

Revolting Christians

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Theologies in Action

Kevin Snyman and Lawrence Heath-Moore

Walking the Walk Publications

Manchester



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Global Theologies to Confront the Climate Catastrophe
Kevin Snyman and Lawrence Heath-Moore

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Preface

Kevin Snyman and Lawrence Heath-Moore

About twenty years ago I (Kevin) had one of those dreams – you know the type – they rise up from the very depth of your subconsciousness with such ferocity that they frighten the bejeebes out of you. They're the ones that are impossible to forget. In this dream, 2023 had arrived only to be greeted with fire, chaos, death, and destruction. All was lost. Everyone was running around screaming and in a flat panic. It was the End of the World. I've often wondered in the years leading up to 2023 whether that dream was a premonition of my impending demise. Fast forward to 2023 IRL and although I'm still around, the planet seems to be in the beginnings of its death throes. From environmental scientists to the UN, from climate activists to manic street preachers, almost everyone predicts that awful things are coming our way. Christian theology seems barely able to keep up with what seems pretty much the end of the world brought about by the climate catastrophe.

We felt it was about time we left behind the daydreaming and did something about it.

'Yes, theology's all fine, but what is the church going to DO?'

This was Nicolás Rosenthal's challenge as we presented an idea of holding a global theological consultation that took seriously the looming climate catastrophe. How were Christians to go about *revolting* against the mega-death machine killing our only home and planet?

Nicolás was on a visit to the UK and Europe from Argentina. He is the director of the *Fundación Protestante Hora de Obrar*, the diaconal body of the *Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata*. While many in the church wonder what to do about the looming climate crisis, his organisation is actually engaged in

climate action. It plants trees in the northern part of Argentina while empowering indigenous communities through resilience and climate adaptation training. But as wonderful as that all was, we all realised that none of it was enough.

Nicolás, who by the way helped to shape *The Accra Confession*, challenged us to engage not only in theological reflection but also to inspire and undertake transformative actions that would resonate with the action-reflection cycle inherent to liberation theologies. And so an environmental theological consultation was born as a collaborative event, hosted by *The United Reformed Church*, the *Fundación Protestante Hora de Obrar*, and the *Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture* at Regent's Park College.

Our starting premise was to frame our theologies as intentionally liberationist, anti-racist, post-colonial and anti-Empire. The climate catastrophe, we acknowledged, and the devastation now wreaking havoc on every living systems of the earth are a direct consequence of the depredations of Empire. The only truly 'Jesus-shaped' response (Lawrence's key concern) to climate disaster was to go to the root of the problem, then to resist, subvert, lampoon, expose, and overthrow Empire's domination systems of power, economics, racism, and propaganda.

A call for submissions to the consultation went out in the summer of 2022. We had twenty fabulous responses, and so we went ahead with the consultation in early June 2023. Those contributions are presented as chapters in this publication.

This resource is made freely available as a gift to the church, pretty much as an 'up-your-nose-with-a-rubber-hose' to Empire's economics. Our deep hope is that this book will find, create, fire-up, and equip activists of all theological persuasions, that they in turn would inspired to resist the death-dealing systems of Empire with every fibre of their being. In so doing, perhaps we can all begin to model the actions of the Carpenter Rabbi who fearlessly overthrew the

death-dealing, money-sucker tables of Caesar's ancient Ponzi Scheme.

Kevin Snyman & Lawrence Heath-Moore

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Introduction

What should the church's response be in the face of the almost inconceivable suffering being unleashed on the earth by the climate catastrophe? And given that we are only at the very earliest stages of the looming disaster, why has the church's response been so remarkably anodyne? Yes, it's important to have an Environmental Policy, to encourage recycling, and to sign your congregation up to Eco Church, but these things are hardly revolutionary. Even BP has an Environmental Policy. What actions ought the church to take precisely because it is the church?

We posed the question to Roger Hallam, one of the founders of activist environmental groups *Extinction Rebellion* and *Just Stop Oil*: what should the church be doing? He sat across his tiny bedroom from us, right leg badly broken while a police constraint bracelet choked his left ankle and seemed to be staring up at us like some sign or metaphor of everything we were not doing. After a period of quiet reflection (he is normally fairly garrulous, to be fair) he said, "I think you Christians know what you ought to be doing, but very few of you seem to have the courage to pick up your cross and follow Jesus."

Yes, well: instead of picking up our cross we organised a theological consultation. We Christians do love a good conference, after all, and besides, this one was called 'Revolting Christians'. Aim high, we always say. The hope was to gather as diverse a range of voices as we could muster that might challenge our lethargy, to confront our fear, and to equip the church for transformative climate action. But the question that haunted much of the consultation like the dying echo of a dystopian dream was, "Why has the church's response to the

greatest existential threat to all life on the planet, by and large, been so profoundly inoffensive?”

In his book *The Uninhabitable Earth*, David Wallace-Wells attempts to break through the psychological resistance humans show when confronted with the looming climate catastrophe. Whatever you think you know about the consequences of the climate crisis, ‘it is worse, much worse, than you think,’ he warns.

“It should be no great prize to be right about the end of the world. But humans have told those stories incessantly, across millennia, the lessons shifting with each imagined Armageddon. You’d think that a culture woven through with intimations of apocalypse would know how to receive news of environmental alarm. But instead we have responded to scientists channeling the planet’s cries for mercy as though they were simply crying wolf.”

Where does this resistance to urgent and effective action come from? In 2008 and 2009 (in Rachel Riederer, *The New Yorker*, March 6th 2019) the American Psychological Association identified two key factors keeping people from taking action: one was habit, and the other was lack of control. Ingrained behaviours tend to be deeply resistant to change. Also, people too often believe that their actions are too insignificant to make a difference, so end up doing nothing. But as uncertainty or outright denial of climate change have diminished, they have been replaced by similarly paralysing feelings of panic, anxiety, and resignation, says Riederer.

We realised early on that we had to leverage what Hallam had intimated: the church has as its disposal remarkable theological and practical resources to confront the root causes of the climate crisis. We needed to break through our resistance to change, confess our addition to Empire, shake off our debilitating fear and denialism, and take seriously Jesus’ story about mustard seeds in which even the tiniest act of resistance can be transformative. The climate crisis is the

single most important theological question of our times, and as Wallace-Wells recalls a comment made to him by the writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, “We really can’t let people’s need for hope get in the way of the telling the truth”.

We chose to frame the truth of our response within a theology of what The Council for World Mission (CWM) and others have called Empire or ‘Systems of Domination’. Empire is what the oppressed the Israelites in Egypt. Empire is what Hebrew prophets railed against, whose money tables were overturned by the Cheeky Rabbi from backwater Galilee. These biblical exemplars refused to submit to the destructive forces of political, social, racial, and economic hierarchies that stole, privatised, enslaved, dominated, commodified, rendered scarce, and profited from God’s abundant graces and gifts.

Empire swoops into every nook and cranny of our physical, environmental, sociological, psychological, and spiritual lives to shape abso-bloody-lutely everything into its own image, and so God’s mission always takes place in the context of Empire, says CWM. Recognising, subverting, and Coming Out! of Empire is not simply one way of modelling the Kingdom of God. It is not only one hermeneutical key to understanding God’s mission as expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is the necessary requirement for justice, peace, equity, and genuinely egalitarian Shalom. It is the simple, yet profound, answer to the question of what the church ought to be doing in the face of the looming climate catastrophe.

Empire has been around for 5000 years, but in late modernity tended to manifest itself as colonialist, racist, asset-stripping corporatocracies, protected by sycophantic politicians, powered by the indiscriminate burning of fossil fuels. The church has arguably in much of its 2000 year history acted not so much as the scourge of, but as chaplain to, Empire in the (vain) hope of knocking off its worst edges and make its systems work for good. It thought that perhaps by modelling itself along Empire’s hierarchical structures, and by leveraging

Empire's power and economic systems, it might encourage the system to care for the poor and oppressed. But of course you cannot use Moloch to cast out Moloch. The tools of Empire are designed to extend Empire. They don't overcome it. The result has been that the church has lost its prophetic calling and task to Come Out! of Empire and to resist Babylon with every fibre of its being, like Jesus and the prophets, even to the point of death.

The church ended up incarnating Empire and exacerbated the very worst elements of its life-denying sin. The church can no longer afford to play chaplain to Charlie's Empire. The church must lampoon Empire, resist Empire, defy Empire, and once again risk being crucified by Empire.

God honours even the smallest act of resistance against the destructive forces of Empire. God blesses every 'No!' against temptation to remain passive in the face of injustice and racism and destruction and death. And so what... Even if this entire human experiment soon fizzles out and dies in a whimper and a tear, what is there really to fear? Our hope remains firmly rooted in Christ: Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ among us even now.

Especially now.

The Theological Task

"Philosophers have only sought to understand the world in various ways; the point, however is to change it! (Marx's 11th Thesis on Feuerbach)

For "philosophers, read "theologians". Any theology of climate crisis that does not identify a course of radical action appropriate to the scale and magnitude of the crisis as integral to what discipleship of Jesus means in the face of the climate catastrophe is rendered theologically (as well as practically) meaningless.

That conviction was shared by all our contributors. They take critical issue with those theologies that fail to engage with the magnitude of the crisis or rest content with action that is less radical than the existential threat to global survival demands of us as followers of Jesus.

For example, a dominant theological approach to climate issues emphasises the stewardship of creation. Humans are viewed as caretakers of the Earth, promoting responsible environmental practices. Advocates of this approach see the climate crisis as a call to restore balance and protect the Earth's ecosystems, aligning with their understanding of divine will.

However, the time for which this was a remotely viable response to irreversible climate change – if it ever was – is long past. David Coleman contends that it has, in fact, been a potent contributor to the catastrophe and calls explicitly for an end to a theology of stewardship.

The breadth of geographical contexts from which the contributors are drawn was made possible by making the event hybrid. We failed, however, in our attempts to secure participation from some of the communities most affected by the catastrophe – not least because time for theological reflection and action planning is already a luxury many cannot afford.

Theologically, however, the deliberate decision was made to draw from theologians and activists working within a Black and Liberationist, Post-colonial, Anti-empire and Anti-racist perspective.

Some of the major theological themes to emerge again and again, therefore, are:

- The question of which theological framing deals most appropriately with the nature, scope and urgency of the crisis, its theological significance, and the kind of action that faith demands (Pope, Heath-Moore, Perkins).
- The interconnectedness of all creation, recognising the

intrinsic value and interconnectedness of all life forms. From this perspective, the climate catastrophe makes visible the broken relationship our human community has with the Earth and the absolutely urgent need for healing, justice, compassion and the rediscovery of covenant community (Adams).

- An examination of the systemic causes of climate change and the workings of climate injustice: social inequality, racism, consumerism, and exploitative economic systems; advocacy for transformative change at personal, communal, and societal levels (Mkandawire, Lewney, Mitchell).
- Calling out the defence mechanisms of Empire and the role of the church-as-empire with its theology of death: themes of hope, rage, resilience, and solidarity as a gospel-shaped counter to denialism and despair (van Andel, Kikuyu, Chevasutt, Ranawana)
- Supporting activists: inspiring individuals and communities to engage in sustainable practices, advocate for environmental justice, and foster a sense of intergenerational responsibility (Rosenthal, Olofinjana, Malgay, Delgado, Turner).
- The call to activism and a liberative pedagogic as the demands of faithful discipleship: the moral implications of our actions (especially disruptive protest); the need for far-reaching collective action effective enough to address the urgent challenges posed by climate catastrophe (Chesterman, Plen).

Something that emerged unexpectedly and organically from the contributors was consensus time and time again around the intersectionality of racism and Empire, economics and climate justice in terms of the causes, effects and costs of the climate catastrophe. It made editorial sense to us, therefore, to group the papers thematically around these several separate

yet interrelated themes as an aid to engaging with the material.

Thematic Structure

Chapter One: Reformation or Revolution?

Lawrence Heath-Moore	<i>Recognising the Kairos: from Reformation to Revolution</i>
Robert Pope	<i>Dare to Die but Dare not be Damned: Insights from a Protesting Past</i>
David Coleman	<i>Kill the Steward, Be More Church, and Pray for Heaven too!</i>
Chrissie Chevasutt	<i>Dominion-ism or Foot-washing? A Time to Choose</i>
Victoria Turner	<i>A Scapegoat named "Hope"</i>

Chapter Two: Racism and Empire

Bob Kikuyu	<i>Running Your Race: a Reflection on Decolonisation in Kenya</i>
Anupana Ranuwana	<i>'We need Endarkenment for a While': Why We Need to Build Theologies of Rage</i>
Arianne van Andel	<i>To Hope or not to Hope?</i>
Yenny Delgado	<i>The Implications of Colonisation and the European Christian Message in Abya Yala</i>
Israel Olofinjana	<i>Contemporary African Identity and the Need for a Pan-African Theology of Justice</i>

Chapter Three: Economics, Education, & Environmental Justice

Simeon Mitchell	<i>Economy, Ecology and Christian Ethics: Rethinking our Economics will help us Solve the Climate Crisis</i>
Richard Lewney	<i>'Take my Intellect': Winning hearts and Minds in the Climate Policy Debate</i>
Damon Mkandawire	<i>Ecologic and Economic Injustice: The Zambia Perspective</i>
Matt Plen	Faith-driven Social Action: Lessons from Jewish Education

Chapter Four: Environmental Praxis

Graham Adams	Holy Anarchy as an Alternative Ecology of Living Possibilities Christian Climate Action: Lessons for the Wider Church?
Kate Chesterman	El Bosque Atlántico en Misiones
Mariana Malgay	The Sleeping Cobra "For us, it is a crisis": Mia Mottley and the Caribbean Revolt against the Climate Crisis
Nicolás Rosenthal Anna Perkins	
Romario Dohmann & Jorge Weishein	Climate Justice: Actions for Creation Care in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay

Where to from here?

These contributions should be viewed as attempts to hear again Christ's call to come out of Empire. They seek ways to incarnate the vision that Jesus had of an an-archic community of love that refused to be shaped by power hierarchies, political control, propaganda, and Empire's economics of interest-bearing debt. Some future generation, if any remain, will be the judge of how effective we have been.

We are in the planning stages of our next collaboration – imagining alternatives to the economics of Empire, and given the role of the monetary system in the destruction of the planet, that's probably a good place to go next... In the meantime...

We offer this publication to you as a gift, in keeping with God's economy of abundance and grace.

The Editors

Kevin Snyman

Lawrence Heath-Moore

PART I

Chapter One

Reformation or Revolution

PART I

REFORMATION OR REVOLUTION?

1.

Recognising the Kairos: from Reformation to Revolution

Lawrence Heath-Moore

1. Reformation or Revolution?

I was struck very forcibly by the opening words of Green Christian in their chapter, “How to declare a climate emergency” in *Time to Act*:

“One of the key demands for Extinction Rebellion is that people ‘tell the truth’ about the environmental crisis, and declare a Climate and Ecological Emergency. That’s something governments, political parties and councils can do, but also businesses, arts and cultural institutions, interest groups, charities, NGOs and universities. Churches can declare a climate emergency too, as denominations, parishes or individual congregations.”¹

Bishop Andrew Watson, they go on to point out, declared a climate emergency for the Diocese of Guildford. He said:

“As Christians we need lift our voices to join with the growing environmental movement to tell the truth about climate catastrophe, to repent of the behaviours that have caused this emergency, and to prioritise this

ministry as an act of sacrificial love to all people, including those yet to be born”²

There’s no argument about the urgency and appropriateness of this particular call to action for churches that understand themselves as communities of disciples of Jesus. Writing in the Opinion column of the New York Times on 31 October 2019, Professor Katharine Hayhoe, Co-Director of the Climate Center at Texas Tech University, frames the discipleship imperative thus:

“Climate change is not a belief system. We know that the earth’s climate is changing thanks to observations, facts and data about God’s creation that we can see with our eyes and test with the sound minds that God has given us. And still more fundamentally, it matters: because real people are being affected today; and we believe that God’s love has been poured in [sic] our hearts to share with our brothers and sisters here and around the world who are suffering.

