

EMBARGO AGAINST DELIVERY

**Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro:
A Witness of a Suffering Creation**

Address to the Lutheran World Federation Council
Mark S. Hanson
President of the Lutheran World Federation
Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.
(Rom. 8:19-21)

Humbled and Hopeful

- (1) We have come to the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, a place that embodies both the majesty of God's good creation and its present travail. This is a place to contemplate the splendor of God's creative handiwork. It is a place to meet each other in honor and respect, repentance and renewal, love and care.
- (2) This place is also a crossroads. People come here from across this continent and from around the world to be renewed in their intersection with God's creation and God's people. At the same time, as a human community, we are at a crossroads in our relationship with the earth, each other, and God.
- (3) For the snows on Mount Kilimanjaro are melting. The mountain's waters that renew the earth and its people each spring are diminishing as the glacier recedes. The air that provides the breath of life and filters the sun's light is changing. Creatures that God created as our companions on this earth are disappearing and human families are dying from starvation.
- (4) The exploitation and neglect of the creation that have brought us here yield a harvest of hard questions, not easy answers. This crossroads is a place to discern not only where we will go in the future, but also where we truly are and who is at this crossroads with us. We have come to chart a path of faithfulness that is true to our Lord Jesus Christ and our life in him, true to our companions on this earth, and true to the creation itself.
- (5) Please join me as a creature of God placed in God's creation, humbled and yet hopeful. Please join me in seeking the mind of our Lord Jesus Christ, who did not exploit the earth and its inhabitants, but who, on the cross, humbled himself for the life of the world. As Joseph Sittler wrote, "What I am appealing for is an understanding of grace that has the magnitude of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

- (6) The grace of God is not simply a holy hypodermic whereby my sins are forgiven. It is the whole giftedness of life, the wonder of life which causes me to ask questions that transcend the moment.”¹

Questions

- (7) The matter of questions is not simple. Before we ask questions, either as a communion of churches or as members of a larger human community, we must recognize that questions are being asked of us: things we must answer *for* and those we must answer *to*. Only then can we ask questions that arise out of our *faithfulness*, humility, and hope rather than out of *faithless* arrogance, cynicism, or fear.
- (8) Some who have questions to ask of the human race for its stewardship of the creation are quite obvious:
- God, who made the heavens and the earth and who gave the earth to humankind as a trust for life-sustaining care;
 - Future generations, who will receive the earth as gift from God and inhabit it as it is delivered to them by us; and
 - Our present neighbors in a global community, especially those who live in poverty or under oppression.
- (9) Another questioner is less obvious: the creation itself. Although we have often overlooked and ignored the creation and treated it as if it had nothing to say to us, it bears a witness by its very life in God’s presence. H. Paul Santmire writes:

God has a history with nature and values nature in itself, independent of his relationship with the human creature. God creates a grand and beautiful world of nature for his own purposes, not just as a home and fecund source of blessings for the human creature. God loves nature. God wants all the creatures of nature to flourish, in their own domains. God fashions nature as a harmonious and beautiful whole, of infinite diversity. God rejoices in all the creatures of nature.²

¹Joseph Sittler, *Gravity and Grace: Reflections and Provocations* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986) 14.

²H. Paul Santmire, “Partnership with Nature According to the Scriptures: Beyond the Theology of Stewardship,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, vol. 3, 12 (December 2003). Santmire writes that “God calls us to be in partnership with nature in three major ways . . . creative intervention in nature, sensitive care for nature, and awestruck contemplation of nature.” Santmire expresses his “reservations about the theology of stewardship” because “sociological forces—like the ExxonMobil materials—keep dragging the stewardship theme back to anthropocentric and secular default meanings in general cultural usage.” Among both theological conservatives and liberals, “the assumptions are anthropocentric and managerial in character. The chief concern on both sides is how best to manipulate or exploit nature for the sake of human well-being.” While recognizing the validity of this critique, I continue to believe that a theology of stewardship is necessary, and so continue to use the terms “steward” and “stewardship,” though with indebtedness to Santmire’s insights.

