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Report

Reflections on COP26:
What Does Theology Have to Offer the Conversation around the Climate Crisis?

Madeleine Pennington and Ian Christie (eds.)

Theos is the UK's leading religion and society think tank. It has a broad Christian basis and exists to enrich the conversation about the role of faith in society through research, events, and media commentary.

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Theos Licence Department
77 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2EZ

+44 (0) 20 7828 7777
hello@theosthinktank.co.uk
theosthinktank.co.uk

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List of Contributors

Maria A. Andrade V. is an Ecuadorian theologian and sociologist. She has spent more than 15 years accompanying Christians in engaging with justice and development in different places around the world. Her current research areas include environmental justice, migration, gender and decolonial theologies. She currently serves as Tearfund's Theology and Network Engagement Global Lead.

Clark Buys is a Theology Research Assistant at Tearfund, as well the Senior Development Manager for The Justice Conference in the UK. Clark contributes to Tearfund's work and theology through research, writing and training, particularly in the area of Economic and Environmental Sustainability, as well as leading Tearfund's global Young Theologians program. He holds a Masters in Theology from King's Evangelical Divinity School, and is a qualified Spiritual Director. He shares his thoughts on theology and spirituality at *everythingeden.org*.

Ian Christie is Senior Lecturer in the Social Science of Sustainable Development at the University of Surrey, as part of the Centre for Environment and Sustainability. He has written widely on sustainable development and environmental policy for academic institutions, central and local government, public agencies, business, NGOs and think-tanks. He was researcher and lead author for the Church of England's 2009 vision, Church and Earth. He is a founding member of the Surrey Climate Commission, and is an environmental advisor for the Dioceses of Guildford and Southwark in the Church of England.

Claire Foster-Gilbert is Director of the Westminster Abbey Institute. She previously worked for the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England as policy adviser in medical ethics and environmental issues, where she led efforts to shift the Church's thinking on the environment, and served as

a lay Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, where she co-founded the St Paul's Institute. Claire holds a doctorate in ecological consciousness and Julian of Norwich from King's College London, and is Visiting Fellow at Jesus College, Cambridge. She has authored numerous books, including *Sharing God's Planet* (CHP, 2005); *How many lightbulbs does it take to change a Christian?* (CHP, 2007), and *Don't stop at the lights: leading your church through a changing climate* (CHP, 2008).

Rachel Lampard has worked for many years to enable churches to engage with issues of social justice, particularly through the Methodist Church and the ecumenical Joint Public Issues Team, and served as Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in Britain between 2016 and 2017. She spent over a decade working for the Gambling Commission, seeking to regulate the industry to prevent gambling harm, and now chairs a youth work charity and an east London secondary school.

Hannah Malcolm is an ordinand in the Church of England and is writing a PhD on a theology of climate and ecological grief. She is on the board of Operation Noah, and regularly speaks and writes about climate justice and the church. She is the editor of *Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church* (SCM Press, 2020).

Alastair McIntosh is a writer and climate activist, and the author of various books including *Soil and Soul: People Versus Corporate Power* (Aurum Press, 2001), *Poacher's Pilgrimage: An Island Journey* (Birlinn, 2016), and most recently, *Riders on the Storm: the Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being* (Birlinn, 2016). He was previously Director of the Centre for Human Ecology, and is Honorary Professor in the College of Social Sciences at the University of Glasgow.

David Nussbaum served as Chief Executive of The Elders until October 2021, and was previously the Chief Executive of WWF-UK and Chair of WWF's Global Climate and Energy Initiative. He also holds various non-executive director posts, and a couple of theology degrees.

Martin Palmer is Chief Executive of FaithInvest, an international non-profit founded in 2019 to grow the scale and impact of faith-based investing. Previously, he spent 24 years as Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, established with HRH Prince Philip in 1995. Martin has been working with the faiths on the environment for more than 30 years, and on their investment programmes for 20 years. He is a Patron of Faith Plans.

Madeleine Pennington is Head of Research at Theos, and leads Theos' environmental and economic sustainability programme. She is author of *Cohesive Societies: Faith and Belief* (British Academy, 2020)*, The Church and Social Cohesion: Connecting Communities and Serving People* (Theos, 2020), *Quakers, Christ and the Enlightenment* (OUP, 2021), and *The Christian Quaker* (Brill, 2019). She previously worked as a research scholar in a research, conference and education centre in Philadelphia.

Jonathan Rowson is a philosopher, chess player, and Co-Founder and Director of Perspectiva. He is also the former director of the Social Brain Centre at the Royal Society of Arts, a chess grandmaster, and three-time British Chess Champion. His books include *Spiritualize: Cultivating Spiritual Sensibility to Address 21st Century Challenges* (RSA, 2014) and *The Moves that Matter: A Chess Grandmaster on the Game of Life* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

Ben Ryan is Home Affairs Adviser to the Church of England, having previously served as Head of Research at Theos until

2019. He is the editor of *Fortress Britain? Ethical Approaches to Immigration Policy for a Post-Brexit Britain* (JKP, 2018) and the author of numerous Theos reports, on chaplaincy, the EU, the Catholic charity sector, mental health and ecumenism. He holds degrees in European politics from the LSE and in Theology and Religious Studies from the University of Cambridge. He is a trustee of CSAN (Caritas Social Action Network).

Introduction

From 31 October to 13 November 2021, the world's political leaders gathered in Glasgow for the United Nations 26th Conference of Parties, known more commonly as COP26.

This was the first of the international climate summits mandated by the 2015 Paris Agreement, which required individual countries to submit increasingly ambitious "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) every 5 years, and subsequently to agree multilateral action on that renewed basis. Delayed for year by the pandemic, the purpose of COP26 was therefore to secure accelerated state-led climate action.

In advance of the gathering, the conference was described variously as the "last best hope" and the "last chance saloon for the planet".[1] Certainly, its historic significance should not be underestimated: a major climate report released by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in August 2021 underlined the critical and urgent importance of limiting global warming to 1.5°C[2] and UN Secretary General António Guterres had this to say in response:

> *We must act decisively now to keep 1.5°C alive. We are already at 1.2°C and rising. Warming has accelerated in recent decades. Every fraction of a degree counts... That is why this year's United Nations climate conference in Glasgow is so important. The viability of our societies depends on leaders from government, business and civil society uniting behind policies, actions and investments that will limit temperature rise to 1.5°C.*[3]

To some degree, the sense of urgency paid off. Positive progress was made on various aspects of climate policy: over 100 countries pledged to reverse deforestation by 2030; more than 80 countries signed up to a pledge to cut methane by 30% by 2030; the number of countries pledging to reach net-zero emissions reached 140.[4]

However, a last minute dilution of the pledge on fossil fuels (changing the promise to "phase out" coal to "phase [it] down") left many disappointed with the central agreement, the Glasgow Climate Pact.[5] The target to secure $100 billion in finance to developing nations by 2020, originally set at Copenhagen in 2009, was missed. Several notable Heads of State failed to attend altogether, including China's Xi Jinping and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. Most concerning of all, the globe therefore remains on track for warming between 1.8 and 2.4°C. We can now only meet the critical 1.5°C target through pledges made by the "ratchet" mechanism in years to come – a mechanism that must now secure precisely what was seemingly impossible at a conference widely hailed as the best chance we had.

How did we get to this point? And how might the seemingly impossible materialise in the way ahead?

Over half of global emissions since 1751 were emitted after 1990, in a period in which human-driven climate change was a known concern.

After all, for many years now, scientists have been clear that human action is responsible for startling climatic changes. We have known what we must do to address these changes for a long time – and yet, better scientific understanding alone has not translated into action. Over half of global emissions since 1751 were emitted after 1990, in a period in which human-driven climate change was a known concern.[6] Despite new possibilities for emissions reduction through the COVID-19 pandemic, emissions were back up to near pre-pandemic levels as of November 2021.[7] Even in the week before COP26, the UK government (the hosts of the conference) announced a

reduction in air passenger duty for domestic flights, followed in the next week by the budget airline Ryanair announcing 250 new flying routes for the winter season.[8]

We might say that the crux of the issue is a crisis of the human will: we know what we need to do, but doing so seems constantly beyond reach. The COP26 President Alok Sharma MP made a speech three months after the conference, underlining not only the achievements but the risks of failure, once again, to match declarations with urgent action:

> *All in all, there is no doubt that the commitments we secured at COP26 were historic. Yet, at the moment they are just words on a page. And unless we honour the promises made, to turn the commitments in the Glasgow Climate Pact into action, they will wither on the vine. We will have mitigated no risks. We will have seized no opportunities. Instead, we will have fractured the trust built between nations. And 1.5 degrees will slip from our grasp.*[9]

No forms of human expression have grappled with the reality of human weakness (or our capacity to hope) more profoundly than, or for so long as, the theological traditions.

The risks of inattention were highlighted a month after Mr Sharma's speech, as the latest IPCC report[10] on the impacts, risks and damage from global heating received negligible coverage from mass media and politicians, coming as it did while Russian forces launched their invasion of Ukraine. The focus on Ukraine was understandable; but the inability or unwillingness of leaders and media editors to give prominence to the IPCC report was frustrating, especially given the linkages between the geopolitics of the Russia-Ukraine crisis,

dependence on gas and oil from Russia, and the climate crisis.[11] (The IPCC report made no appearance in President Biden's State of the Union address on 1 March 2022, for example: that speech contained just two swift references to climate.)

Many people, governments and businesses are in a heightened state of awareness on the issue of climate change, but still, progress comes nowhere near as fast as we hope or need it to be. Especially when it comes to those of us living in the Global North, our collective attention is badly misaligned. "In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark" (Matthew 24.38).

In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. (Matthew 24.38)

It is perhaps here that theology can play a part. After all, no forms of human expression have grappled with the reality of human weakness (or our capacity to hope) more profoundly than, or for so long as, the theological traditions. With this in mind, Theos asked a range of climate professionals, activists, faith leaders, theologians, philosophers, and charity-workers to consider the climate crisis from this different perspective, reflecting on the question: "What does theology have to offer the conversation around the climate crisis?"

Their responses were published on the Theos website over the course of COP26, and are gathered here with additional reflections from Maria A. Andrade V., Claire Foster-Gilbert, and Ian Christie. Each contribution focuses on a different

element of the climate crisis, reflecting the rich resources that spirituality can offer this most urgent of contemporary issues.

In chapter one, the philosopher **Jonathan Rowson** considers why we might view the climate crisis as a spiritual issue at all, pointing to the deep "stuckness" of humanity, and the profound questions raised by our current predicament around the nature of love, death, and self. In chapter two, **Hannah Malcolm** reflects on the feelings of grief that more and more of us feel in response to climate breakdown, and the recognition that our emotions are not morally neutral, but can guide our understanding of what should be valued and what has already been lost.

Next, **Maria A. Andrade V.** considers what we might learn from the indigenous theological traditions of the Ecuadorian *Kichwa* people, drawing on principles of relationality, common good, 'enoughness' and revelation to interrogate some of the mainstream assumptions of modern Western society – as well as noting the similarity between these themes and the wisdom of the Bible and the Christian moral tradition. In chapter four, **Ben Ryan** urges the West to rediscover moral courage, imagination, and hope that positive action is possible, especially reflecting on the most recent papal encyclicals as a basis for the "new settlement".

He is followed in chapter five by **Clark Buys**, considering the rich potential of the Bible to create communities of accountability that motivate and mobilise ensuring creation care – and in chapter six by **David Nussbaum**, reflecting on what a biblical vision of creation care might teach us today.

In chapter seven, **Rachel Lampard** draws our attention back to the shortcomings of Global North assumptions to learn from the local perspectives of Pacific Islanders, while

in chapter eight **Alastair McIntosh** considers how we might tackle the excesses of consumerism which lie at the root of the problem.

In chapter nine, **Ian Christie** considers the nature of the climate predicament and why it is so hard to face and act upon, and notes the scale of the political challenge ahead, particularly in the United States of America; he also points to political opportunities and breakthroughs. In chapter ten, **Martin Palmer** reminds us that faith groups earn their legitimacy to speak through practical engagement too, as one the largest investor groups on the planet. In chapter eleven, **Claire Foster-Gilbert** reflects the progress made at COP26, what is still required, and the power of asking for help.

Finally, in the conclusion, **Madeleine Pennington** considers what sort of leadership might be asked of us all, as we tackle the formidable challenges ahead.