Climate change will strike hardest against the very people we’re told to care for and love – the poor and vulnerable – amplifying hunger and poverty, and increasing risks of resource scarcity that can exacerbate political instability, and even create or worsen refugee crises.

Then there’s pollution, biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, species extinction: climate change makes all those worse, too. In fact, if we truly believe we’ve been given responsibility for every living thing on this planet (including each other) as it says in Genesis 1, then it isn’t only a matter of caring about climate change: We should be at the front of the line demanding action.”³

So yes, we should be at the front line demanding action (and

doing a lot more beside) but we're not – which is, of course, the point of Hayhoe's article.

That "more beside" includes declaring a Climate Emergency, as per the Diocese of Guildford. I'm therefore tempted to say that it's a timely call, except that it is already way too late. The poorest and most vulnerable communities are already threatened by and dying as a result of the climate catastrophe. The 1.5 degrees temperature rise has already been breached.

When Bishop Andrew says that "we need to lift our voices", he's operating in the familiar territory of *reformation*: we need to recognise the nature – the "truth" – of the moment at hand and begin (however belatedly) the process of changing people's minds and building up a critical mass of [in this case, church] people to drive genuine policy change.

1.1 *Reformation?*

I say, "the familiar territory of reformation" because, ironically, of the absence of an appropriate sense of crisis and immediacy. Yes, the call to action is a call for "today", recognising that it is overdue in the church (others – the "growing environmental movement" – have been leading the way for some time).

Crucially, though, the change envisaged is gradual, not immediate. It's a call to begin a process of change that will begin to take shape "tomorrow", but not a call to effect change *by* "tomorrow".

It accepts as a given the continued suffering of the poorest and most vulnerable communities that are already victims of climate catastrophe. It accepts as inevitable the final death toll (of people, habitats, species, communities and life forms) that climate catastrophe will exact between today and whenever the process of change is complete.

This is significant. The cost of any change needs to be measured in terms of who *bears* it and who *benefits from*

it. In Jesus' terms, Cost-Benefit Analyses need to benefit the least first – the victims of Empire's socio-political and socio-economic policy-making.

And herein lies the problem. Reform necessarily takes time because it is predicated on fine-tuning the existing system – making it operate more efficiently and effectively. It preserves the existing values, while providing an improved means of implementing them. It's a "fix" that operates according to established principles and protocols. It secures buy-in to achieve the critical mass necessary for change.

Vitality, it takes time because those trying to effect change *have* the time. They are the people who currently operate the System⁴ – the principal beneficiaries. They are the most effectively protected from the costs and dis-benefits of the system. In terms of climate catastrophe, they are people who can accept the interim costs in lives, communities, habitats and species because they will be relatively unscathed. The speed at which reform happens, therefore, relies not on how costly it will be to the victims of our current lifestyle, but on how long it will be before the beneficiaries begin to feel that cost for themselves.

This is both morally and practically unacceptable. Theologically, this is Empire-made-visible, where the "haves" (the rich and powerful) live at the expense of the "have-nots", who are the slaves and drones within the Imperial System – the expendables; the Little People. They are the people who miss out on the benefits of the System while bearing the costs – including the costs of reform. Moreover, they will go on to miss out on the benefits of reform, because the drive behind reform is the growth of profit margins – the increased flow of wealth to the beneficiaries of the power-holders.

It is the dynamic which saw Austerity, the cost in lives of the financial crisis of 2008, being borne the poorest and most vulnerable. It is the dynamic that saw Jeff Bezos' personal worth increase by \$123 bill over the pandemic, while Amazon

employed agency workers on zero-hours contracts for 20 hours a week, subject to instant cancellation, at less than the minimum wage.

Practically, it is unacceptable because it does not address the severity and urgency of the climate crisis that is already upon us.

1.2 Revolution?

The United Nations issued a statement on 22 October last year to mark the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, saying, “Human-induced climate change is the largest, most pervasive threat to the natural environment and societies the world has ever experienced, and the poorest countries are paying the heaviest price.”

Practically, what is at stake is the very survival of the planet. The issue isn't that the System needs reformation; it is the System itself that has brought us to this point and which needs replacing wholesale.

The planet is under attack by the System. The struggle is between two futures – two eschatologies: the System or the planet, and with it, the future of creation. The System cannot therefore be any part of the solution to climate catastrophe. The only possible response to the scale and urgency of the climate catastrophe, therefore, is revolution.

The Occupy movement defines revolution ethically as “*a response to political, social and economic hierarchies that offend basic human dignity*”.⁵ It becomes necessary when it is clearly impossible to “fix” the existing power structures; in these circumstances, the existing power structures must be rejected for a new one.

The driver, for Occupy, is the immediacy of the issue: the cost that the process of reform inflicts on those already victimised. They put it this way:

“If we rely upon electoral “democracy”, how privatised will our National Health Service be before real change occurs? How many more children will be forced into poverty? How many more elderly or disabled people will die as a consequence of welfare cuts? ... These inhuman injustices are happening right now. The choice we have is to either tolerate them while looking forward to a slightly less worse “Labour “ government, or to call for fundamental and therefore radical political reform.”⁶

1.3 Reckoning with our Reformation heritage

As Reformed churches, we do not deal well with revolutions. We find it difficult to respond to extreme situations so organisations like Occupy, XR and Just Stop Oil are seen as worryingly extreme, rather than as natural allies who use creative, confrontational and non-violent means as a strategy to effect revolutionary change.

We’re instinctively happy with making changes to our personal lifestyles and becoming eco-churches; we’re instinctively very uncomfortable with moving into the arena of public protest and confronting the System.

At the same time as being deeply uncomfortable with climate protest movements, large numbers of URC churches celebrated the coronation, decking the sanctuaries with flags, balloons, and images of Charles and Camilla. They also make a great deal of 11 November Remembrance services and raise money for the British Legion. They celebrate church members who are enlisted in the Armed Forces. Killing for King and country is apparently less extreme (and “following Jesus more nearly”?) than glueing oneself to the highway for the future of the planet.

The clue is the name: we are Reformed (with a capital “R”) churches – children of the Reformation. Neither Luther nor

Calvin set out to found new churches; the break with Catholicism was forced on them because of their attempts to reform the church, rather than being their deliberate choice.

Reform is therefore instinctively and exclusively “the way we do change”. We are good at it. We’ve only to look at the way in which we were at the forefront of the traditional denominations in navigating our way through the sexuality debate to recognise how radical a change contemporary reformations can effect.

As the United Reformed Church, we have recognised and given ourselves space for far-reaching change: we “*affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ*”.⁷ Potentially, therefore, we are a denomination much more freely poised for revolution (when necessary) than our fellow Reformed Churches.

At the same time, our theological and ecclesiological heritage exercises a drag on us that locates us very firmly within the Christendom model of church and the current System.

Christendom – “church-as-Empire” – was born in 313 CE when Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. The missiologist David Bosch locates this as the point at which “the church left the tents of Moses for the courts of Pharaoh”.⁸ Since then, the church has been the church of Empire, rather than the alternative to Empire.

Crucially, in our case, it has employed the tools of Empire as it has aligned its mission uncritically with the expansionist goals of imperial Britain (see, for example, its role in colonial expansion, of bringing “Christ, Commerce and Civilisation” to Africa).

Christendom is Church-in-domination mode. Its history of patriarchy and the oppression of women, the Inquisition, the witch-burning, the slave trade, the persecution of gay people, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, lynching and Apartheid

would not have been possible without (a) its place and role within the System, giving it the power of enforcement and (b) its theological rationalisation and justification of Empire – however unconscious – that blinded it to the fact that it was now aligned with that from which God in Jesus came to save the world, rather than being a sign and instance of what Graham Adams so helpfully calls the “Holy Anarchy” Jesus came to unleash on the world.⁹

It is important to realise the limits of the reformation Calvin achieved. His Geneva was intended to be a “Christian city-state” (what we have been talking about in terms of “Sign of the Kingdom”). It was not a challenge to the Christendom model of the church; it simply replaced the dominant Catholic Church with a Protestant one. It was ultimately a model of an alternative church-as-ruler, rather than a return to the biblical notion of church-as-alternative-society.

In the same way in the UK, as David Cornick has argued convincingly, the Presbyterian Church saw itself primarily as an alternative Established Church¹⁰ – ie it operated with an “alternative church” model which left the fundamental power relationships between church and state of Christendom untouched. Similarly, the history of Congregational Church building demonstrates clearly that being “the alternative parish church” – and even “the alternative [and true] Congregational Church – was deeply part of non-Conformist identity and self-consciousness.

My point is that our ecclesiological, theological and sociological heritage locates us very firmly within a Christendom model of church, one in which we feel instinctively “at home” as part of the Empire (the “Christianised” part, it must be said), rather than as an alternative to it, crucially alive to the alternative structures and operations of power-as-domination, aware of the intersections of the political, social, economic, military and religious powers

that ensure the continuing dominance of and benefit to the few rich and powerful at the expense of its victims.

So despite coming from the non-conformist wing of British churches, our heritage has taken away the very theological and sociological tools that ought to have equipped us to respond early and appropriately to the climate crisis.

For all our willingness not to be bound by past understandings of what faith and discipleship might mean when confronted by the challenges of today, in practice, we are held and largely determined by our inability to break from our history of immersion in Empire, and the theological conviction that this is (a) blessed by God and (b) gives us a welcome alternative to the revolution demanded by the immediacy of climate catastrophe.

2. Kairos Theology and Climate Emergency

Let me flag a change of terminology. I have no doubt that the issue before us as a global community is the climate catastrophe that is already here. “Catastrophe”, like “extinction”, are the only words capable of conveying the scale and urgency of the matter.

For the majority of this paper, however, I’m going to use “Climate Emergency” and “Climate Crisis” interchangeably, because of their resonances with the *Kairos Document (KD)* that emerged from the State of Emergency in South Africa during the mid- to late- 1980s, and was subtitled, “A theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa”.¹¹

2.1 Why Kairos Theology and the Kairos Document?

The Climate Emergency constitutes a crisis that demands an urgent theological response on the part of the URC to move beyond reformation to revolutionary action. Kairos Theology and the *KD* arose out of a crisis that was, in several ways, within its own national context, of similar magnitude to the climate crisis, and in which the church/theological context was predominantly Reformed. They therefore illuminate the path helpfully in the following ways:

- The *KD* was one of the most theologically vital and insightful documents to emerge from the Anti-Apartheid Struggle. It located different church approaches to the crisis. Calling the moment a kairos was a theological exercise in truth-telling; a moment in which nothing could be hidden and the church's responses would be seen for what they are in relation to God and God's purposes. In particular, it recognised that, unless people were engaged in the struggle against Apartheid, they were actively supporting and maintaining the status quo. I want to explore the implications of our own different theological responses to the climate crisis.
- The 21st meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Ottawa in 1982, had already declared that Apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* and the biblical and theological support for Apartheid was heretical. What are the implications of recognising the climate emergency as a *status confessionis*?
- The period following the emergence of the *Kairos Document* saw a serious grappling with the question of a Christian response to violence – in particular, to the relationship between the structural violence of Apartheid and the violence of resistance. It is only when we examine

the role violence plays within the climate crisis that we can evaluate the types of resistance that might be necessary, as well as appropriate.

- The *KD* is clear-eyed about the need to take sides in the conflict. There is no “Christianly neutral” position. Taking sides is particularly difficult for liberal churches such as the URC. I want to explore what Desmond Tutu’s notion of “critical solidarity” might mean for how we might begin to move from reformation to revolutionary, Jesus-shaped praxis.

2.2 Different theological responses to the crisis

The *KD* emerged from the South African townships which, under the State of Emergency, were the battlegrounds on which the conflict between the Apartheid State and Black resistance were played being out. That it was literally a life-and-death struggle was terrifyingly visible on the streets – and just as terrifyingly invisible to the White population, huddled in the hermetically sealed bubbles of their all-White suburbs and cut off from any inconvenient news reporting.

Equally clear was the fact that the South African Church was divided. *“There are Christians (or at least those who profess to be Christians) on both sides of the conflict – and some who are trying to sit on the fence!”*¹² The division among the churches over how to respond to a life-and-death conflict becomes the theological focus for the *KD*. This is what constitutes the *kairos* – the “Moment of Truth”, which is the first chapter title of the *KD*:

“Does this prove that Christian faith has no real meaning or relevance for our times? Does it show that the Bible can be used for any purpose at all? Such problems would be critical enough for the Church in any circumstances but when we also come to see that the conflict in South Africa is between the oppressor and

the oppressed, the crisis for the Church as an institution becomes much more acute. Both oppressor and oppressed claim loyalty to the same Church. They are both baptised in the same baptism and participate together in the breaking of the same bread, the same body and blood of Christ. There we sit in the same Church while outside Christian policemen and soldiers are beating up and killing Christian children or torturing Christian prisoners to death, while yet other Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace. The Church is divided and its day of judgment has come.”¹³

The Kairos Theologians identify three theological responses to the conflict: State Theology, Church Theology (chapter 2) and Prophetic Theology (chapter 3). My purpose in looking at them here is to see how they might have more or less direct application to our own responses to the climate emergency.

2.3 State Theology

Apartheid was devised, instituted, operated, enforced and justified theologically and biblically as God’s will for South Africa. Its architects and politicians were all Dutch Reformed theologians, leaders and Dominees (ministers). It was as much a theological system as it was a political one.

The KD describes State Theology as “*simply the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy ... It does this by misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes.*”¹⁴

The point here is the way in which structural injustices are justified and maintained biblically and theologically. In the context of the climate emergency, we may note the

theologically unsustainable premillennialism so prevalent in the fundamentalism of the US Bible Belt, memorably summarised by one of George W Bush's energy spokespersons, who said, "We do not have to worry about global warming because Jesus is coming again!"

It is an anti-Creation theology that allows us to commodify and exploit the planet to destruction without ever having to take responsibility or face the consequences of the catastrophe we have inflicted because, ultimately, God is going to nuke the earth and whisk all the good Southern Baptist oil billionaires up to heaven!

Much more relevant is its applicability to issues of climate justice and the actions of groups that recognise how the climate crisis exacerbates already-present inequalities and seeks to address the just division, fair sharing, and equitable distribution of the burdens of climate change and its mitigation and responsibilities to deal with climate change.

