



## SEASON OF CREATION

Each year, the ecumenical steering committee that provides this Celebration Guide proposes a theme for the Season of Creation. The theme for 2022 is, **Listen to the Voice of Creation**.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have become familiar with the concept of being muted in conversations. Often, people using a platform do not have the capacity to unmute themselves. Even more do not even have access to digital platforms, and so their voices are never heard. Many voices are muted in public discourse around climate change and the ethics of Earth-keeping. These are the voices of those who suffer the impacts of climate change. These are the voices of those who hold generational wisdom about how to live gratefully within the limits of the land. These are the voices of a diminishing diversity of more-than-human species. It is the voice of the Earth. The 2022 Season of Creation theme raises awareness of our need to listen to the voice of all creation.

The Psalmist declares, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge...their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the Earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (19: 1-4) Creation never ceases to proclaim, but do we listen?

The Psalmist acknowledges that hearing the voice of creation requires a kind of listening that is all too rare in this age. Within the ecumenical Christian family, there is a diverse range of traditions to help us recover our capacity to hear the voice of creation. Some of the earliest Christian writings refer to the concept of creation as a book from which knowledge of God can be read. The theological tradition of the book of creation runs like a golden thread from the writings of Origen through the Patristic writers such as Tertullian, Basil of Caesarea and others. Like the Psalmist, St. Maximus reminds us that the entire cosmos praises and glorifies God ‘with silent voices’, and that praise is not heard until we give it a voice, until we praise God in and with creation.<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine writes, “[Creation] is the divine page that you must listen to; it is the book of the universe that you must observe. The pages of Scripture can only be read by those who know how to read and write, while everyone, even the illiterate, can read the book of the universe.”<sup>2</sup> For an Advent Sermon Martin Luther wrote, “God has written [the gospel] not only in books, but also in trees and other creatures.”<sup>3</sup>

A “book” or a scroll was meant to be read aloud, and therefore, it was a spoken word that was meant to be heard. The scrolls, and books of Scripture were meant to be read aloud, breathed into a community, and heard as proclamation. The Psalmist who declares that creation proclaims God’s handiwork also knows that the book of Scripture perfectly revives the soul, makes the simple wise, rejoices the heart, and enlightens the eyes. (Psalm 19:7-8) The book of creation and the book of Scripture are meant to be “read” side by side.

Care must be taken not to confuse the two books, nor to blur the lines between reason and revelation. But what we “hear” from creation is more than a metaphor drawn from our understanding of ecology and climate science. It is more than the biological and physical sciences

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<sup>1</sup> St. Maximus, *Ad Thalassium* 51.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 45, 7: PL 36, 518.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's House-Postil, Or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church-year*. 30.

that have shaped the dialogue between theology and the natural sciences since the scientific revolution. In his encyclical on *Faith and Reason*, Pope John Paul II recognized that while Christ is the heart of God's revelation, creation was the first stage of that revelation.<sup>4</sup> The harmonies that emerge when we contemplate the books of creation and Scripture form our cosmology about who we are, where we are, and how we are called to live in right relationships with God and our co-creatures.

Contemplation opens us to many modes of listening to the book of creation. Psalm 19 says that creatures speak to us of the Creator. The harmonious balance of biodiverse ecologies and the suffering cries of creation are both echoes of the Divine because all creatures have the same origin and ending in God. Listening to the voices of our co-creatures is like perceiving truth, goodness or beauty through the lives of a human friend and family member. Learning to listen to these voices helps us become aware of the Trinity, in which creation lives, moves and has its being. Jürgen Moltmann calls for "a discernment of the God who is present in creation, who through his Holy Spirit can bring men and women to reconciliation and peace with nature."

The Christian Tradition helps us learn to listen to the book of creation. Christian spirituality is replete with practices that move our bodies to contemplation in words and silence. Liturgical and spiritual practices are accessible from early childhood to adulthood. Cultivating a spirituality of active listening helps us to discern the voices of God and our neighbours amongst the noise of destructive narratives. Contemplation moves us from despair to hope, from anxiety to action!

For Christians, Jesus Christ holds the two "books" of creation and Scripture together. Faced with the reality of brokenness, suffering and death, Christ's incarnation and resurrection becomes the hope for reconciling and healing the Earth. The book of Scripture proclaims God's Word so that we can go into the world and read the book of creation in a way that anticipates this Gospel. In turn, the book of creation helps us to hear the book of Scripture from the perspective of all creation that waits with eager longing for the good news. Christ becomes a key to discern God's gift and promise for all creation, and particularly those who suffer or are already lost to us.

During the Season of Creation, our common prayer and action can help us listen for the voices of those who are silenced. In prayer we lament the individuals, communities, species, and ecosystems who are lost, and those whose livelihoods are threatened by habitat loss and climate change. In prayer we center the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. Communities of worship can amplify the voices of young people, Indigenous people, and affected communities who are not heard in society. Through liturgies, public prayers, symbolic acts and advocacy, we can remember those who are displaced or have disappeared from public spaces and political processes.

Listening to the voice of creation offers members of the Christian family a rich entry point for interfaith and interdisciplinary dialogue and practice. Christians walk a shared path as those who hold different kinds of knowledge and wisdom in all cultures and sectors of life. By listening to the voice of all creation, humans joined in our vocation to care for our common home (*oikos*).

May this 2022 Season of Creation renew our ecumenical unity! And may this season of prayer and action be a time to **Listen to the Voice of Creation**, so that our lives in words and deeds proclaim good news for all the Earth!

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<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 19.