

Every time we see a Rainbow

Joan Turner – JPIC Study Week 2004

In the story of the flood we read that Noah was a good man, a man of integrity who had found favour with God. But for the rest of creation – human, animals, reptiles and birds – God said, “I regret having made them.” In the eyes of God, “the wickedness of man was great on earth...the earth grew corrupt...and filled with violence.” (Genesis 6)

When God looks on his creation today, some thousands of years after Noah, does he not see a situation similar to the pre-ark days of Noah? Wickedness? Corruption? Violence? Greed? Self-interest? Very few are taking the threat to creation seriously. Lots of words, lots of promises, but always lots of reasons why “Not us” or “Not us yet” or “Not us until everyone else does.”

Climate change is a fact. The forecast of the amount and rate of change and consequent effects may differ between agencies and researchers but the reason for change is not in dispute. The concentration of carbon dioxide, one of the greenhouse gases, in the atmosphere is now greater than at any time during any interglacial period in the history of the planet earth over the last forty million years. According to a recent (2000) report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, “there is no precedent in recent geological history to help us understand precisely what consequences will follow...the speed at which carbon dioxide concentration is changing appears to be unparalleled in geological history.”

But the more alarming and plausible forecasts of the consequences of global warming are that we are fast approaching a “positive feedback” situation (meaning that one consequence triggers another action which reinforces the first. Unchecked, it leads to a disastrous, catastrophic end.) One example of such an effect, quoted by Aubrey Meyer in a Schumacher briefing is the release of massive quantities of methane, a much more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, from hydrate in the Arctic seabed and from permafrost, which at present covers about a third of the planet, following an initial slight warming of increased release of methane which would result in a thermal runaway – goodbye life on earth!

Today it is not God who is destroying life on earth but humans who have failed in the stewardship task entrusted to them by God. The industrialized nations are the worst offenders. Twenty percent of the world’s population (the so called ‘developed’ world) are responsible for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions and receive 80% of the world’s income. There is, not surprisingly, a very strong correlation between emissions and GNP. Former US President George Bush the elder refused to sign the 1991 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change because of the economic growth interests of the USA until it had been so watered down as to be ineffective. George Bush the younger withdrew the USA from the Kyoto Protocol. Meanwhile gas concentrations continue to rise to disaster levels.

We can expect more and more ‘unnatural’ disasters worldwide. Already in the UK some properties are becoming uninsurable because of flood risk. It has been assessed that if storm damage continues to grow at its present rate (about 10% a year) by 2050 the annual damage to property resulting from climate change will exceed the total value of everything that humanity will produce in that year. Neither insurance companies nor governments will be able to underwrite the losses. Is God again regretting creation?

Every time we see a rainbow let us ask ourselves: are we respecting our side of God’s covenant with his people?