Climate justice is a vital strand in the web of climate crisis-related issues. Ian Fry is the first UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. He is an international environmental law and policy expert. His focus has focussed primarily on mitigation policies and loss and damage associated the Paris Agreement, Kyoto Protocol and related instruments. In his address to the UN marking the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last year, he notes:

"There is an enormous injustice being manifested by developed economies against the poorest and least able to cope. Inaction by developed economies and major corporations to take responsibility for drastically reducing their greenhouse gas emissions has led to demands for 'climate reparations' for losses incurred. The G20 members for instance, account for 78 per cent of emissions over the last decade."¹⁵

It is not only one of the most vital strands, but also one of the most visible because of the actions of XR, Just Stop Oil and other climate activists.

One element of State Theology that the KD identifies is the use made by the state of the concept of Law and Order to maintain the status quo and depict it as “normal”.

“But this law is the unjust and discriminatory laws of apartheid and this order is the organised and institutionalised disorder of oppression. Anyone who wishes to change this law and this order is made to feel that they are lawless and disorderly. In other words, they are made to feel guilty of sin ... In the present crisis and especially during the State of Emergency, ‘StateTheology’ has tried to re-establish the status quo of orderly discrimination, exploitation and oppression by appealing to the consciences of its citizens in the name of law and order.”¹⁶

The UK is a member of the G20. Its automotive industry, under threat as we speak because of Brexit, is a multi-billion pound national industry. I simply note that, as the cost of living crisis has emerged, almost at every point when a change of government direction was floated, the first action proposed was to abandon net-zero targets. There is plenty of evidence of a concerted government-driven campaign to break down consensus over the move away from fossil fuel dependency, with investment in that sector planned to increase, rather than decline.

Just as worryingly, I note the use of law and order in responses by the UK government to the disruptive protests by climate activists, which has been to circumscribe and criminalise disruptive protest in the UK. There has also been a concerted, co-ordinated media campaign to stigmatise disruptive protest as an illegitimate assault on people’s civil

liberties that continues to stoke public opposition to climate activism.

Its effectiveness is seen in church members who are otherwise vociferous and active evangelists for eco-churches and radical changes to our carbon-hungry lifestyles, but who balk at the notion of disruptive protest and arrest. Disruptive protest is our contemporary equivalent of prophetic action, of speaking truth to power. It is costly. Its stigmatisation is our own government's equivalent of State Theology; it manages to convince church people that resistance and disruptive protest is not prophetic, but is somehow a worse sin than the oppression and death of people and our planet.

2.4. Church Theology

Church Theology broadly characterises the theologies of the White, liberal, English-speaking churches. The *KD* says:

“In a limited, guarded and cautious way this theology is critical of apartheid. Its criticism, however, is superficial and counter productive because instead of engaging in an in-depth analysis of the signs of our times, it relies upon a few stock ideas derived from Christian tradition and then uncritically and repeatedly applies them to our situation. The stock ideas used by almost all these Church leaders that we would like to examine here are: reconciliation (or peace), justice and non-violence.”¹⁷

The section of this chapter in the *KD* most applicable to the climate emergency is the treatment of justice and non-violence. The Kairos theologians acknowledge that there is a deep concern for justice and have been some very strong and sincere demand for justice from this group.

“But the question we need to ask here, the very serious

theological question is: What kind of justice? An examination of Church statements and pronouncements gives the distinct impression that the justice that is envisaged is the justice of reform, that is to say, a justice that is determined by the oppressor, by the white minority and that is offered to the people as a kind of concession. It does not appear to be the more radical justice that comes from below and is determined by the people of South Africa.”¹⁸

The Kairos Theologians go on to explain that the justice of reform, as opposed to the type of radical justice needed, is based on ‘moralising demands’ that rely upon an appeal to ‘individual consciences’. This, they say, has not worked and never will. That is not to say reforms do not happen. What drives these reforms, however, is not a conversion to justice but a calculation based on what minimum level of change is needed to maintain the status quo. And they happen at a pace and cost that the power-holders can bear.

Reform is a wholly inadequate response to the entrenched inequalities and structural injustice that are the concerns of the Climate Justice movement. The inadequacy of the response to the climate emergency by the liberal churches, with their strategy of reformation rather than revolution, is the contemporary manifestation of what the *KD* calls ‘Church Theology’.

The problem with Church Theology is that it is devoid of the necessary social analysis that exposes the ways in which power is distributed and operates. It penetrates the ideological smokescreens to expose the way in which the status quo serves the interests of its beneficiaries at the expense of its victims. Social analysis, say the Kairos Theologians, is a key theological tool because it enables us to uncover and call out the workings of Empire/the System that we need theologically to call “structural sin”.

Social analysis also sheds light on the structural violence of the System. As Frey's warning to the UN made clear, the poorest and least able to cope economies are effectively under attack from those of the world's developed economies, responsible for over 78% of greenhouse gas emissions. People and communities are literally dying as a result.

Characteristic of Church Theology is a blanket condemnation of violence of any kind, without any distinction between the structural violence of the climate crisis and what climate activists do to confront the state with its responsibilities for the crisis and spur ordinary people to wake up to the crisis and take action.

The violence and oppression endemic to the climate crisis calls for radical action. Discipleship of Jesus carries a theological mandate for revolutionary climate activism. It entails a theological call to oppressed people to stand up for their rights and wage a struggle against their oppressors. It tells them it is their duty to work for justice and to change unjust structures.

To any people who are in some measure protected against the worst excesses of the violence and oppression, it is a call to prophetic action – to stand in solidarity with the oppressed people in their struggle for justice.

2.5 Towards a Prophetic Theology

Chapter 4 of the *KD* explores what a prophetic theology might begin to look like – a theology that will call the church to transformative action that is both the proclamation and practice of Christian hope in the context of the crisis. I want to sketch out some contours of what a prophetic theology for our own context of climate emergency, informed by Kairos Theology, might look like.

2.5.1 *Declaring a kairos*

We began with the call for churches to declare a Climate Emergency. To do so adds nothing either distinctive or new. It may be that many churches might need to recognise that we are in the midst of a Climate Emergency, but that is only playing catch-up.

What churches need to do is declare that the climate catastrophe that is already upon us is a *kairos* – a Moment of Truth. A *kairos* is a God-moment that exposes everything for what it really is. It becomes the litmus test of what true faith and faithfulness mean in a particular context. In the gospels, Jesus is the *kairos* – the moment of God’s visitation (cf Luke 19:44). People’s response to Jesus is their response to God. In his parable of the Good Samaritan, the man lying on the side of the road is *kairos* for the passers-by and in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, it is the person in need of help and sustenance who is similarly a *kairos*: everything people believed about God, the Law and God’s intention for humanity were revealed by their response.

The climate catastrophe is the single biggest issue of our time. It is also the single biggest theological challenge of our times – the greatest counter to the Good News that the world has an eschatological future under God. If the gospel is to address our contemporary world with any Good News, it has to address the reality of pollution, biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, and species extinction.

It has to address, as Hayhoe reminds us, the role of climate catastrophe in amplifying hunger and poverty, and increasing risks of resource scarcity that can exacerbate political instability, and even create or worsen refugee crises.

Because it is a Moment of Truth, the action we as individuals and churches take in response to the climate catastrophe is the single most important test of our faith. For Mark’s church, the content of faith and the practise of faithfulness was

demonstrated thy their response to the Great Revolt. The climate catastrophe is our kairos.

2.5.1 *A status confessionis*

As we noted earlier, the 21st meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, meeting in Ottawa in 1982, declared that Apartheid constituted a *status confessionis*: Apartheid was a sin and biblical and theological support for Apartheid was heretical. The White Dutch Reformed Church was expelled from the WARC, only rejoining the WARC in 1998 after the General Synod had renounced Apartheid.

We need to declare that the climate crisis constitutes a *status confessionis* – a make-or-break issue of what true faith requires of us. The human-induced climate crisis is a sin and the System that created it cannot be reformed, repaired or restored. It has brought us to the brink of extinction. It has no part in God's future and needs to die.

That means recognising the System for what it is and how it operates. We need to label as sin the consumerism, the will to power, the greed, the addiction to a fossil-fuelled lifestyle, the preparedness to live at our neighbours' expense, the militarism, expansionism, exploitation, oppression and injustice against the poorest and most vulnerable people and communities that are the features and building blocks of Empire.

To recognise the climate crisis as a sinful creation is to recognise the need for remorse, repentance, restitution, reparation and resistance. It is a fresh call to the church to live intentionally as an alternative to Empire, part of creation, not its Lord, as it explores and learns what dealing with sin means in this context.

Finally, we need also to declare that any theological or biblical attempt to deny the reality and sinfulness of the climate catastrophe is heretical.

2.6 A Challenge to Action

This is not an attempt to put together a comprehensive action plan. I'm restricting myself here simply to a conversation with the final chapter of the *KD* to note what it flags up helpfully.

2.6.1 Taking sides in the Struggle: Critical Solidarity

“Christians, if they are not doing so already, must quite simply participate in the struggle for liberation and for a just society.”¹⁹

When we listen to the voices and experiences of our South African sisters and brothers in the *KD*, we hear the following:

- We need to recognise the conflict between the Little People and communities and their oppressors in the struggles for climate justice.
- We need to take the side of the Little People. We must proclaim that their cause is God's cause. The church must not become a “Third Force”. In particular, it is not a “neutral honest broker” between the warring factions.

This is what Archbishop Desmond Tutu terms, “Critical Solidarity” – what Lyndon B Johnson referred to memorably as “being inside the tent pissing out”, rather than the other way around. Tutu's theology meant that he disagreed with the ANC's Armed Struggle; he was absolutely clear, however, that this was a strategic and principled disagreement among comrades and allies and not opposition to the Struggle from without. Critical engagement with the values, strategies and aims of the climate activist organisations on behalf of the most adversely affected and vulnerable needs to take place from

a place of unwavering commitment, so that it is a discussion among friends, not an attack on the campaign itself.

2.6.2 Putting our activities at the service of the campaign

If we were to take the course of action urged on the church by the *KD*, we need to support and encourage the direct action campaigns of all the various groups committed to addressing the climate catastrophe. But the church has its own specific activities: Sunday services, Communion services, baptisms, Junior Church, funerals etc. It also has specific ways of expressing its faith and commitments. All of these activities must be reshaped to be more consistent with the prophetic faith demanded by the *kairos*.

Some of the best examples I have seen have emerged from Christian Climate Action (CCA), the Christian wing of Extinction Rebellion (XR). I refer you to their contribution to the anthology *Time to Act* in chapter 36, where they lay out examples of their actions.²⁰

XR's stated aim is to use nonviolent civil disobedience to compel government action to avoid tipping points in the climate system, biodiversity loss, and the risk of social and ecological collapse.²¹ CCA's chapter is entitled, "Distinctively Christian direct actions?" They conclude,

"What we choose to do matters ... But how we act is just as important, and it is perhaps here we can see what a distinctively Christian protest act might be. We act prayerfully. We seek God's guidance. We try to do what is right, and seek forgiveness and learning when we get it wrong. We understand that what we do is part of a whole life discipleship, and a call to follow a rebel Jesus. And most of all, we have to come at the world with a

different energy than fear, hate, and anger. I absolutely believe it is the hard work of faith, hope and love.”²²

2.6.3 Mustard seeds & cracks: a spirituality of struggle

My own denomination, the United Reformed Church, has a distinctively unique older age profile. The majority of its members are aged between 70 and 90+. The most common response to talking about climate catastrophe – and direct action in particular – is discouragement, depression and despair: “We aren’t the right people to make any kind of difference; we’re too old, too frail and too few in number!”

While age is a very particular factor for the URC, those “3 Ds” – discouragement, depression and despair – are common and widespread responses to the scale of the existential challenge of climate catastrophe from outside the church as well as inside. Is there any realistic hope, or is this a Struggle that is already doomed to failure? Is it remotely plausible even to imagine transforming our fossil fuel-driven global economy and lifestyle? And even if we can/could, what hope is there that we can do so in time to avoid self-destruction as the Last Word?

I want to suggest that our faith provides us with two vital resources for developing a spirituality of Struggle – because a spirituality of Struggle is absolutely vital that is (a) unafraid to look the scale of the challenge in the face and (b) sustain us in the Struggle over the time it will take.

When I look at the Anti-Apartheid Struggle, I am struck by two things. The first is that South Africa’s world has been transformed. Against all expectations and prognoses to the contrary, Apartheid has been abandoned and dismantled. And it happened without the massive blood-letting that many feared. A significant contribution was the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, an initiative driven largely by

Desmond Tutu and based on the Jesus-shaped principle of forgiveness.

The second is that post-Apartheid South Africa is, in so many ways, a far cry from the vision that underpinned the Struggle. The end of Apartheid has not ushered in a society in which all South Africans have equitable access to the collective wealth, resources and life-chances that the country affords.

That said, there is a genuine, wonderful reality to Mandela's vision of the Rainbow Nation. South Africa is a beacon of how a racist society can be transformed. The peaceful transition from Apartheid is due in no small part to a handful of individuals – the personalities, character and integrity of the ANC leadership in the persons of Mandela, Tutu, Naudé and others – and the unparalleled experiment in national healing that was the Truth & Reconciliation Commission. In other words, while post-Apartheid South Africa is a very imperfect reflection of the vision, it nonetheless genuinely embodies aspects of that vision and has been genuinely transformative.

I want therefore to suggest two indispensable building blocks for a spirituality of Struggle. Firstly, as we confront the magnitude, scope and duration of the task ahead, we need to draw hope and encouragement from Jesus' insistence that Kingdom-shaped mustard seed actions and changes have a transformative effect far beyond their size.

The Apartheid regime was ultimately defeated by myriads of small actions by individuals and households across the globe, like boycotting South African oranges and wines, and the refusal of international sports teams to play against the Springboks. The cumulative pressure of these actions by ordinary people changed government policies with regard to South Africa. Direct action on the part of individuals, local churches and denominations in all its forms is effective and makes a difference, however small.

Secondly, the brokenness and betrayal of what can and will be achieved is both inevitable and not a final barrier to genuine

transformation. God is a God whose saving grace is seen and discovered in that very brokenness. Nobody, for my money, has expressed that more clearly than Leonard Cohen in the refrain of his song, *Anthem*:

“Ring the bells that still can ring!

Forget your perfect offering:

There is a crack in everything –

That’s how the Light gets in!”

Let it be so. A luta continua! ²³

End notes

1. Jeremy Williams (ed), *Time to Act: A resource book by Christians in Extinction Rebellion*, (Christian Climate Action, SPCK, 2020), p248.

2. Ibid, p249.

3. Katharine Hayhoe, “I’m a Climate Scientist Who Believes in God. Hear Me Out” (Opinion, NYT, 31 October 2019).

4. I am using “the System” as a way of signposting its connection to Empire and sin. It is the term used by Black South Africans to refer to Apartheid – the interconnected web of political, social, economic, religious and military strands of policy and life that ensured that White South Africans led a charmed existence where the cost was measured and paid for in Black lives and futures. It is provocative well as being useful for this purpose: “System” highlights its intentionality, as well as carrying a sense of its reluctant exposure.

5. “The Great Debate: Revolution or Reform?”, *The Occupied Times*, (22 January 2012). This forms part of a lively discussion within the movement over how best, effectively and ethically to respond to the global social and economic inequalities that were exposed by the 2008 financial crisis.

6. Ibid.

7. *The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed*

Church (Version II, as approved by General Assembly, 1990), clause 5.

8. In conversation with me, 1986.

9. Graham Adams, *Holy Anarchy: Dismantling Domination, Embodying Community, Loving Strangeness* (London, SCM Press, 2022).

