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Treasuring the Earth

Inspiring Heads, Hearts and Hands in
School Communities for People and Planet



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Ryan Parker

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Treasuring the Earth: the Fifth Mark of Mission

1

Know that you are incredibly lucky to be alive at a time when you can make a transformative difference to the future of all life on earth. You are not powerless. Your every action is suffused with meaning and you are part of the greatest chapter of human achievement in history.

(Christiana Figueres)¹

Teachers and students all over the country are talking about it. And why would they not? Rising and record global temperatures, species decline, deforestation, wildfires, plastics abounding in the oceans: it is hard not to notice how human action is significantly harming the earth at an alarming rate. Such conversations are informed by a cocktail of emotions. Speak with any group of pupils and you might detect deep levels of joy and love for the natural world, hope and optimism due to the solution-focused acts of many, as well as frustration and anger for the disregard of many for habitats across the world. Sometimes, even, students might express overwhelm or apathy. How we relate to the environment is a key moral and spiritual issue of our time.

Recent international conferences have likewise stimulated heartfelt discussions upon environmental degradation and climate change. These gatherings have provided a platform to highlight the current environmental emergency and the factors which contribute to it: increasing carbon emissions, dietary choices and pollution, to name a few. These occasions have also been used to amplify a clarion call urgently to reduce carbon emissions, live more sustainably and protect the diverse natural world. This call inspires agreements and plans towards a vision of a hope-filled future, one which sees the flourishing of the planet and all life upon it. It is this vision which is animating much discussion, emotions and action, not least amongst children and young people.

A Vision for a Thriving Planet: the Fifth Mark of Mission

In thinking about how to live well and worshipfully, many Christians look to the five Marks of Mission. These marks are a set of principles outlining the core activities of Christian mission; a summary of what many Christians feel the church and Christian living should be all about. The five marks have been encapsulated as: *Tell — Teach — Tend — Transform — Treasure*.

- *Tell*: to tell the good news of Jesus
- *Teach*: to teach, baptize and help new believers to grow in their faith
- *Tend*: to respond to human need by loving service
- *Transform*: to make the world a fairer, more just place for all; to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- *Treasure*: to treasure and look after the planet

This book focuses upon the latter mark, treasuring the earth. Fully stated, this mark is, ‘To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.’ Never has this mark been more important. Yet, as Hughes and Newton lament, its positioning at number five has led to many holding it as the least important.² This viewpoint should be challenged. Whether you draw upon the Marks of Mission in your own worldview or draw upon other sources of wisdom, this fifth mark invites us to consider how we relate to the natural world. How do the active verbs of ‘strive,’ ‘sustain’ and ‘renew’ feature in your own thinking and living in—and for—the earth?

Moreover, it would be unwise to see this mark as sitting in isolation from the others. For instance, responding to human need by loving service requires that we think about and redress the disproportionate impact human action in the West is having upon the lives of communities elsewhere (‘Tend’ and ‘Transform’). Whatever our worldview, we would do well to take a careful, critical, compassionate and broad view when pondering how we might treasure the earth and what this means for us and the communities of which we are part.

Aims and Audience: Who is this Book For?

In this book, I offer both reflections and questions on how we can support those in our school communities to treasure the earth. Pupils and adults bring a range of emotions, questions and perspectives in their deliberations and actions for a thriving planet. This is important to recognize as we enable, resource and equip one another to act as agents of change for a flourishing earth.

This book is for leaders, teachers, governors, diocesan advisers and wider stakeholders working in and with schools. My primary and middle school experience perhaps renders my reflections more suited to primary contexts, yet I hope there will be much here that those working in secondary institutions will find useful too. Many of the principles mentioned throughout this book informed the *Heart for the Earth* resources created by the Diocese of St Albans.³ Aspects of that resource will be drawn upon at relevant stages to showcase some ways in which the principles mentioned in this book have been exemplified.

Following this introductory chapter are reflections on various ways through which school communities can be supported in their desire to treasure the earth:

- Chapter two is all about *vision*. Here, a biblical vision is considered that might engage, support and inspire pupils and adults within a school community to have a heart for the earth. I also make the case for treasuring the earth to form a key part of all school visions.
- Chapter three introduces the heads-hearts-hands framework to support and emotionally resource children as *spiritual agents* in treasuring the earth.
- Chapter four provides reflections upon how the ‘community of creation’ theology offered in the second chapter might implicate the *curriculum*.
- Chapter five focuses on how *collective worship* can support the school community in treasuring the earth.
- Chapter six closes the book with deliberations on how to encourage spiritual reflection on treasuring the earth more broadly—*at home, across school life and in community*.

Wherever you are on your own personal and professional journey in supporting yourself and others to treasure the earth, I hope the reflections offered in this book are of use. Let us each play our own part in the ‘greatest chapter of human achievement in history.’

2

A Biblical Responsibility to Treasure the Earth

We should have a heart for the earth because God made the earth...[we should] look after it, take care of it, and let [God] know that you care.

(Pupil, age 10)

As put forward in the previous chapter, both a recognition of the environmental issues that people and planet are currently facing, and hopes for a future where both thrive, tie closely to the fifth Mark of Mission. Indeed, questions around *how* we can ‘strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth’ need to start with *why*. The pupil quoted above certainly has a clear reason as to why, for them, caring for the planet is so important.

