



Lukas Vischer: Time for God's Creation An Appeal to the Churches in Europe

1. Place and Date of Publication

European Christian Environmental Network ECEN (ed.), Geneva 2006.

2. Historical Context

ECEN was founded in 1998, Lukas Vischer being among the initiators. In 1999, ECEN propagated the introduction of a "creation time" in European churches. For the promotion of the idea, Vischer compiled a booklet "Time for God's Creation", with texts and liturgical elements of several ecumenical assemblies. His article "Praising God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, in the cycle of the liturgical year" was part of the manuscript (cf. Editor's Remarks).

3. Summary

In 1989, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Dimitrios I suggested to all Churches to observe September 1 - for Orthodox Churches the first day of the ecclesiastical year - as a day "of the protection of the natural environment" and to offer "prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both in thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and in petition for its protection and salvation". Ten years later, in 1999, the European Christian Environmental Network urged the churches to introduce a Time for Creation stretching from September 1 to the second Sunday in October. – What about the legitimacy of this proposal?

The great festivals in Israel had their roots in the cycle of nature. Later they recalled some historical episodes of the people of Israel. The Sabbath tradition changed its meaning in the Christian context. Christians celebrated the Sunday as the day of Christ's resurrection. More Jewish festivals were given a new, Christ-related signification. The ecclesiastical year as we know it today is the result of a long and complicated development which is still going on. Therefore, the endeavour to introduce a "creation time" is legitimate. Why shouldn't the church see to it that the confession of God the Creator finds an adequate expression in the liturgical life?

But which points of departure are possible? First of all, Sunday reminds us of our responsibility towards humans and all creatures. It puts limits to blind business and is a criticism of human self-realization which shuts off the access to God's new world. "Creation *Days*" have already been introduced in some parts of the world.

It is, however, important to show that "commitment to preservation of the creation is not an issue among many others, but an essential dimension of all church life." There are good reasons for introducing a *season* of creation, for instance from September 1 until the second Sunday of October. This period is both the beginning and the end of the ecclesiastical year. It points to God's new creation. It reminds us that we are creatures among other creatures. It gives us an occasion to think about the way we have used or abused God's gifts. And finally, it gives the church an occasion to put a new, more responsible lifestyle into practice.

4. Editor's Remarks

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AN APPEAL TO THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE

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AN APPEAL TO THE CHURCHES IN EUROPE



TIME FOR GOD'S CREATION

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THE APPEAL

Throughout the year the Church is invited to recall in a special way each of God's great deeds in Jesus Christ. Each year we are led from Advent, Christmas and Epiphany to Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day and Pentecost, and when the Advent Season returns, we not only prepare for Christmas, but pray for the coming of God's kingdom. One reminder follows another – an uninterrupted sequence, repeated year by year. But, surprisingly, no special time is reserved for recalling that God is the Creator of heaven and earth, the source of life. The annual circle of special times and days focuses on the second and third articles of the Creed. No special time is set aside for giving thanks for the gift of God's creation.

We urge the Churches to designate the period from September 1 to the second Sunday of October as an opportunity to reflect together on God the creator and on the gift of life.

True, the Creator is by no means absent from the worship life of the Churches. A powerful reminder comes, of course, each Sunday, the constantly recurring day of rest. "Six days you shall labour and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God ... for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth ... and rested on the seventh day (Ex.20, 9-11)." For Christians, the primary content of the Sunday is Christ's resurrection. But how can we celebrate the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection without at the same time recalling God's creating and sustaining power. Trinity Sunday, following Pentecost, underlines the inseparable link between God creating, redeeming and bringing to fulfilment. Prayers offered throughout the year contain many references to Creation, and it is important to identify, and make fuller use of, such references. But the need for a special time remains.



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A time to renew our sense of dependence on the Creator, the awareness that we are creatures among creatures, called to serve and care for God's Creation, a time of praise, of repentance and renewal. We are not asking for an official change of the liturgical year. What we need is simply a period of undivided common attention to the Creator and the creation.

Why do we insist on this proposal now? The reason is obvious: because our relationship to God's Creation is deeply disturbed. Through our excessive exploitation of the planet we have caused serious damage and continue to cause harm to the 'rest' of Creation. The effects of our behaviour are disastrous – pollution, destruction and death. The present situation raises fundamental questions about the ways we have given expression to our faith in our day to day life. Have we really understood what it means to be created? To have life in the midst of life? We have to ask the question why and when things took a wrong turn. How could it have happened that the resources of the planet became overexploited and that air, soil and water are now filled with waste?

We need a common time to elucidate such questions, a time

- **to recognise the magnitude of the crisis;**
- **to reflect on its implications for our faith and discipleship;**
- **to enter into dialogue and exchange with one another and people of other persuasions and faiths;**
- **to learn from scientists and experts;**
- **to discover new approaches and accept new commitments – both as congregations and persons;**
- **to witness to the true voice of the Scriptures and**
- **to live as the first fruits among God's creatures (James 1,18).**

In the spirit of the European Ecumenical Assemblies in Basel and Graz the Charta Oecumenica states: "Together we want to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation." This commitment inevitably opens a horizon beyond the borderlines of Europe. European Churches belong to nations whose claims on the resources of the planet are excessive, and entail, in fact, a new form of intolerable injustice. The way of life in Europe aggravates the gap between the rich and poor nations worldwide. Climate change may serve as an illustration: European countries are responsible for comparably high emissions of greenhouse gases but the anomalies resulting from the constant rise of temperature are affecting primarily the poorer countries of the world. A new approach towards God's creation is therefore not only a matter of self-protection but also of justice. The Time for God's Creation which we propose provides an opportunity to reflect anew on the solidarity and on the other commitments that our dependence on God requires.

In our view a Time for Creation will provide an opportunity to all Churches in Europe both East and West

- **to join in common praise;**
- **to share the resources of their traditions;**
- **to work towards a new orientation of the life of their societies.**



WHERE DOES THE PROPOSAL COME FROM?

In 1989 the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Dimitrios I suggested to all Churches to observe September 1, for the Orthodox Churches the first day of the ecclesiastical year, as a day “of the protection of the natural environment” and to offer “prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both in thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and in petition for its protection and salvation”. Ten years later the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) widened this proposal, urging the churches to adopt a Time for Creation stretching from September 1 to the second Sunday in October.

Message of His All-Holiness
the Ecumenical Patriarch DIMITRIOS I
on the day of the protection of the Environment
(September 1, 1989)

This Ecumenical Throne of Orthodoxy, the keeper and proclaimer of the centuries-old spirit of patristic tradition and the faithful interpreter of eucharistic and liturgical experience of the Orthodox Church, with great anxiety follows the merciless trampling down and destruction of the natural environment which is caused by man with extremely dangerous



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**His All-Holiness
Patriarch Bartholomaios I.**

consequences for the very survival of the natural world created by God.

The abuse by contemporary man of his privileged position in creation and of the Creator's mandate "to have dominion over the earth" (Gen 1:28) has already led the world to the edge of apocalyptic self-destruction, either in the form of natural pollution which is dangerous for all living beings, or in the form of the extinction of many species of the animal and plant world, or in various other forms. Scientists and other learned individuals are now warning us of the danger and speak of phenomena which are threatening the life of our planet, such as the so called "phenomenon of the greenhouse" whose first indications have already been noted.

In view of this situation the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved. It constitutes a fundamental dogma of her faith that the world was created by God the Father, who is confessed in the Creed as being "the maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible." According to the great Fathers of the Church, man is the prince of creation endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being simultaneously a partaker of the material and the spiritual world, he was created in order to refer creation back to the Creator so that the world may be saved from decay and death.

This great destiny of man was realized, after the failure and fall of the "first Adam", by the "last Adam," the Son and Logos of God Incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ, who united the created world with the uncreated God in his person and who increasingly refers creation to the father as an eternal eucharistic anaphora and offering.

The Church in each Divine Liturgy continues this reference and offering (of creation to God), in the form of the Bread and the Wine which are elements taken from the material universe. In this way the Church continuously declares that man is destined not to exercise power over creation as if he were the owner of it, but to act as its steward, cultivating it in love and referring it in thankfulness with respect and reverence to its Creator.

Unfortunately, in our days of the influence of an extreme rationalism and self-centredness, man has lost the sense of sacredness of creation and acts as its arbitrary ruler and a rude violator. Instead of the eucharistic and ascetic spirit with which the Orthodox Church brought up her children for centuries, we observe today the violation of nature for the satisfaction not of basic human needs, but of man's endless and constantly increasing desires and lust, encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of a consumer society.

But creation "groans and travails in all its parts" (Rom 8:22) and is now beginning to protest its treatment by human beings. Man cannot infinitely and at his pleasure exploit the natural resources of energy. The price of his arrogance, should the present situation continue, will be his self-destruction.

In full consciousness of our duty and in paternal spiritual responsibility, having taken all the above into consideration and having listened to the anguish of modern man, we have come to the decision, in common with the sacred and Holy Synod surrounding us, to declare the first day of September of each year, on the occasion of the Feast of Indiction, which is the first day of the ecclesiastical year, to be the day of the protection of the natural environment with prayers and supplications for all creation to be offered by this holy Centre of Orthodoxy.

