

MCSA Conference 2017 Bible study Two

Greetings

Having said yesterday highlighted the need for the convergence of Soil, Soul and Society in all our theological thinking and practise;

I today I would like to:

See if we can strengthen this worldview by showing:

The Joel 2 story which we use for Pentecost points to this convergence. To note that John Wesley seems also to be concerned about this link in his sermon *The Great Deliverance*

Our conclusion will be to place this within a theological framework of reconciliation.

1. The Joel 2 story which we use for Pentecost points this convergence

Yesterday we spoke of the Triple S today the ‘Triple F’ if you like.

Essentially Joel 2 is inclusive of the restoration of three things **fauna (animals); flora (plant life) and food security.**

Let us briefly look at these:

According to the Access Bible commentary: “*Joel is unique among the prophets in his focus on a natural catastrophe, a widespread and destructive locust plague...*” Of course, the prophet Joel does what a prophet does he interprets the ‘sigh of the times’ in relation to these catastrophes, and sees this as *divine judgement on Jerusalem*. He calls

on people *to mourn their predicament (1:5 to 20)*. Then Joel does what all good authentic prophets do *he calls all the priests to declare a solemn assembly to repent and ask God for forgiveness (2:1 to 17.)* After this he *predicts that God will restore the land to its former prosperity followed by the outpouring of God' Spirit and of political renewal.*”

The catastrophe destroyed the synergy between three things, fauna, flora and food security. The restoration emphasises each of these in turn, afterward God's Spirit is poured out on all flesh followed by political renewal.

Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people Joel 2:18) ...

Restoration begins of:

Fauna & Flora: *“Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice for the Lord has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field for the pastures of the wilderness are green. The tree bears fruit, the fig tree and vine give of their full yield...”* (Verses 21 and 22)

Let us pause and moment and note that John Wesley was also concerned about this link between fauna; flora and the liberation of the children of God (The spirt poured on all flesh)

John Wesley in is sermon **THE GREAT DELIVERANCE** offers some insight into his concern for what he terms ‘brute creation’

His sermon is based Romans 8: .¹⁹ *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;* ²⁰ *for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* ²¹ *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* ²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;* ²³ *and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.* ²⁴

He offers three points as an enquiry into this question:

I. *What was the original state of the brute creation¹?*

II. *In what state is it at present? And,*

III. *In what state will it be at the manifestation of the children of God?*

We don't have time to do a thorough examination of this sermon, yet it helps get a sense that JW was concerned about physical creation, especially the fate of animals (fauna).

I think he remains essentially anthropocentric, in that he views humans as a higher being than animals. “

“What then is the barrier between men and brutes? The line which they cannot pass? It was not reason.....: Man is capable of God; the

¹ Synonyms for **brute creation**: *noun* animal world animal group; animal life; Animalia; Animality; Animals; fauna; kingdom Animal

inferior creatures are not. We have no ground to believe that they are, in any degree, capable of knowing, loving, or obeying God. This is the specific difference between man and brute; the great gulf which they cannot pass over

However, he hints at the possibility that animals may well become aware of God later in this sermon. *“But will “the creature,” will even the brute creation, always remain in this deplorable condition? God forbid that we should affirm this; yea, or even entertain such a thought! While “the whole creation groaneth together,” (whether men attend or not) their groans are not dispersed in idle air, but enter into the ears of Him that made them. While his creatures “travail together in pain,” he knoweth all their pain, and is bringing them nearer and nearer to the birth, which shall be accomplished in its season. He seeth “the earnest expectation” wherewith the whole animated creation “waiteth for” that final “manifestation of the sons of God;” in which “they themselves also shall be delivered” (not by annihilation; annihilation is not deliverance) “from the” present “bondage of corruption, into” a measure of “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*

(One will be happy to see one’s pets again and all the animals that we ate)

This link between the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God

We see in God's world **fauna** and **flora** and the liberation of humanity are inextricably linked with **Food security**, and that which sustains it all is **the soil**.

Food Security and the essential rain needed comes: *“O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you, abundant rain (pula).... The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. (verses 23 and 24)*

Editor of Fresh from the Word, Nathan Eddy points out that like *“many cultures in ancient times, and today, ancient Israelites believed their behaviour, their faith, was connected to the coming of rain.*

Deuteronomy is particularly insistent on the connection between faithful observance of the heart and God's gift of rain: *11: ¹³ If you will only heed his every commandment^[b] that I am commanding you today—loving the LORD your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul— ¹⁴ then he^[c] will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; ¹⁵ and he^[d] will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill.*

¹⁶ Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshiping them, ¹⁷ for then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you.”

