

together
with all
creatures
CARING FOR GOD'S LIVING EARTH



A Report of the
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
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This document was prepared by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in response to a request "to develop a biblical and confessional report on responsible Christian stewardship of the environment" (2007 Res. 3-06). At its April 2010 meeting the CTCR adopted this document (CPH item 09-2621) and also a longer, expanded version of the same (CPH item 09-2622).

Highlighting with red letters and a larger font are used for key ideas and for Scripture references in this document to help the reader follow the train of thought and to facilitate its use as a Bible study.

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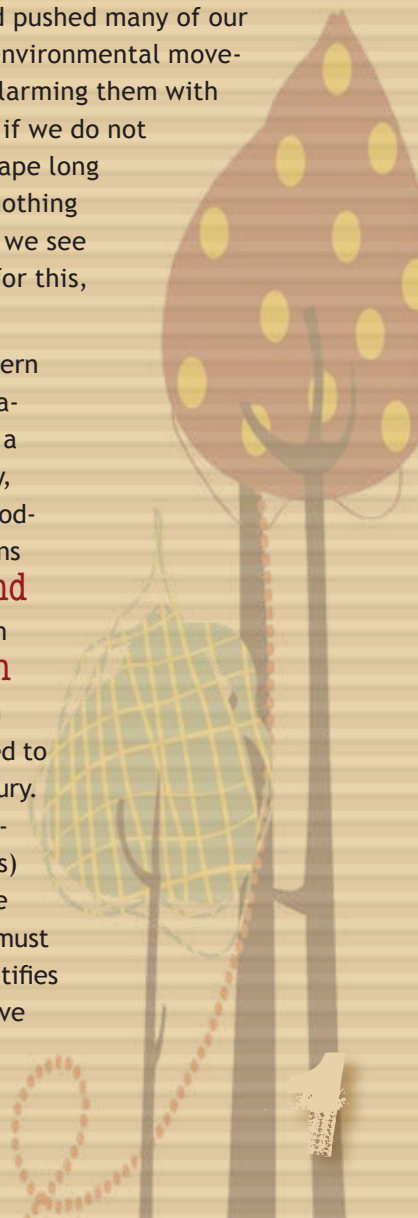
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Together with All Creatures: Caring for God's Living Earth

In the last two centuries, we have acquired a mastery over the earth never before seen in human history. That mastery, fueled by the scientific and technological revolutions, has brought about dramatic improvements in human health and well-being but has also come with a heavy cost. The environmental movement has drawn attention to the way in which our domination has diminished the beauty of God's earth, damaged the health of its ecosystems, and pushed many of our fellow creatures to the brink of extinction. The environmental movement has also aroused people to take action by alarming them with doom and gloom scenarios that would take place if we do not act to avert them. But can the movement also shape long term attitudes and behavior? For that, we need nothing less than a fundamental reorientation in the way we see ourselves and our relationship to the earth. And for this, we need the Christian story.¹