- (10) The witness of creation chiefly is to give testimony to God's glory and to sing God's praise. This theme is clearly evident in Scripture, especially in the Psalms, and has been sounded throughout the history of Christian theology. That theme is so familiar, however, that perhaps we have become negligent in our listening, for the creation's witness includes an implied question about we human beings, who are partner creatures.
- (11) The question is implicit in creation's eager expectation for God's children to be revealed and for a common liberation from its bondage to sin, death, and decay. The question hangs in the air while the creation is waiting with eagerness and hope for the human race to fulfill its calling.
- (12) In other words, we have something to answer for. We have testimony to give as witnesses. If we are to be true witnesses, we cannot evade being questioned, as in a courtroom, under cross-examination. A clearer understanding of the true nature of this testimony was brought home to me by the man I met who grew up as a member of a persecuted minority. Now a Christian, he carried the memory of that persecution and what it means for giving testimony, for being a witness. "You Christians," he said "always want to give testimony without being the accused one who must give a defense."
- (13) Can we hear the implied question in creation's expectant waiting? Throughout human history, but especially in recent centuries, the human race has acted as if its calling were to be more like God than like the rest of the creation. In the Christian tradition, those who have done so have appropriated language in Scripture like the invitation to have "dominion" over the earth and "subdue" it (Gen.1:28).
- (14) The consequence of this appropriation has been thoroughly examined in theology, philosophy, literature, and the sciences. It is important to recognize the uniqueness of our responsibility as a human race for the rest of creation. Although it is liberating to acknowledge the potential of human creativity, to disown our creaturely status and claim a relationship of mastery with our fellow creatures is a betrayal of our calling to care for the earth and the rest of God's creatures.
- (15) Let me state it explicitly: the calling to "have dominion" or to "rule" and "subdue" was never an invitation to human beings to be our own gods. Claiming the prerogatives of "co-creators" rather than recognizing ourselves as *co-creatures* betrays our human rebellion against God, against our status as creatures, and against our true calling in relation to the creation. Humankind's enslavement to sin has brought tragic results. As is clear from the narrative of human rebellion in Genesis 3 and from the chronicles of human history that have followed, humankind has rebelliously seized and abused the creation. Rather than receive this trust of "dominion" from God as a calling to faithful stewardship of what belongs to God, we have been saying to God that we will be our own gods.
- (16) Let me briefly describe three dimensions of this abused dominion or authority:
 1. We have treated the earth as if it owed its life to us. This is more than an environmental problem, for we have thought and acted as if:
 - the human race were the guarantors of the creation's continuation;
 - the purpose of the creation's life were to serve and glorify the human race;

- earth's value and worth were measured by its utility to human aspirations, whether depraved or noble.
- (17) However, something much broader and deeper is involved. Joseph Sittler identified the fundamental issue over a generation ago.
- [I]t is difficult but possible to get men to understand that pollution is biologically disastrous, aesthetically offensive, equally obviously economically self-destructive, and socially reductive of the quality of human life. But is a very difficult job to get even Christians to see that so to deal with the Creation is *Christianly* blasphemous. . . From a Christian point of view the ecological crisis presents us not simply with moral tasks but requires of us a freshly renovated and fundamental theology. . . The word essential to such renovation is not the social, aesthetic, economic, or even scientific word, but the Christian word — blasphemy!³
- (18) Ultimately the problem is not simply pollution of the water and air with the resulting global warming. Rather, it is the spiritual blasphemy of treating God's good creation as something else: an adversarial wilderness, a god-forsaken wasteland, a natural resources dump to be used for our own self-interest rather than cared for in obedience to God and for its own sake. The problem is that humankind is blasphemously saying by its conduct, "We'll be our own gods. We'll treat this planet as if there were no god who made it, no god who declares it a good creature, and no god to whom we are responsible for it."
- (19) 2. In spite of this abuse, the land, seas and skies will endure, however scarred. The living creatures that inhabit the earth, however, are much more vulnerable. The reckless pollution of the air and water, the voracious consumption of forests and farmland, the diversion of food and fiber from hungry mouths to wasteful consumerism, and the consequent changes in the climate (e.g. global warming, desertification, melting ice, and rising sea levels)—these offenses comprise a systematic assault on our fellow *living creatures*, those who live around us and after us, including other human beings who are less privileged, less powerful.
- (20) More clearly than a generation ago the inter-relationship of environmental abuse and exploitation of the poor and powerless is being made evident. Here are some samplings from a large and growing body of literature.
- Ricardo Navarro, founder of a large grass roots conservation effort in Central America and former chair of Friends of the Earth International, has concluded that "the three most dangerous things you can do in El Salvador are breathe the air, drink the water, and eat the food, in that order."⁴

³Joseph Sittler, "Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility" in *Evocations of Grace*, p. 84.