If no rain fell, then the Israelites needed to take a hard look at themselves.

Yes, what about praying for rain when it obvious we are responsible through rampant consumerism for causing the lack of rain?

Eddy goes on to say: *We may be reluctant to see God behind all weather, but in the age of global warming, I wonder if we, like ancient Israel, understand that our practices profoundly impact the environment. Our worship at the false idols of constant consumption and limitless growth development will have consequences.*”

I believe sir that it is quite possible the we tend to worship our cell phones more than the true God, when it is used in an abusive way through social media. *“God desires true worship of the heart and the flourishing of all life here on earth, the stakes are very high indeed.”*

Sir we **know what to do, but it is time to do what we know.**

PB sir *it is time that we blow the trumpet. and sound the alarm* and call all the priests to gather our people to repentance and reconciliation (V12 to 14.)

Essentially this is a call to be reconciled to nature in the context of what Prof Hezkias Assefa² calls the four dimensions of reconciliation.

² I am hugely influenced by my good friend Prof Hezkias Assefa (from Ethiopia) who is a Lay theologian an economist and a mediator of note in his monograph: PEACE AND RECONCILIATION AS A PARADIGM: A PHILOSOPHY OF PEACE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CONFLICT, GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN AFRCA, 1993, pp14/15

It is time for the priests to the first is to be reconciled with nature.

Reconciliation presupposes that we are alienated and need to discover the other afresh. Assefa says that there are four dimensions of reconciliation: Between,

1. Us and God;
2. Us and ourselves;
3. Us and our neighbours
4. and Us and nature.

He says quite categorically and unapologetically, that we cannot speak of saying I am committed to Jesus or a be disciple of Jesus if we are not committed to these four dimensions of reconciliation.

Before we look at these four dimension, especially being reconciled with nature, and their implications, let us look at the process of reconciliation.

It is not conflict management or in the case of nature, only about Conservation. (e.g. of Apartheid in favour of animals over people – The save the Rhino campaign etc.)

I use the paradigm from Mary Burtons book on the History of TRC
Acknowledge; Apologies and Atonement

ACKNOWLEDGE that there is a problem or deny it

‘Why revisit old hurts’, asks Mary Burton, the answer *‘is that unless they are attended to, they will not heal’*” and our desire for a Christ

Healed Africa, which includes the soil and nature, for the healing of the nations will not be realised

Dr Lungile Bhengu Baloyi in her book *Africa Reborn* says “*The ‘big picture consciousness is critical; this requires that we see beyond our positional limitations caused by our racial, gender, Ethnic, class, culture, and belief system differences. The first step to effectively solving a problem begins with recognising its existence.*”

The first thing we need to acknowledge is that God loved the cosmos. This is our, *big picture consciousness*. Should we fail to become part of this vision, God’s vision, we can kiss having food and life good-bye.

We have fallen short of this vision and trivialised it to make this about us and not the entire creation. We have become anthropocentric and not Theo-centric in our worldview.

We need to acknowledge our sinful participation in rampant consumerism and destruction of the earth. We need as a WCC report says, to have “*a conversion from dangerous destroyers to restorers of Creation, from degraders to keepers of Creation...*”

Pope Francis says:

“*The Earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. In many parts of the planet, the elderly lament that once beautiful landscapes are now covered with rubbish. Industrial waste and chemical products utilised in cities and*

agricultural areas can lead to bioaccumulation in the organisms of the local population, even when levels of toxins in those places are low. Frequently no measures are taken until after people's health has been irreversibly affected."

Reconciliation with nature is not simply about tree hugging, in fact we need to chop down all invasive alien trees like the Jacaranda³.

We are not to destroy but to have *dominion* and be good stewards of the Integrity of Creation

We need to acknowledge that Apartheid and colonialism has been responsible for the eradication of indigenous plant life and with that traditional ways of practising medicine.

Game parks in the name of conservation, is just another form of apartheid, where animals are more important than people.