10. *Under God's Good Hand: History of the Traditions Which Have Come Together in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom* (United Reformed Church), 1998.

11. Institute for Contextual Theology, *The Kairos Document (KD)* (2nd revised edition), Skotsville Publishers, Braamfontein, 1986.

12. *KD*, op cit, p1.

13. *Ibid*, pp 1-2.

14. *Ibid*, p3.

15. UN Press Release, "Climate change the greatest threat the world has ever faced, UN expert warns", *Human Rights 75* (22 October 2022).

16. *KD*, op cit, pp 5-6.

17. *Ibid*, p9.

18. *Ibid*, p11.

19. *Ibid*, p28.

20. *Time to Act*, op cit, pp 239-246.

21. Coincidentally, section 5.5 of the final chapter of the *KD* is on Civil Disobedience.

22. *Ibid*, p246.

23. "The Struggle goes on!" The saying was the rallying cry of the Frelimo independence struggle in Moambique, but became associated with the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa. The original, longer form is "A luta continua, vitória é certa" meaning, "The struggle continues, victory is certain".

2.

Dare to die but dare not be damned: Insights from a Protesting Past

Robert Pope

Abstract

This paper begins by identifying the apocalyptic threat posed by nuclear weapons, pandemics and the climate emergency. It argues that these 'reveal' that the church's response should be to find its own voice, speaking from the standpoint of its faith rather than from a standpoint of general agreement with all people of goodwill. Some historical examples are identified in which testifying to the gospel enabled Christians to find a means of protest through outlining, and attempting to live, in the public arena, a politics grounded in faith in the crucified and risen Christ.

Looming Apocalypse(s)

After the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, Jürgen Moltmann tells us, 'our time has become time with a time limit'. As a result of the development of nuclear weapons, 'the end of humanity can be brought about at any minute' (Moltmann, 1996: 204). Nations of the world responded by joining the nuclear arms race believing that, in doing so, they had created 'a system of deterrence by which an all-out atomic war has thus far been

prevented'. Nevertheless, 'the potential of mass extinction continues to exist' (Müller-Fahrenholz, 2020: 44). The threat of nuclear devastation persists and, at the time of writing, seems more real than for a generation following Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022. The Russian state's propaganda in justifying the invasion, supported by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, reveals both the falsehoods that are told in defending the indefensible and how easily religious leaders are beguiled into offering spiritual legitimacy to the leaders of their own nations. Perhaps it is easier to question this when it happens abroad. But as Timothy Gorringer points out, 'the living God is known in the giving of life' and therefore 'death is the hallmark of idolatry'. As a result, theology here might be an exercise in 'lie detection' (Gorringer, 2014: 18).¹

Having experienced it first-hand, we now know only too well the threat posed by pandemics. It is possible that one small mutation to a novel virus may cause a pandemic of catastrophic proportions. When Avian flu broke out in Hong Kong in 1997, eighteen people were infected and six died (Quinn, 2008: 182). The consequences of a similar virus spreading throughout the world would be cataclysmic. Louis Pasteur foresaw it: 'it's the microbes that will have the last word', he is reputed to have said (Honigsbaum, 2020: 279). However, there is a link between contagion and widespread poverty where those living in places where survival is a constant battle have been forced to encroach on habitats otherwise untouched by humans and, in the words of Tom Quinn, '[allow] no room for other animals and the diseases they usually keep for themselves' (p. 297). It is ecological disturbance that releases deadly and novel pathogens, but this is frequently connected to poverty, inequity and climate change. Perhaps here theology's task is to witness to the connectedness of life and that dealing with any single issue is impossible because so many of the world's problems relate to each other. A just and righteous world where resources are shared would, for

the most part, be a world free from war, hunger, poverty and disease. Trying to deal with the latter without the former would be a policy doomed to fail.

And yet we might find the most pressing issue today to be the danger posed by the climate emergency². This is not simply a matter of how we treat nature, or of seeing how to react to nature's response. This very real threat of catastrophe is rooted in over-consumption on the part of the privileged which, if not checked, will lead to 'a future marked by wars over scarce resources, widespread famine and drought, mass migration and climate refugees, and the death of entire species of living beings' (Marais, 2020: 297). Yet, as Cynthia Moe-Lobeda opines: 'we have become a society so addicted to our consumption-oriented ways that we close our hearts and minds to the death and destruction required to sustain them' (Koster, 2020: 421)³. Among other matters, the climate emergency calls for a reassessment of our views of nature, of humanity's place alongside it, of human relationships, of how wealth should be distributed, of how privilege has led to destruction and of how we might try to live together in a sustainable way.

Nuclear weapons, novel pathogens and global warming all pose a threat of cataclysm, of annihilation, of the end of humanity, if not the end of the world. They are in that sense 'apocalyptic' according to the popular use of the word. Biblically, 'apocalyptic' literature is both a revelation of God and therefore an encouragement to those suffering for their faith. What, then, might these looming apocalypses tell us?

Rediscovering the Church's Vocation

If it were not already clear, these matters, and especially the climate emergency, signal that the Constantinian project has failed. It is dead in the water and there is no hope of

resurrecting it. While this does not mean that pressure should not be put on governments to commit to peace, to justice and to reduce the emission of the gases responsible for the most dramatic changes to the world's climate in millennia, nor does it mean that all people of good will should not form coalitions in order to do what can be salvaged, it does mean that the church qua church needs to find its own voice. There may well be opportunities for churches and Christians to cooperate in a common cause with others who acknowledge the emergency. But the church's vocation is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to live out the good news that the world changed because of his life, death and resurrection. Indeed, this, and not the human potential for mass destruction, is why Constantinian-ism is dead. In briefly exploring the Constantinian influence on the church, the church's vocation may become a little clearer.

Alfred Loisy's oft-quoted dictum that 'Jesus came proclaiming the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church' (Loisy, 1902: 111), is not, as sometimes imagined, a lament for a missed opportunity, but the recognition that Jesus' ministry and teaching led inevitably to the formation of a new community. According to Rowan Williams, three words were used by the earliest followers of Christ in order to understand their identity in belonging to this new community: *hagioi*, a holy or sacred people; *ekklesiai*, civic assemblies; *paroikoi*, resident aliens. Williams explains that all three posed a risk to the Empire because they assert that, for followers of Jesus, 'their actual roots and loyalties were in another context than the cities in which they actually resided'. In this sense, their citizenship was in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and, Williams tells us, 'the Church is nothing if it is not an assembly of migrants, answerable finally to the law of another city' (Williams, 2014: 33-34). The church's vocation, then, is to live according to God's values and to remain loyal to them, especially when challenged by Caesar's values. And the seal on

this commitment was that the crucified Jesus had risen from the dead.

But when presented in the early fourth century with the possibility of wealth and privilege, the church grasped its opportunity in a desperate attempt to move from the position of outcast, repudiated by the Empire and subject to sporadic outbursts of violence and persecution, to the position of acceptance and the offer of influence and power. It was felt that the church's faithfulness had been rewarded: God in Christ was vindicated and the church, almost overnight, went from persecuted sect to accepted and protected, if not also privileged, religion. But in so doing, it sold its soul on the basis that the support of the Emperor required the church's support of the Empire. And so those who had been persecuted became persecutors in the misguided belief that the church should possess and exercise power in the same way as powerful rulers in the world, rather than in the way modelled by the one who came not to be served but to serve (Mth 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45). The result was that the church compromised over the message of Jesus and the gospel in order to align itself with the force of Empire. A different Christianity emerged.⁴ But, in order to share power, Christian leaders had to make 'the faith credible to the powers-that-be' (Hauerwas and Willimon, 2014: 22). This meant that Christians could only share power if they no longer posed a threat to the powerful. The gospel was shorn of its radical challenge to power, wealth and privilege in order to be palatable to the powerful, the worldly and the privileged (Hauerwas and Willimon, p. 27).

In more recent times, this Constantinian-ism has taken the form of the association in Western nations of the church with liberal democracy. Classically, though perhaps misleadingly, described by H. Richard Niebuhr under the heading of 'Christ transforming culture' (Niebuhr, 1952: 192-228), the church enters into a contract with liberal government in the hope that its association will be a force for good or for improvement. Such

hope has proved to be misplaced. The church's trust in liberal democracy has done nothing to stem the threat of nuclear war, or to close the gap between rich and poor, or to encourage divestment of polluting gases. Meanwhile, the church is tolerated while restricted to personal piety, but its interventions are rebuffed once they trespass into the public realm. Niebuhr's optimism was misplaced. As Hauerwas and Willimon explain, he 'merely justified what was already there – a church that had ceased to ask the right questions as it went about congratulating itself for transforming the world, not noticing that in fact the world had tamed the church' (p. 41).

Furthermore, the politics of liberal democracy in so many places in the twenty-first century has lost its way. In a context where fake news and conspiracy theories abound, it seems that evidence is ignored, and politicians cannot bring themselves to admit the negative consequences of their policies. Debate has given way to the most puerile, adversarial defamation and counter-denigration, in the belief that securing power is more important than knowing what to do with it. In such circumstances it seems futile to believe that any ecclesio-political pact will bring relief or improvement and that a means of 'speaking truth to power' is required. Maybe the church should acknowledge its otherness in society as it seeks to live out its vocation, as it rediscovers and establishes what in effect is an alternative polis, a way of social living that is not dominated by the worldly, pseudo-values of power, wealth or celebrity.

Willimon and Hauerwas offer an alternative vision for a church by promoting the 'Barthian' (or Christian?) claim that the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ ended an old world and began a new one. Theology's task then is 'not to make the gospel credible to the modern world, but to make the world credible to the gospel' (Hauerwas and Willimon, 2014: 24). They suggest that the church, tamed by Constantine, descended into intellectual debate as if Christian discipleship

were merely a matter of belief or a series of intellectual problems to resolve, rather than as a politics, a way of living life formed through faith in the unbelievable notion that the crucified Jesus was raised from the dead. The Constantinian project left the church 'judged politically by how well or ill the church's presence in the world works to the advantage of the world' (p. 30). Instead, the church's politics is characterised by participation 'in God's continuing history of creation and redemption', in order that its activity is rooted in faith rather than unbelief (p. 36).

It would be too easy to dismiss this as suggesting a separation between church and world in which people of faith retreat into pious enclaves. Instead, it is a rallying cry to live out faith in the world. The 'Christ transforming culture' model betrays the faithful by suggesting that all desired political outcomes can be achieved without faith in God. While to some degree that may be possible (a statement which might betray my own position as encultured into collaboration with liberal democracy) it also asks us to consider what difference it makes to our response to worldly problems if we believe we are called to follow the crucified and resurrected Jesus.

Confession, then, in the sense of 'admitting failure' and in 'pointing to where help is available' (Williams, 2014: 49-50) lies at the heart of the church's protest that the world operates as it does because it knows not God. John Howard Yoder locates the confessing church alongside two other types: the 'activist' church, which in effect seeks to improve society and by doing so glorifies God but abandons its unique calling as church; the 'conversionist' church which concentrates on the extent and implication of human sin, thereby pandering to a modernist individualism seeking personal salvation and offering no social ethic or alternative politics; and the 'confessing' church which grounds all things in the worship of Christ. Conversion is required, but to a life-long commitment to being grafted on to the Body of Christ. The 'confessing' church asks how the

gospel makes a difference to living life in this day and age.⁵ It does not retreat from the world but boldly testifies before it. It relates the questions thrown up by life to gospel claims and finds solutions there. In short, the confessing church rushes not towards activism in the name of a worthy cause but testifies to the Christian gospel to see what difference its unbelievable claims might make and to proclaim them – to live them out – in the public square.

Some historical examples will serve to show how testimony and protest have gone hand in hand in the church.

Confession, Testimony and Protest

Protestant Christianity was born out of protest rooted in witness to the gospel whose liberating power had been rediscovered. If events of 1517 raised a question mark over what was really the scandal (both theological and financial) of indulgences, then Martin Luther's speech at the Diet of Worms in 1521, made before political as well as ecclesiastical grandees, suggested the audacity of one convinced that because the church had strayed from its message, then truth needed to be spoken to power. When asked to recant the contents of his written work his reply was uncompromising: 'if then, I revoke these books, all I shall achieve is to add strength to tyranny and open not the windows but the doors to this monstrous godlessness for a wider and freer reign than it has ever dared before'. Even if 'Here I stand, I can do no other' is 'the most memorable thing that Luther never said' (MacCulloch, 2004: 131), the defiance of Empire and church was clear. And it was based on a perception of truth, grounded in scripture, articulated by Luther as justification by faith alone, which, by conscience, he was unable to deny.

Luther's protest was aimed at a complacent church which believed its relationship to temporal power gave it an

unassailable authority by which any dissent could be eradicated. It was made before an equally complacent Emperor who realised that the support of the church was necessary in order to achieve his political ambitions. Doubtless Luther's opponents held sincerely to their religious beliefs, but their trust in the Constantinian enterprise led them to refuse to engage with the details of his argument.

Initially, the reformers identified themselves as 'evangelische' because they believed they had rediscovered the heart of the gospel message. They were often lumped together as 'Lutherans', as they were by the Imperial authorities gathered for a Diet at Speyer in April 1529. Here the authorities sought to stem the tide of reform while awaiting a full meeting of the church to make a final decision. Though seeking to put an end to reform, they allowed 'Lutheranism' to continue in lands where it could not be eradicated without causing public uproar, providing Catholics there could be allowed to practice their religion in peace. No such concession was available to the 'evangelicals' in lands where Catholics were in the majority. The 'evangelicals' protested not because of the suppression of reform movements in Catholic lands, but because in lands where evangelical Christians were in the majority they in effect had to tolerate two religions. Against this, they claimed, '[they] must protest and testify publicly before God that they could consent to nothing contrary to his Word' (Bainton, 1988: 318). Both verbs are significant. They must 'protest' and 'testify'. Protesting what seems an injustice while bearing witness to the gospel go hand in hand.

Similar voices were heard in England leading to the emergence of a small but strong alternative to established religion. Finally tolerated legally, religious dissenters and nonconformists were officially treated as second class citizens for almost two centuries following their protest against the status quo where religion – the property of conscience – had been requisitioned by the State. The Act of Uniformity (1662)

required 'unfeigned assent and consent' to the Book of Common Prayer, not only prescribing the content of worship but requiring episcopal ordination for those who had been ordained in other ways during the Commonwealth and had been free to minister in the church while upholding Presbyterian or Independent polity.

Between 1660 and 1662, almost 2,000 ministers and teachers refused to conform and found themselves outside the Establishment, both ecclesial and political. Those who faced the 'Great Ejection' did so because they were forced to testify to a higher authority, and they made this plain in their 'farewell' sermons preached as they were about to leave their livings. For some, there was little choice but to stand firmly on conviction. Robert Atkins, the soon to be ejected Rector of St John's, Exeter, was all too aware of the links made by his opponents between Nonconformity and treason. Described as 'A very comely little Man. His Countenance cheerful, his Voice clear, his Pronunciation very agreeable' (Matthews, 1934: 18), there seems to have been very little of the revolutionary about him. But the requirement of uniformity galvanised him and he proclaimed in his farewell discourse: 'Sirs, we will do any thing for His Majesty, but Sin. We could even dare to Die for him, only we dare not be Damn'd for him'⁶.