Therefore, we invite the entire Christian world through this our Patriarchal Message to offer together with the Mother Holy Great Church of Christ, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, every year on this day prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both in thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and in petition for its protection and salvation. At the same time we paternally urge, on the one hand, all the faithful in the world to admonish themselves and their children to respect and protect the natural environment, and, on the other hand, all those who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing nations to act



**His All-Holiness
Patriarch Dimitrios I.**



without delay in taking all necessary measures for the protection and preservation of natural creation.

Finally, we ask the Lord for all good things for the world and bestow upon all, those near and far, our wholehearted Patriarchal and paternal blessing.

At the Phanar the 1st of September, 1989,
+ PATRIARCH DIMITRIOS



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Resolution of the European Christian Environmental Network adopted at its meeting in the Evangelical Academy in Loccum on October 31, 1999

The Second Ecumenical European Assembly in Graz (1997) adopted the following resolution: "We recommend that the churches consider and promote the care for creation as part of church life at all levels. One way

would be to observe a common creation day, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate celebrates each year. Rationale: The seriousness of the ecological dilemma for the future of the human race means that the churches' consciousness must be raised. Commitment to the care for creation is not an issue among many but an essential dimension of all church life."

The European Christian Environmental Network, having considered and discussed this resolution, submits to the churches in Europe and to all organisation and people concerned, the following recommendation:

We welcome the resolution of the Second Ecumenical Assembly in Graz. We urge the churches to put it into practice through a common and concerted effort.

The theme of creation is present in the worship of all Christian tradition. For example, many Protestant churches celebrate harvest worship services and in the Roman Catholic Church the Day of Saint Francis is acquiring increased significance. The proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate adds a further occasion of celebrating the Creator. September 1 is meant to be "a day of thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and of petitions for its preservation and healing". In response to the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarchate the churches should introduce into the church year a period explicitly devoted to the first article of the Creed, the confession of 'God, the Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth'. At present the theme "Creator and Creation" has no firm place within the church calendar. The various periods and days of the church year have as their focus the second and third articles of the Creed.

1. We propose that the period from September 1 to the second Sunday of October be observed as a period of celebration of the Creator and Creation.

We have noted with interest that certain churches have already begun to use this period as an occasion to strengthen within the churches the consciousness of their responsibility for creation. We suggest that all churches introduce this period into their calendar.

2. Such a period of the Creator and Creation can serve as an occasion for a common witness of the churches. With a view to this, we have prepared a file with suggestions which may facilitate a creative use of the period.



REFLECTIONS ON THE PROPOSAL OF A CREATION TIME

Praising God,
the Creator of Heaven and Earth,
in the cycle of the liturgical year

Lukas Vischer, Geneva

Throughout the year Christian churches celebrate the foundational events of the revelation of God in Christ. However, there is no day and time in the liturgical year when we explicitly remember God as Creator. The church year concentrates almost exclusively on the second and third articles of the Christian creed. Is this state of affairs acceptable in view of the ecological crisis? Is it not time to reconsider the sequence of the church year? Certainly belief in “God the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth” is presupposed in any church celebration. But are these hidden references enough? In view of the criticism that the Judeo-Christian tradition has substantially contributed to present-day destructive ways of treating nature, there are more and more calls for a reform or renewal of the liturgical year. For, even though it can easily be shown that this criticism is based on a biased interpretation of the biblical texts, the absence of God the Creator in the succession of Christian festivals is striking. If it is true that worship forms the consciousness of believers to an even larger degree than the teaching of the Church, it is essential to give God the Creator a larger place in worship. The entire creed must find expression in worship.

1. The revelation of God in history

The succession of Christian festivals is embedded in the changing seasons of the year. Every year the cycle ends and begins anew. To a certain extent the rhythm of nature provides the framework for the church year. However, the content of the festivals does not coincide with the rhythm of nature; they rather commemorate the events connected with God's revelation in Christ. The liturgical year recalls the turning point in history brought about by Jesus.

This movement from nature to history can already be seen in Israel's traditions. The great festivals celebrated in Israel were originally rooted in the cycle of nature. The Passover originated in the nomadic period, as a spring festival at which the first-born lambs were sacrificed. Three other feasts have their origins in the Canaanite context and had to do with the cultivation of the land: a) the festival of *Mazzoth*, the unleavened bread, was celebrated at the time of the barley harvest; b) the festival of the wheat harvest, *Shabuoth*, celebrated seven weeks after the Feast of *Mazzoth*, was also called the festival of Weeks; and c) the festival of Booths or Tabernacles, *Sukkoth*, was the feast of the wine and fruit harvest, and could also be called simply *the Festival*. The original meaning of these festivals is especially recognisable in the customs which were observed. At the Feast of *Mazzoth*, the first barley, the bread of the poor, was offered, and at the Feast of Weeks the first wheat. The use of branches at the Feast of Tabernacles goes back to a grape-harvest festival celebrated in vineyards and orchards.

All these festivals were given new meanings in Israel. At Passover the Exodus from Egypt was remembered. The Feasts of *Mazzoth* and Tabernacles also served to recall this history. The use of unleavened bread was now explained as a recollection that the Israelites, forced by the Egyptians to leave in a hurry, had no time to let that morning's bread dough rise and thus had to bake it as unleavened cakes the first time they camped (Exodus 12:34,39). The Feast of Tabernacles was to be celebrated according to Yahweh's commandment "so that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 23:39-43). The Feast of Weeks was seen in later years as the festival recalling the revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai.

This does not mean that Israel was thereby forgetting its relation to creation. The Sabbath, which was observed every seventh day, was fundamental to the consciousness of Israel. Whatever was the origin



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of this day of rest, in the course of Israel's history it was brought into relation to God's work of creation. "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and consecrated it." (Exodus 20,11) The Sabbath was a day of rest not only for people and cattle, but also for the soil. The extension of the Sabbath rhythm to sabbatical and jubilee years makes this especially clear. In the seventh year there was to be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land; neither sowing nor harvesting was allowed (Leviticus 25:4). But even as festivals were given new meaning in the light of historical experience, their roots in the cycle of nature was not lost. How could gifts of first fruits have been offered without thinking of the Creator?

Attributing historical meaning to inherited festivals continued in the Christian church. The decisive event to be recalled was now the resurrection of Christ. In the Christian communities it became the custom to gather on the evening of the first day of the week, that is, on the day of Christ's resurrection, to celebrate the breaking of the bread. Gradually, this Day of Resurrection, the Lord's Day or Day of the Sun, absorbed the Sabbath tradition. The Sabbath, for Christians, was moved from Saturday to Sunday. But this also changed its meaning. The central content of this day was now the celebration of Jesus' victory over death. The congregation gathered to celebrate the Lord's presence in the Word, prayer and supper and to await his second coming. The reference to the creation had no longer primary weight. Certainly the Lord's Supper continued to remind Christians of Creation, since the bread and wine, God's gifts of life, were shared. However, the primary meaning

of sharing the supper was the communion with the crucified and risen Christ, and the expectation of the new creation.

The Jewish festivals were no longer observed, or were replaced by Christian festivals. The reference to the creation which was still present in them was thereby lost.

2. The gradual development of the church year

The church year as we know it today is the result of a long and complicated development. It did not come into existence all at one time. Its construction is therefore not consistent in all respects, but rather reflects the viewpoints and aspirations of various historical periods. "Differing orders and spheres of time, tied to rival calendars and their cycles which overlap, have resulted overall in a highly complex construct of dates, observances, feasts and festival periods - a bewildering, artfully layered architectonic structure."¹ The divisions among the churches have



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led to differing ways of shaping the church year. Each confessional tradition has its own peculiarities. First it was East and West which went separate ways, but the divisions which appeared with the Reformation in the 16th century also had particular consequences in this regard. Thus it cannot be taken for granted that the various confessions can easily agree on the ordering of the church year.

Various cycles determine the basic pattern of the construct. The first cycle is the sequence of *Sundays*. As it was for Israel, for the church too, the unit of seven days is decisive, and forms the basis of the church year.

Second in importance is the *Easter* cycle. Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection, was the first Christian festival to be celebrated annually. Around Easter, other festivals developed at various points in time: before Easter, Lent, Palm Sunday and Holy Week, especially Good Friday; and after Easter, the Easter season with Ascension and White Sunday (Pentecost). Around the year 1000 Trinity Sunday was added as a festival which sums them all up. Since Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox, its date varies, and with it all the dates of the Easter cycle.

The third cycle, that of *Christmas*, is distinguished by two feast days, those of the birth of Christ

and of Epiphany on January 6. In contrast to Easter, Christmas is fixed on a particular date in the solar calendar, and therefore is not a movable feast and does not fall on a Sunday in every year. Since the Christmas and Easter cycles are based on different systems of reckoning, the length of the period between them varies from year to year. The number of Sundays between Epiphany and the beginning of Lent, and also the number of Sundays between Pentecost and the beginning of Advent, are different from one year to the next. Other festivals are scattered throughout the year, some loosely connected with the great cycles, others, such as the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6), having no immediately visible connection with them. A few festivals such as Reformation Sunday are memorials, others, like New Year, are fixed in the civil calendar.