In former Bishop Rev Purity Malinga's address to Conference 2016, we were encouraged to look for the marginalised person in the crowd; we were always to look to the periphery. I would like to suggest that as we look across the landscape of nature we see that our indigenous endemic plant life has been marginalised to small green spaces, making way for sugarcane;

³ These trees are from South America

We need to have a gathering where we acknowledge our complicity in the destruction of the earth and how this has been one of the root causes of death and poverty

Look at what happened in Sierra Leone, because people have to live in survivalist mode, the destruction of trees is inevitable, and this is what caused the mudslide which killed 500 people. There is nothing more disingenuous when some eco-activists condemn people for cutting trees to survive...

Acknowledgment is followed by APOLOGY:

- We need to grind our teeth and apologise to those indigenous earth-keepers from whom we have stolen their land, and pushed them into poverty.

Prof John de Gruchy said in one of his sermons: *“It appears that the privileged and affluent have a greater concern for endangered species than for human life, for homeless people, for shanty dwellers. What can people living on the margins of society do when they are cold but cut down trees for firewood. Their needs are immediate, not long term.”*

De Gruchy goes on to say: *“Yet they are also long term. Somehow, we have to see the interconnectedness between the struggle for justice, the struggle for human life, freedom and dignity (like the struggle against Apartheid) and concern for the environment. If there is no care for the earth, then there will be*

no resources for human life but only a bare earth, a treeless desert, in which everyone will eke out a living.”

Let us remember that greed as well as poverty degrades nature with the primary cause being greed – therefore it is imperative, not a choice, to make this connection we he we work toward a healthier environment which at the same time we work toward the elimination of poverty.

The biggest sin of our age is rampant consumerism, yes, we can acknowledge this (Is this conference floating on rampant consumerism?)

The prophet Isaiah in keeping with ancient cosmology, clearly saw the connectedness between, injustices and the destruction of the earth. AS declared in the book of Isaiah 24:

24 Now the LORD is about to lay waste the earth and make it desolate,
and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.

² And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest;

as with the slave, so with his master;

as with the maid, so with her mistress;

as with the buyer, so with the seller;

as with the lender, so with the borrower;

as with the creditor, so with the debtor.

³ The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled;
for the LORD has spoken this word.

⁴ The earth dries up and withers,
 the world languishes and withers;
 the heavens languish together with the earth.

⁵ The earth lies polluted
 under its inhabitants;
 for they have transgressed laws,
 violated the statutes,
 broken the everlasting covenant.

⁶ Therefore a curse devours the earth,

- We need to apologise to the children in the DRC, who die to ensure our cell phones have coltan.
- South African mining interests are contributing to the eradication of the DRC rainforest and the death of people in that regions
- Taking this further, do we want jobs like mining that not only destroy the environment but kill people slowly, through diseases like silicosis?

ATONEMENT:

This is about redress; restoration; it is about giving back the years that *the locusts have eaten.*

- Our property must be given back to those from whom we stole it: the earth-keepers.

- Suburban gardens: Part of repentance and redress is transforming pristine, lollipop gardens to wilder indigenous ones (say something about how specifically ‘whites’ need to do this)

When we have gone through a sincere and heartfelt process of Acknowledgment, Apology and Atonement.

When we truly understand that God loved the cosmos and that this is our, *big picture consciousness*.

When we recognise in Romans 8- that Nature is eagerly waiting for the daughters and sons, for us, to be liberated.

When we recognise that there is one central biblical word that unifies us with all that is life; the work oikos – the root word for economy (oikos-nomos); ecology (oikos-logos) and unity (oikumene).

Then surely, we are on the path of reconciliation with nature. Neighbour, ourselves and God.

Then surely, we can merge care for nature and food security?

I have seen models of this:

- in Zimbabwe (Chikuwa permaculture project) and
- South Korea (Hannam community);
- Kenyan Women Are Quietly Revolutionizing Farming.. And The Government's Noticing
- The beginnings of this in some urban farming projects in Durban like Green Camp and rooftop gardening etc.

Pope Francis says” *Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.*”

What are other options?

Here we need hugely imaginative thinking beyond the staid default positions from which we continually develop our economic policies. As communities of faith we are a PEOPLE OF PROPHETIC IMAGINATION. We imagine a world of peace; harmony and fairness to all. Already there are global movements who are creating alternative life-styles; living of the grid; developing local economies; collaborative consumers; economics of happiness; South African New Economics(SANE) to name but a few.

The question is, are we as church communities transformed enough to do likewise?

As MCSA what do to do... we know what to do... but let us do what we know...