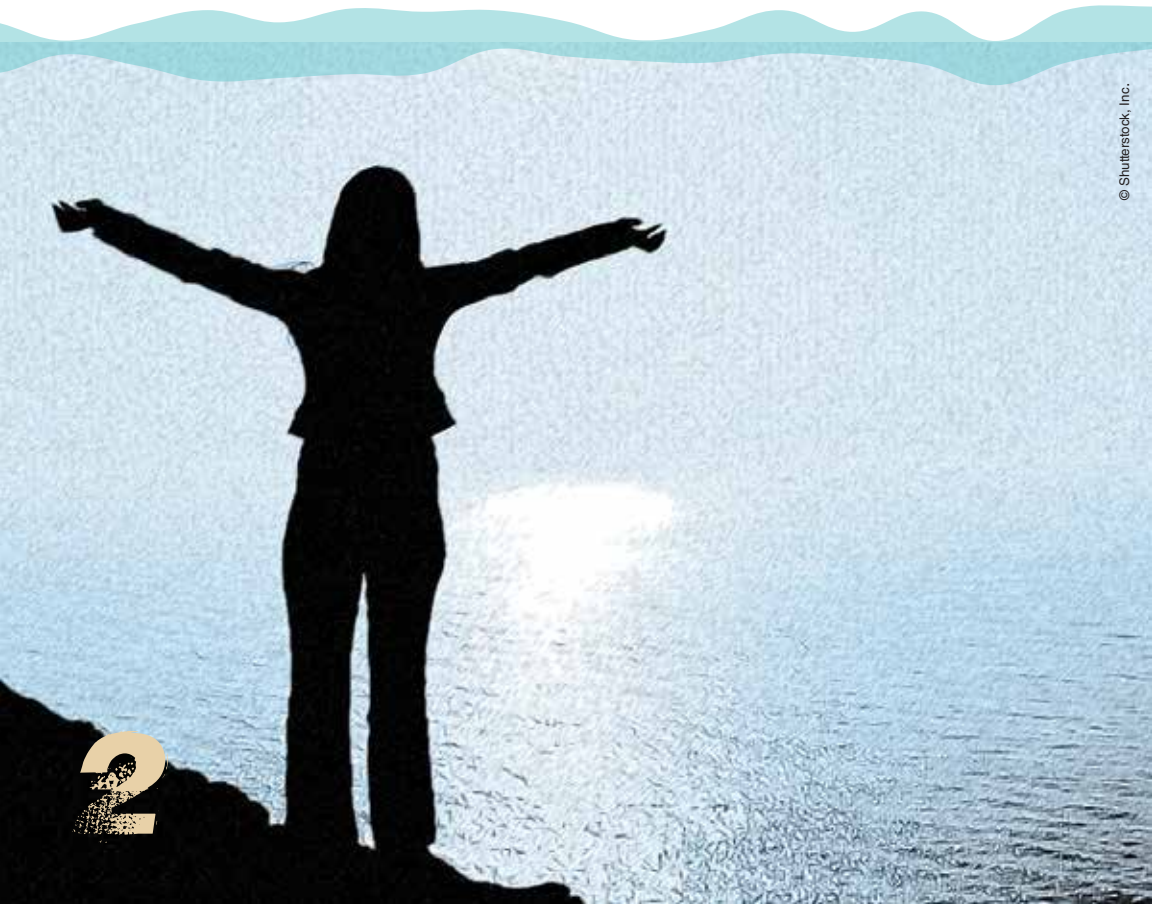
Two thousand years ago, Christianity gave western society a vision of the earth, rooted in the Old Testament, as a good creation brought into existence by a gracious God. In an age shaped by Greek philosophy, many considered the earth to be a prison and our bodies to be tombs. But in the Apostles' Creed Christians confessed that **God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1)**. This Creator sent His Son into the world to become a human creature (**John 1:1, 14**) so that our bodies would be raised up on the last day (**1 Cor 15:51-57**). Christians need to reclaim the Creed's vision for the twenty-first century. Today we have come to see ourselves either as masters of the universe (given our technological powers) or as the worst thing ever to happen to the universe (given our ecological destructiveness). Instead we must articulate a view of human creatureliness that identifies where we fit within God's living earth and how to live generously with our fellow creatures.



Where Do We Fit Within God's Living Earth?

"God has made me together with all creatures . . ." — Martin Luther

the various ecological issues of our day raise more questions about **us** than about the environment. How do we see ourselves and our place within creation? The answer to that question will shape how we live on God's earth. For example, if we distinguish ourselves too sharply from creation we might seek to free ourselves from the constraints of the earth or to control it for purely self-centered purposes. If we identify ourselves too closely with the earth we might lose our distinctive identity to the point that we value nonhuman life above human life. The Christian story avoids these two alternatives by affirming **our common creatureliness as well as our distinctive creatureliness**. Within this story we confess that God has called us to care for His earth as creatures among fellow creatures.



