

Environmental Policy of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden

A policy document for the environmental work of the
Mission Covenant Church of Sweden

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For some time now, environmental issues have attracted attention in several different ways in our country. Creation is bleeding and we are becoming more and more conscious of the fact that we have to act quickly for a more sustainable future. We are all part of the interplay between God, the creation and our fellow human beings. In the Great Commission according to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus gives us the task of preaching the gospel for the whole creation. That is why our responsibility towards the Creator is to find ways in which our work can contribute to ecological balance.

The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden (MCCS) wants to ensure that more people in Sweden and in our partner countries gain a better understanding of the environmental issues, that they discover new ways to influence the world around them and that they themselves can be a positive force for change.

This policy seeks to encourage reflection on the part of the whole organization (head office, congregations, and individuals) and promote the formulation of action plans at different levels. The way we act during the coming 10 – 15 years is of extreme importance in relation to the current climate changes. We can affect the world around us, we can influence politicians and decision makers and we can make active choices about the way forward ourselves. With its clear aim the Environment Policy could become a starting point for policy documents and plans of action in districts and congregations.

Today a great amount of study material is available to help us along in our talks on environmental issues. We would like to encourage you to study these documents and to engage in dialogue in different groups within the congregation and at your working place, in order to arrive at what you yourselves would like to do, and what you can do for a better environment. There is also a theological background material at your disposal to help and encourage you in this very important work.

Let us all contribute to creating creation-friendly contexts in which we, as staff and members of the MCCS may live and work in harmony with God's creation.

Stockholm, April 15th, 2008.

Göran Zettergren

MCCS President

The Environmental Policy of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden

Vision and Mission of the M CCS

The M CCS vision is to be a Church with room for the whole of life. Our mission is to offer liberation and restoration through the meeting with Jesus Christ.

From the M CCS Constitution:

Human beings are created in the image of God but is also himself/herself part of the creation.

Human beings have a unique responsibility as collaborators with God and as stewards of creation.

Aim of the Environmental Policy

The M CCS is a Church which joyfully stewards God's creation, on a local level as well as on a global one, through its congregations and districts and through its central office. The M CCS wants to take its part of the responsibility for coming generations and for the future of the world.

Goals

The comprehensive goals for the M CCS environmental policy are as follows:

- An environmental aspect should be adopted in relation to all activities within the M CCS;
- The theological and pedagogical work encompasses perspectives on sustainable development;
- Giving priority to a reduced environmental effect in the following areas: transport, energy, purchasing and consumption;
- Lobbying in favour of national and international decisions to preserve the earth's climate and resources, in order to enable a sustainable global development;
- Communication of the environmental policy to all employees and others involved in the work e.g. contractors;
- Increased knowledge in relation to environmental issues within the M CCS;
- A plan of action is drafted and revised yearly.

Attitude

The M CCS is a clear voice in society that together with other actors M CCS shows that it preserves the environment and takes the environmental issues seriously. This attitude should be reflected in the Churches collaboration with partner churches and other international actors.

Human beings have a responsibility to protect nature and thereby fellow human beings and to be God's co-creator. The M CCS thus wants to encourage individual and collective standpoints contributing to a minimization of the stress on the environment.

Responsibility

The M CCS President has an overall responsibility for the environmental work on a national level. Every head of a department or district supervisor is responsible for the complying with the environmental policy within their respective areas of responsibility.

All employees have an environmental responsibility and should work in conformity with this policy. This policy should be followed up by yearly plans of action.

A Theological Reflection

On the basis of the stories of creation in the Bible, Åke Jonsson here shares a reflection with us which is part of the M CCS policy document on the environment.

The faith in God who meets us in Jesus Christ and His passion for the world are central themes in the M CCS. When we look at the world today, questions accumulate. The earth is not in balance. Does God create a malfunctioning world? What is our responsibility as human beings?

The text is about the strong human being, the weak human being and the co-creating human being. Human beings are not just stewards, but above all co-creators. According to the third story of creation, human beings must be on the front-line in the completion of the world, whoever or whatever causes its imbalance.

The Church of the Third Story of Creation

When the earth runs a temperature and the climate puts human security at risk in many parts of the world, the theology of creation is brought to the fore in our churches.

The belief that God once created the world and its natural laws in order to leave it alone to take care of itself is something we have abandoned. This belief flourished in the 18th century when the world was looked upon as being a perfectly well functioning machine which did not even need to be serviced.