This chapter is therefore all about *vision*. I start by inviting readers to ponder how the desire to have a heart for the earth might position itself centrally within the very vision (and subsequent *provision*) of schools and the importance of doing so. Put more explicitly: can the need and vision to treasure the earth form a key part of *why* and *how* we are educating children and young people now and for the future? I then move to root this vision biblically. Although a coherent environmental ethic is not obvious within the Bible, I present a biblical vision/rationale—or, in other words, a theology—that might support, engage and inspire adults and pupils within school settings to treasure the earth.

Rooting Treasuring the Earth Within a School’s Vision

I am privileged to regularly witness first hand how the vision of a school can animate its community in a shared endeavour. Leaders in Church of England schools, for instance, have been reflecting deeply on questions around the purposes of education in their own settings, prompted by the *Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*.⁴ As part of these deliberations, they have been thinking carefully about:

- the context of the community they serve
- the curation of a theologically rooted, contextually informed, Christian vision

This theologically rooted vision is key in enabling a Church of England school to live out its foundation as a church school in contemporary, relevant ways. Such visions find their roots, their starting place, in biblical and Christian teaching. They draw on the life and teaching of Christ, alongside wider aspects of the Bible and Christian thought, to influence the *why*, *what* and *how* of school life in a way which enables pupils and adults to flourish.

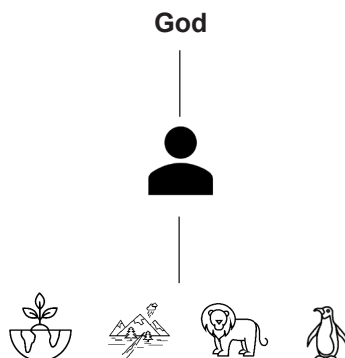
It is a real joy as part of my role to read and hear about school visions which, with their associated mission statements, indicate what leaders are passionate about, and working for, in serving the needs of their school community. Many visions I encounter are about thriving children and adults. This is right and vitally important. Yet, although the desire for individuals within the school community to flourish with, and for, each other is regularly articulated, developing and demonstrating a heart for the earth is mentioned less often.

Perhaps as a result of my developing interest in environmentalism, I am increasingly struck about how human-centred school visions often are. In the light of environmental issues being a spiritual and moral crisis of our time—with our shared context of increasing global temperatures, climate injustice, species decline and the deep levels of eco-anxiety that many bear—I wonder whether treasuring the earth should feature more explicitly within the envisioning of what education should be for? And since treasuring the earth is key theologically (for example, as in the fifth Mark of Mission or the biblical thread establishing the importance of flourishing relationships with God, self, others and the *world*), does this not mean that it should form a greater part of biblically rooted visions in church schools than it does currently?⁵ Such visions can then act as a lynchpin which informs *provision*.

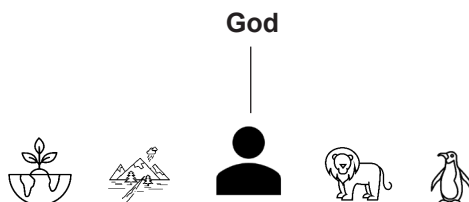
Reflections on how a commitment to treasure the earth might inspire approaches to culture, curriculum and collective worship will be the focus of chapters three, four and five respectively. Before doing so, it is important to ground educational endeavours to treasure the earth within a clear and meaningful theology.

A ‘Community of Creation’ Theology

The environmental challenges currently being faced have stimulated significant reflection from many Christians on their root causes and the possible ways forward. Although a range of factors have contributed to contemporary environmental issues, many centre around views of humanity as set above and apart from non-human creation, as shown overleaf:



Too often, this ‘dominion’ worldview has led to many exploiting the resources of the earth for their own gain. Many Christians are now challenging this vertical view.⁶ They are increasingly contending that several parts of the Bible (such as Genesis 1, Psalm 104 and Job 38) encourage a theology which appreciates how humans live as part of a community of creation; that all parts of creation have value, are interconnected and have common dependence on God. This horizontal view (shown below) provides an antidote to a human-centred perspective on creation in which humankind is perceived to have a special, God-given place within a hierarchy of creation:



A horizontal view inspires greater humility and acknowledges that treasuring the earth is a form of worship to God, hence its importance as one of the five Marks of Mission. Having and demonstrating a heart for the earth is not an ‘add on’ or optional extra; indeed, many Christians derive a biblical mandate to safeguard creation from Gen 2.15: ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’ (NIV). Even from a non-theistic perspective, these vertical and horizontal views can still hold meaning regarding the place of humans within the world without reference to God.

An ‘Earth Tourist’ and ‘Earth Pilgrim’ Analogy

Satish Kumar’s analogy of ‘earth tourist’ versus ‘earth pilgrim’ is perhaps useful here.⁷ An earth tourist ‘look[s] at the earth as a resource of goods and services’ for ‘use, pleasure and enjoyment,’ valuing the natural riches of the planet ‘only in terms of usefulness to themselves.’ Earth pilgrims, on the other hand, ‘treat the planet with reverence and gratitude...perceive the planet as sacred and recognize the intrinsic value of all life.’ Each of these epithets identify:

- a particular view of the world and one’s place within it, which
- influences one’s relationship to the earth, which
- animates, in its own way, action or inaction.