The fourth cycle is that of the *saints' days*. Early in the history of the church the custom was already being established of remembering our "cloud of witnesses" on certain days of the year. The lists of the saints are not the same for all churches; they are different in East and West. In the churches of the Reformation, the calendar of saints lost much of its meaning when the veneration of the saints was condemned. The saints' days became merely memorials or were forgotten altogether.



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3. A changing order

Solidly as these fundamental cycles are rooted in the life of the churches, the liturgical year is not an order which has been concluded for all times. Construction is still going on, with each century making its contribution. Festivals whose position at one time seemed unshakeable have ended up in the background, and new ones have been added. Excesses which have developed are swept away by radical reforms, most radically at the time of the Reformation. Gentler reforms, such as those of the Second Vatican Council, seek to eliminate inconsistencies and to make the ordering more understandable.

Thus the endeavour to include a time in the church year especially to honour the creation and its Creator is legitimate.² Why should the church not see to it that, in the face of the ecological crisis, its confession of God as Creator finds a clearer expression in its liturgical life? Individual churches have already taken steps in this direction. In numerous churches, especially in rural areas, there are harvest festival traditions: today one finds here and there attempts being made to revive these traditions. In the Roman Catholic Church the day of Saint Francis of Assisi on October 4 is being given an increasing role. In ever-widening circles the need is being felt for God's creation and its preservation to be an explicit theme in worship.

4. The Ecumenical Patriarch's proposal

There is particular significance in the Ecumenical Patriarch's proposal to celebrate September 1 as a day of "thanksgiving for the great gift of creation and petitions for its protection and salvation". What is behind the choice of this date?

For the Orthodox churches, September 1 is the beginning of the church year. This regulation has a long tradition, going back to the way time was reckoned in the Byzantine Empire. It was based on *indictions*, which are periods of a certain number of years. Official documents always gave the indiction and the year within the indiction. This system of dating was introduced under the Emperor Diocletian in the years 297-98, and was declared obligatory under the Emperor Justinian I in 462-63.³ The year began on September 23, which was changed to September 1 in the second half of the 5th century. An indiction was at first five years long, later changed to 15 years. At the end of each

indiction the next began. The church also used this system of reckoning time. The beginning of each year, and especially of a new indiction, was ceremoniously observed. In Constantinople, the Patriarch announced the new year of the indiction. After celebrating the liturgy in the basilica of Hagia Sophia, the Patriarch and the members of the Holy Synod gathered in a great hall. Following prayers and liturgical hymn-singing, the Patriarch named the new year and granted absolution to all. He then confirmed, by signing the official document, the beginning of the new year.⁴

With the end of the Byzantine Empire this tradition lost its practical significance. However, the church preserved the date, and the Orthodox churches today still celebrate September 1 as the beginning of the new year. The year is, however, not structured according to its beginning on September 1.⁵ This festival is one of the relics left over from calendars used in the past. In his message the Ecumenical Patriarch does not give any explanation of the traditional meaning of the day; he merely mentions it.

Thus the Patriarch's proposal is to be seen as an endeavour to give a new content to a festival which has largely lost its original meaning. The church year is to begin with a reflection on God the Creator, the gift of creation and our responsibility before God and towards our fellow-creatures.

5. What new points of departure are possible?

How can we give more room in worship to the praise of God as Creator? What new departures are possible within the framework of the liturgical year?

Sunday is without doubt the most important element. The relationship of the Sabbath or Sunday to God the Creator and his creation should never have been lost. True, the central meaning of Sunday are Christ's resurrection and victory over death. Every Sunday is a sort of "small Easter". But this more recent content need not be understood as irreconcilable with the Old Testament meaning of the Sabbath as a day of rest, analogous to God's rest on the seventh day of creation. God's new world is the fulfilment of the creation. As God's creatures, we praise the Creator who called this world into being and preserves it, cares for all creatures and gives them their food in due season, and puts an end to death with the in-breaking of the promised reign of God. Sunday reminds us of our responsibility towards other persons and all



other creatures. It puts limits to blind business, and makes us take a step back and realize again who we are before God and the entire creation. Sunday is a criticism of human self-realization which shuts off the access to God's new world.

But is there not also room in the church year for certain "days of creation" or, even more appropriately, a special time to recall God as Creator? Would it not be meaningful to celebrate September 1, or Harvest Festival, or October 4 as such a time? A certain uneasiness appears almost instinctively. In recent decades a great many new Sundays have been introduced into the churches to remind us of particular ethical obligations - days for refugees, for persons with disabilities, Human Rights Day etc. One could almost say that a second, ethically-oriented 'liturgical' year has developed. Should this series of days be extended by yet another 'special day'?

The following environmental days are observed in certain parts of the world:

- a) Earth Day on March 21 or 22, launched by John McConnell in 1970. The choice is based on the idea of the spring equinox;
- b) Earth Day on April 22, launched in 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson (1916-2005). Both dates often coincide with Lent or Easter Tide;



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c) The World Environment Day of the United Nations on June 5th, introduced by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1972, in connection with the First UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm.

But the proposal of a Creation Day does not just add another special Sunday. The primary concern is to give clearer expression to a fundamental part of the Christian confession of faith. What we need to do is to show, as the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (1997) said, that “commitment to preservation of the creation is not an issue among many others, but an essential dimension of all church life.”

There are therefore good reasons for introducing, instead of one day, a season of creation. ECEN suggests that it begin on September 1 and last until the second Sunday of October. This period covers various days observed in different confessional traditions. It also corresponds to the season of harvest celebrations in many parts of the world. Such a Time for Creation fits without strain into the existing church year. Before the observances of the great events in the history of salvation begin, from the birth of Christ to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded of God as the source of all life. And after following through the succession of God’s mighty deeds, we would be led back again to the God whose hands encircle all times.

A possible difficulty might be that this season comes at different times of the year in the northern and southern hemispheres. When Europe is harvesting, spring is coming to Argentina, South Africa and Australia. But is a day for the Creator dependent upon the seasons? It could be connected with the springing to life of nature just as well as with its fading. Just as Christmas is not necessarily tied to winter, nor Easter to spring, praise for the Creator does not have to be connected with a particular season. It will only mean that meditations in different places will bring out different aspects.

6. Alpha and Omega

A time for creation in the church year! It would have the advantage of bringing faith in God as Creator into relation with the whole creed. The talk of ecological responsibility today easily gives the impression that this is a new ‘political’ task. But, in fact, we are talking about an imperative of the Christian faith. The way the gifts of the creation are treated today amounts to a denial of God. Whenever this responsibility is isolated from the entirety of the faith, it is faith which is being played down.



A time for creation prepares the ground for a deeper understanding of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. The structure of the creed is replicated in the church year. God as Creator of heaven and earth is the pre-condition and the background for everything that follows. In becoming a human being God enters into the creation, and through the resurrection makes new life break forth, and pours out the gift of the Spirit upon humankind and the whole creation. The time for creation would make possible a deeper understanding of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The time for creation is both the beginning and the end of the church year. In reflecting upon the Creator, our attention is directed to God's new creation. God's creation cannot ultimately be fully understood without its fulfilment in Christ. Over the horizon of this creation, from the beginning, shines the light of God's reign. In the time for creation we celebrate both the origin and the fulfilment - Alpha and Omega.

Above all, the time for creation reminds us that we too are creatures, among many others. It gives us an occasion to think about the way we have used God's gifts, and how we will do so in future. It gives the church an occasion to put a new, more responsible lifestyle into practice. The Ecumenical Patriarch's message says with great urgency: "We must attempt to return to a proper relationship with the Creator and the creation. This may well mean that just as a shepherd will, in times of greatest hazard, lay down his life for his flock, so human beings may need to forego a part of their wants and needs in order that the survival of the natural world can be assured. This is a new situation - a new challenge. It calls for humanity to bear some of the pain of creation as well as to enjoy and celebrate it. It calls first and foremost for repentance - but of an order not previously understood by many." If a time for creation contributes to this conversion, it has fulfilled its task.

Notes

¹ Karl-Heinz Bieritz, in *Handbuch der Liturgik*, Hans-Christoph Lauber and Karl-Heinz Bieritz, eds., Leipzig und Göttingen 1995, p. 453

² *Ibid.*, p. 487

³ *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, Nov. 47,2

⁴ V. Grumel, *Indiction*, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 1967, vol. 7, pp. 466-468

⁵ "The idea of the year as a unit and as a real time within which the church dwells for the purpose of its fulfilment is so weak that the Byzantine list of months begins with September, a month which in our present calendar has no special liturgical 'significance' whatever." Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, London 1966, p. 136

Reviving Quatember Times

Philipp Harnoncourt, Graz

The Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (1997) urged all Christian churches to “consider and promote the preservation of Creation as part of church life at all levels” and recommended to “observe a Common Creation Day, such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate celebrates each year on September 1”. At its meeting in Loccum in 1999, the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) proposed that a longer period be set apart for reflecting on God the Creator and his Creation and suggested the dates from September 1 to the second Sunday of October. ECEN drew attention to the fact that no special time in the church calendar is at present reserved for this purpose.