⁴cited by Larry Rasmussen, "Green Discipleship: Economy, Equity, Ecology" in *Intersections* 13,1 (April 2006):2.

- Aruna Gnanadason tells how in many parts of the world women who shoulder the responsibility for gathering water, fuel, and food suffer the greatest hardships as resources become scarce due to waste and mismanagement.⁵
- In an impassioned sermon on the story of King Ahab and the peasant farmer Naboth (1 Kings 21), David Mukuba Gitari, archbishop of the Anglican Church in Kenya, confronted the ways in which privileged decision-makers harm the poor and powerless when they exploit the creation for their own benefit and degrade its capacity to benefit the larger community.⁶
- Africans, who have borne the burden of the legacy of European colonialism—its exploitation of labor, its exclusion from the economic benefits of Africa’s natural resources, its degradation of the physical, social and political environment—now face the prospect of renewed economic imperialism from foreign economic powers.⁷
- Among those who have examined the link between abuse of the creation and exploitation of the poor, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has identified the root spiritual rebellion. She writes, “We are . . . living toward ‘a *dead end*,’ destroying Earth’s life systems, and building a soul-shattering gap between the rich and the impoverished. . . . God created a planet that spawns and supports life with a complexity and generosity beyond human ken. Never before has a species endangered that generative capacity. *We have become the ‘uncreators.’*”⁸

⁵“For many third-world feminists the “death of nature” demands that when we speak of the survival of trees, of the air, of the land, of the seas such a concern is inextricably linked with the survival and improvement of the quality of life of all people — particularly women, who bear the greatest consequences of the degradation of the earth.” Aruna Gnanadason, “Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth! The Earth as God’s Body in an Age of Environmental Violence” in *The Ecumenical Review* (April 2005).

⁶“The story of Naboth urges us to seek to know our fundamental human rights and to defend those rights at whatever cost. The story also serves as a warning to all land grabbers, whoever they may be. Land is the most precious commodity and we cannot be mere spectators watching a few rich people and politicians grab as much land as they want, to extend their ‘vegetable gardens.’ . . . [I]t should not be given to people who have already grabbed many acres and plots of land, but should first and foremost be given to the desperately poor and landless people living in our midst.” David Mukuba Gitari, “Was There No Naboth to Say No?” in *In Season and Out of Season* (Regnum, Carlisle, UK; 1996), pp. 105-6.

⁷For example, Peter Bosshard has examined the growing concern about the consequences of China’s economic expansion in Africa in “China’s Environmental Footprint in Africa” (<http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/SAIIA%20policy%20briefing%20508.pdf>).

⁸In *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (ed.) (Fortress, 2006), p. 183.