Although not a perfect analogy, it does raise questions about how we can walk well and ‘more lightly on this earth, with more regard for the other life around us.’⁸

A Useful Theology to Underpin School Visions?

The environmentally sensitive theology described above could be used to purposefully inform school visions which support, engage and inspire both pupils and adults to treasure the earth. Indeed, the notion of a community of creation invites reflection upon how we each, in our own unique way, might demonstrate our heart for people and planet through our thinking and actions. The notion of community also brings to mind how we might support one another in this shared endeavour. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Questions/Tasks for Reflection

- How do you view your relationship to the earth—is it closer to earth tourist or earth pilgrim? How is this seen in your thinking, decision-making and actions?
- What do you think of the community of creation theology? How does it make you feel?
- Describe three ways your school might change, if treasuring the earth became part of its vision.

3

Helping Children Treasure the Earth as Spiritual Agents

‘We cannot protect something we do not love.’ (Richard Louv)⁹

In this chapter, I consider how to support and resource the school community in having and demonstrating a heart for the earth. I begin by describing the heads-hearts-hands framework. This framework is useful as it helps us think about how we can enable children to be informed, emotionally resourced agents of change who can navigate and advocate for a flourishing planet in an intentional and sustained manner. A key aspect of this is helping pupils manage their eco-anxiety, for which several ideas to support students are suggested. Such thinking is at the heart of treasuring the earth across the curriculum and collective worship (considered in later chapters). My immediate focus is on the quotation from Louv above: how can we champion children as compassionate, capable and courageous agents who desire a hopeful future for people and planet?

Supporting Pupils to Treasure the Earth: Heads–Hearts–Hands

One way to support pupils in treasuring the earth is through the framework heads-hearts-hands. Specifically:



Heads—understanding the environmental emergency, what has led to it, a view on what should be done for a more sustainable future and why this matters.



Hearts—having a heart for the earth, a desire to see the planet and all upon it flourish.



Hands—making practical and purposeful responses in one’s own life and within the communities of which one is a part.

These three aspects, and the clear link between them, are key in encouraging intentional and sustained care for the world in which we live. If one of them is missing, action may become sporadic or tokenistic. For instance, if one knows how to make a positive difference for the world (head) but does not care about the planet (heart), then action is likely to be limited (hands). Likewise, holding a deep desire for the thriving of the earth (heart) without knowledge of how to bring about positive change (head) can also stymie action (hands). According to Dixon, often it is heart or hands aspects which are in deficit; pupils may learn about climate change (head) but not have opportunity within the curriculum to connect with the planet or reflect upon how they might respond.¹⁰ Attending to all three can enable pupils practically to demonstrate their heart for the earth in an informed manner.

Enabling Pupils to be Agents of Change

This heads-hearts-hands framework is useful when thinking about how pupils can exercise their volition and voice for the planet. The quotation at the start of this chapter reminds us that the inspiration to act as agents of change for the earth grows from a love of the natural world and that which exists upon it. This sense of connection might express itself and emerge from moments of *awe* and *wonder*. It might also emerge from reflections following awareness of environmental degradation: ‘This is *awful*—I *wonder* why this is happening and what can be done to protect the planet?’

Supporting pupils to act as informed agents of change for the earth requires that they have requisite knowledge of three aspects: 1) what has led to environmental issues; 2) what needs to change to safeguard creation, and 3) democratic processes by which change can be enacted. This mirrors closely the ‘See-Judge-Act’ model of Catholic social teaching—developing a kaleidoscopic understanding of an issue, pondering the root causes and then discerning and moving towards the enactment of change.¹¹ Part of this process is considering where the power and levers for change lie. This might be the school leaders or other local decision makers, such as members of parliament. A brilliant guide to support understanding here is Christian Aid’s *Beyond the Bake Sale*.¹²

An additional aspect to consider in enabling pupils to be agents of change for the planet is school culture. Inspection Question Five of the SIAMS Framework 2024 invites school leaders to reflect ‘upon how the school’s theologically rooted Christian vision creates an active culture of justice and responsibility.’¹³ Pupils can be empowered to treasure the earth through a culture which encourages them to *look outwards*. This involves reflecting on how they could / should / do relate to the natural world, as well as becoming aware of others who are negatively impacted by environmental degradation—often people who have contributed the least to these changes, yet are most vulnerable to

extreme weather and all its consequences. Such a culture requires intentionality and time to build. As argued in chapter two, if environmental advocacy is core within a school's vision, it is more likely to happen. How this culture might be expressed through curriculum and collective worship are the focus of chapters five and six respectively.