The following reflections may be relevant in this connection.

a) The traditional church calendars contain many hidden references to Creation – both in the sense of the act of creation and created nature – which should be uncovered and brought back to consciousness before new dates or periods are introduced. The whole calendar



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as a system of organising time (measures of time, recalling the past and planning and anticipation of the future) is related to nature, and therefore to Creation. It aims at establishing a way of life in harmony with the order of the cosmos. Years, moon-months, zodiac-months and individual days correspond to the movements of sun, moon and the planet earth and to their position in the hemisphere.

The feasts of thanksgiving and reflection on God's great deeds, understood as God's affirmation of life, have their fixed places within these cycles, places which are already characterised by the recurring realities in created nature (seasons, moon-phases, rising and setting of sun and moon).

b) The choice of September 1 as feast of Creation by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1989, can be explained by the fact that for the Orthodox churches the liturgical year begins with September 1. This tradition is in harmony with the experience of agrarian cultures. Autumn as the time of harvest and renewed sowing invites people to meditate on the mystery of creation and life:

- to give thanks for the Creation and its fruits maintaining us in life;
- to pray for the renewal of Creation towards its fulfilment and
- to reflect on the responsibility of human beings towards Creation, to keep it in its integrity;
- to develop it within the framework of laws and rules derived from nature and from the Creator's revelation.

This reflection leads to a fuller awareness of our place in God's creation, and the responsibility of human beings – creatures among creatures – for the preservation of Creation. It inevitably also implies the recognition and confession of our own errors, acts of conversion, and commitment to renewal as well as atonement.

c) The suggestion to introduce this Feast of Creation in all churches and to enlarge it by the adoption of a Time for Creation from the beginning of September to the middle of October raises the question in which way the concern can be rooted, and given its proper place, in the traditional calendars of the churches.

We experience Creation in analogy to cyclical time. The created world comprises phases – beginning, growing, maturing, harvesting, decreasing and coming to an end. The question remains open whether the end is to be understood as irrevocable ending or rather as a constant new beginning and eventually a fulfilment. The cycles of

nature suggest a constant new beginning. Revelation promises the fulfilment of the whole Creation by the Creator.

d) God's incarnation in Jesus Christ and Jesus' death and resurrection point to the preservation of Creation and its future fulfilment.

The fact that Easter is celebrated in spring and Christmas in the days of winter solstice turn also these feasts into Creation feasts! This dimension is often overlooked – it needs to be revived today.

e) Every day points to Creation – the rising sun reminds of its beginning and fulfilment. Each Morning Prayer turns the rising sun into a "Sacrament of Creation and Fulfilment", transforms the experience of nature into an experience of faith.

The same is true for Sunday, the First and the Eighth day in the cycle of the seven-days-week, which is to be understood as a continuous reminder of Creation, because it is the only circle in our calendar with no connection to any cosmic cycle.

f) There is another important feature in the Roman liturgy with implications to our awareness of God and Creation – the *Quattuor Tempora*, or so-called Quatember seasons.



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- Winter (or Advent-) Quatember in the third week of Advent,
- Spring (or Lent-) Quatember) in the first week of Lent,
- Summer (or Pentecost) Quatember in the week after Pentecost (the Second Vatican Council moved it to the week before Pentecost),
- Autumn Quatember in the week after the Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14).

In pre-Christian Roman culture these days were special harvest times, i.e. times of

- thanksgiving for the gift of life,
- requesting God's continuing presence in life,
- offering penitence for human misdeeds against life.

In the occidental liturgies these Quatember weeks were observed as general days of penitence, fasting and prayers – in later times only on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. They were often used for conferring the lower orders and for the consecration of deacons.

Relating to the annual seasons each of the Quatember weeks was given a particular colour. Each has its own profile – expressed through customs and the special concerns of prayer and fasting.

The Second Vatican Council agreed to leave the maintenance or suppression of the Quatember weeks to the local churches. The Catholic Churches in German-speaking areas which introduced a Common Regional Calendar for all dioceses decided to maintain the Quatember weeks – because of their relation to the annual seasons and also because of existing regional customs – and to revive them by attributing to them central concerns of Church and world. But they fixed for 1979 the dates a little bit differently according to special customs: The first week of Advent, the first week of Lent, the week before Pentecost, and the first week in October.

In my view the Quatember weeks provide an important framework to express the responsibility of Christians towards God's Creation in the church calendar, especially as these periods are not meant to be times and days for the commemoration of individual and once for all events of salvation, but times and days of prayer, fasting and penitence related to important concerns of both the Christian Church and humanity.

It may be worth exploring whether traditions of Quatember weeks also continue to exist in the churches of the Reformation and in what form

and orientation. It seems to be clear, that the "Eidgenössischer Dank-, Buß- und Bettag" in Switzerland, a day adopted by all churches in the 19th century and integrated in the Swiss constitution, is in accord with the Autumn Quatember Day.



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THE RESPONSE TO THIS PROPOSAL

At the international level

1. The first church body to welcome the Ecumenical Patriarch's proposal was the **Conference of European Churches**. On the eve of the opening day of its Assembly in Prague (September 1 to 11, 1992) all participants attended Orthodox Vespers where prayers were offered for the 'Protection of the environment'. The message His Holiness Bartholomew I addressed to the Conference concentrated on the theme of Creation.

God unites – in Christ a new Creation, 10th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in Prague, Geneva 1993, S. 10 and 36

2. The **First European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel** (May 1989)

had already placed strong emphasis on the churches' responsibility towards creation. In one of the working groups the suggestion was made to "institute a week of prayer for creation on the model of the week of prayer for Christian



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unity” and to create “Church Commissions for creation at all levels, contact point for base groups and communities, increased deployment of environmental staff”.

Peace with Justice,
Documents of the
First European
Assembly in Basel
1989. Working
Group 16, p. 118



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The Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz (1997)

even more explicitly emphasised the need for a new commitment of the European Churches to the care of God’s Creation. It passed the resolution quoted above, pp. 12-13. The Assembly also recommended “that a network of persons with environmental responsibilities” within the churches should be set up at a European level.

*Reconciliation,
Gift of God and
Source of New Life,*
Documents of the
Second European
Ecumenical Assembly
in Graz, 1997, CEC
and CCEE, Graz,
1998, p. 57



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3. The recommendation of the Graz Assembly was confirmed four years later by the **Charta Oecumenica**: “We recommend the introduction in European churches of an Ecumenical Day of Prayer for the Preservation of Creation.”

Charta Oecumenica, 22 April 2001. I, 9

4. In September 2002 the Central Committee of the **World Council of Churches** recommended to its member churches the introduction of a day of creation in September.

At the level of the European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN)

1. In response to a recommendation from the Graz Assembly the **European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN)** was founded in 1998 at the Orthodox Academy of Vilemov. One year later, at its second Assembly in Loccum, it suggested to the churches to observe a Time for Creation extending from September 1 to the second Sunday of October (see above). The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) considered the promotion of this Creation Time as one of its priorities. A special ECEN working group was formed for this purpose. The group made contact with churches and church associations in various countries and sought to stimulate new initiatives. It has regularly reported on its efforts to the ECEN assemblies.

2. The Conference of European Churches took a special interest in the proposal and has consistently contributed to its promotion. Under its auspices, a workshop on the implications of the proposal for the liturgical life of the churches was held in Geneva (December 2000). Every year the Conference of European Churches shares with its member churches liturgical material – texts, prayers and hymns – for use during Creation Time. Every year a new aspect of the ecological crisis is addressed. So far the following themes have been chosen: 2002 Energy. 2003 Our responsibility towards future generations. 2004 Preserving Water, Land and Air, and 2005 Rhythm of Creation and Rhythm of Life. In 2006 it offered a series of meditations on Biblical passages. All these texts are available on the ECEN web site: www.ecen.org

3. On behalf of the ECEN Working Group. ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung (Austria) has put together and published every year dossiers containing explanatory articles on Creation Time and suggestions for its celebration. It has also regularly published study material on pressing ecological themes such as water, food etc.

4. Under the auspices of ECEN two international consultations have taken place – the first in 2004 on Creation Theology resulting in a publication under the title ‘Listening to Creation Groaning’ (John Knox Series 16, Geneva) and the second in 2006 on Creation Spirituality, with special attention to the relationship of the Eucharist to Creation

5. In 1999 the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences (CCEE) launched a series of six consultations on ecological themes, involving



environmental officers of the bishops' conferences. The second consultation at Bad Honnef (May 2000) recommended the "observation of a day of Creation in the period from September 1 to Harvest Feast".

At the national level

The proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarch was endorsed in March 1992 by a meeting of all Orthodox Primates in Istanbul. The Ecumenical Patriarch issues every year a message emphasising various aspects of our responsibility towards creation.

September 1 is regularly celebrated in many Orthodox churches. A good example is provided by Belarus. The Orthodox Church of Belarus has officially adopted the proposals both of a Creation Day and a Creation Time. The Day of Creation is celebrated, according to the Orthodox calendar, on September 14. Every year environmental activities are organised in the period from September 1 to October 4. The centre of activities is the Saints' Methodius and Cyrill Christian Educational Centre in Minsk, a founding member of the European Christian Environmental Network and from the beginning engaged in the promotion of Creation Time. In 2005 teachers and students of the Centre organized a special event in the park of Loshitsa, a unique reserve close to the city, comprising more than 120 hectares of land. The event had a double purpose – cleaning up the park and praying for the preservation of creation. The *Te Deum* was celebrated by Father Vladimir Gerasimenko in an ancient building, now abandoned with no water, electricity, heating – a symbolical reminder of the 'ecological decline' of the planet. The group visited a nearby church, also in ruins, and placed two crosses near to it. (Information provided by Andrej V. Danilov)

The proposal of a Creation Time is being met in more and more countries with a positive response. The degree of reception differs, of course, from place to place. In some countries the proposal has been formally adopted by decision-making bodies of the churches, in others church associations and centres have made it their own and offer programmes and activities to the churches. A few examples may illustrate the situation.

