

Pro-Cathedral / Donnybrook

25/26 September 2021

Welcome

The whole of September has become the month when Christians are called to reflect on creation. You can hardly look at a news source and you will be informed about the rise in temperatures, the obliteration of habitat, the disappearance of species. Very immediately the astronomical rise in energy costs will bring the crisis literally into the homes of everyone. It would be easy to fall into some combination of anxiety, guilt and powerlessness, a disempowering and unholy trinity. Somehow, we have to find the inspiration and vision to take the necessary steps as individuals, families, communities, not to mention nationally and internationally.

Topic

As believers, we can also ask: what is the role of faith as we face this enormous crisis?

Steps

It should be said immediately that faith does not contribute to the science of the crisis. The contribution of faith is elsewhere. Three dimensions stand out for me.

1. The first is this: as people who believe in God, creator of all, we are aware that this world, in all its beauty, complexity and tragedy, is a gift from the divine giver. When we respect creation, we acknowledge the creator. There is actually more. In the Bible, the book of Sirach reflects most powerfully on the astounding beauty of the world around us. The poem starts by looking at the sun, in the following words:

Sir. 43:1 The pride of the higher realms is the clear vault of the sky,
 as glorious to behold as the sight of the heavens.
Sir. 43:2 The sun, when it appears, proclaims as it rises
 what a marvellous instrument it is, the work of the Most High.

The poem goes through all of creation and at the end it makes a risky, unexpected claim:

Sir. 43:27 We could say more but could never say enough;
 let the final word be: "He is the all."

Because the writer is so clearly not pantheistic, he can risk saying "he is the all". In other words, for believers, the world is not simply a gift *from* God, but a kind of sacrament of the *of* God, present in all that is. As St Paul said in Athens, in him we live and move and have our being.

2. The second contribution of faith is the call for justice. Climate justice is a very wide expression – and it includes animals and plants and the depletion of resources. Still, in a very prophetic way, faith can voice the experience and demands of the victims of

climate change. In a recent declaration from the the heads of the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches, the leaders wrote as follows:

But we also face a profound injustice: the people bearing the most catastrophic consequences of these abuses are the poorest on the planet and have been the least responsible for causing them. We serve a God of justice, who delights in creation and creates every person in God's image, but also hears the cry of people who are poor. Accordingly, there is an innate call within us to respond with anguish when we see such devastating injustice.

Prophetic words. St James, in our first reading, could hardly have but it more bluntly.

3. Last year, a great Jewish leader died in the UK: Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. His last book was entitled *Morality. Restoring the Common Good in Divided Time*. It was written just before Covid and was extraordinarily prescient. Faith still has the power to call us back to the common good and to galvanise communities into action. We can see this in the Letter of Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, on climate change, in 2015, inspired by St Francis. We can see it in just quoted recent declaration by Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew and Archbishop Justin Welby. We can see it in the first pastoral letter of our new Archbishop here, Dermot Farrell, *The Cry of the Earth. The Cry of the Poor*. The letter proposes many practical steps we can take right now in our own lives and homes, work places and churches. The Archbishop is rightly concerned that we do not lose heart and he quotes Brendan Keneally:

Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
that always seems about to give in
something that will not acknowledge conclusion
insists that we forever begin.

Conclusion

As I said at the start, it would be easy to fall into anxiety, guilt a powerlessness, an unholy trinity. Faith offers a more life-giving trinity: God-in-creation, justice and the common good. Quite appropriately, the theme for the month of creation this year is "Restoring our Common Home." Each word is important: restoring our common home.