Supporting Pupils Through Eco-anxiety

We live at a significant time for the planet, a time rich with opportunities to address, avert and minimize harm to the environment through treasuring it. Whilst some are empowered by this opportunity and view it with hope, others may hold deep levels of hopelessness and climate anxiety. Studies are identifying that climate anxiety is a growing concern amongst children, with many fearful and worried about the future. It is important to recognize this so that we can support and sustain them. Here are some ways of supporting pupils emotionally as they navigate changes to the planet and their own relationship with the earth:

Recognizing and Validating Feelings

Treasuring the earth is emotionally-rooted. It is important to provide spaces regularly where pupils can express their heart for the earth and have their emotions validated, as well as recognizing the feelings of others. An excellent resource stimulating such reflection using blob characters has been created by Christian Aid and Jo McAndrews.¹⁴ Students should be taught that feelings such as anxiety, eco-grief and frustration are normal, healthy and perfectly reasonable responses to environmental degradation; they are not alone in experiencing these emotions. They worry because they care. Sadly, too many children feel that their emotions and concerns are dismissed or ignored by adults. It is important that we give pupils opportunities to air how they are feeling about the earth, as otherwise they may find their emotions overwhelming and/or feel alienated.

Treasuring the Earth is a Shared Endeavour

A key way in helping pupils manage eco-anxiety is considering with them where responsibility for redressing the impact of environmental degradation lies. Certainly, the view too frequently expressed that 'the fate of the planet rests on your generation/ individual action,' can exacerbate apprehension and negatively impact well-being. Children should not be left with the feeling that the burden of responsibility is placed on them alone.

Instead, it is better to recognize that treasuring the earth is a shared endeavour. I am personally inspired by the Latin root of 'community' here: *com-* means 'together,' whilst *-munus* links to our own individual gifts, time, treasure, talents, interests and positions that we bring to our relationship with the

earth. We act as part of a hopeful collective, in which each can contribute in their own way, within their own spheres of influence. Pupils should also be reassured that there are many aspects which are the responsibility of adults.

Framing Treasuring the Earth: Avoiding Infowhelm

The above conception of responsibility is most effective when placed alongside a healthy, realistic view of how change occurs. A common, unhelpful approach taken by some activists is that of infowhelm, where statistics and devastating effects of environmental degradation are presented in an attempt to stimulate immediate action.¹⁵ This sky-falling is not helpful; it may make us do things short-term out of guilt rather than for the right reasons, or even render us inert due to despair. For Ray, love, desire and joy are better motivators.¹⁶ What do we want to preserve for the future? What are the benefits of making change (rather than dire consequences if we do not)? How can we each play our own significant and valued part in this? It is also important to help pupils recognize that change is often slow, unnoticed and not always obvious; many news reports or case studies do not make this explicit.

Showcasing Positive Actions

Spotlighting individuals and groups (through trips, visits, case studies, news reports etc.) who are positively impacting the environment can be empowering and inspire hope. Examples might be local (even from within the school community itself) as well as further afield. Not only does this show how others are using their heads-hearts-hands to champion the earth and all upon it, it also helps counter the view that humans are only bad for the planet. It is good for pupils to see that many people, like them, care passionately.

Questions/Tasks for Reflection

- What is the most helpful element of the heads-hearts-hands framework for your own practice?
- How do you think pupils can be empowered to treasure the earth as agents of change?
- What ideas from the chapter do you want to take forward in your school during the coming year?

4

Treasuring the Earth Through the Curriculum

‘What we choose to teach conveys clear and powerful messages about what we value.’

(Rachel Macfarlane)¹⁷

It is a privilege for school leaders to curate a curriculum which helps students in their care to flourish both now and in the future. With environmental aspects such as climate change comprising a significant moral and spiritual issue of our time, many are driven by a moral imperative to consider how curriculum provision can help pupils develop, and live out, a heart for the earth. This includes a comprehensive and robust education on climate change. Such a curriculum would help pupils understand the science, reality, impact and vocabulary of climate change. But, more than this, exploring the impact of climate change can—and should—‘inspire a feeling of responsibility and hope leading to engagement in action.’¹⁸ Indeed, helping students to treasure the earth implicates not only what we choose to teach, but also requires us to reflect upon why and how. In what follows, I offer a theological rationale for curriculum development in this area.

Treasuring the Earth: A Theological Rationale for Curriculum Development

The themes of responsibility, hope, engagement and action are core aspects of a theological rationale for curriculum development directed towards helping pupils treasure the earth. This rationale is informed by the community of creation theology described in chapter two, and recognizes pupils as reflective, active spiritual agents (chapter three). The *Church of England Vision for Education* draws upon Jesus’ words in John 10.10 to promote a view of education which enables those in school communities to have ‘life in all its fullness.’¹⁹ A community of creation theology emphasizes that fullness of life for us and future generations is predicated upon ethical living which takes account of the interdependency of all aspects of the created order. In short, how we think (head), connect (hearts) and act (hands) towards the planet is vital to ensure the flourishing of all creation, including humanity.

Such a theology has implications for curriculum intent, development and approach. It provides a lens through which to contemplate how climate change

education (and learning more broadly) can contribute more meaningfully towards the flourishing of students and the world in which they inhabit. How this theological rationale of community of creation (as opposed to dominion worldview theology) might inform curriculum development is shown below. It has a particular focus on the influence of the curriculum on pupils’ attitudes and behaviour, articulated through the four types of ‘Educating for...’ from the *Church of England Vision for Education*.