Austria

In Austria the proposal of the Creation Day was first introduced in 1995 by the ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung, an ecumenical environmental association of Roman Catholic background. Responding to the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarch, ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung began to observe September 1 as an 'Action Day' for Christians: how do we translate ecological concerns into our personal lives and the life of the churches? ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung provided checklists, 'mirrors' of daily behaviour, theological and liturgical texts, personal counselling, celebrations and exhibitions. "Our aim was to transmit knowledge, to promote a sense of responsibility and to establish cooperation between the churches and the Agenda 21 process. Each Day was concluded by an ecumenical liturgical celebration." In 1997 ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung presented the proposal to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz, and eventually adopted the proposal of a Creation Time from September 1 to October 4 as a common platform for the ecological witness of all churches. In the following years a wealth of activities took place during Creation Time, e.g. manifestations in the streets, presentation of sustainable solutions (alternative energy, alternative vehicles, products of fair trade), symposia on relevant environmental themes, exhibitions, concerts, encounters with representatives of science, NGOs, churches and politics, media briefings, liturgical celebrations, blessing of bicycles, blessing of animals (especially on Saint Francis Day). Every year ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung produces material on general themes but also on specific issues such as mobility (car-free day on September 22), eco-tourism or animal protection (September 4). Reports reaching ARGE Schöpfungsverantwortung indicate that Creation Day is increasingly celebrated by local churches as the launching day for Creation Time. It is interesting to note that harvest festivals are placed into a new context. At the national level September 1 has become the focus for environmental activities not only for the churches but also for environmental NGOs, development agencies and committed persons in economics and politics. At the celebration in 2005 a message from the President of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, was received. (Information provided by Isolde Schönstein, Vienna)

Belgium

In 1999 the Belgian Bishops' Conference decided to create a Commission on the Care for Creation (sauvegarde de la création) with the mandate to promote reflection on environmental themes and to



enhance the public witness of the Church with regard to the Care for Creation. After the Year 2000 the Belgian Bishops proposed for a period of three years annual themes with a strong ecological dimension. The Commission seeks to motivate church members to respond to the ecological crisis, and proposes to parishes measures of eco-management. With regard to Creation Time the Bishops suggest that parishes and religious communities pay special attention to the theme of Creation on one of the Sundays between September 1 and October 4 by adapting the liturgy but without changing the lectionary. For the last three or four years several communities, e.g. ten parishes in the diocese of Namur, have decided to celebrate a 'Day of Creation' during this period. Often these celebrations are connected with other activities, lectures etc. (Information provided by Bernard Sorel)

Czech Republic

Since 2002 the proposal of Creation Time has been promoted by the Environmental Section of the Czech Christian Academy in collaboration with the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the Saint John under the Rock College. Every year a new theme, e.g. water, transport, climate change, globalisation, forests is introduced by an information campaign and illustrated through a children's art exhibition. During Creation Time events take place mainly around Saint Francis Day which coincides with the beginning of the university term. (Information provided by Ilona Mužátková)

France

On January 10, 2000 the Bishops' Conference of France published a statement entitled 'The respect of creation'. It led to an increased awareness among Christians of the environmental crisis. Roman Catholic church movements and services, e.g. Pax Christi, CMR (Christians in rural areas), MRJC (the Rural Christian Youth movement) started organising encounters and working sessions, publishing articles etc. CCFD (the French Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development) and Caritas began to devote more attention to the ecological dimension of their activities. Pax Christi is developing an ecumenical network of regional groups under the title 'Peace, Environment and Life Styles'. It is an ambitious project with the goal of engaging Christians in working for a better environment. For several years the idea of a day of creation in the period from September 1 to October 4 is promoted in France and is slowly gaining ground. Events during this period normally involve several churches. Since 2003 an Ecumenical Forum on Creation takes place annually in Bordeaux with the participation of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Reformed, Evangelical,

Baptist and Adventist Christians. (Information provided by Jean-Pierre Ribaut, Bordeaux)

In 2006, pastors from different Protestant churches launched an appeal to introduce Creation Time in France and to devote the first Sunday in October to the Christian response to the ecological crisis.

Germany

Already in 1999 the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg decided to introduce an annual Day of Creation in all congregations without fixing a precise date. A few years later the Association of Christian Churches in Württemberg joined in this recommendation. In 2004 the Synod of the Church in the Rheinland encouraged the congregations and church districts to put to the test the idea of a creation time – wherever possible in ecumenical collaboration with other churches. Even before that, the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) had organised a consultation on 'Creation theology and spirituality – on the way to a common creation day'. The reaction of the participants was positive, and the ACK is now preparing a recommendation on a creation day or creation time for its member churches. In 2004 the association of environmental officers of the Evangelical churches in Germany (AGU) published a guide of 62 pages under the title 'Creation Time'. It contains an introduction to creation theology and spirituality, liturgical material, meditations and suggestions for religious instruction and games.

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg added to its 1999 decision the following explanation: "The Day of Creation is meant to remind us of the fact that we are God's creatures, to guide us into thanksgiving for the gifts of creation and especially to make us aware of our responsibility towards creation. It is essential to develop the Trinitarian dimension of this day: God the Father who created all things, God the Son who came to redeem creation and God the Holy Spirit who helps us find the right approach to creation."

On the basis of the Synod's decision the Church of Württemberg has published every year since 2000 material for the congregations. The following themes have been chosen: 2000: Fire, water, soil and air; 2001: Animals – our fellow creatures; 2002: Let the earth put forth plants, herbs and fruit trees; 2003: Sun, moon and stars; 2004: God remains faithful from generation to generation; 2005: Blessed diversity; 2006: Water – source of life. In 2002 the Church launched a 'song competition'. 180 responses were received. Obviously there is a great



desire in the congregations to praise creation. The best songs were selected and included in the 2002 material. In 2006 the Day of Creation was prepared in the framework of the 'Decade to Overcome Violence'. The opening ceremony was followed by a series of happenings along the river Neckar together with confirmation classes, youth and young adults.

A helpful publication: *Ich höre das Gras wachsen*, edited by Günter Banzhaf, Gottfried Mohr and Andreas Weidle, Stuttgart 1999. This gives a presentation of Creation day as part of the liturgical church calendar and offers guidance for worship services and other activities.

In 2004 the Association of Christian Churches in Baden-Württemberg visited the island of Crete and confirmed its determination to join the Orthodox Church in observing a Creation Time. A liturgy was designed on this occasion and celebrated together. On the occasion of September 1, 2005 the President of the Synod of Württemberg referred to this visit. Addressing the participants in the opening ceremony in Bad Urach he underlined that the Day of Creation was meant to raise the level of consciousness. We are invited to perceive the wonders of creation. "For we will only preserve what we have perceived and taken to heart."

Creation Day under the motto 'Celebrating Creation' liberates participants from an exclusive attention to environmental ethics. Action flows from celebration and reflection. Generally, congregations in Germany are grateful for the material prepared for Creation Day. In many places the celebration leads to actions. The day is also an opportunity to establish new relationships with politicians and environment-conscious people in society. (Information provided by Hans-Hermann Böhm)

Greece (*Greek Evangelical Church*)

The congregation in Volos has developed, in collaboration with its youth movement, an environmental programme collecting trash from the city and the beaches. A similar effort was made in Athens during the Olympic games of 2004. Psalm 24,1 'The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness' provides the framework for these efforts. The idea of a creation time in September/October is under discussion. It will be a means to spread activities also to other cities of the country. (Information provided by Ioanna Sahinidou)

Hungary

The Ecumenical and Diaconal Order of Jesus' Brothers and Sisters has for a long time been engaged in celebrations of Creation. A first celebration

took place in 1991 involving leaders of several churches. Generally, the churches in Hungary celebrate harvest thanksgiving and consider that the celebration of the Creator can be included in this occasion. But there are congregations committed to new liturgical efforts and the engagement of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary on environmental issues is of high significance. For the Order, the UN World Environment Day (June 5) is of special importance because it provides a link with initiatives of civil society. So far, celebrations have taken place primarily in connection with this date, and it seems important to maintain this tradition. We now plan to celebrate Creation by an ecumenical day of prayer on September 1. June 5 could also be considered as a 'forerunner' of Creation Time in September/October. (Information provided by Béla József Széchéy, Budapest)

Italy

In response to the recommendations of the Graz Assembly the Protestant Federation of Italy named a working group on 'globalisation and environment' (glam). Through this instrument the proposal of a creation time has been promoted in the Protestant churches of Italy since 1998. Many activities have taken place in this framework. Worship services have been celebrated in congregations and conferences, and other public events have been organised in various cities, in particular in Torino, Milano and Venice, more recently also in Cagliari (Sardinia). Glam produces every year study materials for Creation Time (Bible studies, liturgies, lessons, pastoral suggestions) on different subjects: genetically modified organisms (GMO), mobility, time, water, food. They are published by the Protestant Publishing House Claudiana. Materials made available by ECEN have proved to be very helpful. (Information provided by Antonella Visintin, Torino)

At its meeting from January 23 to 26, 2006 the Permanent Council of the Italian Bishops' Conference decided to adopt the double proposal of a Creation Day and Creation Time:

“The institution of a ‘Day for the Preservation and the Defence of Creation’ to be celebrated in accord with other European Churches and ecclesial communions on September 1 leaving to the local churches the development of complementary initiatives during the whole month. This choice is meant to underline the urgency of the ‘ecological issue’, with its ethical and social implications, and is also proposed as a concrete ecumenical sign, as recommended by the Charta Oecumenica jointly published by CCEE and CEC.”