In the Company of Fellow Creatures

*“The whole creation, the entire cosmos,
is on tiptoe with expectation for God’s glory
to be revealed to his children.”*

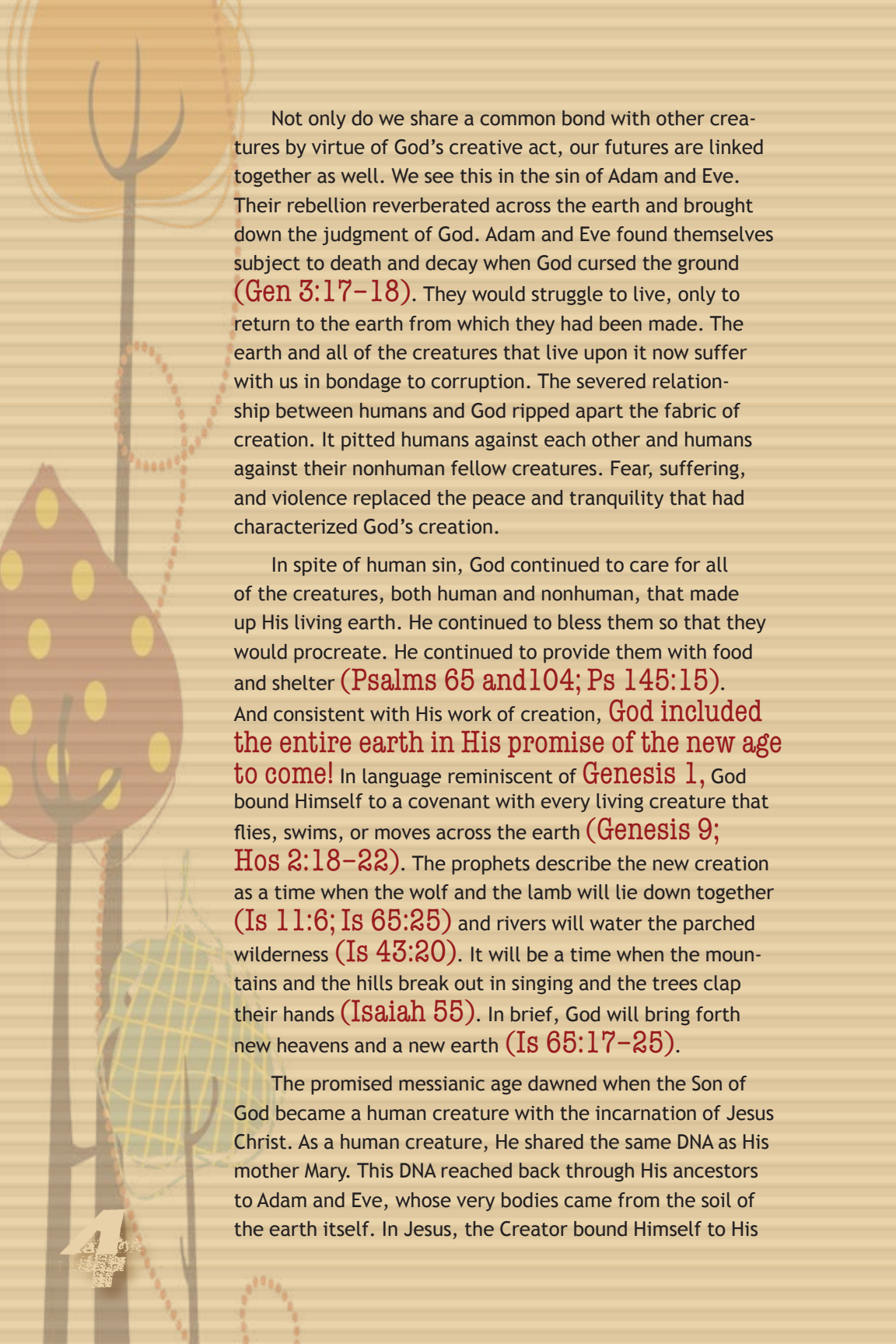
— N. T. Wright’s paraphrase of Romans 8:21

The way we tell the Christian story says something about the way we see ourselves and our life on earth. Does that story include or exclude our fellow creatures of the earth? Are other creatures simply background scenery for our story or fellow participants in that story? So how do we tell the story? Does it go something like this?