1 John Kerry, quoted in BBC News, "John Kerry says Glasgow COP26 is last best hope for the world", *BBC*, 19 October 2021. *https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-58914524*; Prince Charles, quoted in Peter Walker, "Cop26 'literally the last chance saloon to save planet – Prince Charles', *Guardian*, 31 October 2021. *https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/31/cop26-literally-the-last-chance-saloon-to-save-planet-prince-charles*.

2 IPCC, "Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis: Summary for Policy Makers" (IPCC, 2021), C.2. Available at: *https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM_final.pdf*

3 António Guterres, "Press Release: Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report 'Code Red for Humanity', Stressing 'Irrefutable' Evidence of Human Influence", *United Nations*, 9 August 2021. *https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm*

4 For more detail on the various policy breakthroughs secured at COP26, see UK COP26, "COP26 OUTCOMES". *https://ukcop26.org/the-conference/cop26-outcomes/page/2/*

5 UNFCC, "Glasgow Climate Pact". *https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf*

6 Thorfinn Stainforth and Bartosz Brzezinksi, "More than half of all CO2 emissions since 1751 emitted in the last 30 years", *IEEP*. 29 April 2020. *https://ieep.eu/news/more-than-half-of-all-co2-emissions-since-1751-emitted-in-the-last-30-years#:~:text=Slightly%20over%20half%20of%20all,the%20creation%20of%20the%20UNFCCC*

7 Seth Borenstein, "Global Carbon emissions have returned to pre-pandemic levels", *Time*, 2 November 2011. *https://time.com/6113851/carbon-emissions-up-after-pandemic/*

8 HM Treasury, *Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021* (London: Crown, 2021), p. 83; Simon Calder, "Ryanair's sky grab: Europe's Biggest Budget Airline Launches 250 New Routes This Winter", *Independent*, 3 November 2021. *https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/ryanair-new-routes-winter-flights-b1950112.html*

9 Alok Sharma, "COP President Alok Sharma outlines Presidency aims for the coming year", gov.uk, 24 January 2022. *https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/cop-president-alok-sharma-outlines-presidency-aims-for-the-coming-year*

10 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *6th Assessment Report - Climate Change 2022, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Summary for Policymakers(IPCC, 2022) PDF available at: https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf*

11 Helen Thompson, *Disorder: Hard Times in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

1
Why is the climate crisis a spiritual issue?

Jonathan Rowson

Around ten years ago, I started thinking about why people are so uncomfortable speaking about spiritual matters in public policy contexts. I was working at the Royal Society of Arts in London at the time, on a programme that tried to make sense of how to speak of 'spirituality' more clearly: how to ensure its intellectual rigour, keep it connected with (but not necessarily limited to) its religious traditions, and 'put it to work' in some meaningful sense, without instrumentalising or denaturing it.

Around the same time, I was working on rethinking the climate change conundrum, because for me, it was always obvious that climate change was not a simple environmental issue or a green issue. In fact, I always thought equating the climate crisis with other environmental issues in this way was a conceptual catastrophe.

It is much deeper, broader, and fuller than that. It concerns the underlying logic, sensibility, and disposition of our entire civilization – and as such, is about the movement at scale of culture, economic logic, and political modalities that lead to one way of life prevailing over time.

It was always obvious that climate change was not a simple environmental issue or a green issue... It concerns the underlying logic, sensibility, and disposition of our entire civilization.

When asked how climate change is a spiritual issue, you may think, "Surely not?"

Surely, it is an economic and political matter? Surely, it is about global cooperation? Surely, it is about the energy supply? Surely, it is about green finance? It is all of that – but we have

been talking about these aspects of the problem for a long time, and getting almost nowhere.

Remembering that about half of global emissions have come after 1990 helps to focus the mind.[1] Of course climate change has a historical element, but it is really a contemporary problem – and very much to do with industrial capitalism of a certain kind, principally in the last 30 years or so. You can go back to the industrial revolution, but that misses the point that this is now a way of living at scale for approaching 8 billion people.

Ultimately, human beings are stuck – and not just individual human beings, but societal structures, social imaginaries, and political logics that keep us trapped in a way of living.

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We must therefore become unstuck – at scale – if we are going to have a chance of significantly improving climatic projections. This requires economic, political and cultural transformation at scale – and it is here that the spiritual matter comes in, because transformation (becoming unstuck) is the language of revelation, insight, epiphany, spiritual practice, growth, and the role of community in supporting and fostering that growth.

We cannot get that with a click of the fingers. It does not happen because we wish for it to be so. Nor will we get it through progressive imperialism – through wishing everyone was good, and nice, and shared the same eco-sensibility.

Instead, it will be a much deeper and darker reckoning, which, again, is why spiritual matters come into play.

First, it encompasses questions of *love*. What does it mean to love the planet? To love the conditions of conscious life that the planet gives us? To re-discover that love? Of course, love is no fluffy pink thing that we like to add on to our emotions. Love understood as a primordial force – the ultimate reality – contends with matters of power.

So too, we must consider questions of *death*, because we deny our own deaths in this crisis. We know that we are going to die intellectually, but do not live every day as though we feel it emotionally. Likewise, when it comes to climate collapse, we really might be stupid enough to destroy our only home. As I mused in a recent essay, "Are we really condemned to be the idiots who blame the bastards for the world falling apart?"[2] It looks a lot like we might be.

In those last 30 years when half the emissions happened, we were talking about this. *The Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore; the New York climate marches; Greta Thunberg; Extinction Rebellion. We have had moments of global awakening. But they are not happening quickly enough, or at sufficient scale. We need more unsticking; more revelation; more epiphany; more resolute waking up.

To get there, we also have to contend with our understanding of *self*. Who are we in response to this conundrum? Each individual cannot possibly fathom (let alone respond to) a global collective action problem caused by billions of people. Yes, it is primarily a certain number of companies; yes, it is predominantly in the Global North; of course, it has a political dimension. Nonetheless, the gap between each individual's scope for agency and action, and the

problem writ large, remains huge. Therefore, we must find a way of reimagining identity that is more collective and global, yet is not disconnected from our own sense of agency and purpose in the world (in our own homes, streets, communities, schools, businesses, and so forth).

So too, the crisis raises questions of the *soul*. It is darkly beautiful – horrific and tragic – that human beings might be deluded, feckless, disorganised and wayward enough not to be able to get their act together and preserve their only habitable habitat. As far as we know, we really might be that craven. But before we get to the responsibility we each take towards that, there is the 'soul feeling' of being in this historical moment.

Not everyone has this kind of awareness, but we do have collective awareness that each of us is called upon to act in a certain way. The nature of the action will not be an energy efficient light bulb, or investment in green technology, or installing solar panels on your new home. These things play a part, but such relatively low-hanging fruit is not our only real hope. Instead, the hope is that – through the soul's encounter with this historical moment, and the relationship of love and power that we are called upon to contend with – we find our unique contribution somehow. And that we find a way to live fully, deeply, and joyously, while nonetheless facing up to this challenge.

That is a species-level event of singular proportions. We cannot possibly deal with it in the way that we deal with our breakfast, or our job. Nonetheless, we must look it in the eye and feel that we are doing what we are called upon to do as human beings. Love, death, self and soul are the parameters of becoming by which we become unstuck. It is in this sense that the climate conundrum is a spiritual problem.

1 Thorfinn Stainforth and Bartosz Brzezinksi, "More than half of all CO2 emissions since 1751 emitted in the last 30 years", *IEEP*. 29 April 2020. *https://ieep.eu/news/more-than-half-of-all-co2-emissions-since-1751-emitted-in-the-last-30-years#:~:text=Slightly%20over%20half%20of%20all,the%20creation%20of%20the%20UNFCCC*

2 Jonathan Rowson, "Tasting the Pickle: Ten flavours of meta-crisis and the appetite for a new civilisation", *Perspectiva*, 9 February 2021. *https://systems-souls-society.com/tasting-the-pickle-ten-flavours-of-meta-crisis-and-the-appetite-for-a-new-civilisation/*

2
How can we grieve well?

Hannah Malcolm

Reports of climate and ecological grief, anxiety, and trauma have dramatically increased in the last decade – and not just in our headlines, but also in professional care settings. The American Psychological Association, for example, now offers official guidance on mental health in a changing climate.[1] For many of us, it seems as though our feelings about the death of the world are finally being recognised as a vital dimension of both behavioural change and our collective flourishing.

Yet we also live with conflicting narratives about the truth of our experiences: 'facts don't care about your feelings' and '(all) your feelings are valid'. These claims appear at odds – but they both assume that our experiences of the world operate outside ethics. Feelings are presumed personal and in some sense inevitable; we don't choose or change them. As such, they are beyond moral judgment. Consider this summary of climate grief from 'Climate and Mind', a project established by psychotherapist Andrew Bryant:

> *There is no "right way" to grieve... (we should be) wary of talking about grief in terms of rigid, universal stages or tasks... having a fixed idea about how we should feel about particular loss can make it difficult to notice how we actually feel... No model can override your personal experience... (or) deny other, equally valid ways of conceiving of and working through loss.*[2]

As short-term advice for individual emotional distress, this therapeutic approach is compassionate and useful. However, climate and ecological grief is not a temporary, private state from which we can recover. Climate and ecological breakdown are grief multipliers: the sources and severity of this grief will grow over time. If we are to live well, we will need to ask how

to grieve well – and admit that we can grieve badly, both in what we grieve and how we grieve.

If we are to live well, we will need to ask how to grieve well – and admit that we can grieve badly, both in what we grieve and how we grieve.

This is, I believe, where theology can offer a different story.

The Christian tradition treats emotions as bearing moral weight: they reveal the direction of our love, and under the guidance of reason can be powerfully redirected towards goodness, transforming ourselves and those around us.[3] Our emotions – our longings – are shaped by the world around us. We can learn what to grieve, and if our grief is poorly directed or dysfunctional, we can learn again what is worthy of sorrow and what is not. Your feelings are real, but not all of them are good, useful, or an approximation of truth about the world.

How do we know if our grief is good? In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo launched a powerful defence of the passion of sorrow against the stoics of his day.[4] While the Stoics maintained that the truly wise could control their passions so completely that they would not experience sorrow at all, Augustine argued that sorrow was a fitting response to brokenness and even a virtue:

> *Sorrow... which the Stoics would not allow to be represented in the mind of the wise man, is used in a good sense, and especially in our writings. For the apostle praises the Corinthians because they had a godly sorrow... according to sacred Scriptures and sound doctrine, the citizens of the holy city of God, who live according to God in the pilgrimage of this life, both fear and*

> *desire, and grieve and rejoice. And because their love is rightly placed, all these affections of theirs are right.*[5]

Sorrow can, however, also be the product of a poorly directed will: we can grieve things we shouldn't grieve, and that should provoke self-examination and the desire to redirect our longings. His approach would later be adopted by Thomas Aquinas, who would likewise treat sorrow as morally powerful, and to a certain extent something our will can direct.[6]

Augustine and Aquinas both looked to Christ as exemplar for fitting sorrow. In his sorrow over the sins of Jerusalem (Luke 19), over his imminent crucifixion (Mark 14), and over his dead friend Lazarus (John 11), he offers a model of sorrow over sin, death, and suffering:

> *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you put him?" He asked. "Come and see, Lord," they answered. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (John 11:33-36, NRSV)*

1500 years later, liberation theologies would also turn to Christ's sorrow, though not so much as model, but as a sign of his solidarity. Black liberation theologians like Howard Thurman and James Cone would emphasise that Christ sorrows because he comes to us as one of the poor, the suffering, the oppressed.[7] These two approaches – Christ's sorrow as exemplar and Christ's sorrow as solidarity – can direct our grief. We learn *what* we should sorrow over, and *whose* sorrow is echoed at the very heart of God.

As far as we know, Christ did not weep over animal death or barren land. If sorrow can be read as a spiritual or moral condition, is it appropriate to experience it in relation to the

death of the non-human? Theologically speaking, climate grief should involve sorrow over sin and its consequences, not only as a therapeutic coping mechanism but as prayer: naming our grief and the griefs of others, acknowledging our culpability, asking for God's help.

In the Christian tradition, this prayerful grief and anger is called 'lament'. Lament's communal nature also makes its expression useful in teaching each other what is worthy of grief in the eyes of God. *Good* climate grief is not, for example, compatible with a continued desire for wealth accumulation and power, or a narrowed focus on our own anxiety and loss. Expressing climate grief through lament will also teach us to treat the world with fitting humility, our prayer framed by the conviction that we are not gods on a dead planet. We are creatures on a living planet, who have much to repent, much to rejoice in, much to learn.