Netherlands

The idea of a Creation Time in the Church calendar is supported and promoted by the Project Group on Church and Environment of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands. The proposal was recently sent for consideration and comment to the member churches of the Council. Meanwhile, some local churches have observed Creation Time through worship services, sometimes combined with events during the week. A particular initiative was taken by The Christian Ecological Network (CEN), an association of Christians and Christian NGOs, representing primarily churches of a more conservative persuasion. They actively engage themselves in the promotion of Creation Time from September 1 to October 4. CEN published a special information kit under the title 'Amazing Creation'. Before being published it was tested in 25 congregations and later widely distributed. CEN recently won an environmental prize for their project "Creation Time 2006". The judges considered the project to be 'fresh, contemporary and practical'. (Information provided by Hans Schravessande and Peter and Magda Siebe)

Norway

Ecological issues are high on the agenda of the Church of Norway – both nationally and internationally. **The Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway has passed several relatively radical resolutions on environmental themes. In 2003 the Synod decided that the congregations should observe a Day of Creation in the time after Trinitatis, preferably together with other churches.** In 2005 the Church published for the first time materials for such a day. The Church of Norway is at present engaged on the revision of its liturgy. It will be important to consider in this context the proposal of a creation time. (Information provided by Hans Jürgen Schorre)

Sweden

The proposal has met with sympathy in Sweden but has so far not been accepted on a large scale. Traditionally, the major day for the environment has been Midsummer in most Swedish churches. On the day of John the Baptist readings and other texts refer to creation and there is the custom to celebrate outdoor services. In recent times, efforts have been made to turn Thanksgiving Day, normally the second Sunday of October, into a Day of Creation. The national office of the Church of Sweden has provided material for the congregations based on the ECEN material of the last three years. The focus has mainly been on climate change. One of the problems is the limited translation capacity. It is important to continue promoting the proposal. Its potential is considerable. Creation time can play a crucial in local ecumenical work

as it will be more and more recognised by the churches. (Information provided by Henrik Grape)

Switzerland

The primary advocate of the idea of Creation Time in Switzerland is the Ecumenical Association Church and Environment (*oeku*). *oeku* is an association of parishes, institutions and monasteries, and also individuals from all the church traditions represented in Switzerland. It was founded in 1986 and counts today several hundred collective and individual members. In 1993 the *oeku* proposed for the first time to observe a Creation Time from September 1 to October 4. Several special days related to the theme of Creation occur in September, e.g. the federal thanksgiving day on the third Sunday of September, harvest feasts and Saint Francis day. The period seemed therefore particularly suitable for promoting awareness of the ecological crisis. The initiative met with an encouraging response. The impulse of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro was still fresh. The exercise was repeated in the following years, and, after thirteen years, creation time has now become for many part of the ordinary life of the Church. Every year the *oeku* chooses a new theme and provides material for worship services, discussions and debates and also practical suggestion for congregations and individual members.

Themes addressed from 1993 to 2006: Energy (1993). Animals – and humans (1994). Giving a future to our children (1995). Our daily bread – what about it today? (1996). Climate change – living with less energy (1997). Creation: holy diversity (1998). Tourism and transport (1999), The sun (2000), The soil (2001), The air (2002), Water (2003), Rhythm of life (2004). Hunger of life (2005), Time (2006)

Creation Time gives an opportunity to collaborate with experts and other organisations committed to the environmental cause. The theme 'soil' chosen for 2001 provided a link to a public campaign under the auspices of the Swiss Confederation, the cantons and communes; in many places joint activities took place. Each year about 500 copies of the material are shared with multipliers. (Information provided by Kurt Zaugg-Ott, compare www.oeku.ch)

Australia

The idea of a Creation Time was introduced in Australia for the first time in 2004. A group of persons took the initiative to launch the proposal. In 2004 forty congregations celebrated the period from September 1 to October 4. In 2005 an appeal was issued to all churches and congregations in Australia to join this period of four



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weeks of prayer and reflection. For centuries Christians have celebrated Christmas without a preceding Advent time. Why should the church calendar not now be enriched by a time for Creation? Four reasons speak in favour of such a time: a) God gave a creation with whom we are invited to celebrate; b) The ecological crisis requires a spiritual response; c) Observing anew the Creation leads us to recognize our responsibility for it; d) A creation time gives us the opportunity to celebrate the many links which unite us with Creation. For the years 2006 to 2008 a three year cycle of lessons, Bible studies on the lessons and liturgies for each Sunday has been established. (Information provided by Dr. Norman Habel)

Philippines

On September 1, 2003, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines issued a pastoral statement entitled 'Celebrating Creation Day and Creation Time'. The first paragraph states:

"Today, September 1, in many parts of the world Christian churches are celebrating 'Creation day'. They have also set aside the period from this day to October 4, or the Sunday after October 4, as Creation Time. We wish to introduce this period to our Catholic faithful and acknowledge 'Creation', that priceless gift of the Almighty and Loving Creator, who has made us in own image and likeness ... During this special period of Creation Time we urge ... that our different liturgies celebrate the beauty and pain of our world, our connectedness to the natural world and then our on-going struggle for social justice. We also urge once again the setting up of a Care of Creation ministry at every level of Church organisation. We strongly remind our government not to pursue short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term ecological damage."

During creation time exhibitions, e.g. on renewable energies, symposia, e.g. on Teilhard de Chardin, and liturgical celebrations have been organised. (Information provided by P. Georg Ziselsberger)

Four Lessons from this Survey

1. In an increasing number of countries activities are taking place during the period extending from September 1 to the second Sunday of October. Some congregations concentrate on September 1 or on one special day during this period, others regard the whole period as a time devoted to the celebration of God the Creator of heaven and earth. In recent years the proposal has met with increasing interest.

2. The proposal is still new. In many countries the initiative for its promotion lies with environmental associations and persons with an ecological commitment. They regard Creation Time as an opportunity to emphasize the spiritual dimension of their commitment. For Christians care for Creation is not an 'additional activity' but is rooted in their faith. To give credibility to Christian witness in today's world it is essential that more and more Churches respond to the proposal.

3. Several dates have been proposed as special 'days of creation'. In some circles in the United States an 'earth day' is celebrated on March 21 or April 22, and another option is the UN Environment Day on June 5. Other days have been suggested. Some churches use these 'neutral' dates as an opportunity of witnessing together with environmental NGOs and other activities. In some countries especially June 5 has found a place in the calendar of the churches. For the churches the September period has, however, many advantages over all other dates. It provides a natural enrichment of the liturgical year and fits into its logic.

4. In some countries attempts have been made to give liturgical expression to Creation Time by assigning to each Sunday a theme and accordingly Biblical lessons. Such initiatives offer guidance to congregations but it would obviously be premature to expect an agreement among the churches on the liturgical content of Creation time. The proposal has succeeded in emphasizing the need for giving more space to the praise of the Creator in the worship of the churches. For the time being Creation Time is a testing ground for new suggestions and departures.



NEW DEPARTURES AND PERSPECTIVES

In many respects Creation Time opens new horizons for the Churches – both for their own life and for their witness to society. A few aspects may be mentioned here.

Opportunity for Joint Efforts

The Charta Oecumenica (2001) puts it succinctly: “**Together** we want to help create sustainable living conditions for the whole of creation.” The ecological crisis confronts all churches with new challenges. They no doubt need to re-visit, and reflect on, their own traditions. But at the same time they need to combine insights and to join forces. A special time for Creation provides an opportunity for joint initiatives. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminds the churches of Christ’s prayer ‘That all may be one’. Creation Time invites them to a common response to the ecological crisis.

A Time of Praise, Meditation and Reflection

The theme of Creation has not always received adequate attention in the churches. Creation Time is a time of praise and thanksgiving for the gifts of the Creation, an opportunity to listen anew to the true voice

of Scriptures, to discover the riches of the various Christian traditions, to develop a spirituality which gives its proper place to the respect of the created world. It is a time when the worship of the churches can concentrate on the theme of Creation and new forms of worship and prayer can be tested. In recent years much thinking has taken place. Despite all efforts of integration many Christians fail to see the intimate link between the Biblical witness and the challenges of the ecological crisis. Creation Time can help to build bridges by bringing nature and the threads to nature into the orbit of Christian spirituality.

