identity, representing their aspirations, perspectives on life and the world, and their harmonious relationships with both tangible and intangible aspects of existence.

Dwelling in harmony with creation is not a favour that we are called to do for others, but it is a total change of heart and return



of one's whole self into a perfect order of community living that God intended in creation. The present-day climate catastrophe compels us to reflect critically on the dichotomic understanding of God's concern for human beings and nature and view the two concerns through the eyes of God. God's heart for mission is holistic in nature. God's love that covers the whole world (John 3:16) covers the same for salvation. In other words, all that is covered by God's love/will is covered in the plan of God's salvation.

We need to seek the total well-being of the whole of God's creation and live with that creation in harmony. The biodiversity we find in creation reflects the richness and beauty of their Creator. Not only that, but they are also included in the plan of God for salvation as Romans 8:21 says 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay.' Moreover, the beauty of heaven cannot be imagined without the help of nature and natural beauties here on earth. For this reason, the image of God in human beings must not be understood in terms of ruling, exploiting, or exercising dominion over nature for the sake of human beings but as a responsibility to live peacefully with God's entire creation.

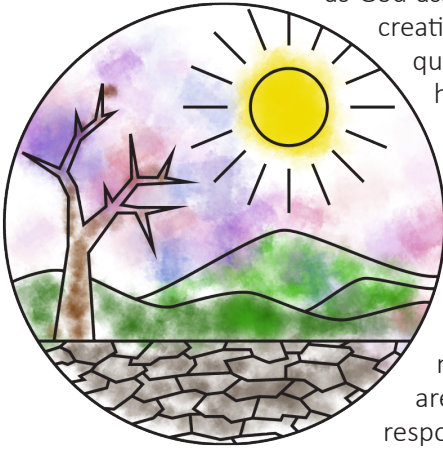
Renewal and Restoration of Creation: Towards Attaining Life in its Fullness

Life in its fullness is a desire of God for humanity and creation (John 10:10). The sharing of life is not limited to human beings but to the entire community of creation. The creation is so designed that all may have life in abundance through mutual dependency. For God, communion and community are the means that lead to life in its fullness despite all differences and diversities. The Triune God is the creator and the cardinal patron in the story of creation

which shares God's life-giving breath. God experiences the fullness of life through the mutual indwelling in Godhead. The concept of *perichoresis*, a Greek term, describes the eternal interpenetration and mutual indwelling of the three persons in the Trinity. This mutual indwelling implies that each person of the Trinity fully exists within the other two, while still possessing the entirety of the divine essence. Perichoresis metaphorically represents the constant circulation of the divine essence, where all three persons coexist with one another. In essence, to perceive one person of the Trinity is to simultaneously perceive the other two, as they occupy the same divine "space". Perichoresis emphasises the inseparability of the three persons, stating that one cannot exist without the other two, and no person of the Trinity can be experienced without the entirety of God's being. The inter-communion of the persons is reciprocal, and their operations are inseparable; "Each are in each, and all in each, and each in all, and all are one." To put it simply: *perichoresis* affirms that God refuses to be alone.



Human beings are created in the image of a mutually indwelling God implying that humans were created in interrelationship with all living things, just as God exists in relationship with all that is. Humans possess a unique quality that reflects their connection to God: their conscious relationship with all life on earth, both human and non-human. This special attribute sets humans apart and mirrors God's intentional and intimate connection with everything that God has created. God's presence is found in a loving relationship with all living beings within the natural world, and as beings created in the image of God, humans should strive to cultivate the same relational harmony with the rest of creation. This further implies that humans were designed to assume a role of stewardship over creation, just



as God assumed responsibility for its creation. Therefore, the unique quality that distinguishes human beings and reflects their connection to God is their entrusted responsibility for the care of the natural world. Just as God took responsibility for what God brought into existence, humans, made in the image of God, are called to embrace a similar responsibility. They are tasked with nurturing and safeguarding the created world in a manner that aligns with God's own actions.

However, this 'stewardship' theology should not be a strategy to tone down the discourse about climate change, as if the goal is not to upset anyone. This kind of 'religious equivocation' is erroneous, particularly at this eleventh-hour moment. The world requires religious voices that possess the courage to openly and unambiguously identify those truly responsible for the climate emergency. They should establish specific criteria to assess all climate-related actions, including those taken at COP26 and COP27, while articulating a moral vision. These voices must inspire bold and decisive measures to address the impending suffering and steer the course of history towards justice. This entails moving beyond generic statements such as "We should be good stewards of creation" or "Our faith teaches us to protect the earth"; instead, we should become more comfortable expressing statements like "ExxonMobil, BP, Shell, and other oil and gas companies are systematically destroying the planet, and financial giants like JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, BlackRock, and Vanguard are financing this destruction."