	Community of creation theology	Dominion worldview theology
Educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills	With a developing knowledge of the science and impact of climate change, pupils actively, critically and compassionately discern—and act as advocates for—the flourishing of the whole created order.	Due to the curriculum, pupils may harbour an earth tourist worldview in which the planet is viewed as a commodity to exploit. Knowledge and skills are developed/applied towards pursuing this aim.
Educating for community and living well together	Mindful of relationships to the world, others, themselves and, for many, God, pupils are acutely aware of how their actions can contribute to a flourishing planet and eco-systems which include humans.	Viewing the position of humanity as above non-human creation, pupils may overly focus on human communities, to the neglect of the wider creation of which we are a part.
Educating for dignity and respect	Mindful of their interdependence with all of creation, pupils perceive and treat all aspects with respect and inherent worth.	In viewing humans as ‘premier league’ in creation, wider aspects of creation may be viewed mainly in terms of their utility in meeting one’s own wants and needs.
Educating for hope and aspiration	Pupils have a vision for a flourishing world—their hope is stronger than despair. This animates their thinking and actions, often inspiring courageous advocacy.	Pupils may be hopeful for a world in which they and wider humanity flourishes, perhaps without consideration of the wider creation.

A climate change education informed by a community of creation theology offers a greater emphasis upon pupil agency, voice and opportunities. It brings together the heads-hearts-hands framework (chapter three), acknowledging that a curriculum which attends to all three aspects can enable pupils to respond in an informed and considered manner to climate change. Connecting all three can form the basis of a pedagogy of hope and action throughout the curriculum, where students are empowered to act as advocates for the plan-

et.²⁰ Focusing on hope, alongside meaningful and achievable actions (hands), can help alleviate the climate anxiety and despair that many in our school communities feel. This can be enhanced if, through the curriculum, pupils encounter a variety of real-life examples of individuals and groups who are taking positive, impactful steps in safeguarding creation.

Climate Change Education and Spiritual Development

Alongside an embedded sustainability ethos (chapter two) and collective worship (chapter five), the curriculum can contribute significantly to pupils' spirituality. Indeed, the theological rationale for curriculum development with regard to the pupils' behaviour and attitudes described above—and its attendant head-hearts-hands framework—can enable rich, intentional opportunities for students to reflect upon their relationship to the world, others, self and God within a comprehensive climate change education. Seeing learning sites such as the classroom and outdoor areas as spiritual spaces can assist practitioners in providing meaningful encounters which help pupils develop as global citizens who possess, demonstrate and commend an enduring passion for the earth.²¹ For instance:

- In science, pupils could learn about the science of climate change and the factors that have contributed to rising temperatures. Students could relate personally to this knowledge: *What does this make me think about? How does this make me feel? I wonder what we as a school community and society more generally might/should do to treasure the earth?*
- In geography, themes of climate justice can be explored as pupils explore environmental migration (the movement of people forced to leave their homes due to environmental changes that negatively impact their lives or living conditions). Students can reflect on the fairness of this as they consider root causes and the steps that might be taken to enact positive change.
- In religious education, pupils could encounter case studies of those who have been animated by their beliefs to advocate for environmentalism. These could focus on activities of the Christian Climate Action who campaigned in 2019 on Blackfriars Bridge, London, as well as the Humanist Climate Action group.²² Learners could reflect upon their own worldview and relationship to the planet.

Pupils at St Andrew's Church of England Primary School, Much Hadham, were empowered by a curriculum encounter to act for change.

Following an air quality workshop in which they learnt about and measured levels of air pollution, students decided that they were unhappy with cars sitting idly outside with engines running. They created their own placards and staged an effective peaceful protest to encourage parents/carers to switch off their car engines whilst waiting to reduce levels of air pollution. Heads-hearts-hands in action.

At St Michael's Primary, Bishop's Stortford, pupils learn about how biodiverse environments support a range of flora, fauna and wildlife. They spend time in the school grounds, exploring and appreciating the creatures and plant life. As a result, many pupils share their learning and reflections with their parents/carers. A number of families have subsequently thought about how they could increase the biodiversity of their own gardens to attract pollinators and support wildlife, and have planted a range of flowers to demonstrate their heart for the earth.

This chapter starts with the wise words: 'What we choose to teach conveys clear and powerful messages about what we value.' Do we want pupils to understand that the earth matters and to treasure it for themselves? The following questions and activities support an appreciation of, and potential development to, school curricula:

Areas of school life	Questions/areas for Reflection
Vision/purpose	- In what ways does the school's vision encompass environmental issues and demonstrate a heart for the earth? What about the school's curriculum intent(s)? - How might the community of creation theology and heads-hearts-hands framework enrich pupil thinking and reflection about the environment and ethical actions through the curriculum with regard to content, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes? - How important do you think a pedagogy of hope and action is with regard to the planet? What might this look like in your context?
Curricula opportunities	- In what ways could environmental issues be highlighted and addressed in one area of the curriculum? Repeat with a second curriculum area. - To what extent are pupils developing an understanding of the science of climate change through the school's curriculum? - To what extent does the curriculum help pupils consider the root causes behind environmental issues and ways that they might act as agents of change? How might it further do so?
Trips and visitors	- How might/do visits and visitors (for instance, to a wildlife sanctuary, eco-farm, recycling plant or from local businesses) help pupils recognize how others follow the 'See-Judge-Act' framework (implicitly or explicitly) to treasure the earth? - How might trips help pupils develop their connection to, and heart for, the earth?

