**Partners with God and creation**

Most of you know that 1st September to 4th October each year is ‘The Season of Creation’. Since 2015 all the world’s churches have adopted these weeks – which end of the feast of St Francis of Assisi – as a time to thank God for Creation, and to pray for the future of planet earth. So, let’s think again about the inter-connectedness of humanity, the natural world, and God the Creator.

For many centuries the creation parable contained in Genesis chapter 1, (‘Have dominion over the earth …’) was understood literally. The natural world was put there for the human race to use and exploit as we wished. Dominion meant domination. It is only in the last 40 years or so that the idea of stewardship entered general discussion in the Church – the idea that God has given us the responsibility to care for his Creation. This understanding has led to Christians being among the leaders of the conservation movement.

Current thinking has developed this further, and a book by an Irish Catholic, Dermot Lane, explains it in a way I find helpful. He writes of the ’Community of Creation’:

This new modeltakes us back to the biblical vision of the community of creation, and is first and foremost God-centred. “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it.” Psalm 24:1. Within this God-centred vision of creation, the whole of creation reflects its divine origins, and not just one particular part of it [i.e. people].’

Yes, we humans are created in the image of God, but he continues

The difference between humans and non-humans is a matter of degree and not of kind… This new model also re-situates the human being alongside other beings … Human beings are not above other creatures, but alongside them … Human beings are called to care for our common home just as it cares for us. We now see other beings as our neighbours so that when we talk about ‘we’ and ‘us’ we should include our new neighbours in the earth community.’

Dermot Lane *‘Theology and Ecology in Dialogue’,* Messenger Publications 2020 p.124ff

So how can contemplative prayer be enriched by understanding that sparrows, clouds, ladybirds, hamsters, ash trees, the sun … are our neighbours and as much a part of God’s community of creation as we are? I wonder if it is that, instead of leaving the world OUTSIDE our prayer, we bring into the silence with us. The shower we sheltered from, the autumn leaves we walked through, the apple we crunched, the goldfinch on the bird feeder … all these encounters become part of our prayer, part of our offering in praise to God who loves all his creatures and whose Spirit infuses us all.

**Phrases from Psalm 104 to lead into the silence**

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God you are very great. You set the earth on its foundations. You cover it with the deep as with a garment. You cause grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the human heart. The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly; in them the birds have their nests. People go out to their work and to their labour until the evening. I will sing to the Lord as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him.

**A closing prayer leading from the silence**

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

we marvel at the way we are gathered

into an intimate relationship with you

that includes

the entire family and community of creation.

May the unity you desire to have with us

extend to the rest of the natural world

so that we learn

to have a dialogue with creation

and live in harmony within it.

Helena Ibbotson