

Christians reflect on Good Friday/Earth Day concurrence

News

April 21, 2011

New York, April 21

(ENInews)--As Good Friday coincides this year with Earth Day, churches around the world are reflecting on environmental concerns as they commemorate Christ's Crucifixion, but some believers think that, theologically, the two don't belong together.

Proponents say that planting trees and meditating on ways humanity has wounded the earth can parallel devotions that mark Jesus' sacrifice, but opponents say that a political message, even a pagan one, is being pushed onto sacred territory.

"This year's Earth Day falls on Good Friday. This is a right and appropriate occasion to remember the cross, which was made out of trees, leads us from bondage to liberation, death to life," said the National Council of Churches in India, which groups 30 Orthodox and Protestant churches.

The NCCI suggested that congregations plant trees in church compounds and include Sunday School children. Congregations were reminded to thank God "for trees and forests, which breathe in our carbon wastage and produce life-giving oxygen for us to live."

Earth Day has been observed on 22 April since 1970 and is considered one of the seminal events in the modern environmental movement; Good Friday is on a different date each year since it moves according to the observance of Easter.

In the U.S., the Episcopal Church, based in New York, has compiled resources for incorporating earth-care themes into services and celebrations, according to Episcopal News Service.

Mike Schut, the church's economic and environmental affairs officer, said that "on Good Friday ... might we suggest that when earth is degraded, when species go extinct, that another part of God's body experiences yet another sort of crucifixion -- that another way of seeing and experiencing God is diminished."

At the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Journal reported that a task force called Greening Anglican Spaces compiled a Good Friday Earth Day Reflection in which theologian Christopher Lind writes, "in our callous disregard for the needs of all living beings, we have put the Earth upon the cross. [Good Friday] is the day for us to recognize our guilt in perpetuating injustice against our partners in creation and confess it."

However, comments on the Anglican Journal website ranged from "the connection between the crucifixion of our Lord and the desecration of the Earth is obvious" from the Rev. Shawn Sanford Beck to "paganism [is] creeping into the church," from Jack S. Pratt. Olive Dunn wrote that, "whilst the care of God's creation is important, nothing should detract from the marvel of Our Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sin."

On a Christian website called www.crosswalk.com, television host and author Jerry Newcombe wrote that "[putting] the celebration of Earth Day with grave concerns over global warming at the same level of Christ crucified seems terribly misguided to me" since it "trivializ[es] the commemoration of the greatest act of love in history."

A blogger, writing as James H, or "Opinionated Catholic," allows that "some peace and justice Good Friday devotions can be done right [but] care must be taken ... that Good Friday ... does not become the tool of just one political theme. It needs to be a day of Christians in unity focusing on the cross."