A theological approach to climate and ecological grief dethrones us: it demands that we examine ourselves honestly, admitting the ways our grief can become nihilistic, self-involved, destructive.

A theological approach to climate and ecological grief dethrones us: it demands that we examine ourselves honestly, admitting the ways our grief can become nihilistic, self-involved, destructive (and the ways we have driven loss ourselves). It demands a humble response, driven by love, rather than belief in our own rightness or power. And it redirects our will: away from our own comforts and towards the flourishing of those whose sorrow was embodied by Christ, the man of sorrows, our teacher.

1 American Psychological Association, "Mental Health and our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications and Guidance", *APA*, March 2017. *https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf*

2 A. Bryant, "What is Climate Grief?", *Climate and Mind*, 25 August 2015. *https://www.climateandmind.org/what-is-climate-grief*

3 In particular, this is a theme found in St Augustine's writings: "Love, then, yearning to have what is loved, is desire; and having and enjoying it, is joy; fleeing what is opposed to it, is fear; and feeling what is opposed to it, when it has befallen it, it is sadness. Now these motions are evil if the love is evil; good if the love is good." Augustine, The City of God, Book 14, Ch 7.

4 Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 14.

5 Ibid. Chapters 8 & 9.

6 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Secundae Partis, Questions 35 & 36.

7 For example, see Howard Thurman, Jesus and the Disinherited (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949); James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

3
The past as hope for the future: returning to ancestral wisdom as an urgent task

Maria A. Andrade V.

"Wisdom is found in the wrinkles of our elders." Angela Porras Velasco

In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its sixth report, confirming what experts have already been warning for many decades: today's climate crisis is largely caused by humans.[1] In fact, an overwhelming amount of evidence shows that human activity has contributed to the unprecedented warming of the atmosphere, the oceans and the earth, leading to the extinction of many species as well as intensifying extreme weather events – making them more frequent, more unpredictable, and more severe.

> **Climate change is just a symptom of a bigger problem: an ideological, economic and political system sustained in the exploitation of many (both human and environmental) for the benefit of a few.**

Ironically, those who suffer most from the effects of climate change are those who have done the least to cause it; this includes countries located in Central and South America, Africa and parts of Asia.[2] According to Oxfam's 2020 report *Confronting carbon inequality*, "the richest 1% of the world's population are responsible for more than twice as much carbon pollution as the 3.1 billion people who made up the poorest half of humanity."[3] So too, the 40% increase in CO_2 in the atmosphere since the industrial revolution is due specifically in part to the exploitation of the colonies.[4]

These facts reveal a poignant reality: environmental, social and historical injustices are deeply connected when it comes to climate change. In other words, climate change

Climate change offers us a beautiful invitation to look back to the past and learn from what the modern world systematically rejected: the wisdom and the spirituality of indigenous communities.

is far from being a new and isolated problem merely related to environmental damage. Rather, it needs to be understood as a complex and historic issue, which is deeply related to inequality but also strongly connected to colonisation and to the neo-colonial systems that perpetuate the exploitation of peoples and the environment. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff puts it simply: "Climate change and social injustice are two faces of the same problem."[5]

From this perspective, climate change is just a symptom of a bigger problem: an ideological, economic and political system sustained in the exploitation of many (both human and environmental) for the benefit of a few. Because the current world's crisis is such a complex issue, the solution is less about planting more trees and developing technology for better recycling, for instance (which are necessary but not enough) and more about making a deep paradigm shift.

This paradigm shift is by no means easy; it requires imagination, courage and a lot of hope, but it also offers us a beautiful invitation to look back to the past and learn from what the modern world systematically rejected: the wisdom and the spirituality of indigenous communities. This is what Portuguese anthropologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls "epistemologies of the South". Santos states: "Saving our planet requires going beyond the Eurocentric frame of reference, recognising the plurality of ways of acquiring knowledge

(which includes scientific knowledge)."[6] Interestingly, indigenous wisdom is much closer to biblical wisdom than commonly thought.

In the following paragraphs, I will highlight four ancestral teachings from the *Kichwa* peoples of Ecuador, where I come from.[7] All four derive from the concept of *sumak kawsay*, which translates as 'good living'. The ethic of *sumak kawsay* nurtures *Kichwa*'s spirituality, which is reflected in many aspects of their daily life: in their way they up bring their children, in their work at the *chakra* (their land), in the ancestral use of sacred plants to heal, and in the way they fight to protect the water springs in *Pachamama* (Mother Earth).

> **If the modern world is founded on rationality, the Kichwa world is founded on relationality.**

The first teaching is around 'relationality', which is foundational to many indigenous communities, including the *Kichwas*. If the modern world is founded on rationality ('I think, therefore, I exist'), the *Kichwa* world is founded on relationality ('I relate, therefore I exist'). In that sense, individuals are not conceived as beings outside of relationships. The principle of relationality is present at the micro level (everyday relationships) as well as at the macro level (time and space), and affects every aspect of life and every type of relationship between humans, with animals and all nature, with things, with transcendence, and with the wider cosmos.

Understanding human beings *as part of* a spider web of equal relationships challenges anthropocentrism – the idea that humans are superior to every other species and that these are only 'resources' to be used – which has led to massive

exploitation and destruction of the wider creation. Therefore, the principle of relationality highlights the unavoidable interdependence and interconnectedness between all beings.

The second valuable teaching is 'common good', which means that an individual cannot enjoy a 'good life' if the rest of the community does not enjoy it. This principle is derived from the principle of relationality and adds the notion of harmony and co-responsibility with one another, including nature. Therefore, an individual's 'good life' should never be achieved to the detriment of someone else, or if it damages harmony within the community or with nature, because all are responsible for others. In the same way, a 'good life' should never be reached through destroying natural resources, because this would harm other beings and put harmony at risk.

The third teaching is derived from the two former teachings and promotes the idea of a life that does not seek to be 'the very best', or 'better' than other people's lives; it is a life that is 'good enough', a 'satisfactory' life. This principle has allowed indigenous communities to coexist with nature without destroying it, because, if they only take what they need, then they do not need to over-exploit, over-produce, over-consume and over-discard. It is a simple yet countercultural principle in the present world.

The fourth teaching is conceiving nature as a privileged setting for God's revelation. In fact, while the modern Western world chooses to see nature as a 'thing', for *Kichwa* people nature is not only alive but also divine, because it carries the divine fingerprints of a divine God. Because God is the creator of each creature in this 'common house', then he is present in the land, the rivers and seas, the mountains and in all the creatures that inhabit them. Therefore, they cannot arrogate,

sell, use, exploit or destroy anything that breathes God's sacred presence. Boff put this beautifully, in relation to the celebration of Mother Earth Day in 2010:

> *This change means a revolution in our way of looking at Planet Earth and of relating to it. It is one thing to say Earth, just like that: it can be bought, sold, scientifically investigated and economically exploited. It is another thing to say 'Mother Earth', because a mother cannot be economically exploited, much less bought or sold. A mother must be loved, cared for, respected and revered. Attributing such values to the Earth, because it is Mother, leads to affirming that it is a subject of dignity and bearer of rights.*[8]

These four ancestral principles from the Ecuadorian *Kichwas* are full of wisdom. They are simple but they represent a huge paradigm shift for the Western world because they are an invitation to challenge objectification of peoples and nature, individualism, accumulation and the idea of a limitless world. For many indigenous cultures, the world is living a crisis of 'dis-coexistence' with humans, with nature, with the divine.

Many Christians would use the concept of 'broken relationships' to explain the same crisis, and would recall Colossians 1 to emphasise the 'cosmic' aspect of the relationship brought in Christ.

In the same way, none of the teachings presented above are far removed from biblical texts. The common good is reflected in Jesus' commandment to care for self and the others (Matthew 22:36–40) as well as forming a significant pillar of Catholic Social Teaching.[9] The 'good enough' ethic is similar to Yahweh's provision of the manna and quail in Exodus 16. Finally, the conception of nature as 'subject' of God's revelation is also present in the biblical worldview, in Leviticus 25 when

Yahweh commands the resting of the land during the Sabbath year; in the Psalms (19, 89); and even in Matthew 6, when Jesus points to it as a discipleship model and paradigm of the kingdom.

In the face of the current crisis, indigenous ancestral wisdom brings hope as it offers to the world an alternative paradigm to the current ideological, economic and political system. It is an invitation to return to a holistic spirituality that transcends God and self, and embraces other humans as well as the wider creation.

1 IPCC, "AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis", 9 August 2021. *www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/*

2 Hannah Ritchie, "Who has contributed most to global CO2 emissions?", *Our World in Data*, 2019. *https://ourworldindata.org/contributed-most-global-co2*

3 Oxfam, "Confronting carbon inequality: Putting climate justice at the heart of the COVID-19 recovery: Oxfam Media Briefing", 21 September 2020. Available at: *https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621052/mb-confronting-carbon-inequality-210920-en.pdf*

4 Joanna Haigh, "A brief history of the Earth's CO2", BBC, 19 October 2017. *www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-41671770*

5 Movilización Global por la Desinversión "Crisis climática e injusticia social: dos facetas del mismo problema", 18 April 2017. *https://es.globaldivestmentmobilisation.org/crisis-climatica-e-injusticia-social-dos-facetas-del-mismo-problema/*

6 Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *La cruel pedagogía del virus* (CLACSO, 2020). Available at: *www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/la_cruel_pedagogia_del_virus_de_sousa_santos_clacso.pdf*

7 Nicholas Limerick, "No es lo mismo quiche que kichwa", GK, 28 July 2014. *https://gk.city/2014/07/28/no-es-lo-mismo-quichua-que-kichwa/*

8 Leonardo Boff, "La Madre Tierra, sujeto de dignidad y de derechos", *Polo Democratico Alternativo*, October 2012. *www.polodemocratico.net/la-madre-tierra-sujeto-de-dignidad-y-de-derechos/*

9 The Common Good is an integral part of Catholic Social Teaching, and an idea upon which much of CST rests. It is defined by Pope John XXIII in *Gaudium Et Spes*, a key document from the Second Vatican Council, as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily", and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as "rights, wellbeing, and peace". Thus, Catholic Social Teaching covers spiritual development but also economic, personal, and political life, with a focus on the dignity of humanity and the right of all to share in the bounty of creation in the light of God's gifts. See Pope John XXIII, "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*", *Vatican*, 7 May 1965. *https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html*; Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, The common good and the Catholic Church's social teaching (1996). Available at: *https://cbcew.org.uk/plain/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2018/11/common-good-1996.pdf* "The Common Good", 3.1.2, The Catechism of the Catholic Church. Available at: *https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/__P6K.HTM*

4
It will take a "spiritually great" West to address the climate crisis

Ben Ryan

Environmental policy is exactly the sort of issue our Western political leaders are singularly ill-equipped to deal with. To make the sort of progress that scientists warn is necessary will demand legislating for radical lifestyle changes and long-term, expensive policies and projects – including costly and disruptive changes to infrastructure and industry that may never see any economic or practical benefit. The opposite, in other words, to what short-term electoral cycles encourage.

To this unpromising cocktail, we can add that major international agreements of the kind necessary (and pursued at COP26) require multilateral co-operation and states acting in concert rather than competition. This has rarely seemed a more remote prospect. Absolute sovereignty and political isolation are more in vogue than they have been in decades. It is difficult to see how the chairing UK government representative at COP could insist on multilateral co-operation for a global common good with a straight face while simultaneously running a coach and horses through the 1951 Refugee Convention – to name just one current example among many.[1]

It was a rare humanising moment to see Alok Sharma, the British politician and COP26 President, break down in tears as he was forced to explain the last minute watering down of the Glasgow Pact. By the next day he was back on message and the press spin was that this was a great step forwards. In the moment, though, the truth was clear: China and India balked at the draft agreement and effectively vetoed all but a diluted version, and states acting in concert compromised dramatically when it came down to the rub.

Yet still, even aside from this political context, the really depressing question is whether we have the intellectual and ethical capacity to respond to what is unfolding.

The big moral picture seems obvious enough: it would be nice to leave more than a smoking cinder behind for our grandchildren to live on once we are gone. The specifics, however, are difficult. For example, what costs should be borne by what generations and what states, and with what compensation for their development? Can refugee law be widened to environmental displacement? These questions are as much ethical as economic or scientific.

Even aside from this political context, the really depressing question is whether we have the intellectual and ethical capacity to respond to what is unfolding.