Atkins was no radical and expressed his loyalty to the worldly rulers in all matters apart from what he perceived to be gospel imperatives. There, for him, his eternal fate was in jeopardy. But also, as with other examples, Atkins protests but also testifies. He bears witness to what for him is the fundamental truth which has always brought trouble on the head of Christians: because Jesus is Lord, Caesar cannot be.

On the surface, these are examples of a defiance of legitimate authority and a socio-political protest against restrictions on human freedom. But in fact, these were instances of testimony, of making a theological statement, of proclaiming the gospel, of explaining why particular actions

in the world arise from the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and raised from the dead. The twentieth century saw instances of such protest and testimony when events in the world led some to consider that the time to testify, to confess the gospel in order to uncover ungodly lies being peddled about Christian teaching and about human beings. These include the Confessing Church's Barmen Declaration (1934) which testified to the Lordship of Christ against the claims of the German Christians and their capitulation to National Socialist propaganda;⁷ the Kairos Document (1985) declaring the then South African government's policy of Apartheid to be heretical; the Belhar Confession (1986) exposing the falsehood of Apartheid and asserting God's standing with the poor, the oppressed and the wronged; the Accra Confession (2004) which exposed the global economy as increasing the gap between rich and poor and that the cost of this was over-consumption and the wrecking of creation.

Reflecting on these instances of a confessing church, Willis Jenkins poses the question whether the climate emergency calls for a similar stance: 'It may be time to explain how central theological confessions of the Christian faith are at stake in the relations involved in climate change, such that those who repudiate or abandon those relations can no longer be regarded as having a plausible claim to the body of faith' (Jenkins, 2020: 81; cf. Marais, 2020: 294). So great is the climate emergency that, especially those living in societies which have high levels of atmospheric pollution, Jenkins believes that a response to global warming should be made an integral part of testifying to faith, thus making it 'status confessionis' (Jenkins, 70).

Not all are convinced. Jenkins writes from within the North American context, and therefore from among those nations which contribute most to the climate change which is suffered most acutely in lands of the global south. Responding to Jenkins from that latter context – and one where the memory

of Apartheid lingers – Tinyiko Maluleki writes: ‘the thought of a status confessionis around theological recalcitrance vis à vis climate change seems far-fetched in our context’ (Maluleki, 2020: 87). Perhaps status confessionis is too strong even in so desperate a matter as the climate emergency. But the church’s vocation continues to be to testify to its faith and relate that to the issues – even the issues that pose existential threats – we face in the world.

Confessing Faith

The church’s vocation, then, is to confess its faith in the public square. Its primary claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and raised from the dead. It is, of course, a claim that is unbelievable by the usual measure of reason and experience. Its potency in the public square, however, stems from its nature as *petra scandalou* – stumbling rock (1 Peter 2:8) which can become ‘cornerstone’ (1 Peter 2:7). When it is the ‘head of the corner’, it reminds us that God is life-giver and restores life even to the one who became the victim of a plot by wicked human beings. The power of death is overcome (1 Cor. 15:55-57). The one who taught that love of God and neighbour fulfilled all the Law (Mth 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:25-28), love as he loved (unto death – Jn 13:34-35) and love of enemies (Mth 5:43-46; Luke 6:27-28) was characteristic of God’s reign while also demonstrating that with great wealth comes great responsibility (Luke 12:16-21; Luke 16:19-31). Then, the church’s vocation is to stand with what is life-giving and life-affirming, to seek fairer distribution of wealth, to stand alongside those who are wronged, and to seek the welfare of the planet to the benefit of all. This occurs not alongside the worship of the church, but constitutes part of it in the name of the God who detests the perfunctory performance of religious rituals and expects that faith is translated into life and living and who

continues to demand 'Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream' (Amos 5:24). Testimony goes hand in hand with protest in the name of the one whose humble obedience, even to death on the cross, has made him Lord (Phil. 2:5-11), whose light is the light of all people and whose light cannot be extinguished (Jn 1:4-5).

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Notes

1 The phrase belongs to Ton Veerkamp in *Autonomie & Egalität: Ökonomie, Politik, Ideologie in der Schift* (Berlin: Aleksar, 1993), 373-4, quoted in Gorringer, 2014: 18.

2 It may be worth mentioning that at the time of writing, in May 2023, the world was warned of the destructive potential of AI by none other than Geoffrey Hinton, formerly considered the leading mind in AI development. He suggested that calamity might follow once the 'bots' realise they are cleverer than humans. This, he warned, was an existential threat and, in his view, the most pressing one facing humanity. Doubtless theological engagement is required here as well.

3 The quotation comes from Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, 'Re-radicalizing Justification', in Ulrich Duchrow and Carsten Jochum-Bortfield (eds), *Befreiung zur Gerechtigkeit/Liberation towards Justice* (Münster: LIT, 2015), 219-60 (243), quoted in Koster, 2020: 421.

4 'The values of the historical Jesus were replaced with the values of Constantine'. See Kee, 1982: 153f.

5 These categories are explored by Yoder in 'A People in the World: Theological Interpretation', in J. L. Garrett, Jr. (ed.), *The Concept of the Believer's Church* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), pp. 252-283. They are outlined in Hauerwas and Willimon, 2014: 44-45.

6 R. Atkins, *The God of Love and Peace with Sincere and Peaceable Christians* (Exeter, 1715), pp.15-16, quoted in Appleby, 2007: 16.

7 Northcott and Scott describe the Barmen Declaration as a 'bold reassertion of the intellectual distinctiveness of Christian confessional doctrines, and the cultural distinctiveness of Christian confessional doctrines', Northcott and Scott, 2014: 3.

8 For an interesting exposition of how 'love of neighbour' should be extended both to the creation and to future generations, see Poole, 2020.

3.

Kill the steward, be more Church, and pray for Heaven too!

A personal on-the-hoof view from full-time EcoChaplaincy

David Coleman

I hate footnotes. The culture where you establish your credibility by bowing and scraping to 'silverback' authorities, even if, writing even a few years before widespread consciousness of anthropogenic eco-crises, they can have, by definition, no idea of today's global context.

But I'll begin with a quote – not from an 'authority', but a friend full of prophetic mischief. Climate campaigner Alastair McIntosh wrote a foreword to the Unitarian anthology *Cherishing the Earth- Nourishing the Spirit* [Lindsey Press, edited Maria Curtis]. I'll commend their methodology because few current books deal so valuably with the emergence of "too late", which is where, by the standards we campaigned for just a few years ago, we certainly are. And their readiness both to critique and celebrate/recycle their own tradition. Anyway: Alastair was asked last year at a conference:

Don't give them too much Christianity. So I gave them lots!

Be more Church! Is it so terrifying? But be attentive to everything you've dismissed, ignored, read past; things you

think you're so familiar with, you don't need Moses' double take [Exodus 3:3]; the warnings and ultimatums which constitute such a large part of what we've classified as "Good News". Everything of which it's been said:

"That might be Christian, but we couldn't possibly do that."

Oh dear, I've quoted again – this time from an elder in my church in North Wales, arguing for the continued publication of everyone's contributions, which inevitably safeguarded the power of the better off, the ruling families of that fellowship. Just as during the campaigns to switch investment from fossil fuels we were told we shouldn't upset the companies which, at that time, had just made widespread redundancies for financial reasons anyway. Local churches are microcosms of global power struggles. Even good works can be manipulative, like 'overseas aid' which supports new fossil fuel investment. Have we ever grown beyond the mentality of serfdom? Or did we happily join in with the coronation oath? I didn't, but I know that urgency means I also have to live with being a complicit prophet. A person of unclean lips amongst a people of unclean lips [Isaiah 6:5] because no one has time left to get perfectly green before encouraging others to shift.

Churches kept in the dark about their own key value as beacons of hope, as God's gifts to the Earth rather than being in any sense "in charge", or recipients of the Earth as a gift, will not be those who "act" as it all falls apart before them.

So they need encouragement even more than information. Churches need 'permission'. That's why supportive movements such as EcoChurch, EcoCongregation Scotland, Christian Climate Action, Green Christian and other parts of the "permission-giving" movement deserve active and overt support, rather than lukewarm toleration from church leadership.

Even the late twentieth century 'Creation Theology', which got me into deep trouble at college, is way out of touch with current events. That's why falling back on the wishy- washy

objectification of Creation implied by “stewardship” (maintaining property rather than engaging in partnership with fellow creatures) and anthropocentrism – which was the convinced boast of educated people well into my adulthood – does worse than nothing.

At the risk of a new bit of jargon, it’s really ‘anthroposummism’ (people as pinnacle) that does the most harm: that we are in every way on top, in the best place, in control, looking down on everything that has breath, all our fellow stakeholders in the rainbow covenant of God with ‘all flesh’ and with the Earth. Everything is expendable. Nothing is conceded the dignity of personhood. Or a soul, whatever we mean by that. But we depend on what we destroy.

Even when there’s official agreement, that ‘something must be done’ we march the bishops and moderators up to the top of the hill and down again without that extra push over the summit to the vista of a different perspective: indeed, to any vision of the future at all other than finding ways, for a few more years, of doing, saying, thinking praying the same unrecycled, repurposed things. Who’s going to give that shove? Who’s going to risk their career? Who’s going to pick up the pieces if a friend does so? And if you think I’m wrong, please prove me wrong. I’ll thank God.

Is the adoption of aspirational net-zero targets, without wholeheartedly preaching that these are a response of faith, in this category, or is it something far more hopeful? What do you think? But don’t waste your time with net-zero in week-day meetings unless you’re preaching it on Sundays too, giving it all you’ve got.

In the holy city of Glasgow, where the circus of COP26 came to town, and where, for me, the final unambiguously causal jigsaw-pieces were convincingly put in place between observed devastation and planned injustice protected by terrified power...

...in Glasgow there was a gathering called the Poverty Truth Commission. They realised you can’t, from a position of privilege, with integrity or effectiveness, deal with poverty without consulting those who experience it. Their mantra, which we now hear in the voices of the fragile life and personalities of the Earth is this:

‘Nothing about us without us, is for us.’

Say it again and hear it from communities suffering 'loss and damage' and from the wildlife they're not embarrassed to be related to. 'Nothing about us without us, is for us'. Don't waste scarce time with twee 'eco-theology' which can't even get over this wee hump: in the practice of our faith, we look Creation in the eye, for you can't love God without loving your siblings [cf 1 John 4:20]. I suppose that includes your human neighbour, too? You can't love God in eco-crises without including indigenous groups who, despite the many genocidal acts of empire, never lost their family relationship with those with whom they share habitat, even when they hunt and eat them too. I know I'm not them, but I can learn from them, and cherish too, my own genuine remnant roots of human relatedness with Earth.

To throw in another hearsay quote, from conversation with the young Samoan Methodist activist Lemaima Vaai:

"We are not part of Creation, we are Creation".

That's one we Global Northerners find hard to digest. But it's worth it.

And another, from our friend Rev James Bhagwan, General Secretary of the Pacific Conference of Churches: there is a sense in which Christianity "amplifies and completes" indigenous spirituality. It should do the same for me. Be more Church!

We need not a new ivory-tower, eco-theology, pondering Creation as a theological construct (and let that be the criterion of a waste of time!), but a baptism of completely General Practice Christianity into the eyes-wide-open liberation of truth [John 8:32] about where we are. Though let this be always the truth offered pastorally and therefore openly, in love.

Don't be afraid of being mainstream, though don't sell your soul to get there. Do you have to dilute the truth or hold it back, to tell it in love? Not in emergency, you don't! For in emergency there is no longer 'pastoral' without prophetic.

We've reached the stage where the martyrdom of opposing short-term oil jobs because we don't wish harm to sisters and brothers and fellow creatures is the only honestly loving position, though it's equally irresponsible to abandon a local pastor or even church to the cost of that witness. Love comes through movements, through mutual encouragement, rather than ordering friends 'over the top' to face the flack. Solidarity Love in community. That's church's distinctive gift. It's what we can always bring to a hard situation, though we may not be the only ones. Since the Glasgow Multi-faith Declaration for COP26 we don't need to water down who we are in order to find common cause with other people of faith.

We are an Easter people: a people of 'beyond too late', constantly assailed by satanic Peter-ism [Matt 16:22]: "Surely you can't put it that clearly with a congregation?"

But why not? The place of the good news is the best place to face the bad news. You've got every spiritual resource of scripture and tradition to hand – unless they're packed away for safe keeping, in glass cases, packing boxes, fenced off for being too wild and embarrassing, or, like Christmas angels, brought out for harmless and decorative seasonal celebrations.

Our most defining Christian seasons are outstanding opportunities for transformative reflection with the participation of Creation, though how often does "that green stuff" just get packed away "because we're doing holy things now." Even a lectionary Advent gives us ample reflection on the 'end of the world' and Creation in turmoil; Pentecost, on wind, power, energy, transformation and inclusive engagement; in Lent we befriend the wildernesses who are finding new significance as carbon sinks and havens of biodiversity; at Christmas we reflect how, though more specific vocabulary was available, John chose to write inclusively that the Word became "flesh".

I, myself, have mouthed the liberal platitude of 'taking scripture seriously rather than literally'. Sadly, we have difficulty

telling the difference: as soon as Jesus' wild apocalyptic sayings in Luke 21 begin to sound like news reports, or scripture begins to sound like a mandate for transformation, we take that as a sign to look away.

Are we terrified that like the congregation of Nazareth [Luke 4] confronted by the call to take their own scripture seriously, will resort to throwing the preacher over the cliff? Practice your falls. Think about spiritual safety nets. Space to recover. You are not indestructible, and nor was Jesus, that's the point! Though attacks will more likely come from worked-up individuals than cowed congregations: not just the dedicated treasurers, understandably terrified by financing infrastructure, but those who've had positions of respect and power based on the appearance of knowledge.

Kickback is useful, though, if only as an insight into what folk are clinging on to. The flaws will be there if you look closely, usually in the potty premises on which competent rhetoric and skillful reasoning is based, but few onlookers will know that. And if, in a given congregation, you're the first one to speak clearly what should be 'public domain insights', then you're likely to attract the slings and arrows, because you're 'pushing your own opinion'. And nice people don't do that.

How grateful we should be to Donald Trump for his apocryphal unmasking of the beautiful game of dialogue where the outcome doesn't matter, with the platitude that there are 'very fine people on both sides'. Even the BBC has claimed to have moved on from balancing climate disaster with denialism.

I've had rank pulled at me, not only on whether a preacher has the right to take God's love in the sending of the Sole Heir as for the Earth rather than solely for human society [John 3:16], but also by the absurdity of when retired academics, who, having sold their souls and reputations to fossil fuels [cf CO2 coalition] are quoted back by someone who likes to appear 'eminent' because 'You bring nothing but gloom and doom and we should be about hope'.

But it's 'faith, hope and love', as well as 'courage, faith and cheerfulness' that are the observable rewards seen in otherwise "powerless" congregations who really get their teeth into action. The 'Hallelujah anyway' of liberation

movements recycled into the still- joyful rabble's cry for help that Jesus refused to silence: "Hosanna anyway: God help us... anyway!"

Hosanna Anyway!

But engaged congregations seldom shout loudly enough [Matthew 5:16] about the good they are doing. As a visitor, you can celebrate and amplify, and move people on from Christianity as 'niceness training': as a polite way to keep the children quiet. Give permission for the mischief of subversion, of the snake's craftiness [Matt 10:16] and the sustaining enjoyment of our faith, rather than grim resignation. These are the ones aware that changing their light bulb to LED won't save the world, but a litter-pick or beach clean builds community like any other form of collective worship. Not always led by the ordained, who can give blessing, indifference, or still do harm.

