

## **NORMAN HABEL AND THE SEASON OF CREATION**



**Norman Habel** is a theologian and retired Lutheran Pastor, based in Adelaide in South Australia. Over many years he has been involved in developing effective responses to ecological violence – what Norm himself calls ‘sins against Creation’.



Norm’s pioneering work has included leading contributions to ecological theology – especially through his Earth Bible Project – and, as part of his long and active commitment to Reconciliation, acting as a scribe to the ‘Rainbow Spirit’ Aboriginal Christian elders in their groundbreaking work of *Rainbow Spirit Theology*.

Now, however, he is helping to bridge the ‘worship gap’ between Christians and their relationship to the environment...

### **Addressing the underlying causes of our violence against Creation**

Norm himself observes:

*‘In many ways, Christianity with which I’m familiar certainly has failed in some ways. We’ve had a very strong belief that human beings were created in the image of God and then given the right, in fact the mandate, to actually go out and rule over the animal world and then subdue the Earth. Now that kind of mandate, while not followed by everybody, was certainly a significant part of Western thought, and I believe that Western thought, along with other forces, has been influenced by Christianity in such a way that a lot of the destruction of the Earth is at the foot of the world’s religions and we need to come to terms with what we’ve done to the Earth as well as what we might do in the future. ...*



*One of the significant things that’s been happening in my context is that we’ve been having Earth liturgies - liturgies in which the focus is on an awareness that you are in this Earth, that the Earth is part and parcel of the worshipping community. And that when you do worship, you don’t simply live inside four walls and close out most of Creation, but the rest of Creation is part and parcel of the whole way in which we’re supposed to live, to which we’re supposed to relate, and part of our worshipping community’.*

### **Worshipping in Creation**

*‘Some years ago I sat in an Aboriginal church in Wujal Wujal in Queensland. I looked out across a forest valley to the hills beyond. I had a sense of God’s presence in creation as I worshipped. Why? There were no walls or stained-glass windows to block out God’s presence in the forest around me.’*

## SEEDS OF PEACE

### The 'Season of Creation' – an Australian Story

*Norm tells the story of how this proposed new season of the church year originated.*

**'We celebrate the season of Advent before Christmas. We celebrate the season of Lent before Easter. When do we celebrate the season of Creation?'**

Around the world, churches are becoming acutely aware of the environmental crisis. In response, many congregations in the Western world have celebrated Earth Day, World Environment Day or St Francis of Assisi Day. The origin of the season of Creation, however, is an Australian story.

Like many in our Lutheran Church in Australia, I grew up in the bush. I climbed every tree within miles of my home. I felt close to creation—to the soil, the streams and the sounds of the bush. Celebrating the creation I love has long been one of my dreams.

An exciting beginning came in 2000, at St Stephen's Lutheran Church, Adelaide. For four weeks - during the four Sundays of September that precede St Francis of Assisi Day (4 October) - we relived the great biblical creation stories. The children loved it. We also confessed what we have done to creation and how God is working to renew creation.



From 2001 to 2003 I worked with the Uniting Church's Commission for Mission in Melbourne,

which, after a series of workshops, agreed to explore the idea of a season of Creation. In 2003 and 2004 the Uniting Church in Melbourne provided the funds for the development resources needed, and the season of Creation was trialled in about fifty congregations in Melbourne and Adelaide. From 2005, the season of Creation is an option for congregations across Australia. But not only Australia. Lutheran churches and the National Council of Churches in America are also planning to introduce this. People in Europe too are interested.

The season of Creation offers an opportunity for churches to introduce new visual elements into their worship and to be ecumenical and Australian. The Sundays of the first year in the three-year cycle of Creation are called for example Forest Sunday, Land Sunday, Outback Sunday and River Sunday. Congregations can turn the sanctuary into a vibrant part of creation as they celebrate with creation.

*We seek to empathise with creation as it suffers from the sins of humans  
and as it yearns for the day of renewal.*

In the season of Creation we affirm the word of God, that humans are to 'serve and preserve' this garden planet (Genesis 2:15). We agree to be partners with Christ in restoring this planet, this sanctuary of God and the home we enjoy as humans. Wherever you look, wherever you walk, Christ is there. Celebrate the Christ who fills our creation!

#### **Sources and more information:**

'The Lutheran' magazine (June 2005)

Season of Creation – [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com)

The Earth Bible - <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/theology/institute/earthbible>