The problems are related: politicians struggle to deal with such questions not only because of electoral concerns, but because there is a lack of a genuine shared ethical framework to hold them to account or to give them the intellectual resources to shape a vision.

This provides a stark and depressing point of comparison to the brief heyday of genuinely effective multilateral internationalism with an ethical vision in the immediate post-war period. Perhaps it takes true existential crises like mass destruction or the Holocaust truly to shake up the world order; a sort of Newtonian moral response to what had been wrought before.

The post-war period saw genuine and radical innovation, as states voluntarily sacrificed their sovereignty, and the ability to militarize independently for the sake of peace and

prosperity, in the early European project. It was the same era that saw international recognition and codification of the concepts of genocide and crimes against humanity: a shared international legal commitment to the idea that some values are so universal and fundamental that they must override even the principle of national sovereignty. The 1951 Refugee Convention was an international recognition of the need to protect those whose humanity was at threat from the actions of states.

It is not a coincidence these agreements came after the war. It is also not a coincidence that they were each in different ways underpinned by universalist ethical models, particularly (though not quite exclusively) Christianity.

The early European project and these other new international models have been called by the academic Scott Thomas "an act of theopolitical imagination".[2] Though not limited to any one religion or tradition, such models all inhabited an ethical scheme shaped and propelled by Christian theology.[3] They provided an intellectual, not merely religious, framework to explain, justify and create a new universalist and multilateral means of politics for a global common good.

The intellectual framework is necessary – but also, more than that, a fundamental courage and belief in the possibility of change. It is interesting to recall Winston Churchill's view of what would be necessary to rebuild Europe after the Second World War:

> *We must build a United States of Europe. In this way only will hundreds of millions of toilers be able to regain the simple joys and hopes which make life worth living. The process is simple. All that is needed is the resolve of hundreds of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong and gain as their*

reward blessing instead of cursing... There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany.[4]

We need a revival – a new global commitment – and to do so will need a "spiritually great" effort.

That was a model and a context for a different age, but in many ways we are in the same place today. We need a revival – a new global commitment – and to do so will need a "spiritually great" effort. We do not just need the vision and ethics, but the belief to propel them into concrete action.

There is a symmetry of sorts in that the Papacy is seeking to provide some of the intellectual framing for this new age. Few Church documents have received as wide or largely positive reception as the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.[5] There, Pope Francis reminds us that "We have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

It also calls for a note of hope: "All is not lost. Human beings... are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start... and [embarking] on new paths to authentic freedom."

In the post-war period, a relatively small but determined group of politicians responded explicitly to the calls of papal encyclicals written decades prior as a model for a new settlement. We need to hope – and to press – that history might repeat itself, even as the chances seem thoroughly unpromising.

1 UNHCR, "UNHCR deeply concerned at discriminatory two-tier UK asylum plans, urges rethink", 10 May 2021. *https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/press/2021/5/6097bce14/unhcr-deeply-concerned-at-discriminatory-two-tier-uk-asylum-plans-urges.html*

2 Scott Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 167.

3 Ben Ryan, *A soul for the union* (London: Theos, 2020). Available at: *https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/A%20soul%20for%20the%20union%2006%20web%20revised%201.pdf*

4 Winston Churchill, "Mr Winston Churchill speaking in Zurich, I9th September 1946", *The Churchill Society*. *http://www.churchill-society-london.org.uk/astonish.html*

5 Pope Francis, "Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*' of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for Our Common Home", *Vatican*, 24 May 2015. *https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html*

5
Motivating and mobilising: the role of the Bible in the climate crisis

Clark Buys

The Bible has been read, interpreted and applied in ways that have caused all sorts of atrocities and grievous injustices that have stained human history. From the Doctrine of Discovery in the fifteenth century,[1] to the theological underpinnings of South African apartheid,[2] it has been used to craft systems and support structures that have caused pain, suffering and injustice.

As a Christian, this grieves me. And I believe it grieves the God of the Bible.

As the world grapples increasingly with the global climate crisis, searching for solutions that would lead to (miraculous) healing and restoration, I can understand why many people might be cautious of bringing the Bible into the conversation. I can sympathise with those advocating for the pages of Scripture to be confined behind church walls to an innocuous Sunday hour.

> **We need sources of motivation that would spark widespread action. Read and interpreted well, the Bible has a deep well of ideas that can produce the needed motivation to serve and care for the environment.**

What could the Bible possibly offer that would help us out of this catastrophe?

Leaving aside all the ways in which the Bible has also been a source of just and virtuous activity (and even leaving aside the fact that, as previous Theos research has suggested, Christianity is by its nature a public religion) I can think of two pertinent reasons to bring the Bible into today's climate crisis conversations.[3]

First, in facing the climate crisis, we need ever more people to care about the problem that we face, and the Bible can play a role in establishing that motivation. We need millions more people around the world putting pressure on politicians, mobilising communities and adjusting lifestyles. We need sources of motivation that would spark widespread action. Read and interpreted well, the Bible has a deep well of ideas that can produce the needed motivation to serve and care for the environment.

For example, the Bible begins by presenting God as a Creator who has created a good world that he cares for. In the Bible, creation has inherent value and worth beyond its usefulness to humanity.[4] And so, as Christians, we act like our God (that is, we "image" or reflect God) as we care for wider creation.[5]

There is, of course, the well-known God-given mandate to humanity to "have dominion over" wider creation (Genesis 1:26 and 28). While this has often been misinterpreted and applied abusively, scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew term used here (*radah*) is, in context, a neutral term, without the negative modern connotations of brute force, violent power-over, and exploitation. Biblical scholars like Walter Brueggemann have argued that 'stewardship' is a more appropriate way of understanding *radah* in Genesis 1 – and while this term is limited and imperfect in describing the mandate here, it helpfully emphasises two important things. Namely, human beings have a delegated participation in God's caring rule over creation; and humanity is *accountable to God* for how we handle and treat wider creation which is ultimately 'owned' by God.[6]

Secondly, there are all sorts of biblical ideas and motifs that could serve as catalytic sparks for pro-environmental behaviour.

But how effective is this content in shaping behaviour? Do religious settings offer any particular benefit in terms of mobilising people in response to the climate crisis?

I am currently working with some brilliant academics at the University of Nottingham exploring how religious settings (for example, church gatherings and small-group discussions) can help to bring about behavioural change that will help the environment. The research is looking at the impact on individuals who have read and studied Ruth Valerio's popular ecotheology book, *Saying Yes To Life*, together.[7] The research is ongoing, but the results so far have yielded two interesting findings.

Firstly, it suggests that engaging reflectively around biblical theology of creation care can indeed result in positive behaviour change. In the study, there was an activation of *latent* beliefs. Discussing environmental issues theologically, in religious settings, is able to tap into deeper, existing beliefs and stimulate pro-environmental behaviour change. As a simple example, a person might be more motivated to do their recycling when they see that act (reframed) as an act of worship of, and love for, God.

I was also excited to see the results indicate that these theological reflections were effective in *sustaining* behavioural change. Caring for creation can be challenging and tiring, whether it is campaigning for climate policy change or making sacrificial lifestyle changes in our personal lives. As we respond to the climate crisis, what we need is not flash-in-the-pan mobilisation for a moment, but sustained, enduring action into

the future. The research indicates theological reflection can help sustain people seeking to care for creation over the long haul.

I hope and pray that societies will acknowledge the role of religious settings in cultivating pro-environmental attitudes and actions. If we respect the Bible enough to study and apply it well – in a way that honours the story and, indeed, the God of the Bible – we will find a deep wealth of ideas that can serve to stimulate, initiate, and sustain behaviour that is desperately needed in our hour of global crisis.

1 The "Doctrine of Discovery" was first outlined in the 1455 papal bull Romanus Pontifex, and is the principle that European colonialists in the early modern period could be seen to "discover" – and therefore exert rights of conquest over – lands inhabited only by "unconverted" (that is, non-Christian) peoples in Africa, Asia and the Americas. The 2010 findings of a United Nations Special Rapporteur concluded that "the Doctrine of Discovery has been institutionalised in law and policy, on national and international levels, and lies at the root of the violations of indigenous peoples' human rights, both individual and collective". Moreover, the find that since Christian terminology has been at the heart of the Doctrine's expression from the start, "the Doctrine of Discovery is more accurately termed the Doctrine of Christian Discovery." Tonya Gonnella Frichner, "Preliminary study of the impact on indigenous peoples of the international legal construct known as the Doctrine of Discovery", *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*, 4 February 2010. *https://undocs.org/E/C.19/2010/13*

2 Robert Vosloo, "The Bible and the justification of apartheid in Reformed circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some historical hermeneutical and theological remarks", in *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, 2 (2016), pp. 195-215. Available at: *http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/stj/v1n2/11.pdf*; Piet Naude, "From Pluralism to Ideology: the Roots of Apartheid Theology in Abraham Kuyper, Gustav Warneck and Theological Pietism", in *Scriptura* 88 (2005), pp. 161-173. Available at: *https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.834.6976&rep=rep1&type=pdf*

3 See Nick Spencer, *Neither Private nor Privileged* (London: Theos, 2008). Available at: *https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/NPNP.pdf*

4 Genesis 1.1-25, Genesis 2.17, Colossians 1.16, Psalm 24.

5 Genesis 1.26-27.

6 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A commentary for teaching and preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 32; c.f. Kiara Jorgenson and Alan G. Padgett (eds.), *Ecotheology, A Christian Conversation* (Grand Rapids: W. B Eerdmans Publishing, 2020), pp. 1-14.

7 Ruth Valerio, *Saying Yes to Life* (London: SPCK, 2019).

6
In search of an alternative view

David Nussbaum

Promotions for the recent BBC Earth series *A Perfect Planet*, narrated by David Attenborough, say: "this stunning series reveals how perfectly our planet is set up to nurture life".[1] The final episode, entitled "Humans", explains how the behaviour of our species is impacting the rest of the natural world. Climate change is one of the principal impacts – and, as well as threatening human life as we know it, it is also a serious threat to the survival of many other species across the planet.

Against the backdrop of this threat, alternative ways of looking at (seemingly intractable) problems are needed more than ever.

One of these alternative ways of looking is through a theological lens. Around a decade ago, while I was Chief Executive of WWF-UK, I met with the Energy Minister in the (then) Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). We discussed some aspects of Government energy policy, including the need to stop using coal as quickly as possible because of its high CO_2 emissions.

Towards the end of the meeting, out of the blue, the minister asked me whether I believed in God (perhaps he'd noticed from his briefing papers that I had studied theology). I said that I did, and that I wondered what God thought about climate change, and our use of fossil fuels which was contributing to it. I suggested that perhaps God saw it this way: he arranged for the earth to have some coal and oil easily accessible, so that we could get the industrial revolution going – with all the benefits that brought – but ensured that most of the rest was buried deep down where it was difficult, dangerous and expensive to get at. In contrast, he had ensured that sources of energy from the sun in the form of solar, wind

and wave energy (I did not mention hydro, biomass, tides or geothermal at the time) were staring us in the face.

So maybe God was rather puzzled as to why, especially now we knew about climate change, we had not taken the hint to use these easily accessible and safer sources of renewable energy.

Theology does not often feature in our policy discussions, but it has been employed as a means of reflecting deeply on our relationship with creation for a very long time.

The minister thought for a moment, and then responded that this was the first time anyone had given him a theological perspective on energy policy!

Perhaps theology does not often feature in our policy discussions, but it has been employed as a means of reflecting deeply on our relationship with creation for a very long time. For example, the story of Noah and the Ark is a familiar narrative to many: Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others. Whatever else we may learn from the story, it illustrates God's concern about the variety of species on earth – what we now call 'biodiversity'. This is consistent with the creation narrative in Genesis 1.24, where God created all the creatures "according to their kinds". In other words, he brought into being the different species of plants and animals. And a few chapters later, we learn from the instructions given to Noah that it mattered to God that this diversity of creatures should be maintained.

As Sir Ghillean Prance, former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, put it:

> *As a botanist, I am working with God's creation. All around me I see that what humankind is doing to the planet is motivated by greed. ... The church at large, and I as an individual Christian, should be a strong voice in defence of creation, or 'the environment' as some people call it.*

Of course, Christians have been (and continue to be) as complicit as others, especially in the West, in the current climate crisis. Yet the deepest sources of the Christian tradition contain valuable resources for understanding our human responsibility to care for God's creation – the world, and everything in it. As James Jones, the former Bishop of Liverpool, says,

> *If the Church wishes to find a common agenda with young people who are passionate about the future of the planet, it needs to recover to its theology the biblical vision and moral imperative of caring for the environment.*

What is this biblical vision?