No one who exhibits such crass foolishness as to deny what's beyond reasonable doubt in the causal links (including slow onset) between Global North lifestyle and eco-crises should proceed to Christian leadership training; no more than should anyone overtly racist, sexist or homophobic. Like racism, it does immediate and systemic harm, especially since it's already so deeply ingrained in our culture and church culture. It's stupid, and God is no protection against chosen stupidity. No one should be commissioned and empowered to speak thus in the name of the church.

And I wonder if there's something fundamentally flawed in the mode of academic training to which we subject our church leaders, both that they dare not raise their head above the parapet with their own inspiration until at least mid-career, inflicting regurgitated commentaries on bored and anaesthetised congregations as if that amounted to preaching the Word. At best, it gives Marx the glory as an only weakly

addictive anaesthetic for the stresses of life in late capitalism. Though maybe he's right that we've nothing to lose but our chains.

This paper concerns just such shackles, including a largely dominant narrative that the only available future for churches is decline and irrelevance, to which responses vary from fantasies of unredeemed evangelical renewal to dutiful palliative care. But with the urgency of eco-crises, even that grim future is blown away. Like the legendary Celtic missionaries adrift without rudders, it's time to try floating on faith!

So why are churches still worried about protecting, rather than blowing their reserves? Is that a naked conflict-of-interest statement? Yes, my ministry is 'blowing' – I'm a full-time court jester of climate crisis. So bless the URC for this! But also bless each church that risks inviting me. We're in times when no one should be expected to carry the burden of a 'lone voice'.

In days of multi-layered eco-crises it's difficult to get through a day without Bad News dropping into my inbox, with the choice of despair or faith. That's not always easy. Some reports stop me in my tracks, and I'm trying to make spiritual provision for when we reach 1.5 degrees, which is in the offing while I'm still in post. My daughter temporarily lost the use of her legs when the UN declared it was 'code red for humanity'.

The roads to Damascus and Emmaus both are quite well-trodden, and of course, when we speak in tongues of one sort or another, these are subject to the discernment of the worshipping community, but they need to get there rather than being pre-filtered.

But there's certainly a self-destructive demon abroad in the (post-war?) endless 'slagging off' of religion which, in the UK context, comes over as 'forget this Christianity crap'. Religion is what makes available, to those outside the elites, the resources of spirituality and spiritual resilience which we're certainly going to need for the rest of our lives. 'Give them lots' – but only the good stuff! And recycle, enlist, repurpose all the constitutive stories we'll take to our deathbeds.

The Bush is not fireproof. It's blazing. On the brink of destruction, but simply, for now, not quite 'consumed'. The House on the Rock was flooded, soaked, stinking, but just not quite washed away. But neither builder could snap their fingers and 'fix' the climate. It was God, not Noah, who promised

not to destroy Earth's life. And the miracle of Jonah was less to do with those charming, cetacean transport options than that a culture took notice of warnings – even though they didn't grasp them – and changed course. Never mind Sodom and Gomorrah [Matt 10:15], it'll certainly be more bearable for Nineveh on the Day of Judgement than any of our cities! Isaiah railed against the desecration of the self-evident holiness of trees by abusive cults, not the trees such as those under which Abram and Sarah encountered God; and for Jeremiah the pollution of moral injustice was as a matter of course reflected in the desecration and devastation of the land. [As an aside, it's still an article of faith for climate denial that this connection must be invalid: that human activity cannot be responsible for 'natural' disaster]. When the Wisdom of Solomon was actually described [1 Kings 4:33] it turned out to be ecological: trees, animals, birds, creeping things and fish! But sermon culture prefers to give him glory for his intervention in the tragedy of neonatal death amongst trafficked women [1 Kings 3:16–28], in which he does nothing to challenge the culture of enslavement.

Jesus, in the life-filled wilderness, was with the wildlife [Mark 1:13] alongside those other fellow-creatures, angels, who kept him going. The Sower discovered that allowing for wildlife and wildflowers was the only way to the best crop. Micah [6:1-2] heard how Creation holds us to account as the preamble to doing justice and loving mercy, and if the fruit-tree [Luke 13] didn't produce after all that manure, it damned well got dug up. 'God's in charge', said Satan [Matt 4:5]: 'You don't have to worry about climate change – now-jump off like a good boy!' And when Jesus taught the disciples to pray [Matt 6:10] did he remind them to include prayer for the climate as well as the soil? Or is that what the WildWind [John 3] is saying to the Churches: pray each day for Earth and Heaven both. Soil and Sky both. For the "Kingdom of Heaven" is the "Way the Sky Should Be Ruled".

The single-use, infinite-growth, defensive superlatives (great-est, high-est ever-lasting, always) which we've prostituted as concluding punctuation to formal 'prayers', obscure the Old and New Testament consciousness of a succession of finite ages, of the fragility of all life, and especially of the Holocene balance which has cradled almost all human culture and religious traditions. It fits, it works, don't be afraid of the connections of poetic reasoning when logic alone might lead only to despair. A textual analysis

might be a foundation for, but is a very long way from having preacher the Word.

We turn up our noses at a ‘bondage to decay’ though happy to be nourished by bread, cheese, and wine. But like the ‘bondage’ of slavery, is the problem an abusive relationship of the haemorrhage of goodness, rather than of the processes by which goodness is circulated to the generations of Life?

And there’s colossal divine irony as, through human agency, Jesus is welcomed by branches (Palm Sunday – when branches of local trees rather than alien imports might get through) before being made one with the Tree of Life.

And then there’s the great Commission of the Risen Christ in Mark, which has accompanied the church through centuries of persecution and turmoil, to be Good News to ‘every creature’ (thanks, King James!) or ‘All Creation’, which was first discarded by the pomposity of text critics and then hopelessly diluted by the well-meaning missiology of the Good News Bible to “all people”.

For Jesus is both incarnate into and ascended into a unified Creation of Heaven-and- Earth, sky-and-soil. Because to suggest otherwise is science fiction, rather than Biblical faith, which ‘works’ when we approach humbly, on foot, authenticating our faith with terrestrial, visceral experience rather than distracted by academic flights of astronomical fantasy. Of course, Heaven is a ‘dome’. That’s the way the sky looks and it’s amazing the lengths modern church writers seem to be prepared to go to divorce the experience of sky from whatever else “heaven” needs to mean. The prepositions of the New Testament (up to heaven) always reassert the identity.

Our churches love to act. It gives them meaning, deepens their faith, multiplies their joy. And they’re longing for the chance to fall in love with Creation, though they live brutally chaperoned by ‘common sense’ and ‘prudence’. They labour under generations of inertia and intimidation, the imperial appropriation of the allegiance due to God. The legacy of Enlightenment – intimidation of spirituality and denial of non-human relatedness – is a denial which deprives Scripture of meaning. But we are enslaved to the expected idiom.

In my days of training, I led worship on Easter Sunday for a congregation in the Rhondda valley. The church was built to seat 500. The assembly now numbered five. I suggested we gather around the communion table, rather than

pulpit and distant pews. “Don’t know ‘bout that,” said one, “We might get into trouble!”

Five years into a special-category ministry in which, scandalously, I’ve become a practitioner without having time to be a (specialist) student, I’m realising what a great picture of British churches that was.

For five years now, I’ve been visiting local churches and talking to denominations. The toe in the door has been ‘Care for creation’ (note the lower-case noun). The dominant generation grew up with ‘All things bright and beautiful’ and even career theologians are prepared to offer a grudging nod of approval, for surely the chief purpose of Creation is to teach us about God? Or for our benefit?

That’s the way we insist on reading Genesis 2:18-22 -presenting fellow creatures as rejected participants in a speed-date session, and sometimes as if they were only rustled up for the occasion when, like the pre-existent and repurposed rainbow of Gen 9:13, it’s the relationship that is “created”. The ‘naming’ of fellow beings, which we otherwise undertake with love and wonder at the birth of a child, is the beginning of relationship, though I’m sure some preacher somewhere leapt ahead and merged the pre-gendered Adam with Linnaeus: classifying, rather than naming.

In a marginal, icing-on-the-cake ministry such as mine, any millimetre of shift is a win. And so, grandparents concerned about their posterity are most warmly welcome along too. Even if I remind them that if they’re planning to live another five years or so, they’re involved just as much.

I asked colleagues at a ministry conference just to try spelling Earth with a capital letter. To see what that does to the way we think. For English speakers, daringly rebelling against the grammar-nazi use of the othering pronoun “it” rather than “he”, “she”, or Shakespeare’s non-gender-specific pronoun “they”, is another great game of discovery, similar to that which a previous generation began with the militant use of ‘she’ for the Holy Spirit, and the realisation that ‘man’ hasn’t been generic for generations. We’re not in charge, and have no big stick. We won’t achieve perfection, but we have nothing to lose in modelling the Church we need to be more of. Relying on the grace of God.

4.

Dominion-ism or Foot-washing? A Time to Choose

My Answer to the Ecological Tragedy facing the World and Church

Chrissie Chevasutt

I have never before attempted to write an 'academic' or 'theological essay'.

I have never been taught how to write an academic essay in my life experience: suffering from being transgender has denied me the opportunity of any education. At the age of 64, I was invited to write for this project. Like most academics, a deadline has prevented me from completing the essay as I would have liked, proving I am worthy of academic acceptance.

I hope my hopelessness to prove my academic credentials does not bar my voice from being heard? It would be ironic if Academic Orthodoxy silenced or erased the voices of the oppressed.

As a child of a single parent, self-employed, working father, I experienced the joy of being brought up my grandparents throughout my school holidays until I reached puberty. My grandfather was a truly beautiful and gentle, devout Christian.

Before the Great War of 1914-18, when two Colonial Empires fought like leviathan monsters of some dark deep primordial evil, devouring the lives of millions of men, women and children, my grandfather had worked as a stable-boy, an

apprentice to the horsemen who worked the farm his father managed for the landowner.

Aged 18 he joined up to fight in the hell of the Somme trenches as part of a 'pals brigade'.¹

He was blown up by a shell and left for dead on the battlefield. He crawled to shelter under a railway bridge over a canal, where he was rescued by a Frenchman in a boat, who rowed him to the nearest field hospital. He survived and carried the fragments, shrapnel – the metal shards of the exploded bomb – in his body for the rest of his life, along with the psychological torment of trauma from the hell of war.

After the war he returned to the land he loved, but the team of shire horses he had lovingly tended either lay slaughtered in Flanders mud or sold to knackers' yards to make way for the 'infernal' combustion engine and the mechanisation of farming. He left the farm and living in harmony with the land to take on the role of medic and first responder in the coal mines, the 'pits,' another hell, where many more men died, buried alive on too many occasions.

The earth exploited for profit, the men just another commodity to exploit and create profit for the landowners.

Many rainy days and cold evenings I grew up snuggled in my grandad's arms, in front of a fire that was never allowed to go out, and listened to the stories he told me, stories that mesmerised and enchanted me. There was not a book in the house, bar two old and huge family Bibles, that recorded the dates of birth and death of each side and member of the family.

My grandfather was both the book and the story, and the stories he told were always stories of the land, of farming, fishing, hunting, harvesting, gathering and gleaning, of animals, wild and domestic. Of the mystery and beauty of living in harmony with the earth and all its bountiful goodness. He was an uneducated walking, talking encyclopaedia of all things in the natural realm.

My father inherited his love of 'creation' and passed it on to me too, but father's knowledge was supplemented by the hundreds of natural history books he devoured. Consequently, I too am a child of the soil. My spiritual roots are in living in harmony with the land and the seasons.

In recent years I have come to the realisation that my grandfather was amongst the last in many millennia to be taught knowledge, not through the supposedly enlightened modern tradition of academia, but by the very last horsemen who learnt their craft by oral tradition and by living in harmony with the land and horses. They were, for the most part, illiterate men, ‘horse whisperers’ who could work supposed magic with their horses.

How do you teach a 14-year-old slip of a lad to calm an agitated shire horse standing eight feet tall to the tip of their ears and weighing about one ton? From a book?

Their ‘knowledge’ they passed from father to son, mother to daughter, master to apprentice, an osmosis and transformation of imbibed and sometimes unspoken gifts, rooted in their being, knowledge carried, embodied in who they were, as much as in their doing. Grandad also told me that most horsemen would know a couple of hundred hedgerow remedies with which to cure their horses from many ailments.

To equate illiteracy with ignorance is the folly of the privileged and educated. These people, living in the agrarian age, knew instinctively when to plough, when to sow, when to harvest; they felt the earth, the land, beneath their boots, and acted upon that embodied wisdom in ways which modern, fast-food farming methods have no knowledge of: it has been lost, erased, despised and desecrated².

Mechanisation and capitalism not only erased co-operation and harmony with the earth, land and animals, for increased yields, profit and the exploitation of both humanity and the earth. It erased the very substance of this knowledge of how to live, in harmony and co-operation with the earth. We have watched our natural native species of wild-life – animals, insects, birds and plants – decimated by this so-called ‘progress’.

About the same time as I was forced to cease seeing my grandparents, I had an equally formative experience. My stepfather was a ‘connoisseur’ of early, original US blues music. I was an atheist at heart, the dark, cold Victorian faith of my grandfather scared me away from God and church, but in hearing the early blues recordings, the hairs on my body stood on end, I had goose bumps, a visceral connection: I had found, as an alienated, queer child, my tribe, my people, my song and a home.

I did not know why or how, but my connection to the blues and to the story

of the blues was one I related to – a bitter life-experience of alienation and oppression – though at that tender age I had not the means nor language to express my inner pain. The blues, ‘The Devil’s music.’³ In my early teens I educated myself about slavery: the bloody, tragic, evil history of colonial and Imperial exploitation, all sanctioned and justified in God’s name. From there, with the help of enthusiastic and ‘woke’ (well before their time) history teachers, I threw myself into the study of the Civil Rights Movement, which had coincided with my birth and coming of age.

The writings of Martin Luther King and Malcom X were my teenage companions as I struggled through social ostracism for my queerness. I felt their struggle in my own body, I understood their battle with the oppressor, though I had not the self-awareness to articulate my own alienation and oppression by empirical Christianity⁴.

I began to hate Christianity and everything it stood for. In 1976, aged 17, I saw Dee Brown’s ‘Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee.’⁵ I bought it and devoured it, and my growing realisation that the white man, the Christian, the Colonialist and Empire had committed genocide against all who resisted their Dominion. The forced marches of indigenous peoples from their homelands by white supremacists both foreshadowed and paved a way for the Holocaust. By tearing these native people from their lands, and marching them thousands of miles, they began the erasure of a people, culture, language, and the knowledge of living in harmony and co-operation with the earth. Just who were the savages?

In so doing, they sowed the seeds of the ecological disaster and tragedy this generation both face and are footing the bill for. It is our children, this current generation, who are having to finally face the reckoning and pay the horrific price for exploiting both the earth and its indigenous peoples, the very ones who once lived in harmony with the earth, giving back as much as they ever took from it⁶. I understood this erasure of indigenous peoples and their knowledge in the light of the deep personal experience and grief of my grandfather, who saw an entire way of a life, and a whole people-group, erased by the tragedies of war, industrialisation, capitalism, and greed: the poisoned fruit of Empire and capitalism.

