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The ecumenical promise of eco-theology...

Chad Rimmer¹

On the 1st of September, 2018, the members of the Season of Creation partners met together with representatives of world communions and agencies, including the WCC, ACT Alliance and the LWF, to inaugurate the Season of Creation, 2018, with the first Ecumenical Prayer Service for the Care of Creation in Assisi. Our representatives proclaimed an ecumenical call to Climate Justice, after having gathered in vigil and prayer for the ecological *metanoia* that we need to bridge the ambition gap between what we must do in the political, technological and economic sectors for a just transition, and what we are motivated to do out of our eco-theological self-understanding. In light of that faithful profession of what we are, and who we are called to be as human beings, I want to reflect on the ecumenical promise of eco-theology.

Part of the ecumenical promise of eco-theology is that it provides an entry point for (a) solidarity in public witness or advocacy and (b) *diap Praxis*. The Season of Creation Prayer in Assisi embodied the way that our ecumenical solidarity multiplies our witness, and magnifies the voices of the poor, the displaced, the climate vulnerable and the habitats in which our communities have their livelihood. The LWF, WCC and ACT Alliance have been coordinating our public witness to climate justice and engagement with political and civil society at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties for years. Our eco-theological solidarity is an example of visible unity of the body of Christ in the public space. Second, eco-theology provides us a point of entry for *diap Praxis* that builds the resilience of habitats and communities through adaptation and mitigation, education and now the possibility of projects that transition communities to zero-carbon economies, divest from fossil fuels and teach practices of green energy, transportation and diet. In this way, eco-theology provides inter-disciplinary entry points for the ecumenical body of Christ to be a motivator and multiplier of real, life giving alternatives.

But even more than our shared public witness, and *diap Praxis* in the public space, there is a more fundamental ecumenical promise for eco-theology. Eco-theology is not only a hermeneutic for articulating climate justice. Eco-theology is not just a list of ways to care for nature. Eco-theology is a lens for thinking about our fundamental identity as humans, and our human vocation. Before we get into dialogue from our different theological perspectives, be they natural law or ethics or Christological doctrines of our confessional theology, eco-theology helps us begin that dialogue from a more fundamental profession that we all share, that is found in the ecumenical creeds. I believe in God...Creator of heaven and earth...of all that is seen and unseen. Believing in the Creator, is to believe that we are creatures. We believe in the Maker, and therefore we are made, along with the land, minerals, waters, plants, and every winged bird of the air, animal of the land and sea. We belong to the same category before the Creator. We are all creatures...

This weekend I took my youngest son to CERN lab here in Geneva. He's old enough now, that we went through the exhibit and I was explaining to him this mystery that

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physicists are beginning to plumb just a couple kilometres from the Ecumenical Centre chapel. That in the beginning...at the Alpha point of creation, when particles were ejected, the theory goes, that for just an infinitesimal fraction of a second there was no distinction between matter and light. There was only energy. And something happened, there was some matrix with which some particles interacted to cause resistance, and in their slowing down they collected as matter. That is the definition of matter. (*Stay with me for a moment because it is amazing - by colliding protons together, CERN is trying to reduce protons into those original constituent elements, which should include that matrix, called Bosons, that cause particles to become matter.*) So, according to infinite wisdom, some materials become matter, which is set into motion in this open system to evolve into Life. While the other particles remain photons, energy, light, which is the Light of all people that nurtures and sustains creation. (*That, by the way, is the reason that you can't go at the speed of light. Light is not matter, it can go the speed of, well, light. And this is why Einstein's theory is what it is. You can't go the speed of light because you are matter. That's the difference in you as matter and light. You have resistance that doesn't allow you to go the speed of light, and if you did manage to do that, you would disintegrate into your constituent elements which are pure energy. In other words, you would cease to be you, a creature.*) Standing in awe of this mystery of life and light to which the Bible bears witness, that is woven into the physicality of the natural world that we can observe...my son said, "Well, then, how do you explain hyper space in Star Wars?"

Ok, he maybe he missed the wonder of the Higgs-Boson theory. But every time we are walking with our children through nature, being with animals, urban gardening, learning where our food comes from, lying in the grass at night to map the stars, watching a meteor shower, plunging into the molecular and chemical depths of our being, and experiencing the biodiversity of the local ecology where we live, we resound the wonder that the Psalmist proclaimed.

This is the theological wonder that we embrace every time we profess in our ecumenical creed, We believe. For eco-theology is not about nature. Celia Deanne-Drummond wrote in her book, *Ecotheology*, that "*eco-theology seeks to uncover the theological basis for a proper relationship between God, humanity and the cosmos.*" An eco-theological hermeneutic is about relationships, the basis of an anthropological claim that we are relational beings, made from and for communion. Being is not just a matrix of forces that hold us together as matter, but living in right relationships in the whole inhabited earth – the *oikoumene*. *Oikos* is our common home, in which we derive an *oikonomia*, an economy, which is *the law of the house*. But that *oikonomia* has to follow the *oikologia* – the logic of the house, *oikologia* which is ecology. Ecology is the logic of our common home, from which all other things are derived. Gender, economics, society and politics are all secondary to our human being; derived means for negotiating the primary relationship between creatures. Turning away from that fundamental logic of our being, is what causes political, social and economic systems to be unjust. When their logic is unrooted from that primary logic, the law, technology and economy become unjust. As theologian Thomas Berry wrote, "*Human economics is not integrated with the ever-renewing economics of the natural world. This ever-renewing productivity of the natural world is the only sustainable economics. The human is a subsystem of the Earth system.*"

Redeeming our social, ethnic, political and economic logics requires us to re-center them within the eco-theo-logic of the life-nurturing web of creation that participates in redemption, and waits for the unveiling of the children of God. This redemption is the

reconciliation begun by the Christ who was the Divine energy, love and matter reconciled, so that we could return to being fully human, and re-enter the web of right relationships, safeguarding the conditions of life for every one of the Creator's creatures.

That is the eco-theological identification that Francis of Assisi made, in calling the sun, moon, water, wind, earth and animals brother and sister (and calling his sister in Christ, Clare, a plant). This is an eco-logical conversion, a *metanoia*, a re-turning to our primary human vocation, tilling and keeping that is rooted in the real logic and mystery of being human – a relational, social being, created for communion, called to care for creation as ourselves, because we are.

So, as we engage in our critique of all the unjust logics and strive for green economics and technology - no matter what entry point we claim as Lutheran or Catholic or Reformed or Orthodox, etc.- we begin by returning to our fundamental ecological identity that is rooted in our Ecumenical creedal confession that we are a creature. As we profess together in the presence of brother sun, and sister earth: We Believe in God, maker of heaven and earth.

Amen.