

FROM REFLECTION TO ACTION

World Assembly 2023 Conversatorio: Thoughts on the practical approach to creation care

INTRODUCTION

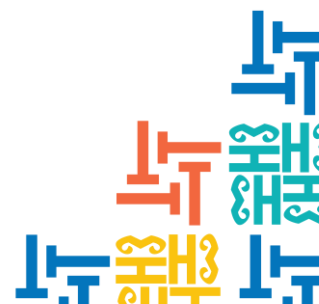
Despite the fact that the effects of the climate crisis are not largely predictable in the long term, it is becoming increasingly apparent that this crisis should be viewed as a consequence of human action, and that society in general is being affected by it. However, the approaches and actions being carried out are constantly changing, and countries around the world are trying to figure out what will and won't work. It is therefore worth mentioning that the following comments are based on the perception of people from Costa Rica, Chile, and Guatemala. Based on their own reflections and experience, these people have suggested ideas about the practical approach to creation care. It would be unhelpful to think that the following comments apply to all contexts, or even to the whole of the regions where this information has been collected. So, we advise you to use your own knowledge and experience to enrich these ideas.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD IN TERMS OF THE ENVIRONMENT?

Nowadays, the effects of climate change are becoming ever more apparent and affecting everyone, although not in the same way across different levels of society. This situation has shaped the interests of main development models, where the generation of wealth is the main goal, as well as the search for a solution to humanitarian problems. However, we acknowledge that various groups in society, such as activists and scientists, already raised concerns about these issues because of how natural resources were being harnessed.

It is now more widely recognised that our relationship with nature is present in all areas of life, meaning that it can be seen in methods of production, consumption, our power relationships, interpersonal relationships, how we manage our feelings, and so on. This is why the climate crisis is being considered by various disciplines, including culture, science, religious, and politics. We must therefore make sure that the dialogue between them is based on humility and on recognising the contributions, as well as limitations of each sector.

This wealth of approaches has also generated various perspectives on how to address the current climate crisis, ranging from those who deny it exists (although this number is probably dwindling) to those suggesting that the problem is not caused by anthropic reasons. There are those who accept that the problem exists and is relevant, and suggest various perspectives, like pragmatic solutions through the use of technological tools such as bioengineering. Others suggest we address the problem by changing our financial and power relationships, and by means of political mediation between countries. Another perspective understands the climate problem as an issue with spiritual and moral roots, a view taken by religions around the world.



In this sense, the actions that look for solutions to climate issues are in line with the positions that we have mentioned (although there may be more), and while it is true that the climate crisis should be dealt with in a multidisciplinary way, some approaches are thought to be more intentional than others. For example, technological solutions often receive more funding than other approaches. There is also the fact that the largest efforts and funding mainly focus on mitigation activities (actions that reduce the causes) rather than on adaptation (adapting to changes that have already happened). On this basis, it is important to be critical and mindful when considering where actions that offer environmental solutions are being aimed. We see this by looking at areas that receive more funding and by reflecting on certain questions – like, why certain approaches receive more support intellectually and financially. Moreover, which sectors of society mainly benefit from certain approaches – who benefits from it less and who is most affected?

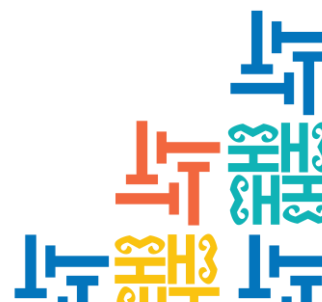
As with all global actions, it is important to acknowledge local initiatives – both individual and collective – that are motivated by and reflect on the knowledge gained from science, ancestral cultures or religion, and do not necessarily fit into global trends.

HOW ARE INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS, AND CHURCHES GETTING INVOLVED?

As mentioned above, causes of the climate crisis are strong and have been hard to counteract. Therefore, many of the efforts do not aim at tackling the root of the problem; rather, they promote alternatives that reduce the causes by working towards the same goals. Accordingly, a lot of work is being carried out to develop alternative energy resources for production models that reduce the impact of our current use of fossil fuels. However, there does not seem to be any interest in changing the reasons for the use of energy, like consumption models in society generally, for example.

We see this too in a funding structure that allocates funds for climate actions that are carried out to comply with agreements between countries. In this sense, we find that some countries agree to ring-fence funding but do not follow through, and there is a lack of transparency regarding how those resources are invested. Elsewhere, countries, following market logic, try to unfairly shift the climate responsibility onto other countries. And, as we mentioned above, a mitigation approach is favoured instead of adaptation processes. Thus, the most vulnerable countries, being less able to respond, are suffering most of the negative effects and, without enough resources to invest, they once again find themselves in a disadvantaged position.

It may be vain to try and view the Church's actions as a homogeneous sector of society, and we could identify various approaches range from denial to Christian communities setting examples that affect broader society. However, it is likely that the Church today is mainly focused on understanding the roots of the problem from a theological point of view and training leadership about the climate crisis. In any case, the Church has been heavily criticised for being too slow in reacting to this problem and for promoting positions that sanction the exploitation of natural resources. It is even criticised for the lack of consistency between theoretical and theological aspects, and the practices of church communities. But this isn't something that has been exclusive to environmental issues.



WHAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED GOOD PRACTICE?

The climate problem is going to be a long-term issue; so too is the need for action. In this sense, here are some basic guidelines to help inform the process of identifying and establishing how we act in a responsible, appropriate way. Good practice in creation care might involve the following:

1. Contextual: It is important to avoid “one-size-fits-all” approaches that promise solutions for very different contexts. Instead, we must start by asking: which approach should be prioritised in the place where action is required?
2. Dialogical: We must try to listen, question, express our views, learn, and collaborate with various sectors of society that offer their opinion on the subject, with the aim of enriching how we see the climate situation based on the solutions being offered.
3. Opportunities for multidisciplinary: The climate crisis is an opportunity to promote interaction between the disciplines of knowledge and society. We need to acknowledge the scope of each, as well as what they can offer.
4. Countercultural: The climate situation requires new lifestyles and communities that inspire and challenge how we develop as individuals, families, churches, communities, and other social stakeholders.
5. Informed: The lack of access to, as well as generation and dissemination of information are factors that have limited our actions. We currently do not have all the answers; therefore, it is tempting to resort to instant solutions and give in to frustration. Social stakeholders, with knowledge-based engagement, must implement criteria that find solutions which avoid counter-productive effects.
6. Comprehensive: We must ensure that our actions build societies that have a good relationship with nature, while developing dignified ways of life for all people and all living beings.
7. Profound: As part of our action for climate care, we must pursue the deep transformation of our minds.
8. Hopeful: Inspired by the Bible’s message of small actions having big effects, we must confront frustration, indifference, hopelessness, and fruitless passivity.
9. Prophetic: Throughout the Bible, we are taught that the messages we preach should not always make people feel comfortable; therefore, we speak out against injustice in order to work towards a dignified life for all living beings.
10. Consistent: 1 John 4:20 states that if we claim to love God, we must also love our brothers and sisters. This consistency is applicable to our relationship with nature and should teach us to appreciate every part of nature as our brothers and sisters.
11. Community: If we want to succeed in large-scale change, beyond our individual selves, our efforts and energy must go towards establishing ourselves as citizens in a new relationship with nature, thus serving as an example to other communities and marking new paths for future generations.

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