God created us in His image, but Adam and Eve sinned and brought God’s judgment upon the whole human race. God then sent His Son Jesus to die for us so that when we die we will be with Jesus in heaven.

This is certainly true as far as it goes. But there is more to the story. The story continues and expands to include the resurrection of our bodies and the renewal of God’s entire creation.

When God created us, He formed us and our fellow creatures from the soil of the earth (**Gen 1:24; 2:7; 3:19; Job 10:9**). We are all made of the same “stuff,” as it were. **We share a bond with other creatures by way of the earth.** God provided all His creatures with food from the earth. We share a common table. God blessed all His creatures and so we share with our fellow creatures a common pattern of life. We mate, procreate, and raise our young. God gave all His creatures a place to live. We share the earth as a common home. God created all of His creatures for His delight and glory. He liked what He made and declared that it was all good. With our fellow creatures we praise God by living as the creatures God made us to be. While we do not think of birds, animals, and fish as our brothers and sisters, they are our fellow creatures and, in a certain sense, our neighbors.



Not only do we share a common bond with other creatures by virtue of God's creative act, our futures are linked together as well. We see this in the sin of Adam and Eve. Their rebellion reverberated across the earth and brought down the judgment of God. Adam and Eve found themselves subject to death and decay when God cursed the ground (**Gen 3:17-18**). They would struggle to live, only to return to the earth from which they had been made. The earth and all of the creatures that live upon it now suffer with us in bondage to corruption. The severed relationship between humans and God ripped apart the fabric of creation. It pitted humans against each other and humans against their nonhuman fellow creatures. Fear, suffering, and violence replaced the peace and tranquility that had characterized God's creation.

In spite of human sin, God continued to care for all of the creatures, both human and nonhuman, that made up His living earth. He continued to bless them so that they would procreate. He continued to provide them with food and shelter (**Psalms 65 and 104; Ps 145:15**). And consistent with His work of creation, **God included the entire earth in His promise of the new age to come!** In language reminiscent of **Genesis 1**, God bound Himself to a covenant with every living creature that flies, swims, or moves across the earth (**Genesis 9; Hos 2:18-22**). The prophets describe the new creation as a time when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together (**Is 11:6; Is 65:25**) and rivers will water the parched wilderness (**Is 43:20**). It will be a time when the mountains and the hills break out in singing and the trees clap their hands (**Isaiah 55**). In brief, God will bring forth new heavens and a new earth (**Is 65:17-25**).

The promised messianic age dawned when the Son of God became a human creature with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As a human creature, He shared the same DNA as His mother Mary. This DNA reached back through His ancestors to Adam and Eve, whose very bodies came from the soil of the earth itself. In Jesus, the Creator bound Himself to His



creation in a most intimate way. He drank the water, breathed the air, and ate the food of the earth. When He embarked upon His messianic work, He went out to be "with the wild animals" (**Mark 1:13**) which did not harm Him during His forty days of fasting. The Messiah had come to restore His creation (**Is 43:20**). That work would center on those who had brought about its ruin—God's human creatures. Jesus fed, healed, and restored people in both body and soul. He died to reconcile them to God, and together with them reconciled all things to Himself (**Eph 1:10; Col 1:15–20**). **When He rose from the dead, He became the vanguard of the new creation.**

As the Lord of creation, Jesus Christ now works through the Holy Spirit to gather and renew His human community, to make them the children of God (**Rom 8:16**). God begins the renewal of creation at the point where its ruin began. **The rest of creation groans and sighs in the pains of childbirth as it eagerly longs for the day when the children of God will be glorified.** For at that time the earth and its creatures will also be released from their bondage to corruption. All of creation will then share in the glory of the children of God. In the meantime, we too groan inwardly as we await the redemption of our bodies (**Rom 8:19–23**). Until that day, we live in an age of ambiguity. We see all around us a beautiful yet