



Christian Gifts in a World of Climate Emergency



Nicola Hoggard Creegan

As Christians involved in social justice movements we often wonder what on earth the Church really adds to our endeavours. Christians often find themselves engaging on two fronts. In the first instance, against a long history of complicity with harsh dominion over the planet and an eschatology of escape, and in the second instance, finding a positive theological voice in the

midst of all the noise.

Even when all of that is dealt with there is still a habit of Christian detachment that is widespread and is often the result of our deep-seated belief that God is in charge, and we are merely spectators. I want to argue that Christians are living in a story of covenant, where what we do matters, and that we also have spiritual gifts which are sometimes hidden, but are much needed as we engage as whole persons in the work of conservation.

Resurrection and gifts

For instance, Jesus' resurrection is the endpoint of a story about God's entanglement with matter. We believe that the Creator God has entangled Godself within this material world. We talk about this as the incarnation, as God becoming human, as Spirit blowing over the waters, as breath; but also as Covenant. Covenant is a sacred agreement, and God has made a sacred agreement with all life.

This means that whether we understand it or not, the material world is where we are at, and that it is in time that we contribute our part to the covenant, our

part of the agreement. We live in a story where what we do matters. The biblical story ends with trees that have healing power for the nations (Rev 22). Those leaves I believe are our possession; they symbolize the gifts we possess for the spiritual and material healing of the nations.

If you remember the Narnia books you will also remember that when the children were in Narnia they were given seemingly useless gifts: a horn, a bow and arrow, a potion. They forgot what the gifts were for. With a little nudging, they sometimes remembered or found their gift just in time. The church believes that we are all the possessor of gifts, gifts of healing. And that it matters whether we wake up and use those gifts or not because we are in covenant with the living God who has made God's home amongst us.

Despite the bad press the Christian Church is getting, and its sometimes indifferent history, if we are pulling with God we have spiritual resources and gifts for this crisis, and these are the gifts the church offers the world at this time. These

might be gifts of intelligence and oratory like young Greta Thunberg, gifts of seeing the creation in a new way as artists, poets or musicians; technical/engineering gifts, or gifts of prayer, discernment, activism or encouragement.

The church is of use in this epic task of building a more sustainable world, because we see a fuller picture, one in which spirit invades nature, one in which humans must act because we are in covenant with God. We must find our gifts, and find our theological voices, as well as joining in with other activist groups. One way of doing this is to join with others around the country in different churches and denominations who are part of A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand's Eco Church project.

Nicola is a theologian based in Auckland. She specialises in the interface between evolutionary theory and systematic theology and has broad interests in all issues of public and contextual theology, and especially eco-theology. Nicola is co-director of New Zealand Christians in Science and Chair of the Board of A Rocha Aotearoa NZ.