5

Treasuring the Earth Through Collective Worship

‘Collective worship is...more than a daily “awe and wonder” moment. It is the unique heartbeat of the school.’

(Church of England Education Office)²³

In my own role, I am frequently struck by the impact of collective worship when it is held and experienced as the heartbeat of school life, as described by the Church of England guidance quoted above. Collective worship provides powerful opportunities to reflect and connect with oneself, others, the Bible, God, current events, the school’s vision and values, and more besides. Such connection and reflection can elicit deep introspection from the school community upon how we can thrive with and for other people and the planet. In so doing, the pulse of collective worship can reverberate both within school and beyond. In this chapter, I offer some reflections on how collective worship can support the school community in treasuring the earth.

Deepening our Relationship with the Planet Through Collective Worship

Collective worship is a powerhouse of spirituality. It provides a daily opportunity to ponder questions of meaning, purpose and identity, and to become increasingly connected to oneself, others, (for many) a transcendent being and the world. Regarding the latter, how often do acts of collective worship in schools stimulate reflection upon:

- our relationship to the world?
- the environment and environmental issues?
- aspects in the world or actions which might fill us with *awe* and *wonder*?
- aspects in the world or actions which might make us think ‘This is *terrible*. I *wonder* why this is happening and what should be done?’

Through collective worship, we can provide a range of opportunities for the school community to reflect upon and connect with the earth. This is important—such opportunities can inspire pupils and adults as informed

agents of change who desire a hopeful future for people and planet. Some ideas of how we might do this include: catering for *spiritual styles*, through *singing worship*, holding *outdoor worship* and curating plans that attend to the *heads-hearts-hands* of the school community.

Attending to Different Spiritual Styles

We each have a spirituality as unique as our thumbprint. Whilst some may find silence or song powerful in helping them connect to the planet, others might prefer opportunities such as discussion or being outside. The work of Joyce Bellous and David Csinos is useful here.²⁴ They identify four main spiritual styles through which different people might make sense of (and interact with) the world, God, self and others. These styles are named for the medium through which a person primarily accesses their spirituality:

- *Word*—through engaging with words, such as quotations, stories, prayers
- *Emotion*—through the use of emotions evoked by art, drama, music, speaking with others
- *Symbol*—through silence and symbols, images and metaphors, rituals and mystery, being outside and sensing awe and wonder
- *Action*—through actions, to make a positive difference to the world

This thinking helps us craft acts of worship which help those of different spiritual styles to reflect upon their relationship with the earth. The Diocese of St Albans incorporated spiritual styles within their *Heart for the Earth* resources. The collective worship plans offer various ways for the school community to reflect upon the wonder of the world and the impact of human actions both on, and for, the environment. This includes engagement with/through art, video, drama, silence, quotations, concepts, discussion with others, the outdoors and more besides. Ideas for class-based worship are also provided, as these smaller cohorts are ideal for giving reflective opportunities not always possible in larger gatherings, such as creating art or playdough sculptures.

Treasuring the Earth Through Singing Worship

Singing enables many to access and express their spirituality. It provides a rich opportunity to connect and reflect both individually and as a school community, as voices are lifted and words sung. Within the growing catalogue of Christian music, there are numerous anthems that link to the earth and encourage care for the natural world. They either focus on praise of God's creation or express a view akin to the community of creation theology

previously discussed. Songs from Resound Worship's *Doxecology* album are excellent resources here, as are:²⁵

- *The Glory of Creation* (Denzil Walton)
- *Creator God* (Nick and Becky Drake)
- *Lord, Show Us How to Live* (Chris Idle)
- *All Things Bright and Beautiful* (Bill Staines)
- *Think of a World Without Any Flowers* (Doreen Newport and June Boyce-Tillman)
- *When God Made the Garden of Creation* (Paul Booth)
- *All the Nations of the Earth* (Michael Cockett)

Such lyrics align with the view that treasuring the earth is important both as an act of worship towards God now and for the future. A range of collective worship plans exploring creation-focused Christian songs can be found within the *Heart for the Earth* resources.

Outdoor Worship

As considered in chapter three, *people will not protect what they have not learnt to love*. Taking collective worship outdoors (when and where possible) can provide impactful opportunities for students to connect with, and reflect upon, the natural world. As Ruth Wills encourages, experiences in nature lead to a love of nature.²⁶ A number of schools have incorporated a programme of regular, outdoor, class-based worship. Some excellent plans and ideas for taking worship outside can be found in 'Outdoor Worship for Schools' by Engage Worship.²⁷ Furthermore, some schools facilitate outdoor acts of collective worship for the whole school or specific key stages.