We must make new demands such as an immediate end to new fossil fuel projects, deforestation, and related financing; continued fossil fuel divestment; a generous welcome for climate refugees;

funds for developing countries from the nations responsible for the lion's share of historic emissions; access to renewable energy for every person; a massive green jobs commitment to rebuild the infrastructure of human civilisation; and a just transition for impacted workers and communities. These demands are ambitious and politically fraught. But they are the foundation of a truly moral response to the crisis. Churches must directly address the misery and suffering that climate change is causing and will cause and demand compassionate responses to otherness. We must name the evil that perpetuates this grave threat, evoking an unyielding thirst for justice.

There is always the scary, uncomfortable 'other' in each member of the creation. The harmonious living of the creation with otherness is the key to life in fullness, while at the same time, otherness can be a threat to harmonious living since otherness can lead to fear, and fear can lead to hate, and hate to violence. A concept of 'many-ness' helps to overcome such fear, since it encourages interaction, intercession, and interrogation.

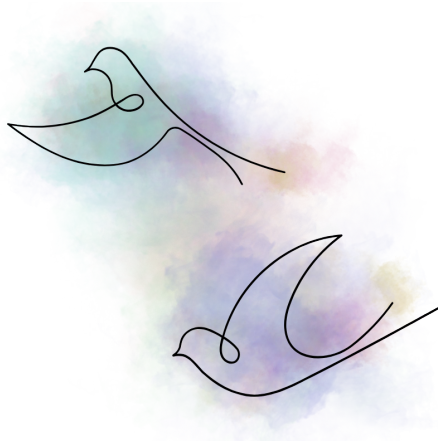
Otherness not only disrupts the web of life but also prevents life from being lived out in its fullness. It is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ('us', the self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ('them', other) by stigmatising a difference (real or imagined) presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. This allows individuals to be classified into two hierarchical groups: 'them' and 'us'. The



out-group is only coherent as a group as a result of its opposition to the in-group and its lack of identity. This 'lack' is based upon stereotypes that are largely stigmatising and obviously reductionist. The asymmetry in power relationships is central to the construction of otherness.



Only the dominant group is in a position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures. As a result, the competing discourses are either integrated into the dominant discourses or neutralised/marginalised. In order to validate otherness further, hegemonic groups construct constant metaphors of savagery. With the help of anthropological theories, they portray the other as 'inferior', devoid of refinement and elevation of thought, 'childish', 'incapable', 'primitive', 'irrational' and requiring the paternal rule of the West to become 'rational', 'adult', 'masculine' and 'civilised'. Otherisation is made possible through a range of binary opposites about the other and the othering of self. These biologically constituted (morphological) classifications dampen the spirits of the colonised people and their lands.



The hopelessness arising from social injustice and discrimination, climate change, and religious fundamentalism is a key feature of the context of Asia. The vision of a ‘new heaven and new earth’ is an eschatological hope central to the Christian faith that deals with the final future of history and the world. It is normally understood as the futuristic end of history as the church has done in the classical and modern eras. The word *eschaton* means the ‘special end’ that invites exploring the possibility of addressing the issues of marginal space and marginalised people. It is a call to reclaim the messianic vocation of the church to be a ‘cruciform community’. For the church, new heaven and new earth is a reality now with the vocation of resistance. The oppressed and marginalised communities, the raped women, the dispossessed farmers, the exploited migrant workers, the war victims, the minorities, the indigenous people, Adivasis, and Dalits, the stateless people, and the refugees are the eschaton—the sight/event of the new beginning, the epiphany of new heavens and new earth. It is the new Church. The context we experience and face in Asia affirms the urgency for a cry for renewal of the people and restoration of the creation.

The 15th CCA General Assembly theme, ‘God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation’, is a prayer of public confession and repentance for the sins we have committed. It is also a prophetic

witness to the commitment that declares our participation with God in renewing and transforming the relationship with other human beings and creation into a joyful coexistence with the creation and people of all faith traditions.