If we used the Bible to discern God's values, one of them would surely be *justice*. Climate change is also a question of justice: it may affect all humans, but its impacts are unevenly spread. Those who already benefit from resources and technology are generally less impacted than others, and those societies which have the highest historic emissions of CO_2 per capita – such as the UK – are often those less affected by climate change, or more able to adapt to its impacts, or both.

If we used the Bible to discern God's values, one of them would surely be justice.

Alongside justice, many of the psalms, and of both traditional and contemporary Christian hymns and songs, *celebrate* creation – the world which God called into being. This musical celebration of the natural world should spur us on to stop and reverse the harm that we are causing to it by changing the climate.

Christians look forward to the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:17, when God will renew everything, including the earth (Revelation 21). But in the meantime, as well as acting themselves, Christians can urge all humanity to fulfil the creation mandate given in Genesis 1:26: to be God's caretakers of his wonderful creation, and the incredible diversity of life on earth.

1 David Attenborough, "A Perfect Planet" (film), *BBC*, 2021. *https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p08xc2lh/a-perfect-planet*

7
Realising connectedness: a new lens for looking at climate change

Rachel Lampard

In 2020, just as the pandemic hit, the Methodist Church in Britain set up a project spurred on by the (then upcoming) COP26 Conference in Glasgow.

The Church funded six young people from Britain, Fiji, Italy, Uruguay, and Zambia to create and lead a "Climate Justice for All" campaign amongst churches in the global Methodist family (which numbers about 70 million people).[1] The campaign has also drawn in volunteers from countries as far apart as India, Russia, the USA, and Argentina. It was built on the pillars of listening to the experiences of people in other countries, committing to action, and calling on the governments attending the COP26 conference to aim for climate justice.

This project was deliberately not centred on British experience, but rather was rooted in the transformative power of learning from others.

The campaign has shared stories of climate change and the actions being taken by churches in countries around the world.

The climate crisis in the island nations of the Pacific, for example, is urgent and existential. In Fiji, parts of the country's main island will disappear because of rising sea levels. People living in 45 coastal villages are in line to be relocated as their villages are lost to the sea; some communities have already been moved. The acidification of the sea is affecting the livelihood of those who farm the sea. Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama warned of an "almost constant level of threat from these extreme weather events" after repeated cyclones hit the country earlier this year.[2] Churches in Fiji are providing practical and pastoral support to relocated communities.

Whilst simply hearing these experiences alone may give urgency to act, I wonder whether listening more deeply to their motivations – the way that they frame their beliefs – might also be of help to those of us in the Global North to reframe our own understanding.

The Pacific Islands are predominantly Christian, and Fiji primarily is Methodist. I cannot presume to speak for Pacific islanders, but there is strong connection – integration even – of Christian belief and indigenous culture and spirituality.

As someone raised in northern European political and religious traditions, my instinct is often to perceive things in terms of difference; to sort into binary conditions, opposing parties, good and evil, heaven and earth, humans and nature. I do not believe that this binary approach is one we should accept as biblical, Christian, or indeed healthy; it has been at the root of much division and exploitation over the centuries. There is, therefore, much to learn from the Pacific Island spirituality of 'relationality', which weaves together ideals and experiences of connectedness, reciprocity and relationships.

To northern European eyes, the sea in a changing climate is a threat to islanders who face rising sea levels, acidification, storm tides. The sea also isolates tiny Pacific communities, who are often represented on the edges of maps, as spots in a vast sea of blue. Yet for Pacific communities, oceans speak of connectedness. They see themselves instead as "large island nations", part of the Liquid Continent. Instead of dividing communities, the sea is the thing that joins them together, that enables trade, travel and exchange. The ocean connects rather than divides.

The sea itself is indivisible from the land. "No sky without the ocean, no land without the sea... no me without you,"

according to one poet.[3] To ensure the connectedness of the child to their motherland in the local tradition, the child's umbilical cord is buried with the child's totem plant to signify that the child's identity is rooted in the land and that wherever they travel they will always return home. Facing the prospect of having to relocate from villages due to rising sea levels is not just an economic challenge or and emotional upheaval. It is also a spiritual trauma, as people are wrenched away from places where generations of their family have lived for thousands of years.

This connectedness to sea and land is also a connectedness to people. To those who have gone before, those around and those yet to come. Revd. James Bhagwan of the Pacific Council of Churches says:

> *We recognize from our indigenous spirituality, culture and Christian faith that our identity, our value is not based on possession, but on relationship and holistic well-being. In such a community, life is meaningful, valued and celebrated.*[4]

This deep and historic sense of connectedness of creation and community is rooted in and expressed through both biblical texts and indigenous heritage.

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The Global North could reflect on how we might learn from a reframing of our own theology and politics around this paradigm of connectedness. Yet we need also to recognise the damage that our colonial history has done (and is doing) to countries in the Pacific. Reefs are over-fished and plastic debris is washed up

on shores. Bhagwan talks about how colonialism disconnected communities, imposing exploitative hierarchies, and has resulted in disconnected and destructive "throwaway" economics. Disconnection from creation, from communities, and from the Creator.

Can a realisation of disconnectedness lead to a change in behaviours?

The Pacific Theological College, the Pacific Conference of Churches, and Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture have proposed a new framework for ecological development, envisaged in terms of *Reweaving the Ecological Mat*.[5] This "reweaving" needs to include a moment of realisation, of seeing "where we ought to be", of repentance. The first step towards a change of heart and practice is confessing our complicity in the sinful structures that have caused the problem. The Churches call for reconnection, but through an approach that may be difficult to those of us from the Global North. Revd. Dr Upolu Vaai says we must

> *acknowledge that we humans are not at the centre of the Pacific ecological Aiga [family]. And by de-centring ourselves, we may realize that salvation is also about recovery from the addiction to extraction, from the selfish pull of consumerism, and from the digestive rulers and rules of the market-driven empire."*[6]

Climate change cannot be limited to a single country, yet many countries continue to act defensively, emphasising their economic needs. The target to provide $100bn of climate finance a year by 2020 was missed,[7] and Oxfam has estimated that 40% of the finance provided has been at market-rate loans rather than grants.[8]

What might it look like if we reframed our conversations about climate change through a lens of connection?

What might it look like if we reframed our conversations about climate change through a lens of connection? If we truly 'decentred' ourselves, as humans, from the debate, but saw ourselves as part – a beautiful, essential part, but one part – of an abundant, interconnected creation? What economic models would we seek if we delighted in this plentitude, rather than relying on scarcity?

I find these questions challenging on an individual level. How much more is that the case for countries following their attendance at the COP26 conference? We must be prompted into action by the experiences of island states in the Pacific for whom climate change is an existential reality. Yet we should also humbly seek inspiration and wisdom from their experience of total connectedness and, as a result, reframe the questions that we ask of ourselves and our governments.

With thanks to Iemaima Vaai, Climate Justice 4 All worker, Fiji.

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3 Institute for Mission and Research, "Reweaving the Ecological Mat" (film), *Facebook*, 9 August 2021. *https://fb.watch/9jbI5QyWWo/*

4 Original in Italian: "riconosciamo dalla nostra spiritualità indigena, dalla cultura e dalla fede Cristiana che la nostra identità, il nostro valore non è basato sul possesso, ma sulla relazione e sul benessere olistico". From: Metodisti.it, "28 febbraio – rifiuti e cambiamento climatico – Obiettivo 12: garantire modelli sostenibili di produzione e consume", February 2021. *http://www.metodisti.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Quaresima_ProgettoCOP26_28febbraio_rifiuti.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1nCQsLqtRu5ky5mxdvdcPkaHqbtVkQJrGVA0jJrCNb3ZsWRa_b8VpsUPQ*

5 Cliff Bird, Arnie Saiki, and Meretui Ratunabuabua, *Reweaving the Ecological Mat: Toward an Ecological Framework for Development* (Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College, 2020).

6 Ibid. xii.

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8
COP26 as a ritual space

Alastair McIntosh

To have COP26 coming to Glasgow was astonishing for those of us who live here. For me personally, the proximity was additionally provocative because the summit was hosted just a mile away from where I live and wrote my latest book, *Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being*.[1] In advance of the conference, I saw waste ground being manicured in our area. Letterboxes were washed. And as I began to draft this reflection, two massive Chinook military helicopters flew low right past my window. The last time I saw those was in 2005, during rehearsals for the G8 summit hosted in Scotland. You could say that they left a sense that 'something's in the air'.

But what was that something, and where might it land us?

A "demanding common task"

I can only see from my window on reality, and I am involved with several local groups within about a mile of where COP26 took place. The Centre for Human Ecology put on events that ranged from the science of climate change, to the theology, to celebration of the arts that give resilience. At the Quaker Meeting house, my wife and I offered training courses in "Meetings for Clearness" for climate activists, this being a Quaker discernment process to help find deeper calling and meaning in life.[2] Community Land Scotland mounted events that explored local people's indigenous responses to land connection and protection in the face of climate change. And the GalGael Trust, just round the corner from the COP campus, served as a hub for indigenous peoples from around the world, melding their indigenous traditions with those served up by Scottish pipers, bards, singers and fire-makers.[3]

There was a Church of Scotland minister here in Govan in the 1930s, George MacLeod. His response to the Great

Depression was to spearhead the rebuilding of Iona Abbey and start the Iona Community. His vision was to open out a future for the Christian faith that was grounded in the life experience of poor and marginalised people. One of his best-known sayings is that "only a demanding common cause builds community."[4]

As the first Green Party member of the House of Lords, he would most certainly have seen the relevance of this saying to climate change. Now, more than ever, our "demanding common task" is to reconnect with one another and to give the Earth space and time to heal. But that requires human depth – and so our response to climate change must be not just about politics, economics, and technology, but about our human being-ness. Our spirituality.

"

Now, more than ever, our "demanding common task" is to reconnect with one another and to give the Earth space and time to heal. But that requires human depth.

After all, COP26 revolved around conventional political, economic, and technological responses to climate change, but it also demonstrated the inadequacy of these on their own. It leaves us in a position where the nations of the world have committed merely to "phase down" burning coal, and for the first time to naming "fossil fuels" as the global warming culprit. But really! Is that all? We must press deeper.

A spiritual calling

More than anything, we must consider what drives consumerism, understood as consumption in excess of what is needed for a dignified sufficiency of life. That depth of insight – and potential action – becomes a psychological and then a spiritual calling.

For many, to posit a spiritual ground of being is unreal. But what if the spiritual is valid? What if to see the world spiritually is the opening of the way that otherwise appears blocked? If a metaphysical reality – a reality beyond or behind ordinary reality – exists, we would be remiss to overlook the revelations it might hold in the face of such a great challenge. And if there is that 'meta' behind the 'physical', how might we begin to see it?

More than anything, we must consider what drives consumerism, understood as consumption in excess of what is needed for a dignified sufficiency of life... Many spiritual traditions concur that truth is central to this process.

Spirituality concerns the inner life – the roots of life, love and consciousness, which are interconnected. These roots make us "members of one another" at the deepest level, as branches on the vine of life.[5]

Many spiritual traditions concur that *truth* is central to this process. "The truth will set you free" says the Gospel.[6] Gandhi spoke of *satyagraha as* "truth force", and that, as the power to change the world non-violently. *Satya* in Sanskrit means both truth and reality. Therefore, explained Gandhi, if we are not standing on "the bedrock of *satya*" we will be in *asatya* – without truth – and therefore unreality.[7] The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (an Upanishad dating back to the earliest parts of the first millennium BCE) speaks about the *dharma* – the laying out and opening of the way that leads to life – and states that *dharma* and *satya* are the same.[8] And let it not escape our notice that when Hindu-Buddhist scholars try to translate *dharma* into English, the word they often choose is "righteousness".

To me, the implications of this are very profound. We will all see truth from different angles, but constantly seeking it (and perhaps testing it with such processes as Quaker Meetings for Clearness or other discernment methodologies such as the Jesuits teach) can be a hugely powerful process. Perhaps the most striking landmark of COP26 is that nobody serious is now questioning climate change and that it is primarily human caused. That is the work of truth. And the power of truth, as Jesus saw, is that it walks hand in hand with the way and the life. Or as Gandhi saw, it is a "force" by which the world can change non-violently.