At Leverstock Green Church of England Primary School, church and school leaders collaborate to offer a monthly 'Woodland Worship.' Gathered around a fire pit in the school's small woodland, pupils and adults (including parents/carers and grandparents) have an opportunity to reflect deeply together, often in very practical ways. These include creating a Good Samaritan bug hotel, making jam-jar lanterns at Advent to represent Jesus as the light in the darkness, alongside bird feeders to demonstrate caring for animals as St Francis did. Pupils speak eloquently about the impact of these sessions: the peace they feel listening to birds; pondering new perspectives to Bible stories (such as the Parable of the Sower); and a sense of connection to God's creation.

Supporting the Heads-Hearts-Hands Through Collective Worship: ‘Wow,’ ‘Ow,’ ‘How’ and ‘Now’

One approach used within the *Heart for the Earth* resources is ‘Wow,’ ‘Ow,’ ‘How’ and ‘Now.’ This links to the heads-hearts-hands framework through: inviting reflection, appreciation and wonder of/at the natural world (*Wow*); a consideration of the negative impact of human action (*Ow*); a case study of initiatives bringing about positive change (*How*); as well as time for individual reflection on how they might demonstrate a heart for the earth in their thinking and actions (*Now*).

Below are two plans for collective worship inviting reflection on ‘How can we show a heart for the earth through our ecological awareness?’ which follow this simple outline:

Plan One

Wow—after considering the third day of creation in Genesis 1, the school community ponder the vast ecosystem that a single oak tree supports (around 2,300 species!) and consider this beside the community of creation theology (described in chapter two).

Plan Two

Ow—the school community reflect upon the fact that many of the world’s ecosystems are in danger, why this might be (such as pollution, rising temperatures due to climate change, loss of habitats) and why this is an issue.

How—a powerful example is shared of an initiative encouraging diverse and flourishing ecosystems. This is the *Forest of Marston Vale*, a community forest covering 61 square miles between Bedford and Milton Keynes. Workers and volunteers for the charity have planted over two million trees since 1990.

Now—an opportunity is then given for the school community to spiritually reflect upon how they too might treasure the earth through their ecological awareness.

Questions for Reflection

- What is the shared understanding of spirituality in your school context? How does/might treasuring the earth link to this?
- What make you take from this chapter to enrich your school’s collective worship offer?

6

Broadening Opportunities to Develop a Heart for the Earth

So far, I have considered how we can support children and young people to develop and demonstrate a heart for the earth through aspects such as culture, curriculum and collective worship. In the remainder of this book, I offer several ideas regarding how we might enable the pulse of this heart to be strengthened through providing opportunities for further reflection. This includes reflection via *spiritual spaces*, at/with *church or home* and *eco-councils*.

Treasuring the Earth Through Opportunities for Reflection: Classrooms, Corridors and Outdoors

Many schools provide areas which pupils (and adults) can access to spiritually reflect/connect. Such spaces might be in classrooms, along well-trodden corridors or outdoors. These environments can be very effective in helping the school community to reflect upon the earth, offering a chance—perhaps during breaktime or even as part of class-based worship—to pause, pray and ponder. These places are enriched when there are a variety of activities from which individuals can select whichever best aligns with their preferred way of reflecting—their spiritual style.

For instance, in the *Heart for the Earth* resources, acts of worship focusing on birdlife were supplemented by four ideas for reflection in spiritual areas:

- **Word:** ‘People will not protect what they have not learnt to love.’ What do you think of this quotation? Agree? Disagree? Bit of both? If you would like to, pray that people would care deeply for all birdlife on earth.
- **Emotion:** What delights you about birds? Write your thoughts on a feather outline. Cut this out and place it somewhere within the reflective area. Spend time thinking about the amazingness of birdlife. If you would like to, offer God a prayer of praise for these wonderful creatures.
- **Symbol:** Use the instructions to create an origami bird. Take this home. Use it as a reminder to:
 - ◇ think about the wonder of birds
 - ◇ think of the needs of birds

◇ pray (if you would like to) for birds around the world.

- *Action:* ‘How will you help birds to flourish today?’ Using your finger, trace what you would like to do on the palm of your other hand.

Teachers could provide reflective activities which link well to recent lessons or acts of collective worship. Alternatively, these spaces could be updated by students themselves. Reflective areas outdoors grant further experiences in nature—great for deepening one’s connection to the planet.

Opportunities Through Home–School–Church Partnerships

As mentioned in chapter three, treasuring the planet is a shared endeavour. It is therefore good to explore opportunities to extend shared thinking and action for the earth. School-home and school-community relationships could be the source of transformative encounters.

One simple way to extend the pulse of school thinking around the environment is through communication with parents/carers. They could be kept abreast (via newsletters, for instance) of the questions their children have been grappling with through lessons and worship and invited to engage in reflection and practical activities for the planet we share. Here are extracts from a newsletter on birdlife as an example:

In our collective worship and across school life, we have been thinking about why it is important to look after the planet we share, with a recent focus on birdlife. We are reflecting on how we might delight in these wonderful creatures and make wise choices to ensure they flourish.

If you would like to, below are some ideas to further encourage a heart for the earth on this theme.



- Why not complete challenges from the RSPB’s free *Wild Challenge* as a family? Help wildlife, explore nature and enjoy lots of wild, fun activities. Tell the RSPB what you have done and work towards awards. This can be found online via the RSPB’s website.
- Go bird-spotting! How many birds can you see or hear on a walk? You could even make a pair of binoculars using two cardboard tubes.