Conclusion

A radical ecological conversion challenges the conventional anthropocentric understanding of *ekklēsia* and *diakonia*, which is rooted in the supremacy and self-referentiality of human beings. The word *ekklēsia* literally means ‘called out’; here the question is called ‘from’ what and called ‘to’ what. Is God’s calling an ontological human prerogative? What about ‘all creation’ other than human beings? God has created all species with an intention or purpose. The purpose of creation is not something that a species arrives at, at a later stage. This inherent vocation of all species de-privileges human beings. *Diakonia* in Greek, a noun variously translated as “ministry,” “service,” “relief,” or “support”, refers to famine relief in the form of a monetary contribution. Paul uses the word to refer to his ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 20:24 and 21:19) and it is referred to as a spiritual gift—the gift of serving (Romans 12:6–7). As with the word service in English, *diakonia* can have a variety of meanings and nuances depending on the context.



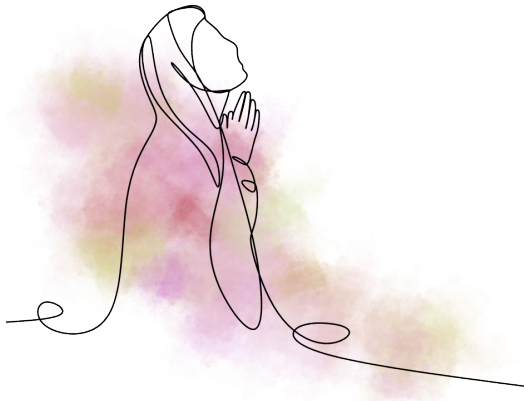


Churches must be engaged in strengthening the Kingdom values needed to promote a new mentality of living within planetary boundaries; and in changing the mentality of people in addressing eco-justice, sharing the common conviction of changing lifestyles, consumption patterns, travel and mobility, waste management and values of eco-social transformation. Working towards the protection of creation is not merely a concept confined within the limits of mere discourses based on the SDG agenda propagation, which is projected as a priority of the churches' diakonal mission. Our diakonal mission needs to be focused on all God's people, overcoming communal polarisation, and narrow-minded partisan interests. For the churches, diakonia has always been linked to love for one's neighbours with a passion for justice and sustainability. In the ecclesial dimension, *diakonia* extends different degrees or levels of manifestations: acts of care, healing, and reconciliation, service to marginalised and suffering communities, empowerment, the transformation of living conditions, advocacy, and lobbying work on behalf of those suffering; the prophetic mission of speaking truth to power and of denouncing structural injustices. The fundamental issues of the protection and care of the environment and ensuring climate justice by way of considering the involvement of the churches as the prophetic witness of diakonia with a specific focus on ecological concerns are imperatives for renewal and restoration of the creation from its brokenness.

All created species are interconnected and thus participate in the calling/purpose and the principles of the shared breath of life. If God's calling is not different from the purpose of creation, then *klesis* (calling) should not be taken as 'separated' in a privileged/ontological/biological sense. As opposed to *creatio ex nihilo*, which assumes that evil is disorder and not unjust order, *tehomopholic* non-anthropocentric idea of creation (*creatio ex profundis*) suggests the agency of all species. 'Calling' means 'to be' in the web of life and thus experience the fullness of life in this relationship. This calls for a new way of being a faith community (*ekklēsia*) in relation to the earth and its bio-history.

A "creative collaboration with nature" as 'green' ethical beings may be realised through compassion, coexistence and cooperation. It implies de-privileging and decolonising human agency. Such a befitting non-anthropocentric faith response could be achieved by being an "ally of eco-justice struggles" and through "inter-faith collisions." Only by destroying the sociopathy of our consciousness as the 'anointed species' will we be able to save ourselves and our planet. The world as an interconnected web of beings calls for demythologising the "hegemonic human being": "There is no escape. Either we recognise ourselves as humans—co-equal in the same Common Home—or we will all sink".

Let us pray for divine guidance and intervention to renew and restore the creation: "God, Renew Us in Your Spirit and Restore the Creation".



“The enduring vision of the creation that sustains the Church is the hope that the creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and God will ultimately restore the creation.

With its distinctive role and with its commitment to participate in God’s mission, the Church and the ecumenical movement can make unique contributions at various levels for developing appropriate responses to address emerging challenges and be partakers in God’s mission of restoring the creation with a new vision and hope.”

(from the Preface by CCA General Secretary)