This points to an opening of the way for people and organisations of faith. It invites us to explore and teach about what is true and where we are in denial; about consumerism, and the idolatry of what it means to try and fill our inner emptiness in ways the market sells to us. It invites us to take a new look – with a new heart – at such practices as prayer, meditation, retreats and pilgrimages, and to relate these things to the many factors that drive climate change. It invites us to consider what is demanded, individually and collectively, from us.

COP26 as ritual space

This sounds like a tall order, and it is. But I've noticed that when large events are well held, within a simple framework, people *can* experience a widening of their worldview. Such events create a cyclical rhythm of departure, initiation and return, if I might borrow from the mythologist Joseph Campbell's schema. In *departure*, we set out (perhaps unwittingly) on a journey of discovery. Through *initiation,* we hit the rapids of life, having to face near-crushing challenges – and, whether we succeed or fail, deepening in the heart. Finally, we *return* to where we started, but this time with new

qualities that help us free up the blocked flows of *life* into our community.

This process is more than just a "contact high" or social buzz. It comes from opening to the ground of being. I have seen it happening at festivals, at outings into nature for several days, at funerals and seasonal celebrations, and even at large conferences when there's just that "something in the air" again.

I was not alone in feeling it happen at the COP: this was what the interaction on the fringes amongst indigenous peoples contributed, and many activists who came to Glasgow experienced this and commented on it.[9]

So too, more than a thousand civil society events took place around Glasgow during the COP that were logged at "Climate Fringe", the events hub of the civil society coalition, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland. Such an aggregation helped to build a sense of ritual space, acting on consciousness with emergent properties that are greater than the individual component parts.

Some sense of this can be gleaned from countless visitor testimonies to the kindness they experienced in Glasgow, to new hope realised, and to changed perceptions of their fellow humankind. The plethora of fringe cultural and learning events saw many testifying to the power of story, love, regeneration and renewed energy. As Kat Jones of Climate Fringe concluded in her blogged appraisal: "I heard more than one person say that Glasgow will never be the same after this moment of collective effort. Glasgow Flourished."[10]

And Coimbra Sirica, a reporter-activist who led a group of indigenous African and Amazonian journalists to examine Scottish land reform in relation to COP 26, reflected: "The story of the Clearances, heard when in Scotland last month, gave me

insight into the global history of the fencing off of commons that Indigenous and local communities still experience. Loved being witness to exchanges between Scottish woodland crofters and Indigenous leaders."[11]

Such openings of inner space, in ways that are anchored to the outer realities of life, are what ritual space can achieve at its best. Ritual unblocks avenues to higher consciousness, to deeper ways of seeing, being, and therefore, to more focussed and hopefully more effective ways of doing.

Most of those that I saw at events in Glasgow were in their 20s and 30s. I delighted to imagine how the experience might shape their still-emergent careers. For example, Sharon Inone was a member of the Solomon Islands delegation. Given my former links with Melanesian countries, she stayed at our home in Govan for the fortnight. She went home renewed in her determination to work for women's equality. The COP, for all its other failings, had given her the chance to meet with people who endorsed the importance of her sense of calling within the wider picture that climate change sits. Who knows where that might lead in years ahead.

To deeper water in the pool of activism

Where might all this leave our future activism?

We should be wary of activist alarmism that exaggerates future scenarios in ways that go far beyond the forecasts of the consensus expert science. Claims like Jem Bendell of Deep Adaptation anticipating the "inevitable" social collapse of most countries because of climate change by 2028.[12] Of Roger Hallam of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and now, Insulate Britain, anticipating six to seven billion dead this century.[13] Or Professor Guy MacPherson, a retired American ecologist's insistence that

human beings will become extinct by 2026.[14] These claims have been roundly discredited.[15]

Alarmism undermines activist integrity and contracts the possibilities of the future. Partly because of this, I think the mass obstructive protest that peaked between 2018 and 2019 is unlikely to repeat itself in the near future. But the remainder of the explanation lies in a wider questioning of what constitutes effective activism in the emerging world. As Micah White, the African American co-founder of Occupy Wall Street already observed in 2016:

> *Activism is at a crossroads. We can stick to the old paradigm, keep protesting in the same ways and hope for the best. Or we can acknowledge the crisis [and] embark on... a spiritual insurrection... a shift away from materialist theories of social change towards a spiritual understanding of revolution.*[16]

White is less clear on what that "spiritual insurrection" might look like. But let me share how I've observed it. Many of us come into activism at the shouty, splashy, shallow end of the pool. Some of us even got thrown in! But, as our commitment and experience grows, and as the social movements around perhaps mature, we get the chance to deepen. To wade out further. To learn to swim. To dive, and even to discover how to breathe underwater.

As an Alice Walker poem puts it, our potential is "to gather blossoms under fire".[17] Our response to climate change needs this deeper grounding if we are to be in it for the long haul and neither burn out nor sell out.

A vision for the future

What, then, might yet be possible for the world? What might be a vision for the future post-COP26? Let me show why

'human being-ness' matters, starting with the prosaic and simplified observation that:

Greenhouse gas emissions = population x consumption

If either side of that equation falls, emissions come down. Some focus on population – and that, too often, with a focus on population in certain countries. However, not least given imbalances in global emissions between different countries, falling population rates won't achieve anything meaningful unless consumption (or the carbon intensity of the production embodied in it) also falls.

Partly, our consumption can be reduced through new technology. Industry talks of "dematerialisation", meaning making more from less; the shift from vinyl to CD to online music is an example. Decarbonising energy is the biggest challenge, and even here, it is hard to do the right thing. Germany chose to get rid of nuclear, but now its carbon footprint is nearly double that of neighbouring France, and the carbon intensitivity of its coal-generated electricity is nine times that of nuclear France.

Neither falling populations nor a falling carbon intensity of material production will do anything unless consumerism (especially in the Global North) is curbed.

Ultimately, however, neither falling populations nor a falling carbon intensity of material production will do anything unless consumerism (especially in the Global North) is curbed. What drives such excess? In *Riders on the Storm*, I have focussed on Four Cs. *Clearance*, of people from communities of place, leading to a loss of connection with both nature and with one another. A resultant *collapse*, of right relationships and inner wholeness. *Consumption* tending to consumerism, to fill the

emptiness. And the antidote? *Community*, which is why this had such powerful traction with COP26's indigenous visitors to Scotland.

Historically and deep within the psyche, the world is ripped by rape and violence. Hope for the future rests in population moving into harmony with carrying capacity, in dematerialising and decarbonising consumption. But there is no hope unless we tackle inner emptiness. At the deepest level, our problems are psychological – and those, opening to the spiritual. It is *being* that must survive, and thrive, in a renewal of that basic call to consciousness.

Climate change forces us to face up to our neglect of human being-ness.

For all their weaknesses, the politics, economics and technological options of COP26 are deeply important. But they must be underwritten by an emergent global spirituality. To me, this is the calling of our times to faith groups.

Climate change forces us to face up to our neglect of human being-ness. That is its *apotheosis*, its revelation. Like Jeremiah as the Babylonians beat down the city gates, let us not allow that revelation go to waste. And what did Jeremiah do? He went out and bought a field. He laid the ground once more, one day, for the desolate lands to be restored (Jeremiah 32). In the words of the prophets as written on subway walls, in tenement halls: "And a new day will dawn for those who stand long/ And the forests will echo with laughter/ Remember laughter?"[18]

1 Alastair McIntosh, *Riders on the Storm: The Climate Crisis and the Survival of Being* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2020).

2 Peter Woodrow, "Clearness for Individual Decision Making", section II of Tova Green, Peter Woodrow, and Fran Peavey, *Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change* (Gabriola Island: New Society, 1994), pp. 53-88, 123-148. Recordings of COP 26 training workshops available at: *https://bit.ly/COP26-Clearness-English1; https://bit.ly/COP26-Clearness-Francais2; and https://bit.ly/COP26-Clearness-English3*.

3 In the indigenous Gaelic language of Scotland and Ireland, gal means the stranger and the gael are the heartland people. The GalGael ethos is that there is a little of each – stranger and local – in most of us these days. The GalGael Trust was featured as a case study in Theos' recent research on faith and social cohesion, commissioned by the Faith and Belief Forum and the British Academy. See Madeleine Pennington, *Cohesive Societies: Faith and Belief* (London: British Academy, 2020), pp. 59-60. Available at: *https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/events/2020/07/17/cohesive-societies-faith-and-belief.*

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5 Romans 12:5; John 15.

6 John 8.32.

7 Gandhi cited in Michael Nagler, *The Nonviolence Handbook* (Oakland: Berrett-Kochler, 2014), p. 10.

8 Valerie Roebuck (trans.), *The Upanishads*, Penguin Classics, London, 2000, p. 22 (1.4.14).

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13 Roger Hallam in "Roger Hallam, Co Founder – Extinction Rebellion: HARDTalk programme", *BBC*, August 2019. *https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0007p33*

14 Guy McPherson, "Extinction Foretold, Extinction Ignored", updated 11 July 2020. *https://guymcpherson.com/extinction_foretold_extinction_ignored/*

15 See for example, Thomas Nicholas, Galen Hall, and Colleen Schmidt, "The faulty science, doomism, and flawed conclusions of Deep Adaptation", *openDemocracy*, 14th July 2020. *https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/faulty-science-doomism-and-flawed-conclusions-deep-adaptation/*

16 Micah White, *The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2016), pp. 241-243.

17 Alice Walker, "While Love is Unfashionable", *Revolutionary Petunias* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 68.

18 Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven" (London: Island, 8 November 1971).

9
The perfect storm hits the last chance saloon

Ian Christie

The decades of accumulating climate science and stuttering policy responses have seen plentiful use of three metaphors.

First, we have the *'wake-up call'*. As the philosopher John Foster has said in his caustic analysis of the lack of adequate political responses to the evidence of climate crisis, if we can keep having wake-up calls that don't wake us up, the global alarm-clock must be set to allow us to 'snooze' our way to disaster.[1]

Second, we are regularly said to be *'in the last-chance saloon'*. As with the 'wake-up call', we have been giving ourselves plenty of 'last chances' in the form of COPs and targets over the past 30 years since the Rio Earth Summit of 1992.

What explains this pattern of feeble political response to mounting evidence of a global deterioration in the stability of our ecological life-support systems and the hospitality of the Earth to industrial civilisation as we have known it? The answers lie in the third of our metaphors: the *'perfect storm'*. This usually refers to an irresistible confluence of forces making for a disaster. In relation to climate inaction, there are three perfect storms to cope with: an ecological one, a political one and an ethical one, all paralysing in their effects. However, the perfect storm metaphor can also have a *positive* meaning: there can be a gathering of forces that prompt *political, moral and economic breakthrough*.

In what follows, I briefly review the nature of the 'perfect storms' that make climate action so difficult at every level, and that have led to the seemingly endless sequence of unanswered 'wake-up calls' and high-level debates in the last-chance saloon. Then I will outline the ways in which we have seen two storms of change that herald breakthroughs for climate

awareness, policymaking and action at all levels. I conclude by arguing that one of the most effective *accelerators of change will be action and awareness-raising by virtuous communities of practice* – among which faith institutions and communities can and should be in the vanguard.

Three kinds of 'perfect storm'

The climate crisis has been documented through a vast effort of reviewing and synthesising scientific evidence and modelling over the past three decades.[2] There is no reasonable doubt left that, unless we keep overall global heating this century to 1.5°C, we run risks of serious disruption of climate, immense damage to human health, wellbeing and prosperity worldwide, and huge loss of wildlife, habitats and capacity to feed the world.[3]

The worst-case scenarios from the IPCC should be avoided, *if* we act on the policy goals already announced by governments and business. Yet even the best-case scenario of 1.5°C heating is a case of damage limitation. The medium-range scenarios of 2-3°C heating are *not* world-ending, but they do point to a depleted, insecure and impoverished future for billions – an outcome we have the knowledge, money and technologies to avoid.[4]

> **In many ways our brains are simply ill-equipped to face up to climate crisis.**

One reason the unfolding climate crisis is proving so hard to cope with is because it involves a 'perfect storm' of complex connections between climate, resource extraction and consumption, land use, biodiversity and industrial systems. This complexity is hard to convey, and can feel paralysing once grasped. In many ways our brains

are simply ill-equipped to face up to climate crisis.[5] Global heating is also a 'threat multiplier', worsening the parallel ecological crises we face – especially the loss of biodiversity and disruption of habitats.[6]

Climate action requires absolute decoupling of our economies from fossil fuels, which have provided the energy base for our industrial civilisation.