Now we know that nature is involved in a constantly ongoing process of change and development. This strengthens our faith in a God who is active in the ongoing process of creation, both in the past, in the present and in the future. In Christianity God is seen as a dynamic creator, constantly active, always in the process of creating. The modern knowledge of nature's processes opens the door for a deepened understanding of God's action in the world. Natural science points to an openness and a flexibility of the physical world confirming the belief in an ongoing creation.

But if God creates the world right now, why does it look the way it does? We live in a wonderfully beautiful and intelligent cosmos, yet there is so much that does not work. Why does the temperature of the earth go up in such an alarming way? Is God creating a malfunctioning world? Or is it us, the humans, who cause the problems? In that case why did God create mankind in such a way? Why does God not influence human beings so that we change our behavior?

The numerous creation stories of the Bible can give us an indication of theological clarity. Yes, there are several stories of creation. The whole Bible can be seen as one big creation story with many elements: creation out of nothing, the shaping of man, balance in nature, catastrophes, reconciliation and new birth – and all this is about creation from the beginning, the ongoing creation and the new creation. Let us now have a look at three stories of creation.

First Story of Creation

- The Strong Human Being

In the best known story of creation, God's first words are: *Let there be light!* And then there was day and night, heaven and earth. On the earth there was greenery and vegetation and in the water there were fish and in the air there were birds, and after the animals, human beings were created. In the meantime there was the sun, the moon and the stars. This does not exactly tally with what we now know about the development of cosmos. The sun was there long before there was any vegetation on the earth, and other stars have existed before the earth, and will arise long after. But at least in one instance the story of creation and modern science agree: human

beings arrived last. We were far back in the queue. It took 13.8 billion years to develop this conscious creature, but when he/she was finally created, he/she is a capable actor. According to the first story of creation, humans are strong, independent and capable and are asked to look after and develop the whole creation. The human being is like God, and man and woman collaborate. This is the first story of creation. It illuminates one side of the human being and nature, and we can read about this in the first chapter of Genesis (Genesis: 1:1-2:4).

Second Story of Creation

- The Weak Human Being

In the second and third chapters of Genesis (from Genesis 2:4 and onwards), we find another story. There we are given a close-up picture of humanity. In this story too the human being is a caring person, but we also see other human features. The human being is weak, lives near death, is tempted and lies, he/she causes suffering in nature and causes the ground to be under a curse ("Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse"). It is from this story that we take the texts we use in the funeral ritual ("You are dust, and to dust you shall return"). This story is about the heavy work given to humans, about conflicts between humans and between humans and animals. It is a realistic story about people in nature and it complements the first story's very positive image of the human being.

Third Story of Creation

- The Human Being – a Co-creator

We choose a third story of creation. It is to be found in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 8:19-21). There it says: All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal his sons... Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery. The translation *God's sons* is a controversial one, but the expression covers women and men who are more spiritually and ethically mature than those people who put a curse on the ground. It is about the human being of the new creation - the image of God and his co-creator. Nature is waiting for this human being to come to the fore, in the walk towards the future. Literally it says that *creation is standing on tiptoe*, waiting. For Paul's creation story has another order of the events than the first story of creation. In the first one nature comes first and man last. In the third one, man comes first. Why? Because nature itself has developed a human being with conscience and competence to complete the creation. More complexity is shown by nature, more consciousness and self-awareness and greater capacity to influence the future. This evolution doctrine has been given a special name in the Bible: the creation of the image of God. The image of God becomes God's co-creator. Nature is on tiptoe waiting for us to start the completion of creation.

The three stories of creation can be interpreted in the following way: In his creative work, God, who is the creator of everything out of nothing, more and more involves the creation/creature itself as an actor. This is especially true for human beings who are not only stewards but above all co-creators. Humans should not only protect nature, but the world should be brought forward until it is born again. The role of humanity is not only to obey but to collaborate. God does not create alone, but in collaboration with his creation.

The world is the creation of God, and it is wonderful. But the world is also out of balance. The earth is heated up. The ground is under a curse. We are now debating whether this is due to natural variations or if mankind is the main cause. Probably there is more than one explanation, but that is not important. According to the third story of creation, the human being must be at the forefront when it comes to the completion of the world, irrespective of who or what causes this imbalance.

Faith in God is the greatest source of inspiration since God created the world out of love and wants what is best for it. Faith also reposes on surrendering to God. Faith in God who meets us in Christ and His passion for the world are central themes in the M CCS. God loves the humans with our strengths and weaknesses and He sees our possibilities. Within the M CCS the idea of taking part also plays an important role (“what a grace to be able to take part”). Our own tradition as the people of God and God’s co-workers can inspire us to become the Church of the third story of creation.

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