

Comments on Paper “Living in Harmony with Creation” –

“As a church, our theology is essential in shaping our response to social justice issues around us, like the impacts of human-induced climate change”.

The definition of theology that I prefer is *“the study of God and of God’s revelation to the world”* (Webster) and I not only find inspiration in the Bible, but in more contemporary secular literature where my knowledge and understanding of the world are enhanced. For me, it is a pity that we do not have a living third book in the Bible that gathers the basic theological wisdom of more recent times.

Some comments:

- I felt that the paper was far too long and a number of good ideas were buried in the volume of words. The fact that the authors in the paper acknowledge that few will read beyond the executive summary should suggest that a drastic edit is required. I believe that the executive summary itself should be at most 2 pages.
- “Living in Harmony with Creation” is broader than carbon induced climate change and some commentary on the wider Earth system perspective could be relevant. In systems of a very large network of interacting components (such as weather and a market economy), the output response to an input are by nature unpredictable. The prescriptions offered by the church paper may well be insufficient to have the outcome we desire. The magnitude of human population, the self-centred nature of homo-sapiens and the inflated faith in the intellectual capability of human beings are key ingredients that I believe will need to be considered in addition to the roles of natural processes in generating and absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. At best, the paper can provide a partially informed opinion on climate change solutions.
- For me, the paper reinforces my view that the church has stalled its theology to Biblical times of around 2000 years ago. The reference to James Lovelock focussed on his thoughts of a war cabinet leadership rather than the insight we could draw from his Gaia Hypothesis and I found this was disappointing. I also cringe when I see references back to Genesis as an authoritative text rather than a story that reflected the understanding of the people at that time. I personally receive as much insight into the God I worship from some modern non fictional literature as I do from the narrative of middle-eastern biblical accounts. I get the feeling that the church is still unable to do that.

- I liked the ideas in Page 28 to Page 30. The concepts of *“Coming to our Senses”*, *“An Informed Faith”*, *“Wise Practice”* and *“Commitments”* resonated, but I had wondered if they could be stated more succinctly and paragraphs amalgamated. To me section 2.8 *“we have lived out a doctrine of the domination of nature by accepting and engaging in practices that have failed to safeguard the integrity of creation”* should really be stated before dealing with the actions of the Uniting Church to repair things. In urging others to take certain actions (section 5) we really have ignored other sources and sinks of carbon that need action and could be accused of not understanding the full extent of the problem.
- At page 33, I saw reference to *“economics”*, *“exploitation”* and *“inequality”*.
 - I like many others, have formed the opinion that economic measures such as *“gross domestic product”* do not distinguish between positive and negative outcomes for society. Financial incentives and market forces generally promote greed and not necessarily good outcomes for society at large. I prefer the mantra of *“meaningful occupation and a living income for all”* rather than *‘economic growth’*
 - I recommend the books *“The Spirit Level”* and *“Inner Level”* by Professors Wilkinson and Pickett, as they show very clearly that those nations with more equal incomes (Japan and Scandinavian countries) do far better on every social measure (see link below) than unequal countries (USA, Great Britain and Australia). This to me reinforces the ideas at the heart of the Christian message to the world and is backed with contemporary research.
 - After reading *“Money Mafia”* by Paul Hellyer, I came to realize how corrupt the global financial system really was and am reflecting on the role that the church could take in offering a principled way forward as this too has an impact on social and environmental factors.
 - In recent times *“Integrity and Truth”* have taken a battering with the consequence that the stability of society is threatened. Here again, the church has a role in helping to rebuild these fundamentals of society.
- At page 37 I like the concept of Oikos, but felt that the essence of Sallie McFague thoughts could be stated more succinctly.
- At page 39 to 45, I liked the concept of *“seven principles for sustainable living”*. I really warmed to statements like *“It is hard to see how a relationship that is marked by severe inequality, oppression or emotional brokenness can be deemed as genuinely ‘good’, and “that according to the Christian understanding, freedom proves its worth precisely in our being able to limit ourselves responsibly in relation to God and our neighbours”* These to me are at the heart of the Christian insight. However, *“Humanity has been given the*

responsibility to work with and care for Creation, while acknowledging that Creation is a gift from God” to me has the overtones of humanity dominating nature rather than being an equal partner in the Earth system. However, I am happy that this impression is clarified later at pages 41 and 42 eg “*Human beings are part of nature, in their own character, in their destiny, and in their hope for life*”. I could not see the relevance of Moltman’s thoughts on Trinity and Pantheism.

- The Sections 8 through to Section 13 were dense with detail and I had wondered if the essence could be drawn out and the data placed in an appendix. The graph of carbon dioxide equivalence against time had me wondering what a log-log plot of carbon dioxide equivalence against the Earth’s human population would reveal.

A few thoughts

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Richard Wilkinson TED talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson_how_economic_inequality_harms_societies?language=en