My rebellion against all authority now became a raging fire of burning anger against my own nation, race, people, and culture. I ran away from home, to live

in squats in south-west London, at the same time as reggae and Rastafarianism hit the city, which took root and birthed local expression in the communities I frequented, especially Brixton, a centre for the Jamaican and West Indian diaspora. I imbibed the sacred herb, soaked in the history, language and culture of black consciousness and its longings for spiritual and physical freedom from tyranny and oppression, white Dominion. I grew my dreadlocks and found faith in Rastafari.

Christianity I could not accept, for its part in the justification of and collaboration in slavery, invasion, conquest, Dominion, and genocide. Rastafari, and its message of Exodus from the white oppressor, Dominion and the Babylon System, was where my heart, mind and body seemed to belong, but I was white and queer in a black man's world⁷.

Five years of total despair and hopelessness of belonging nowhere, I was left starving, begging and homeless on the streets of Old Delhi, India. Lying, dying, in a gutter outside a Jain Temple, I encountered Jesus for the first time.

Forty-two years later, I am still a stumbling, faltering, broken, disciple of Jesus. For forty years I have wrestled with the bitterness of a deeply personal faith in Jesus, a man who seems to bear no likeness to the religion that has consumed me, used me, and spat me out as queer, as a trans-femme disciple of Christ. I struggle to bridge the great gulf between the life and teachings of Jesus, and the religion that has appropriated his name. I still find the disconnect too great, too jarring, too irreconcilable. I am an exile, an outsider, a stranger, and alien within my own religion.

I simply do not understand 'Christianity.' I am exhausted from trying to understand it and trying to fit in to a religion that, for the most part, has sought to erase gender-transgressing people like me⁸.

I see Christ in every slave, in every indigenous person, in everyone oppressed by religious judgements, practices and policies that condemn, exclude, reject and demonise queer folks like me. The intersectionality and history of indigenous and queer folks beneath the crushing weight of Christendom's Dominion is both immediate, visceral and tragic. Our erasure is but the inevitable consequence of Dominion-ism⁹.

Recent years in the US (2014 – 2023) have seen the unfolding horror, tragedy and evil of Christian nationalism and fundamentalism, a mutating strain of white supremacy masquerading as Christian faith, which

systematically seeks to legislate against and erase transgender people from their communities and society. The theology behind this, in the form of conferences, books and online resources, all flying under the banner of Christian faith, has also now taken root in UK church and political culture and action.

It is no exaggeration that many sincere, informed, well-researched, and devout Christian trans, intersex and non-binary people feel, see and believe elements of Christian so-called 'orthodoxy' that wants to erase us from both the church and from society. Legislation and Conversion Therapy are their tools, their theological justification; Dominion-ism by means of 'Conversion theology, theory and therapy.'¹⁰

Simultaneously we have seen the exposure of the poisoned root and 'fruit' of colonialism come to light in the mass graves of the indigenous children who suffered and died through Canada's program of 'Assimilation.' Again, this was a Christian- rooted and funded attempt to erase a people, a language, a culture, and to subsume a people into white nationalism. A systematic, institutional and structural violence of 'Conversion Therapy', all founded in the principle of Dominion-ism.

These mass graves of nameless, faceless children are the poisoned 'fruit' of Dominion-ism; of policies and practises of erasure, by means of conversion theology, theory and 'therapy.'¹¹

Empire and Colonialism, under the sanction of Church, and in God's name, have left indigenous and queer peoples oppressed and marginalised in almost every country that has been Christianised. They / we remain relatively powerless, without political representation or financial backing to protest and protect their homelands, language and culture from further exploitation by the unrestrained and crushing capitalism that Empire and Colonialism have created.

Even today in the US, Dominion-ism as a theology, theory, law and practice, remains enshrined in State legislation and practice, and empowers multi-national corporations to continue to steal and plunder natural resources. Common and precious minerals, water and oil are exploited now from land which was once under the gentle, effective, pastoral care of indigenous peoples, living in co-operation and harmony in a delicate and carefully balanced relational dynamic with the land, that revered the earth and all its

manifest goodness. In some cases, these multi-nationals invade and destroy the land and water sources that indigenous peoples are still reliant upon, and guardians of. In every case they poison, pollute and destroy the delicate and fragile eco-systems that ensure the harmony and co-operation of the human, animal and plant life that have existed for millennia, with no other objective than exploitation, greed, profit, Dominion-ism¹².

Beneath all this Dominion-ism is a white euro-centric supremacy of such short-sighted arrogance that is destroying the very foundations of its own existence in a total disregard of human life and the fragile eco-systems we depend upon for survival, from using insecticides fatal to bees, upon whom we are all dependent for successful crops and fruit, to the extraction of mineral resources that poison and pollute earth, water, and sky.

We need to pinpoint Dominion-ism for the curse that it is upon both humanity and the earth, but also recognise it is the motivating spirit, force and energy behind both capitalist exploitation of people as a commodity to produce profit for the already obscenely rich, and the destruction of the earth, water and skies. We need to recognise too that Dominion-ism, whether acknowledged or not, is the principle, motivation and dynamic behind Christendom's fatal obsession with 'Conversion theology, theory, therapy and practices', even within the conservative evangelical world¹³.

Without Dominion-ism and Conversion theology and therapy, we would not have programs of 'Assimilation', the resulting mass graves of children in Canada, and the deliberate plan to erase indigenous and queer peoples, cultures, and languages; and within these, the erasure of wisdom embodied and passed from one generation to the next, of living in co-operation and harmony with the natural world.

To simplify and conclude, I argue that Dominion-ism is a perversion and corruption of faith in Christ Jesus, and that it is a dark, demonic and destructive principle and force that does not recognise the sanctity of all life, nor reverence it, but instead seeks to 'assimilate, erase and subsume' life into its own parasitic nature and being; the furtherance of Empire, power and Dominion.

If something can ever be described or attributed as being 'Satanic' within Christendom, then I would argue Dominion-ism is just that.

What is the answer, what is the antidote, to the fatal self-destructive

psychodynamics and power dynamics embedded in Dominion-ism, and Christendom as Empire?

I don't think we have to look very far at all to see the answer. Patriarchy is fundamental to Dominion-ism: they are totally integral and dependent upon each other. White, heteronormative, male dominance is just one hall mark of Patriarchy and an essential and integral part of Dominion-ism.

If the gospels of Matthew, Luke and Mark reflect and shape the masculine energy of Christian history, theology and action, then, for me, the gospel of John reflects the feminine energy and lives which would have surely surrounded John. John does not come across in any way as a stereotypical, 'Alpha' male.

It is not surprising to me that Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not even record one of Jesus' greatest and final lessons to his disciples. It is left to John's gospel, which I see as very much the women's Gospel (if we recognise the significance and lasting influence of Mary, Mother of Jesus, as resident in John's home, and as a figure around whom the women in the early church would have both gravitated, sharing their lives, stories, and theology.) Their positive influence upon John and 'his' gospel, are I believe, totally overlooked. The story and theology, impact and reality of Jesus washing feet, is, I believe, the heart and mind of true Christian Orthopraxy, and the perfect antidote to Dominion-ism and its 'Orthodoxy'.

In Jesus washing feet, in all those who truly follow Christ washing feet, we see the total perversion that Dominion-ism is: exposed, in contrast, as a hollow, yet bloody and terrorising counterfeit.

To wash feet is to both serve those we are called to love, and to listen to them. As we wash feet and listen to those God places before us, we learn from them. As we wash feet we are honouring and reverencing each person, tribe and nation; each equally precious in God's sight and made in their image.

In listening to the indigenous and native peoples of the world, in washing their feet, in listening to them and learning from them, we demonstrate the true nature of Christ and of the Gospel.

My experiences through childhood with my grandfather, his love, storytelling and knowledge, are what have helped save and shape my life. My experience of early US blues singers and musicians, my journey into the history of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, is the bedrock of my faith.

My experience of Rastafari and black consciousness as a reality rather than an intellectual, abstract or theoretical concept, was my birth as a spiritually aware person, and was my introduction to Christ through the Rasta prophets, poets and singers (into which my family is married) who referenced him as authentic and authoritative. My experience as transfemme, allied to black, latin and indigenous transwomen, has exposed me directly to Dominion-ism's inherent oppression and erasure, and to certain streams of conservative evangelical faith who are campaigning for the erasure of trans people from society through legislative means.

This essay is my attempt to expose the evil of Dominion-ism and its part in destroying both people, and the earth, and to propose that nothing less than its exposure and renunciation can save this planet, and the most vulnerable people on it, of which I am one. The solution is I believe simple, yet the greatest challenge the church has yet faced: to renounce ego and return to the beautiful, liberating, life-giving model of Christ, as embodied in the spirit of washing the feet of all whom the church is called to serve.

Notes

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7 'I was white and queer in a black man's world.' Here I would have to cite the entire works of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, Marcus Garvey, Linton Kwesi Johnson, The Brixton Poets 1976-81, and many sessions of prayer, studying scripture (the Bible), and smoking Ganja, with Rasta elders in Nyabinghi, developing awareness of black consciousness.

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5.

A Scapegoat named “Hope”

The Absence of Hiraeth from Capitalist Land Detachment and the need for Sumud

Victoria Turner

Introduction

I grew up on a council estate in Cardiff, Wales. Recently there were uprisings in Ely, another council estate in Cardiff. The last time this area clashed with the police was in 1991. It was called the Ely Bread Riots, apparently caused by an argument between Abdul Waheed and Carl Agius over whose shop was allowed to sell bread. The riot involved over 500 people. In response to the 1991 riot, Conservative Home Secretary Kenneth Baker described the perpetrators as “yobbos and hooligans”. His response was criticised by Labour Council leader Bob Morgan who retorted that, ‘He really should be concerned with the underlying causes of these matters.’¹ What were the causes? Because it really wasn’t about who could flog the bread. André Goretz in 1991 wrote,

Between 1961 and 1988, the size of the industrial working class shrank by 44% in Great Britain [...] In the space of twelve years (1975-86), one-third of or even half of all industrial jobs have disappeared in several European countries.²

Only in 1985 did the miners’ strikes end, as the Conservative

government of Thatcher—in their quest to privatise anything and everything, closed down the Welsh mines. The National Museum of Wales claims that actually—despite the myths still perpetrated today, ‘During the 1980s, the British coal industry was known as the most efficient globally.’³ At this point you might be thinking I’ve lost the plot—why is this girl upholding the efficiency of a fossil fuel at a climate consultation. Indeed. But my next point is why.

Already in the 1980s there was unrest because of high unemployment in mining areas. In 1982, only 62 apprentices started working in South Wales, despite 1400 applicants showing interest. This made the community nervous, and the mining trade unions protested to the bosses that the ‘future of your pit is your young people. If you don’t train your young people, you’ve had it.’⁴

With so many men out of work in an area which was almost single-industry, there was a high result of deprivation and breakdown in the community. Unlike the mines in the north of England, where 35% of men went on strike, in South Wales, support for the strike remained pretty much at 100% until November 1984.⁵ The North had other industries—South Wales was because of the mines. The quote above was not concerned with protecting the industry of the mine, it was concerned with protecting the work. The product was not the end point, the consumer not in charge, but the labour was what gave the community identity, meaning and connection.

So, going back to Ely in 1991, Cardiff – the capital of South Wales, the city where the first million-pound deal was struck (because of the coal) – had a huge economic downturn from the start of the 1990s. 30% of young men were unemployed in Ely in 1991.⁴ Bob Morgan, as mentioned above, commented that the violence was because of a ‘build-up of this huge reservoir of disadvantaged youths, which not only can’t find employment, but they have no real hope.’⁵

Fast forward back to the Ely riots that happened on the 22nd May 2023.

On BBC Radio Wales there was a touching interview between two men from the area who discussed how much the area had changed, but also remained the same. The interview came a few days after a riot in the area that came after the death of teenage boys: Kyrees Sullivan, 16, and Harvey Evans, 15. Gareth is the local (pseudonym), Jason Mohammad was the DJ.

Gareth: I truly feel saddened today. The area will just be known as a problem area. And it's just sad because there is so much good in Ely. It can't all be pointed at the individuals involved in this last night. The police are culpable in this. Social services are culpable in this. Local government are culpable in this. Is it from austerity? A lack of investment in our younger generation?

Jason: Two people we understand have died [...] thoughts and prayers are with their families. But having made documentaries on both television and radio in the last two years, where everything you've said were the concluding factors by so many experts [...] Since the event in 1991 the area has been scarred psychologically—the area will once again be tarnished because of a night of rioting.

Gareth: subconsciously it'll be “oh, he's from Ely, he's gonna be a wrong 'un”. And I know that's a very glib statement to make and I can't factually support that—

Jason: Listen, I can tell you now, I can tell you know, I still get people saying, “Oh, you're from Ely ain't you.” I went in a cab once, this is like, this is after being 15 years on telly, he goes “Oh you're from Ely, I'll have to watch my watch.” [...] That's fact. That stigma, no matter what you do in life, is still there.

The point of this paper is not to go back to political polemics and blame Thatcher for 4000 words. It is however, going to discuss how neo-capitalist “rational” (cough-English) concerns, have fundamentally tarnished Welsh belonging and communities.

Hegel in his early writings wrote, ‘We must recognise in materialism the enthusiastic effort to transcend the dualism which postulates two different worlds as equally substantial and true, [and] to nullify this tearing asunder of what is originally One.’⁶ Jason W. Moore, a historical geographer and environmental historian uses this quote in his book *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* to argue that instead of seeing us as leaving a carbon footprint on the natural world as if we are detached from it, we need to instead conceive of how capital is in nature, and how nature is fighting back. I’m going to use the work of Byung-Chul Han and Joerg Rieger to help me articulate how I see this divide that Moore and Hegel were grappling with. Rather than internal v external, or human v nature, I see Capitalocene v Dirty. This paper poses to understand the inability of the climate activism movement to engage the working-classes as from a constant overlook of the division pushed on working-classes and the land by the neo-liberal government and capital-orientated economy that pushed success and results into the Capitalocene and away from the Dirty—the real life *relationship* we should be having with our world.

The Divide

In Welsh there is a word *hiraeth*. There is no direct translation in English,

Hiraeth is a deep, nostalgic, bittersweet wistfulness, or an intense longing to return to something—or someone, somewhere, or sometime—that is now long gone, or perhaps never was. It is an ancient concept to the Welsh people, and a frequent subject of Welsh ballads and poetry that harken back to the long-lost Wales of their authors’ Celtic ancestors.⁷

More simply—it could be described as a longing to be where your spirit lives. At the core of the idea of *hiraethis* our

relationship to place—it's a term deep with Welsh mythology, glens, valleys, running water, fairies, dragons—whatever.

Our removal from “place” has left this idea of *hiraeth* as meaningless, especially for the working classes.

Our world today is not run through co-operation with and dependence on the world we were asked to have dominion over, or steward (Gen1:26-30). Instead, liberation theologian Joerg Rieger explains that we live in the Capitalocene.