- (21) Similarly, LWF Council member Barbara Rossing concludes that the prospect of global warming reflects an imperialist abuse and oppression that calls for a spiritually repentant response, not passive acceptance.⁹
- (22) These are only a few examples of the many ways human beings by their abuse of the creation also have said to other living creatures, “We will be our own gods. We will treat other living creatures as subordinate to the lordship of our own self-indulgence.”
- (23) 3. Finally, if we are to give a true witness of our stewardship of the creation, the ecology of our own bodies is at stake. In familiar ways we fail to care for our own created bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits, saying with our own lives, “We will be our own gods. We will transgress our creaturely limits as if we had a divine capacity for self-transcendence.” Faithful stewards of the earth, however, can exercise self-control, which liberates them for the fulfillment of their creaturely calling.
- (24) The snows of Mount Kilimanjaro are melting. Global climate change is an undeniable reality. The documentation is voluminous, and the consequences are inescapable. Daniel Maguire says it succinctly: “If current trends continue, we will not.”¹⁰
- (25) Focusing narrowly on the reality of climate change itself, while ignoring the spiritual crisis of blaspheming God and God’s creation, however, is as misguided as denying the changing climate and its consequences. In the same way, moving too readily to the role of the questioner evades responsibility for ourselves and our accountability to God and God’s creation. Demanding answers of others, making plans and proposals, deciding the fates of people and cultures, forests and seas, while retaining mastery of the proceedings is simply one more rebellion, one more attempt to grasp for god-like control, one more refusal to be creatures ourselves.
- (26) Because of this, indulging in rituals of blaming and shaming serves neither God nor the creation. Rather, it is a distraction that divides the human race into competing factions, each hiding behind its own justifications and excuses and seeking its own partisan interests. The heart of the question in God’s cross-examination is not a demand for an exact calculation of responsibility for what abuse and for how long. Rather, this examination at the crossroads seeks a faithful answer to the questions that are implicit in the creation’s expectant waiting. *Who are you? Are you the children of God? Are you going to be God’s children?*

Living as God’s Children

- (27) An honest cross-examination of our blasphemous abuse of God’s creation and God’s creatures leaves me humbled. But I remain hopeful. I remain hopeful because of the promise that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). And I am confident. I am confident that “the first fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23) are indeed

⁹ “Hastening the Day When the Earth Will Burn” in *The Bible in the Public Square* (Fortress Press, 2008), pp. 25-38.

¹⁰ Daniel Maguire, *The Mental Core of Judaism and Christianity: Reclaiming the Revolution*, p. 5; cited by Gnanadason in “Yes, Creator God, Transform the Earth!”

present and alive in God's faithful people, including in the witness and work of the churches in this communion of the Lutheran World Federation.¹¹ In other words, I have hope that the expectantly awaited children of God are being revealed in the shared life of our communion, in the liberated life of faith, and in the fruits of its service.¹²

Words and Works

(28) A communion with a rich theological tradition has the resources to address this crisis. This communion of churches recognizes that a living and active faith that serves the neighbor comes from hearing the Word and responding to Christ's call. This communion is committed to the conversations and consultations, the proclamation and practical policies that call out a living faith, shaped into the mind of Christ. The current study program of the LWF Department for Theology and Studies, "Theological Responses to Climate Change,"¹³ is only one instance of theological dialogue taking place throughout the LWF communion.

- Each of us in our own countries must advocate for changes in both policy and practice. We as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are urging our government to act decisively to:
 1. Re-engage the United States in the international talks on global warming and ensure full participation by the U.S. in the development and implementation of any new agreements, leading by proposing legislation that reduces greenhouse gas emissions by 15 to 20 percent by 2020 and at least 80 percent of 2000 levels by the year 2050;
 2. Focus any supportive resources on low-income Americans, who are hardest hit by increases in energy costs, and on increased development assistance to help poor communities around the globe adapt to changes in climate;
 3. Adopt policies that encourage energy conservation in the federal government, and in American homes, communities, national transportation and distribution systems and commercial enterprises;
 4. Re-direct valuable research dollars from "clean coal" technology to renewable sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass; and from corn-based to cellulosic ethanol. New sources of energy present an important opportunity for investment and jobs in a struggling rural America. In October 2007 the

¹¹The importance of attending to God's gracious presence and activity, not just humankind's abuse is reflected in Joseph Sittler's ecological theology. "I am interested in the reality of the presence of God in the creation, because only the doctrine of grace will be adequate to change the spirit of our minds whereby we deal with timber or oil, fish and animals, and the structure of cities, urban design, homes for people, planes to work—all those mundane concrete things that yet constitute the anchorage of our hearts, the home of our daily lives." *Gravity and Grace*, p. 14.

¹²For many of the examples cited in this section I am indebted to the following persons: Ginda Harahap, LWF Department for Mission and Development; Rolita Machila, LWF Department for Theology and Studies; and Joseph Chu, ELCA Global Mission.