The Biblical tradition of the Sabbath requires renewed attention. The link between the commandment and God's creation is prominent in the Hebrew Bible. Not only people but also the land was to observe a time of rest. Jesus used the Sabbath to restore health and bring life. Do our Sundays still reflect this concern? Creation time could contribute to reviving a deeper understanding of the seventh day.

A more Responsible Approach to Creation for both Individual Christians and Christian Communities

How do we respond to the ecological crisis not only in thinking but also through our actual way of life? In face of the threats to survival we realise that the present way of life, especially in industrialised countries, cannot in the long run be sustained. Limits must be respected both in exploiting resources and producing waste. The 'ecological footprint' must be considerably reduced. All of us need to ask ourselves: What amount of energy do I use? What do I eat and what kind of food do I buy where? In what ways do I contribute to the pollution of the environment? Creation Time can serve as an opportunity of **an ecological 'check up'**. Where have things gone wrong? Where can I begin to act more responsibly?

Motorized mobility is one of the main factors of pollution. Do I really need to use a private car? Have my air travels been necessary – and if they have been unavoidable, should I not have paid compensation for the CO₂ emissions which were caused? Creation Time could be a **period of 'car fasting'**, a time to try out another approach to being



mobile. For some years now September 22 is being promoted as a car free day – **Going to the City without my car** – the suggestion deserves the support of the churches.

The need for an ecological check up not only applies to individuals but also to **Christian communities, parishes and organisations**. Is their way of life really ecologically responsible? What about their energy consumption? What can be done to improve the insulation of church buildings? How is the landed property of the churches to be cultivated? What about the style of church activities – camps, excursions and church tourism? New initiatives to respond to these questions can be taken during Creation Time.

An integral part of the churches' witness is the commitment to justice for all people of the earth. Creation Time is a period of solidarity with the poor and the more vulnerable nations of this world.

Witness to Society and Collaboration with Environmental Organisations

'Ecological discipline' is essential for Christian witness. The call for a more responsible approach to the environment will only be credible if Christians take it seriously in their own community and personal lives. But a change of course in society requires political decisions. Churches need therefore also to become active in the arena of social responsibility.

Creation Time can serve as a time to develop and to make more widely known the options of the churches for an ecologically responsible society. Campaigns can be launched. Encounters can be organised. Exhibitions can be arranged.

Wherever possible Christians will seek collaboration with environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, WWF and Green Cross, and associate themselves with their efforts to re-direct the present suicidal course of society. Their specialised analyses of great environmental issues such as energy, climate change, water etc. are indispensable for the churches.

A Privileged Time for Dialogue with Scientists

The ecological crisis offers the opportunity of a new dialogue with science. Though much of the ecological crisis is due to the achievements of science and technology, scientists were also among the first to issue warnings. At an early stage they began to realise that technological development could entail destructive consequences and turn 'progress' into disaster. Not only philosophers but also biologists, climatologists and representatives of various other disciplines have acted and are acting as 'prophets' of the ecological movement. Dialogue with scientists on the impact of the ecological crisis is essential for the responsible witness of the churches.

Dialogue with People of other Faith

The Charta Oecumenica places strong emphasis on dialogue with the Jewish people, with Islam and also with representatives of other religions. It speaks of a commitment to "pursue with them matters of common concern". Care for the gift of God's Creation is no doubt a concern shared by all religions; an exchange on the threats to the future of the planet may help to overcome antagonisms between religions.

Hope Stronger than Darkness and Death

A Time for Creation will be above all a sign of Christian hope in a time of despair. The prospects are far from encouraging. The threats to the future leave little room for constructive action. Darkness seems to prevail. Can we hope? It would be futile to deny the magnitude of the challenge and the possibility of a gradual decline of humankind. But faith in Jesus Christ is the source of a stronger hope than hopes for the achievement of human goals. It is based on the expectation of God's kingdom and sets us free to act in this world as ambassadors of his reconciling love.

This witness is the deepest meaning of a Time for God's Creation.



PRAYERS AND SONGS

related to the theme of the
Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu

“The Light of Christ shines upon all”

A. Opening Prayers

1. Creating God

Creating God,
You are the source of light and life,
So we praise you.
You became flesh to bring light and life,
So we praise you.
You sustain the world with your light and life,
So we praise you.

(from the CTBI Eco-Congregation Programme)

2. We are the people of God

L We are the people of God, the Almighty.
All Created in the image of God,

stewards of the creation

L We are the people of God, the Redeemer.

**All Released in Jesus Christ,
carriers of reconciliation**

L We are the people of God, the Giver of Life.

**All Open to the inspiration of the Spirit
in faith, hope and love**

(Per Harling)

3. From Psalm 104

L Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord, my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.

All (sing) Halleluja

L You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
You set the earth on its foundations,
so that it shall never be shaken.

All (sing) Halleluja

L You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal.

All (sing) Halleluja

L You cause the 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.

All (sing) Halleluja

L May the glory of the Lord endure forever.
May the Lord rejoice in his works.

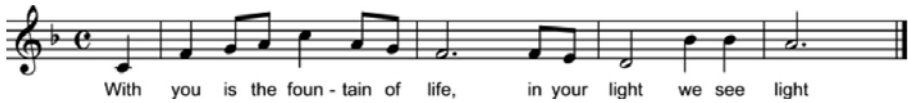
*(from Words and Songs of Reconciliation, 2nd European
Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997)*



4. From Psalm 36

L With you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.

All With you is the fountain of life.



L Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens;
your faithfulness to the clouds.

All With you is the fountain of life.

L Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your judgements are like the great deep;
you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

All With you is the fountain of life.

L How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
All people take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

All With you is the fountain of life.

L They feast on the abundance of your house;
and you give them to drink from the river of your delights.

All With you is the fountain of life.

*(from Gloria Deo, Prayer & Hymns for the 12th Assembly of
the Conference of European Churches 2003)*

5. Author and Creator of every creature

O you who covers the high places with waters,
who sets the sand as a bound to the sea
and upholds all things:
the sun sings your praises,
the moon gives you glory,
every creature offers a hymn to you,
his Author and Creator forever.

(Eastern Orthodox Prayer)

6. May none of God's wonderful works keep silence

May none of God's wonderful works keep silence,
night or morning.

Bright stars, high mountains, the depths of the seas,
sources of rushing rivers:

may all these break into song as we sing
in Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

May all the angels in the heavens reply: Amen! Amen! Amen!

Power, praise, honour, eternal glory to God, the only Giver of grace.

Amen! Amen! Amen!

(Third-century hymn)

7. Praise be to the Holy Trinity!

Praise be to the Holy Trinity! God is sound and life, Creator of the
Universe, Source of all life, whom the angels sing; wondrous Light of all
mysteries known or unknown to humankind, and life that lives in all.

*(Hildegard of Bingen, 13th Century; source: Liturgy of the
European Ecumenical Encounter, Strasbourg 2001)*

B. Confessing our Sin

1. Forgive us, Lord

Forgive us, Lord,

our obsession with ourselves.

We are not able to recognise our own limits.

We are so concentrated

on our present needs and on our own work

that we forget to be grateful

for the gifts You have given us

through the generations who have gone before us.



Forgive us, Lord,
for our closed horizon
preventing us from looking toward tomorrow,
preventing us from handing over to our children
a fertile and clean earth.

Forgive us, Lord,
for our greedy selfishness,
for our closed hands
grasping to hoard all we can
to squeeze our natural resources dry.

Open our hands, Lord,
to the joy of sharing.
Teach them the sower's generous gesture,
so that we may sow seeds without caring
who will benefit from the fruits of the harvest.
Amen

(Luca M. Negro)

2. Giver of Life

L Giver of Life,
in the midst of a plundered earth
We groan with creation

All Have mercy on us

L Giver of Life,
In the midst of poisoned water
We groan with creation

All Have mercy on us

L Giver of Life,
in the midst of polluted air
we groan with creation

All Have mercy on us

L Giver of Life,
in the midst of mountains of waste
we groan with creation

All Have mercy on us

L Giver of Life,
in the midst of a world of war
we groan with creation

All Have mercy on us

L Giver of Life,
we who are made in the image of God have gone astray
and creation groans with us

All Have mercy on us

(from Worshipping Ecumenically, WCC Publications)

3. We use more than what is ours

O God, we use more than what is ours.
Therefore your creation is suffering.
We consume the resources of the earth
at the expense of the poor and the oppressed.
We are prisoners of consumption
and we confess that we do not want to get out of our captivity.
We seek security by possession.
We steal from those coming after us.
We know that the earth is fragile, but this knowledge paralyses us.
We confess that passivity suits us
and that we do not want to get out of it.
We acknowledge that we often know the truth,
but we do not want to know it.
As we do not want to commit ourselves
our proclamations are not credible.
As we do not want to be a part of a change
others have to live in despair.
As we do not want to pay for the costs for a new way of living,
others have to pay with their lives.
We hope for unity, but we do not act.
We honour the ideals of compassion and love,
but we do not follow them.
God, we confess that we take pleasure in confessing
without breaking up from our sins.
"Out of the depth, I cry to you, O God, Lord, hear my cry".