That is one kind of 'perfect storm' problem. Another is that global heating is a perfect storm for politics – that is to say, it is hard to imagine a predicament that political systems are less equipped to face, let alone act on.[7] As others in this collection note, the timescales of climate crisis are in many ways entirely out of kilter with those of political and media cycles in democracies. Climate action requires absolute decoupling of our economies from fossil fuels, which have provided the energy base for our industrial civilisation. The resistance of fossil industry incumbents and their determined efforts to buy support in democracies and dictatorships alike are not surprising. Also unsurprising, while deplorable, is the reluctance of politicians to speak openly to citizens about the scale and unwelcome impacts of the changes to come. Where were the addresses to the nation at the start of COP26? The emphasis is invariably on the capacity of 'new technology' to rescue us from climate crisis, and, above all, to avoid the affluent worldwide needing to make any changes in their lifestyles.[8]

The final sense in which climate crisis is a negative 'perfect storm' is the ethical one. In a powerful analysis, the philosopher Stephen Gardiner has used the metaphor to explore the ways in which global heating brings out some

of the worst in us *morally*.[9] Climate crisis, as made clear by contributors to this volume, poses urgent and profound moral challenges to us all, and above all to the affluent. It demands action on the gross injustice that climate impacts hit the poorest first and worst, who have done next to nothing to cause the crisis; it demands action to safeguard the conditions of flourishing for our children and future generations; and it asks us to take responsibility for eliminating the harms our consumption has caused and will cause.[10] However, as Gardiner notes, the complexity and scale of the crisis, and the unwelcome implications for us individually and collectively of taking action, mean there is a temptation of *moral corruption.* Complacency, false witness, unreasonable doubt, hypocrisy. All have been on clear display for decades in the politics of climate change.

These three perfect storms together are the reason why we fail to hear the 'wake-up calls' as we make yet another trip to drink in the last-chance saloon. But there are other storms to consider, and these may yet be the catalyst of the action we need to keep global heating to tolerable limits.

Two storms of change

A storm of pressure from the climate itself and from civil society took place in 2018-21. For millions of people worldwide (in Australia, California and Germany, as well as in the vulnerable poor places of the Earth) climate crisis became present and unignorable, instead of distant and abstract. The witness of Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists had global impact. Their initiatives were swiftly scaled up into new forms of communal action worldwide via school strikes for the climate and XR protests. The widening impacts of extreme weather had political and economic effects that politicians could not credibly ignore. The witness of Thunberg

and XR injected moral urgency and righteous rage into the discourse of climate change.[11]

We can see the changes of policy and attitude – to the extent we have them – at COP26 as the result of a build-up of forces that came together in 2018-21 in a positive perfect storm.

We can see the changes of policy and attitude – to the extent we have them – at COP26 as the result of a build-up of forces that came together in 2018-21 in a positive perfect storm. This comprised an accumulation of evidence and advocacy, and of political and economic pressure, plus something deeper. A sense of apocalypse (the *revelation* of climate change impacts to millions in the rich world). A prophetic call to shame from Thunberg in her speeches to the powerful. And signs of 'conversion' such as UK Premier Boris Johnson's acknowledgement of shame and duty before future generations in a pre-COP26 speech to young people:

> *Your future is being stolen before your eyes, and I saw the protestors earlier on, and frankly you have every right to be angry with those who aren't doing enough to stop it.*[12]

This is not to say that the perfect storm of new communities of protest, evidence and experience of disaster has transformed the attitudes, values and actions of political and business leaders. The forces for delay, self-delusion and wishful thinking remain strong. But something shifted in 2018-21, and the advances made at COP26, inadequate as they still are, bear testimony to that.

The process has also been helped by a perfect storm of *political realism* to go with the moral idealism. This has two manifestations. First, the costs of climate action are looking

ever more attractive when compared with the costs of damage from global heating. Renewable energy is getting cheaper and the risks from fossil fuels more expensive. Second, the risks of fossil dependence have been hammered home by the Ukraine-Russian war. The crisis has made it suddenly possible to frame climate action and mass switching to renewables in the West as an urgent matter of national and collective energy security.

> **The costs of climate action are looking ever more attractive when compared with the costs of damage from global heating.**

Risks ahead in the 2020s

It would be unwise to assume that these positive perfect storms are going to blow us all on to a course of wise, rapid and ethically based climate mitigation and adaptation in the 2020s. The political constraints and risks outlined above all remain – and perhaps above all there is much to fear about the condition of the USA, which needs to be a climate leader for the world, but which has struggled to be effective at federal level.

> **There is much to fear about the condition of the USA, which needs to be a climate leader for the world, but which has struggled to be effective at federal level.**

Most of the US Republican Party (and its backers in the Christian Right and fossil fuel sector) remain adamantly opposed to taking seriously the science of climate crisis, and to any meaningful action by the US federal government.[13] Many US church communities on the political right have been resisters of climate consciousness and action.

This matters because as the world takes some tentative encouragement from COP26, the risk looms of the takeover of the USA in 2022-24 by a Republican Party and its Christian-nationalist backers who will, on all present evidence, reject the entire UN climate process just as Donald Trump did. This would have incalculable consequences for the prospects of climate mitigation efforts in this crucial decade. In the light of that, every effort needs to be made to 'convert' the still-reachable sections of the US Right from denial and disavowal to willingness to act, whether on self-interested grounds or Biblical ones, for the common cause of caring for God's Good Earth.[14]

Communities of protest and practice

There is, then, a tumult of converging 'perfect storms', and the decade ahead will be hard-going worldwide before we can feel any confidence that we will learn to live well with our new climatic predicament and limit the damage. One thing seems clear from the experience of the past three decades of climate science and (in)action: evidence alone is never enough to shift political interests in the right direction. It is the confluence of unignorable protest and advocacy from civil society with messages to connect to people's core values, identities and social norms that has been decisive in what progress has been made.[15]

Clearly we need systemic shifts in energy, food, transport and consumption. That has led some to downplay the importance of individual action for climate mitigation, but in reality system change and action by citizens and communities are closely linked.[16] Systems can be changed by governments and corporations when they feel pressure from a critical mass of citizens and coalitions. Individuals need to amplify their commitments and actions, and gain strength and confidence,

via collective action – through *communities of virtuous practice*, such as we have seen emerge in the School Strikes for the Climate, and such as we see evolving in action and advocacy from faith networks.[17]

The churches and faith institutions of all kinds understand what a community of virtuous practice is: a *congregation*. And it is precisely *congregational pressure from below* – whether from religious or secular bodies or both in partnership – that will play a vital role in bringing more gains. The churches can be part of the positive perfect storm that is gathering strength for climate action.

The churches and faith institutions of all kinds understand what a community of virtuous practice is: a congregation.

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10
The power of investment: beyond faith protests to faith actions

Martin Palmer

For over 35 years, I had the pleasure of being HRH The Duke of Edinburgh's religious advisor on the environment. Together, we convened the first ever meeting of the key faiths and the major environmental organisations. That was in Assisi in 1986. From this has flowed the ever-deepening role of faiths in environmental issues, through the work he pioneered, and through the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) that he and I set up.

When we set up ARC in 1995 we gave it twenty years, on the grounds that if we succeeded in our two aims – help every major faith tradition create faith-based programmes on the environment, and help each major secular environmental and development organisation to see the faiths as key partners – then we should close. Equally, if we had not succeeded, then we were obviously not much good – and should close.

By 2009, the UN had declared that the faith environment movement was the largest civil society programme on the climate crisis in the world.

When the British Government began to fear COP26 might not work (why are we at 26 and planning 27-30? We knew what needed to be done at COP4!) they reached out to us at FaithInvest and WWF's Beliefs and Values programme to ask if we could highlight the role the faiths were already playing, and dramatically increase that through faith long-term plans (called Faith Plans). The reason is that we are the largest civil society stakeholders on the planet.

FaithInvest itself came out of a realisation that Prince Philip and I had. During the period of ARC's life we had undertaken studies which resulted in *The State of Religion Atlas*. This was a first attempt to map what the faiths own, run, influence and believe in action.[1] From this, we found that 64%

of schools in Sub-Saharan Africa are faith-based, and a third of all universities worldwide are faith-based – ditto hospitals and clinics. We also found that faiths own 5% of all commercial forests and 8% of the habitable surface of the planet. We are also one of the largest investment groups, with estimates of the total being between $12 to 14 trillion.

Put bluntly, the faiths are major stakeholders in the planet. We alone as investors could change the norms and values of the investment market towards only investing in sustainable and environmental projects. Through our education networks, and the hundreds of millions in our youth movements, we can help a generation who believe that the world is doomed and there is little they can do.

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By delving back into our wisdom and experiences of bringing our communities through disasters, natural and human, we can help people find a pathway forward. By right use of our resources, through purchasing only ecological products wherever possible, we can be one of the main engines of radical, utterly necessary change. And we can offer not just another model of how to live sustainably – but many such models.

This is because, in our different faiths, we have a diversity of ways of understanding our place on earth.

I am a Christian and my understanding of why we are here is now profoundly shaped by Orthodoxy's position. It is common for many in the West to say we are 'stewards'

of creation – but stewards alone don't necessarily have a relationship with what they manage. They may simply manage. Meanwhile, Orthodoxy says we have four key relationships: the relationship with God (or the Divine, or Greater Power); with our neighbours; with the rest of Creation/Nature; and with ourselves.

Orthodoxy rejects the 'master model' of stewardship and instead says we are called to be the priests of creation. We are here to bring the gifts and worship of all life to the Creator and to be the glorious yet humble channel by which Grace flows to all life on earth. Or to put it even more challengingly, we need to move beyond sin and guilt (so beloved of the wider environmental movement) and instead ask how we as priests can truly be a blessing to and with Creation.

When we dig deep into our traditions, we have to move beyond the comfortable myths of the purpose of creation as being there for us.

I have worked also for many years with non-Abrahamic faiths such as the Shinto of Japan and Daoists of China. Their understanding is best captured in what happened when we brought together faith forest owners from many faiths. The Christian and Muslim forest-owning traditions wanted all faiths to declare their forests as "faith protected forests". The Shinto were appalled. "That's not right. We don't protect the forests. They protect us!" they cried. We are but part of nature – not the rulers, even if we are often the abusers, in this relationship.

When we dig deep into our traditions, we have to move beyond the comfortable myths of the purpose of creation as

being there for us. We are part of creation and feel its pain and joys equally.

That is why at COP26 the major faiths, along with so many other sectors of civil society, moved from protesters to partners. Partners, that is, with other civil society groups such as business, investors, education, philanthropies, BGOs, and so on, to plan how to take on the key responsibility of making the necessary changes of behaviour.

For the faiths, through the programme of Faith Plans, the faiths agreed to realign their assets – investments, land, building, educational and medical institutes, and lifestyles – to be once again a part of nature working with the rest of Creation, not standing apart from nature, pretending we have every right to do whatever we want.[2]

On 4 October, religious leaders launched an appeal to the nation states for COP26. But at the same time they urged each faith to create faith plans so that, as Confucius put it, "We practice what we want to preach and we preach what we are already practicing."

1 Joanne O'Brien and Martin Palmer, *The State of Religion Atlas* (New York, NA: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

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11
What is enough? A reflection following COP26

Claire Foster Gilbert

COP26 was the first test of the Paris Agreement of 2015. We passed. In fact we passed with flying colours – but we know that it is not nearly enough.

The famous Kyoto Protocol of 1997 was an agreement negotiated, painfully and with many compromises, between so-called developed countries only. Complaints abounded that the rest of the world should be in the room. In Paris they were, and all nations were called upon to return every five years with nationally determined contributions, at each subsequent meeting increasing those contributions. And with a year lost to COVID, six years from the Paris Agreement, the nations met in Glasgow and duly offered their contributions. These were astonishingly generous, relative to what had gone before.

So COP26 was a success on its own terms; and it went further. The sum of what nations had to offer was not enough to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees, and so the nations agreed to meet again not every five years, but every year, with increased contributions each time.

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The sum of what nations had to offer was not enough to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees, and so the nations agreed to meet again not every five years, but every year, with increased contributions each time. Still, it is not enough.

Still, it is not enough. It is an extraordinary thing that is happening: all the nations of the world gathering and in conversation, making promises to each other with their finance ministers in the room, meaning what they say. The nations of the world meeting in peace to work out how together they can combat climate change. In peace.