¹³See http://lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/Dts/Programs/DTS-Church-Social_Issues.html

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) convened a discussion of the environmental crisis at the Lutheran Mission Consultation (LMC) Roundtable. Participants, including representatives of the ELCT and external partners (e.g. several European church and mission agency partners), engaged in Bible study on this topic and heard a keynote address by Prof. M.J. Mwandosya (MP), Minister of State (Environment).

- The Church of Sweden will host an interfaith climate summit later this year in Europe. As Denmark prepares to host a United Nations summit on the environment in 2009, the church has taken an active role in the preparations, along with Nordic and Baltic neighbors.
- Lutherans in Papua New Guinea have collaborated in the Evangelical Alliance by introducing the concept of biblically-based environmental stewardship through a handbook on theology and the environment titled, “Christians Caring for the Environment.” The material considers and communicates both the biblical message and relevant practical issues: ecological, economic, cultural, and political.
- LWF dialogue with indigenous peoples in Asia has led to a greater awareness and appreciation of the wisdom within the indigenous culture. The orientation of their worldview “enables the Indigenous Peoples to maintain such an harmonious relationship with people and nature. It is known that the perspective derived from their spiritualities has led to a sound and healthy attitude toward others and nature, which in turn has been translated into right actions.”¹⁴
- Ethicist Larry Rasmussen’s elaboration of a “green discipleship”—economically aware, environmentally sustainable, and yet still emergent—illustrates the role of individual teachers in creating awareness and empowering responsible action.¹⁵

Local and Global

- (29) We value these conversations and dialogues, the study and learning, in venues large and small, because we know that they are not mere “dead, empty words.” As Martin Luther wrote in his preface to the Romans, we know that the faith, born of the Word, “...makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works

¹⁴“In Dialogue with Indigenous Peoples in Asia on Ancestors, Spirits and Healing: A study document to be discussed and complemented by the Lutheran churches in Asia,” p. 4. (http://www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DTS/Programs/Spiritualism-Asia_EN.pdf). A recent report of ecological wisdom to be gained from resurgent indigenous cultural identity is “Questing the Ayllu,” *New Internationalist*, 410 (April 2008), pp. 9-11.

¹⁵Larry Rasmussen, “Green Discipleship: Economy, Equity, Ecology” in *Intersections* 13,1 (April 2006):2-5.

constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing."¹⁶

- (30) Actions in care of the creation, like the conversations and dialogues, range from local initiatives to global partnerships in our communion of churches. For example, a number of member churches are involved in reforestation projects as a part of larger strategies of changing environmental practices.
- In Indonesia the Community Development Division of the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) has established a tree nursery at its headquarters complex in Tarutung to address the viral attack on carp in Lake Toba. Special Sunday worship services on ecological themes have been followed by symbolic tree planting. The HKBP church and other Lutheran churches in Indonesia have held public community planting days in addition to their ongoing programs on selected planting sites.
 - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania is building on environmental stewardship education by assisting local initiatives to become "green" parishes through activities like planting trees and evaluating their own carbon footprints. Applications for renewable energy projects are being received by the dioceses. Fuel-efficient cooking stoves are being disseminated by many groups. Solar installations are being made in homes, health centers, and schools. In one remote diocese, women are being trained for solar food processing to preserve fruits and vegetables that otherwise would rot. One of the church's vocational training centers has established a two-year renewable energy course, whose graduates are promoting renewable energy technologies.
 - The Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus is participating actively in the nation's tree planting campaign and has already planted over one million trees a year in various integrated rural development projects.
 - The rural development program of Lutheran World Service India is teaching ways to increase farm yield by alternating different crops and reducing fertilizer use.
 - The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada's "Stewardship of Creation Initiative" encourages congregations, households, and individuals to care for the creation as one of "the least of these" in which Christ is present.¹⁷ Similarly the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren has formed a Commission for Environmental Questions, which seeks to raise theological perspectives and further environmental responsibility. For example, energy consumption is routinely monitored during the reconstruction and repair of church buildings.