(Prayer from the Church of Norway)



4. Guide us as we gather

Eternal God,
We thank you for the glory of your creation,
A mystery that surpasses our knowledge.
Eternal God,
We thank you for the earth and water, sun and wind,
Creatures and people, nations and cultures:
Guide us as we gather to confess
That we have violated the gift of life given to us.
Strengthen us
As we seek to affirm that the earth and all therein is yours.
Enable us
As we seek to recall your covenant
And make it our own.
Amen

(World Council of Churches)

C. Confessing our Faith

1. One God, source of all life

[With a period of silence between each section]

L We have faith
**All in one God, one Source of all life,
one Ground of the whole earth, with all her creatures.**

L And thus we have faith
**All in the goodness of earth's life,
in the innate worth of all her dependents,
in human partnership in the life of nature.**

L And we have faith
**All that in Christ we have been shown the special role of the
human race to bear God's likeness in working and caring**

**for the earth,
in seeking to understand her mysteries and powers,
in working with these powers
for the wellbeing of all children of the earth.**

L And we have faith
**All that God's Spirit will lead us
to sensitive closeness with earth's life,
to that meek, unselfish and compassionate life-style
by which the earth is inherited in peace,
by which her life is transformed for all creatures
to share justly in her bounty. So be it.
Amen**

(From India. Source: Sinfonia Oecumenica, © Gütersloher Verlagshaus, GmbH, Gütersloh 1998)

2. A prayer before the yellow flower of late summer

It bears the name Jerusalem Artichoke,
a sunflower risen up through the long heat of summer.
When all else succumbs to the dry heat of August;
when all else seems to wilt and fade,
this one flower emerges strong and brilliant in the summer's last days.
Patience groomed it and its humble acceptance of the last place
in summer's many miracles will not go unnoticed.
It realizes what has called it into being
and it turns toward it in praise and thanksgiving.
Girasole, "turning to the sun" you give glory to God
whose majesty set it above to spill life into a world
open to receive its life-giving warmth.
The wait was worth every moment, the wait to finally become
what it was meant to be.
Lord, my Sun and my Life, allow me the grace in these days of change
to turn towards You with my total being.
May I never hold back what I am before You,
but hand it over to You with joy and trust,
as does the beautiful yellow flower in these last days of summer.
Amen

(by Father Gabriel Zeis, Catholic Campus Ministries, The College of New Jersey)



3. We did not weave the web of life

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it. (*Psalm 24, 1*)

L Every part of this earth is sacred.
Whatever befalls the earth
befalls the children of the earth.

This we know, the earth does not belong to us:
All we belong to the earth.

L This we know, all things are connected:
All like the blood which unites one family.

L This we know, whatever we do to the web:
All we do to ourselves.

(Adapted from Chief Seattle, 19th Century)

4. We belong to the Creator

L We belong to the Creator
in whose image we are all made.

**ALL In God we are breathing,
in God we are living,
in God we share the life of all creation.**

L We belong to Jesus Christ,
the true icon of God and of humanity.

**ALL In him God is breathing,
in him God is living,
through him we are reconciled.**

L We belong to the Holy Spirit,
who gives us new life
and strengthens our faith.

**ALL In the Spirit love is breathing,
in the Spirit truth is living,
the breath of God always moves us.**

L We belong to the Holy Trinity,
who is one in all and Three-in-One.

**ALL In God we are all made,
in Christ we are all saved,
in the Spirit we are all united.**

(Per Harling)

D. Intercessions

1. Grant pardon, salvation and divine mercy

Merciful God,

who loves humankind, look with an eye of compassion upon the works of your hands and set free the atmosphere from dread destruction and death-dealing emissions and every poisonous pollution, through which death and danger threaten. Take pity on what you have fashioned and give to all prudence not to act senselessly, the result of which is corruption, granting to all pardon and salvation and divine mercy

With my voice I cried to the Lord, and he heard me from his holy mountain.

Accept, O Saviour, the entreaties of your Mother which she offers for all creation, and the supplication of all your saints. Grant to all your mercies, and keep unharmed the firmament which you spread out from the beginning with wisdom, Lord, and brought into being for the benefit of mortals. Keep undamaged. O Lord, the whole environment which girds the earth from harmful influences, granting to all pardon and salvation and great mercy.

When I called, you hearkened to me, o God of my justice, in all affliction you set me at large.

With humility we entreat you, Lord, and we fall down before you. At your command deliver the earth on which we dwell from every harm



and from harsh ruin, and speedily avert from it and abolish by your will all destructive emanations, and pour out the fresh dew of life-sustaining air. Fence the whole enclosure of the environment, Master and Saviour, with your mighty power, granting to all pardon, salvation and divine mercy.

(from: Orthodoxy and Ecology, Resource Book, Syndesmos 1996)

2. Bless, O Lord, the fruit of the Land

Bless, O Lord
The plants, the vegetation, and the herbs of the field,
That they may grow and increase to fullness
and bear much fruit.
And may the fruit of the land remind us
of the spiritual fruit we are to bear

(Coptic Orthodox liturgy, Egypt)

3. Come, light of God

Lu - miè - re de Dieu, in - on - de la ter - re, vi -
Komm gött - li - ches Licht, er - leuch - te die Er - de, er -
Come light, light of God, give light to cre - a - tion, en -

si - te nos coeurs et de - meure a - vec nous.
füll uns - re Her - zen, nimm Woh - nung in uns.
ligh - ten our hearts and re - main with your world.

(music and words: Grandchamp Community, Areuse/NE, Switzerland)

**Come light, light of God, give light to creation,
enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

O God, Creator of the universe and of all that lives and breathes,
from your dwelling place you refresh the mountains and forests.
The earth is filled with the fruits of your work.
You make grass grow for the herds,
plants and fruit trees for people to farm,
drawing their bread from the earth.
You entrusted your creation to us. We beseech you:
save us from the temptation of power and domination.
May your Spirit of wisdom teach us
how best to care for and safeguard what you entrust to us.
Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Come light, light of God, give light to creation,
enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

We beseech you, bless every effort and every search,
Every struggle and every pain that seek to restore
the harmony and beauty of your Creation.
Renew the face of the earth, so that every human being
may live in peace and justice, fruits of your Spirit of love.
Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Come light, light of God, give light to creation,
enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

We beseech you, Lord,
bless the fruits of the earth and the work of our hands
and teach us to share the abundance of your goods.
Send rain to the dry soil, sun and fair weather
where harvest is endangered by storms.
Blow your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.

**Come light, light of God, give light to creation,
enlighten our hearts and remain with your world.**

From you, O Lord our God, come all gifts, and we give you thanks.
Hear the sigh raising from your creation,
gather the suffering of all people,
Send us your blessing, so that we may live, in its fullness, the new life
Which you offer us through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*(Community of Grandchamp, Areuse/NE (Switzerland);
translated by Elizabeth Stace)*



E. Sending and Blessing

1. Transform our lives

May God who established the dance of creation,
who marvelled at the lilies of the field,
who transforms chaos to order,
lead us to transform our lives and the Church
to reflect God's glory in creation.

(CTBI Eco-Congregation Programme)

2. God's light and love

As the air sings with songs of glory,
as the water flashes with the silver of creation,
as the forests bloom with leaves for the healing of the nations,
so may God's light and love
fill our hearts and souls and minds.

(CTBI Eco-Congregation Programme)

3. Deep peace

Deep peace of the running water to you.
deep peace of the flowing air to you,
deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
deep peace of the shining stars to you,
deep peace of the Son of Peace to you

Amen

*(Gaelic blessing from Words and Songs of Reconciliation
and Praise, Graz 1997)*

4. May God bless us

L As we prepare to leave
and embrace the challenges

of our lives and our world
let us ask for God's blessing
May God bless us with wisdom
to care for the earth.

All Amen

L May God bless us with love
to bring forth new life.

All Amen

L In the name of God
the Maker of the whole world,
of Jesus, our new covenant,
and of the holy Spirit,
who opens eyes and hearts.

All Amen

L Go in peace and be witnesses of hope.

All Amen

(2nd European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz 1997)

5. Be praised in and through all creatures – especially through Brother Sun

Good Lord, most high almighty
to you all praised is due,
all glory, honour and blessing,
belong alone to you;
there is no man whose lips
are fit to frame your name.

Be praised, my Lord God,
in and through all your creatures
especially among them,
through noble Brother Sun
by whom you light the day
in his radiant splendid beauty
he reminds us, Lord, of you.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and all the stars.
You have made the sky shine in their lovely light.



In Brother Wind be praised, my Lord,
and in the air, in clouds and calm,
in all the weather moods that cherish life.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water.
She is most useful, humble, precious, pure.
And Brother Fire, by whom you lighten night;
how fine is he, how happy, powerful, strong

Through our dear Mother Earth be praised, my Lord,
She feeds us, guides us, gives us plants, bright flowers
and all her fruits.

Be praised, my Lord, through us
when out of love for you we pardon one another.
When we endure in sickness and in sorrow.
Blessed are they who preserve in peace;
from you, Most High, they will receive their prize.

Be praised, my Lord, for our Sister Death
from whom no man alive can hope to hide;
wretched are they who die deep in their sin,
and blessed those Death finds doing your will.
For them there is no further death to fear.

O people! Praise God and bless him,
Give him thanks and serve him most humbly

(Saint Francis of Assisi)

