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Christian Perspectives: one sky, one earth, one people

Many years ago, I stood outside looking up at a starry sky with my husband's wise great Aunt Nina who said something like this, ?Whenever I'm unhappy or worried I go outside at night and look up at the sky. Under that sky my troubles shrink away. There are so many people under that sky whose lives are much harder than mine. It puts everything into perspective and I feel better.?

The night sky helps when I'm far from home or the people I love: no matter how far apart, we can look at the same stars, the same moon, be contained by the same blanket of atmosphere, breathe the same night air.

Skies everywhere are distinctive too. The Chinook Arch over the mountains in Calgary signals dramatic weather changes. The Aurora Borealis in Pangnirtung is breathtaking. This summer in Cape Breton we wondered again how the sky can be such a deep vibrant blue. A couple of weeks ago the drive into Toronto was a descent from pale blue sunny skies north of Orangeville into the brown murk hanging over Toronto.

The particular bit of earth we live on shapes us ? the quality of the soil and water; the terrain whether mountain, or prairie, or desert or forest ? these all determine how we live and to some extent the culture, social life, the work we do and the kinds of resources we enjoy. The sky is the great equalizer: we all receive the same gifts from the sky ? the sun, moon, stars, rain, the air we breathe.

Arguably the biggest challenge facing humanity at this time is the impact we are having on our earth and our skies. Our way of life is rapidly accelerating the rate of destruction. One result is climate change. We see ferocious storms, flooding in some places and prolonged drought in others; the unpredictability of weather patterns.

In our country there has been a conspiracy of silence around climate change. When we travelled in Europe recently, everywhere we went, people were talking about climate change and the necessity to adapt our way of life in order to slow down change, stabilize and perhaps even bring a measure of healing to our earth and atmosphere. People in many other parts of the world are far ahead of us in responding to the challenge.

Why is it so difficult for us to take responsibility for the damage done? Why do we refuse to care about the state of the world we are leaving to our children and grandchildren?

There is already more oil above ground than we can safely use in the years ahead. Sunshine and wind can produce less polluting energy. There are better ways to protect our water supply and process our waste. We can eliminate the poisons that we have been putting into our water and soil and our bodies.

Everyday we hear news commentators and politicians talking about the economy as if it is the only issue or at least the most important over-riding issue we face. We talk about it as if it is a real, living thing that somehow controls us. But the economy is a tool we've developed to manage the exchange of goods and services. It was invented as a tool and needs to adapt to our real needs especially when the tool appears to be broken or outmoded.

What are our real needs? We are earth creatures who are only as healthy as our earth home. Human beings need clean air and clean water. We need safety from extreme weather events. We need food grown in healthy soil that's full of nutrients and free from harmful chemicals.

But we are more than earth creatures with physical needs. We are spiritual beings created in God's image to live in relationship with God and one another. What are our real needs as spiritual, God-created beings? We need to love and be loved. We need to create a just world by sharing the resources that are necessary for whole and healthy living so that no one lives in poverty and no one holds too much power over others by monopolizing an unfair proportion of those resources. We need to learn nonviolent ways to resolve conflict because violence destroys everything. A peaceful world can be achieved only through peaceful means.

There is one sky over all of us. We have this one precious earth to care for and share. We are all one people made in God's image to

love God and care for one another.

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