- Why not make fat balls for birds to eat? These are cheap, simple and fun to make. There are several instructions/recipes that can be found online.
- Listen to birds go to bed. At dusk, many birds chirp, warble and squawk.

In collective worship, we will consider the following questions. Why not discuss these at home?



- ‘People will not protect what they have not learnt to love.’ What do you think about this quotation? Agree? Disagree? Bit of both?
- In what ways do you delight in birds?
- There are 38 million less birds in the UK than there were 60 years ago. Why do you think this is? Does this matter?
- If we are a ‘community of life’ on earth, how can we support birds so they flourish? Is there anything we can do today? This week?

Another idea for stimulating conversation between school and home is an eco-diary activity shared by Ruth Wills.²⁸ One at a time, pupils take home an eco-diary in which they record environmental issues seen in everyday life or the media, and their responses to them. Pupils share their reflections with the class which, in her context, inspired student-led actions such as seed planting and establishing a whole school recycling scheme. Furthermore, students write their reflections via an eco-blog which is shared with parents/carers and readers from the wider eco-community to continue dialogue.

Impactful opportunities can arise through school-church partnerships. They provide a chance for both communities to enrich the thinking of one another in their shared vision of a flourishing planet (the fifth Mark of Mission). This could take place through collective worship, with the local church sharing with pupils what they are doing to treasure the earth and what motivates them to do so. Likewise, representatives of the school community could also share with church communities how they are demonstrating a heart for the earth. A strong example of collaborative partnership is the *Creation Care Workshops* created by the Diocese of Truro.²⁹ These resources provide churches with engaging activities to run which help local school children learn about the world around them and experience nature in churches and churchyards.

There may exist opportunities for all three school-church-home environments to overlap. Christian Aid's *Creative for Climate Justice* is a simple yet powerful way for the local community to think, encounter, express and experience views on ecological hopes, fears and questions.³⁰ Drawing upon rich resources, pupils are invited to communicate their reflections on climate justice through art. These can then be displayed for viewing by parents/carers, church members and the broader local community. Again, enabling pupils to express their emotions and perspectives recognizes their spirituality and agency, two key aspects in supporting them to treasure the earth.

Eco-councils

Many schools have allowed students to develop and act as agents of change through establishing eco-councils (or related nomenclature, such as 'Planet Protectors,' 'Eco-warriors,' 'Green Team'). At their best, such groups afford pupils an opportunity to follow the 'See-Judge-Act' model (mentioned in chapter three): identifying issues they would like to address, discerning root causes and potential ways to bring about change within their own spheres of influence and acting to bring about positive change. It is inspirational to have seen a myriad of ways in which children have advocated for the environment. Here are several examples I have encountered using the five types of courageous advocacy suggested by Caroline Weir:³¹

- *Awareness raising*: an eco-committee planned and led an act of collective worship on the importance and plight of bees.
- *Community influencing*: worried about the prevalence of single-use plastics polluting bodies of water, pupils wrote to parents/carers asking them to bring in such plastics to create a plastic greenhouse. This is used to grow vegetables whilst also acting as a reminder to buy and use more eco-friendly items.
- *Lifestyle changes*: the eco-council created signs by each light switch, reminding and encouraging the school community to switch off lights when not needed as a matter of habit.
- *Consumer power*: mindful of the amount of energy and water required to produce clothes, students asked school leaders to encourage parents/carers to not opt for fast fashion (which items are often purchased and worn only once) during non-uniform days such as World Book Day.
- *Engaging with decision-makers*: students made a case to their borough for meat-free Wednesdays which has been implemented across borough schools.

Supporting children and young people through the ‘See-Judge-Act’ framework (through adult scaffolding when needed) empowers them as informed, reflective agents of change for the planet both now and into the future and avoids such eco-councils being adult-led, with pupils merely completing adult-initiated activities. It is of use to add ‘reflect’ to the ‘See-Judge-Act’ model to encourage eco-councils to ponder the learning that can be taken from their discerning and acting: What went well? What did not go so well, and why? What did we learn? What impact was made? What will we take forward from this attempt to bring about positive change?

Concluding Reflections

In this book, I have considered how we might support school communities to develop and demonstrate a heart for the earth. I hope that, whatever your context, there has been something in these reflections that has resourced you personally and professionally as we undertake together the important work of safeguarding, sustaining and renewing creation.

The one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere.

(Greta Thunberg)³²

Questions for Reflection

- How might spiritual areas help the school community to further treasure the earth?
- Where might opportunities exist for deepening thinking about—and our relationship with—the planet across school, home and church?
- How might eco-councils support pupils as agents of change?
- To what extent are pupils supported to follow the ‘See-Judge-Act-Reflect’ process?
- What are your next steps in taking this work forward?

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Treasuring our planet is the fifth of the 'Marks of Mission,' yet concern for earth's ecology is often forgotten, soft-pedalled or even questioned altogether. This booklet helpfully explores what practical steps schools can take to help nurture our children to care for and treasure the earth we tend to take for granted.



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