Still, it is not enough. Our pace of change, despite speeding up so dramatically, despite such impressively united efforts, is not nearly fast enough for the physics.What will catapult the human family into a place where what we do *is* enough, where we are living *now* without harming the earth, not just moving too slowly towards such a goal?

Studies have shown that politicians consistently underestimate the level of worry about climate change. But they should be forgiven for thinking that concern for the environment does not win elections. As Simon Kuper recently reflected in the *Financial Times*, Caroline Lucas is the only Green Party MP in France, Italy and Britain put together. This autumn, Greens won a total of two seats in Canada and none in Japan.

Kuper concludes with pessimism that our generation does not want to deal with climate change, not really. "We had other priorities. The rich world has chosen its strategy: withdraw from places that will flood or overheat, build dykes around defensible cities like London, put a fleet in the Med to keep out refugees, and hope that tech miracles will save our grandchildren if not today's Bangladeshis and Iraqis, ideally on the cheap."[1]

What a legacy. What a hateful human family of which to find oneself a member.

But that vile selfishness was not what motivated the human family represented in Glasgow; it is not what I see when I look around me; and it is not what anyone would espouse in public, including politicians. It is as though it is happening *to us*, as a consequence we did not seek and do not want, of living in a trap that we made for ourselves without knowing what we did.

What I see is that the mind of the world has changed. There has been a conversion, we have turned to walk in the right

direction for our own future and the future of the planet. The world's mind no longer needs persuading, that work has been done. But we are still frustratingly trapped in our old ways.

Many years ago, Paul Ricoeur warned of the project of growth without limit, with no goal except more growth. This is our trap: that our economic models rely on growth in order to succeed, which demands not our sufficiency but our greed, our consistent desire for more than enough, stuffing more into ourselves, stripping more from the planet's resources. More growth means death – as some of us burst from over-consumption while others, and the planet, burn and drown and starve. And we know it. Once the model worked, bringing wealth to nations. Now it obviously and emphatically does not.

But like the recent convert who remains bound by old habits, despite knowing with all her heart they are wrong, we cannot seem to throw off our bondage to this misguided way of being in the world. It sticks to us like the sticky cloying oil on which we cannot any more depend. Hard to wash off despite best efforts.

That is how the present time feels to me. We know the old ways will no longer serve but we do not know how to free ourselves from their grip.

I think of that powerful image of Eustace Salt in the Narnia stories, who turned into a dragon and tried to scrape off his scales to find the person he really was, the person God sees and loves, and in the end Aslan, representing Christ, did the scraping, and it was the deepest cleansing and it hurt like hell but Eustace was set free. He himself, without the things he was greedy for, was enough. But Aslan had to release him, and he had to know he needed to be free, and he had to ask Aslan to free him because he could not free himself.

When my hair was falling out from chemotherapy last year, on the principle 'if you're falling, dive', I walked into a barber's shop and asked the kind-faced barber if he would shave my head. He did so with the tenderest most particular gentle care and I watched in the mirror as my loosened locks fell from my head and what I saw emerging was *all right*. She was fine, without her hair which had adorned her but was no longer able to, which she thought she needed in order to look acceptable. She was fine despite being so vulnerably all on show. I felt I was seeing myself as God sees me on that day in that barbershop in a little side street near Guy's Hospital, tended by a beautiful angel whose name is Al. But I had to know my need, know I could not meet it by myself, and ask for help.

The surrender has to come before liberation, the crucifixion before the resurrection, and it is an act of trust, but who is our saviour here? We have to ask for help.

Who is our Aslan, our Al? Who will shave our heads, dig deep to remove our scales, free us from the tyranny of greed? It was only after the dragon scales went that Eustace saw how he could live differently. Only after the manky locks had gone, who loss was traumatising me in prospect, that I saw how I could be without them. The surrender has to come before liberation, the crucifixion before the resurrection, and it is an act of trust, but who is our saviour here?

We have to ask for help. Really ask, really know our need and our helplessness in the face of it. Pray as never before, this year.

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Conclusion

Madeleine Pennington

At the start of COP26, Queen Elizabeth II addressed delegates concerning the task ahead:

> *It is sometimes observed that what leaders do for their people today is government and politics, but what they do for the people of tomorrow – that is statesmanship.*[1]

By this measure, the challenge facing our political leaders at COP26 was to extract themselves from their immediate frame of reference, consider their national interests from a different perspective, and plan with a long view.

This kind of leadership is undeniably vital to address climate breakdown. After all, global heating will affect "the people of tomorrow" like no other. When so much power to affect the prospects of future generations is held by so few in politics, big business and finance, the need for wise leadership and responsible use of power is clearly critical for our climate response.

But as Ben Ryan notes in chapter four, the politics of a short-term electoral cycle discourages such longer vision at every turn. The short-term media cycles and political pressures that slow or undermine action on climate were at work soon after COP26 finished: the Ukraine crisis demonstrated with horrible force the old truism that a week is a long time in politics. The publication of the IPCC's latest report on the ruinous impacts around the world of even the middle-range scenarios for global heating was easy to miss amid the coverage of the war in Ukraine.

Not only do we face this constant mismatch between immediate crisis management and long-range crisis action and planning, but we inhabit a world where celebrity influence drives culture overnight, and where, in a volatile marketplace

of ideas, split-second reactions on Twitter and Facebook tempt us all to equate instant comment – or retaliation – with political argument. In such a world, leaders are formed far more for politics than for *statesmanship* – because in such a world, it is overwhelmingly easy to imagine that what is happening right now and most luridly is what is worthy of our attention. By the same token, the skills and virtues of *citizenship* are corroded in the polluted information ecology of social media and partisan news channels. Twenty-first-century political culture seems primed to select against wise judgement and long-term perspectives from citizens and leaders alike.

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Leaders are formed far more for politics than for statesmanship – because in such a world, it is overwhelmingly easy to imagine that what is happening right now and most luridly is what is worthy of our attention.

As Maria A. Andrade V. notes in chapter three, we also live in a deeply unequal global economy, in which those who suffer most from climate change have done least to cause the problem, and those who are most culpable can do most to protect themselves. For those of us in the Global North especially, it is easy to lament the last-minute dilution of a “phase out” of coal at COP26. But our prosperity has already been built on fossil fuel, and if we cannot take seriously the interests of those who seek the same now, it is no wonder that our strategies are unsuccessful. If we grieve for what has not been achieved, as Hannah Malcolm notes in chapter two, we must do so in solidarity with those whose “sorrow is echoed at the very heart of God”.

It is therefore not only the needs of the “people of tomorrow” which demand our urgent attention, but the needs

of those who are already vulnerable and suffering from the impact of climate breakdown, and those whose aspirations are curtailed by the need for drastic emissions reduction in the present day. The climate question is a crisis of justice – about the unfairness and injustice built into the distribution of power, harms and costs bound up with global heating.

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that COP26 did not yield the clarity of resolve that many hoped for. And now the delegates are back home, where the everyday challenges of political cycles and short-term pressures reassert themselves. As Ian Christie explores in chapter nine, the advances in climate policy we have seen are always at risk, and we can see ominous signs across the world, threatening to derail any further hope of meaningful climate action through the actions of just a few countries – and even just a cluster of individuals. This is a dangerous situation, and poses a sobering challenge for a generation uniquely placed (as we are) to avert the worst effects of climate breakdown.

Yet as critical as political leadership remains – as pertinent as the Queen's words may be – a single gathering could never have offered a silver bullet, just as no single approach (whether political will, individual action, or technological advancement) will provide a solution alone. Statesmanship is not all that is at stake; more is demanded of all of us where leadership is concerned. As Jonathan Rowson observes in chapter one, the deeper problem is that we – all of us – are "stuck", and must therefore become "unstuck".

How to do that? This collection has explored what tools we might need to carve out an alternative path, asking, "What can theology offer the conversation around the climate crisis?" Our contributors have considered all aspects of our current

predicament, from our emotional responses to the investment power of faith groups; from political consensus to cultural damage; from the need for spiritually grounded activism to the difficulty of mobilising population-level change. They do not converge around a single understanding of what theology can offer, but rather showcase the rich potential of theological traditions to inform public conversation (and action) in a variety of ways.

We need to draw on something far more expansive than a merely pragmatic or intellectual change of perspective if we are to form a meaningful response to climate crisis.

At the same time, some common threads do emerge. Above all, it is clear that we need to draw on something far more expansive than a merely pragmatic or intellectual change of perspective if we are to form a meaningful response to climate crisis. We face a predicament that goes far beyond the familiar categories of political and economic life. The climate crisis is a challenge to our ethical sense and our core values: it poses questions about what and who matter to us, fundamentally, and what we are willing to do now in order to bequeath a chance of a civilised future to those who come after us.

It is here that theology has most to offer, for a theological outlook invites us – all of us – to a far deeper shift of our desires and perspectives. That is to say, it offers not only *political* incentives to look forwards, but the assurance that the deepest meaning *really does* lie beyond what is immediate. In this sense, theological worldviews go beyond mere forward planning, even though they are perspectives conceived precisely in terms of generations, centuries, and even millennia.

The theological imagination stretches backwards as well as forwards, and the Bible contains several powerful models for such a task. Today, for example, Moses is remembered as the man uniquely charged with leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt – yet God does not allow Moses himself to enter the Promised Land. Rather, he must only look upon it before he dies; it is Joshua that takes the task forward and guides the Israelites to their new home (Deuteronomy 34). Moses has a God-given role, but he is not required to take forward all parts of God's plan alone. Something more profound is going on, requiring his discipline, obedience, compassion, and a humble understanding of his place in the wider whole.

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The theological imagination stretches backwards as well as forwards, and the Bible contains several powerful models for such a task.

So too, in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit reveals to the “just and devout” man Simeon that “he [will] not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah”. When he sees Jesus as a small child in the Temple, he immediately understands that, by this alone, he has fulfilled his own part in a wider story:

> *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,*
> *you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*
> *For my eyes have seen your salvation...” (Luke 2.29-30)*

These are examples of real leadership – real vision – because they hold what is eternal and what is time-bound together. It was through such an ancient and unfolding perspective that both Moses and Simeon were equipped to understand what was truly urgent in their own context.

This way of perceiving takes account not only the "people of tomorrow", but the gifts of the past, and the cries of the vulnerable in the present day. It is also a vision available to us all, extending beyond politics to the moral responsibility each of us faces. Might it be that, by taking this same view, we are better able not only to hold our leaders to account on the pledges they make, but to discern our *own* role in the fulfilment of those promises (political or otherwise) in which we place our trust?

Beyond short-term politics, and even beyond long-term statesmanship, theology has something truly pressing to say; perhaps this is also how we might hope to become unstuck.

1 Queen Elizabeth II, "The Queen's speech at the COP26 evening reception", *royal.uk*, 1 November 2021. *https://www.royal.uk/queen%E2%80%99s-speech-cop26-evening-reception*

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Madeleine Pennington

Religious London: Faith in a Global City

Paul Bickley and Nathan Mladin

In autumn 2021, the world's political leaders gathered in Glasgow for COP26. The climate crisis has moved up political agendas and into the centre of the public conversation in recent years, and the gathering was described variously as the "last best hope" and the "last chance saloon for the planet". But just as climate change is a political challenge, it also has existential, spiritual and moral elements – made only clearer by (what many saw as) the disappointing outcomes of the conference itself. With this in mind, to mark COP26, Theos asked a range of climate professionals, faith leaders, philosophers, and charity-workers to reflect on the question: "What does theology have to offer the conversation around the climate crisis?" Their answers are gathered in this commemorative collection with a range of further essays authored after the event. Together they demonstrate the rich resources that spirituality can offer this most urgent of contemporary issues.

Madeleine Pennington is Head of Research at Theos, and leads Theos' environmental and economic sustainability programme. She is author of various Theos reports, *Quakers, Christ and the Enlightenment* (OUP, 2021), and *The Christian Quaker* (Brill, 2019).

Ian Christie is Senior Lecturer in the Social Science of Sustainable Development at the University of Surrey, as part of the Centre for Environment and Sustainability. He has written widely on sustainable development and environmental policy for academic institutions, central and local government, public agencies, business, and NGOs and think-tanks. He was researcher and lead author for the Church of England's vision *Church and Earth*. He is a founding member of the Surrey Climate Commission, and is an environmental advisor for the Dioceses of Guildford and Southwark in the Church of England.

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