Companions in relationships of accompaniment

- (31) In my 2007 address I noted how we have grown in our understanding of and commitment to partnership in Christ's one body. We are discovering that in Jesus Christ God also leads us beyond our communion and the larger Christian community into partnerships for the sake of the world with interfaith and non-governmental

¹⁶From Luther's "Preface to Romans" (1522), English translation by Robert E. Smith (<http://www.projectwittenberg.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/luther-faith.txt>).

¹⁷According to the ELCIC web page
<http://www.elcic.ca/Stewardship/Stewardship-of-Creation/>

organizations, as well as governments and businesses. Our work in caring for the creation reflects these developments.

- In Indonesia the HKBP has promoted some programs concerning environmental issues such as the development of an environmental consciousness within the church. For example, deforestation and soil erosion are two key issues of concern where the church has explored partnerships with NGOs and government agencies.
- Students from Indonesia, Cambodia, and other Asian countries study at the Asia Rural Institute (ARI) in Japan with support from ELCA Lutherans in the United States. ARI's key emphasis is to train leaders from developing nations in organic farming techniques, working to combine traditional farming technique with modern technology in an environmental friendly way.
- In the United States Pastor Jon Magnuson has collaborated with colleagues and friends through the Cedar Tree Institute to create the Interfaith Earth Healing Initiative—an interfaith environmental project for the Great Lakes basin in cooperation with the United States Environmental Protection Agency. In 2008 this group closely with ten faith traditions on a wide range of environmental projects that involve college students, at-risk teens, American Indian tribes, and others.¹⁸
- Prior to the devastating earthquake that occurred only weeks ago, integrated rural ministry programs by the Chinese government were implemented by the Sichuan Christian Church. Supported by LWF member churches, this program uses pig manure to produce a fuel that is widely used as an alternative to fossil fuels.
- The United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India is partnering with other Christians through the National Council of Churches in India to encourage green parish programs, plastic-free church campuses, and biological farming. The church council urged its members to promote an effective “greening of faith” at the congregational level, and to take steps to encourage and support sustainable farming.
- Lutherans in Mexico support the work of AMEXTRA by teaching subsistence farmers environmentally responsible alternatives to slash-and-burn farming and dependence on chemical pesticides.
- At the invitation of His All Holiness Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople in September 2007 Bishop Sofie Petersen of Greenland joined religious leaders from all over the world at Ilulissat to pray for the planet and to attend a week-long conference on climate change. In a gathering that included Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Christians, she said, “In our small world we all need to struggle together.”

A Humbled and Hopeful Communion of Churches

- (32) The creation's suffering is a sobering truth to face. It is humbling to hear evidence of humankind's broken relationship with God and God's creation and to realize that we participate in this blasphemy and abuse. The burden of guilt, the shame of responsibility for such suffering, and the fear of consequences, easily could turn us against each other in recrimination and judgment. That, however, is not the human

¹⁸For more detail see <http://www.earthhealinginitiative.org/>

community that the creation waits for with eager expectation. It is not the communion that we are in Jesus Christ, for such a community could not be humbled because it had no hope.

- (33) We can live confidently and serve humbly precisely because there is hope. Through the cross of Jesus, God reconciles heaven and earth and holds them together in Christ (Col.1:20). The creation now suffers in hope, in the birth pangs of the new creation.
- (34) Therefore, let us return to questions that arise out of our *faithfulness* and humbled hope. Since we live with God and God's creation, shall we not join them in hope? We are one body of Christ, in solidarity with the creation and its suffering, one with each other in a communion of faith and service, sharing in the sufferings of Christ and of the new creation's birth. Shall we not live in humility and hope as the children of God?

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Rom. 8:22-25)

- (35) The hope in this witness is hope borne of faith—Spirit-given confidence in God's faithfulness to God's promise to redeem the whole creation. It is hope grounded in the belief that, as Luther wrote, "God . . . exists at the same time in every little seed, whole and entire, and yet also in all and above all and outside all created things."¹⁹ Such hope frees us to sing God's praises for the beauty and wonder of all creation. Such hope calls us to receive life as a gift of God's grace through Christ. Such hope compels us to be disciplined and faithful stewards of the whole creation.

¹⁹Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" in Timothy F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), p. 397.