The Capitalocene—the geological age when the maximization of economic profit has made it to the center stage not only in the United States but all over the globe and dominates whatever other ages have been proclaimed, including the Anthropocene [...] the economic interests of a small and privileged group of humans rule both people and planet.⁸

And how does the Capitalocene play out? Through “trickle-down” economics that keep power and wealth in the hands of the very few. Allan Boesak has termed this ‘Global Apartheid,’ noting how the obvious segregation and injustices forced upon black South Africans is now forced upon the Global South and working classes by the privileged few.⁹ Neocapitalism is a corrupt system that mocks the concept of ‘work’. “Hard work will get you anywhere” is a gaslighting technique spewed by billionaires who readily exploit people and the land for their own selfish profit. Hard work puts money into the pockets of the rich.

This is a far cry from the Welsh miners, who took such pride in their trade and work. Working-class areas in Wales since the closure of the mines are still struggling with unemployment.¹⁰ 27% of children live in poverty in Wales. Hopelessness is rife in struggling areas of Wales. Not hopelessness in a macro sense of being scared for the world and all its interconnected problems, but scared because their welfare provision is being reduced and they might not be able to feed their children over the summer holidays. Laura Waddell has written a wonderful

chapter about growing up in a council estate in Glasgow and the meaning of sweet treats—where you could not afford to go on holiday over the summer but you could afford an ice cream from the van, or a real can of coke—the coke not only being a momentary release from normality because of the sugar high, but also because a coke is the same in the hands of a working-class or an upper-class kid. She writes, ‘malnutrition is not a problem confined to the Victorians of history lessons, with millions of people in the UK, particularly those with low income or mobility problems, suffering from undernourishment in the present day.’¹¹ Council estates of grey collective areas of concrete, often badly serviced by public transport and rising poverty (and the pressure of multinational corporations) putting local businesses, like greengrocers, out of business—this leaves the cheap corner shop to serve the local community, where having innutritious ready food saves the bus fare to travel to the supermarket. Sugary food, ‘treats’, serve as a momentary escape from the concrete jungle of struggle.

The reality of food being an escape from the concrete world can be extended through the most recent work of Byung-Chul Han. Chul-Han discusses our living in a world of non-things, and how this distracts us from resistance or work:

We are today experiencing the transition from the age of things to the age of non-things. Information, rather than things, determines the lifeworld. We no longer dwell on the earth and under the sky but on Google Earth and the Cloud.¹²

On first read, I also rolled my eyes and wondered if this crazy philosopher scared of technology also walks around barefoot. But his argument is convincing. Our world is becoming more and more ghostly—we’re not attached to ‘things’, but it is ‘things’ that ground and calm us—sitting in the same armchair, settling into the same bed, having the same walk over the four seasons. Now, he poses, we are all ‘informaniacs’ losing our creative sense of wonder that is being replaced by all-knowing

algorithms. Effectiveness replaces truth and we have no time for lingering. My partner is an avid walker. He has a friend who lives in London who came to stay with him in Cardiff to go walking with him. My partner was astonished an hour into the walk he asked him to take 100s of photos of him and was ready to turn back—1 hour into this planned 7 hour hike.

Han explains how the 'infosphere' has had an 'emancipatory effect' which liberates us from the hardship of work.¹³ But where the tool is an extension of the hand, a hand which gets blisters from the working of a hammer, we transfer our intellectuality to these non-things in the infosphere.

The hand is the organ of work and action. The finger, by contrast, is the organ of choice [...] They *choose*, rather than *act*. They push buttons in order to satisfy their needs. Their lives are not dramas in which they are compelled to act; their lives are play.

Phones, televisions, iPads, social media, are becoming the 'real'. Play is becoming the real. 'Play does not interfere with reality,' play does not resist, or work. Choice in consumerism is not only exploiting our finances, but also our time—where mindless living through lights and colours and overloads of information distracts us from seeing how we are when we are just being. The feeling of momentary escapism that came from sweet treats is now the ordinary. *Hiraeth* perhaps is untranslatable even in Wales where Welsh people are removed from their land from concrete, from their trade by the Capitalocene, their communities from consumerism, their environment from austerity, and their drive for betterment from the lies of the government.

This is where I want to suggest that 'hope' is not helpful when communicating to the working-classes about the climate catastrophe. Matthew Huber writes, 'a specific class overwhelmingly shapes the climate movement: the professional class. The most common climate activists include NGO staff, scientists, journalists, think tank analysts, and

aspirant professionals', those invested in knowledge production—the infosphere. He continues, 'the professional class centres its politics not on a material struggle over resources or power, but on 'knowledge', on the belief or denial of climate change itself, and their positionality is fixated on their power as consumers.'¹⁴

Huber rightly points out the myth of the power of the consumer and the lies of the individualised climate footprint. Sending Boris Johnson on a private jet to an environmental conference in Cornwall is not helping. Petitioning our greedy government intent on blaming migrants for every trouble we have is not going to help. It's becoming play—click-bait for journalists. We have no hope of influencing the Capitalocene—money is controlling money. The middle-class, prosperous climate language of writing, researching, debating is play to those who are not able to use their hands to provide for their families. How ironic that these groups can speak of the need for hope when they have the means to easily provide for their families—money to buy produce from the market chains, a car to find the best produce, outside space to grow their own vegetables.¹⁵

My Nan and Grandad were among the first residents of a new council estate in Wales. It was the place where they chose to retire—my grandad after serving in World War II and spending years of it in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, and a following career with my nan running pubs and an off-license. They chose the estate, built between 1976-1982 because of what was pioneering architecture—with a community that was more easily walkable than drivable, that incorporated the natural lakes and rivers, that would serve a diverse community of people—retired, working, disabled, that could support one another. My grandparents have now left us and so has their mark on the community, but the memories of my Nan growing her flowers in the front garden, or putting out her mulch in the blazing sun, bucket by bucket because the bags were too

heavy, whilst enjoying which birds visited her garden, and my Sunday afternoons growing up walking the dog with her around the lake that was a ten minute walk away preserve *hiraeth* for me.

This image of my Nan working on her garden, surrounded by concrete and overlooked, abandoned outside spaces, is important. The most recent Edinburgh Gifford Lectures were given by biologist John Dupré. He used a scientific experiment on wasps where scientists would try and trick the wasps, but they would continue to do the same thing that would better their environment again and again despite the external unnatural factor (the scientist) trying to disturb it. That was my Nan. In an environment of hate, suspicion, ugliness and austerity she used the little she had to make her garden bright and feed the eco-sphere, she would talk to all of her neighbours, and often her shopping would be walked home by the biggest gang leaders—helping ‘Aunty Dorothy’ who gave them choc ices growing up when she saw them playing outside of her front garden (and often made them help). Today, it is easier to drive around this community than walk because the accessible alleyways have been blocked off because of crime. Kids on the estate don’t use the parks of green spaces but hang out on the streets—with their technology. Dupré discussed how the human species’ ability for co-operation was our biggest strength. Our cooperation, a functioning society, is the thing that enables us to be free. Those without the benefits of a functioning society, who are cold, hungry or bored, have not the luxury of freedom.¹⁶ Distractions from this condition, in line with Han’s infosphere are much more attractive than dealing with the harsh conditions of the Capitalocene.

So, how can we expect the working-classes, who are denied their ability to ‘work’ with their hands, to get on board with the ‘hope’ of the middle-class professionals trying to talk their way to a better future when they are living the ‘better future’ that the people in concrete jungles are prevented from having?

People in Wales stuck in council estates can't get to the beach to see the soil erosion from rising tide levels. They are removed from their land from the pursuit of the Capitalocene to exploit the land for the sake of the accumulation of invisible money.

Challenging the Capitalocene is not going to come by its beneficiaries producing more information for the infosphere. It will come from *Sumud*.

Transferring our context from Wales here to Palestine, if anyone has ever been to the West Bank, one of the first things that hits you is the rubbish. There is rubbish everywhere. I've written elsewhere about the environmental struggles of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, but the struggle of not having control over your own land— your water resources, rubbish disposal, import or export, or air quality, stops enthusiasm for everyday essentials.¹⁷ The grinding battle for freedom and selfdetermination puts questions like how your street looks at the absolute bottom of the pile. But they resist, and there's a word, *Sumud*, which translates as the will to resist, or steadfastness. Palestinians use *Sumud* to describe their condition of absolute raw resistance—where investment is far and few, the *Nakba* ongoing, refugee camps overflowing, and their voices silenced. *Sumud* is constant work to keep their identity in a world that is willing to deny it for ease. *Sumud* is the only reason why George, who I met, continues to take groups on hikes in the West Bank despite it being Area C and him being arrested multiple times for tracking routes.

Wider Implications

So, to retrack, I've talked about how 'hope' is a scapegoat when talking about environmental liberation to working classes who have no capacity to 'hope' for anything beyond the improvement of their immediate conditions, and *Hiraeth* is a non-existent concept for people stuck in concrete jungles from

the ripping of their trade that was bound to earth. So, how might *Sumud* be translatable and help us bridge this divide between the Capitalocene and the Dirty? I'll use an example that's close to home.

The URC, and other denominations in the UK, are right in the Capitalocene. We're at a place where my generation is going to be left with a massive trust fund (multiple massive trust funds) from the sales of expensive buildings. We have to be honest and admit that church as we know it today is declining. I want to pose that the best legacy we can leave is to honour our working-class roots. We are a church that is built up from workers. The Congregational tradition until the mid-1800s was a working-class movement.¹⁸ The wealth that we have accumulated since needs to be put back into our communities in acts of solidarities—not festering in our Synod wealth Trust funds quivering in fear of Charity Law. Translated? This means investing in grassroots co-operatives—not ones that kind of work and maybe help some poor people through foodbanks but the kind of co-operatives that make communities self-sufficient and challenge the national economy. Could we get to a stage where the shortages of fresh food in Tesco pass poorer communities by because they are so well provided for from their community gardens? This is what I want to call *dirty* investment. The kind of investment that makes accountants quiver. Dirty because its investing in 'unsafe people', 'unprosperous places', and literally, in the DIRT—reconnecting people with the land.

The most formative project of George MacLeod that led to him establishing the Iona Community in 1938 was creating a holiday retreat house for families in his working-class, industrial Parish of Govan—Fingalton Mill—the building of which brought Protestants and Catholics together, a monumental achievement if you know anything of the sectarianism of Scotland at the this time, bolstered by the national church. So, why are we as churches (and also as the Council for World

Mission (1977) which kindly sponsored this gathering) investing their impressive resources into the Capitalocene rather than the Dirty? We know with whom Jesus invested his time, where would he have invested his resources if he were born in the place of Caesar rather than a refugee? If there's enough dirty, counter-cultural investment around the country, the multi-billionaire companies that our current government sits in the laps of will feel our disinvestment. That might actually change the course of the world, rather than hoping our petitions might be heard by the besties of oil companies whilst we invest in adjacent, exploitative companies ourselves.

God giving us Dominion over all the earth, stewardship—means that he has given us permission to *work*. Not to accumulate resources in Capitalocene but to accumulate *dirty*—the untraceable things like love, connection, and solidarity between communities and their place. We need to rebuild micro-economies where trade, provision and generational flourishing is more important than profit, and relationships with the land are not only fostering extraction for survival, but pride, care, and mutual accountability. Screw 'hope' that tries to convince others to change things from the top down, can we embrace dirty *Sumud* and actually challenge the Capitalocene by creating alternatives?

Endnotes

1. Ron Ferguson, *George MacLeod: The Founder of the Iona Community* (London: William Collins & Co Ltd, 1990), 138-139.
2. See Stewart J. Brown, 'Outside the Covenant': The Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish Immigration, 1922-1938,' *The Innes Review* 42, no.1 (Spring, 1991), 19-45.
3. This of course slightly overlooks the important question of

how Jesus would understand his relationship to this church—often of Empire if he were here today.

4. Ben Curtis, *The South Wales Miners 1964–1985*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013).

5. BBC News, ‘Canon Morgan’, November 24, 2011, via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-eastwales-15875483>

6. Quoted in Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015), 3.

7. Paul Anthony Jones, ‘Hiraeth,’ September 12, 2019 <https://www.haggardhawks.com/post/hiraeth>

8. Joerg Reiger, *Theology in the Capitalocene: Ecology, Identity, Class, and Solidarity* (Fortress Press, 2022).

9. Allan Boesak, *Kairos, Crisis, and Global Apartheid: The Challenge to Prophetic Resistance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

10. Good article outlining unemployment figures: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-65610675>. This is a complicated debate over the statistics and ‘labelling’ people. Wales is now seeing generations of families who have never worked, or only worked in unskilled industries for short periods of time. Non-work has become the normal and long-term health or disability claims are the highest they have ever been.

11. Laura Waddell, ‘The Pleasure Button,’ in Nathan Connolly ed., *Know Your Place: Essays on the Working Class by the Working Class* (Dead Ink, 2017).

12. Byung-Chul Han, *Non-things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 1.

13. Han, *Non-things*, 7.

14. Matthew Heber, *Climate Change as Class War* (London: Verso, 2022) 4-5.

15. I'd like to point to Anu's great work here where she talks of the need for rage from and for the Global South. A. M. Ranawana, *A Liberation for the Earth: Climate, Race and Cross* (London: SCM Press, 2022).

16. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/gifford-lectures/2023/05/12/john-dupre-lecture-6-free-will/>

17. <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/greenwashing-part-1-control-of-the-land/>

18. See the upcoming paper from Professor Stewart Brown at the URC History Conference 17 June 2023 (or published in the URC History Society Journal).

See also

Max Evans, 'Ely Bread Riots,' August 30, 2016, via <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales37183995>

Amgueddfa Cwm Cynon, "Scargill Valley: The 1984/5 Miners' Strike,' <https://cynonvalleymuseum.wales/2021/04/16/scargill-valley-the-1984-5-miners-strike/> 4 Ben Curtis, *The South Wales Miners 1964-1985* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013). 5 Amgueddfa Cwm Cynon, "Scargill Valley'.

Evans, 'Ely Bread Riots.'

PART II

RACISM AND EMPIRE

6.

The Tripartite Nature of Contemporary African Identity

and the need for a Pan-African Theology of Justice

Israel Oluwole Olofinjana

Introduction

As an African missionary pastor resident in the UK, the area of my scholarly work has been to examine the reverse mission of African Christians in Britain. Reverse mission in this context is understood as an analytical framework to understand the mission theology and mission of African Christians in Britain. In essence, a reverse missiology that explores the migratory implications of African Christians in the British diaspora bringing in a missiological significance in terms of God's multi-ethnic kingdom. But a further question I have been wrestling with is what crucial role does African identity play in the mission of African Christians in Britain? How does African identity impact their mission? Does it enhance or hinder it? Part of answering these questions has been to develop what I refer to as African British Theology which posits that confidence in African identity is essential for the success of the African missionary enterprise in a contested multicultural British society, but that this is not a substitute for contextual approach to mission.¹ While African British Theology is

essentially developing African Theology in Britain how does it relate to Black British Theology?

Black British Theology and African British Theology

It relates because they both take the African experience seriously as an important hermeneutical factor. While Black British Theology draws heavily from the African Caribbean experience, African British Theology draws from the cultural context of continental Africans, that is, Africans who are born and raised on the continent. Black British Theology draws inspiration from Black Theology in America while African British Theology looks to Africa reflecting on African Theology. Black British Theology leans more towards Liberation Theology, whilst African British Theology leans more towards Intercultural Theology. These distinctions while helpful in categorising and understanding the nuances of theologies emanating from the African experience, also somehow takes away from the fact that we both shared a common African ancestry. It is this common African ancestry that has begun to puzzle me recently as I think about the global African identity. This is adequately called Pan-Africanism. While this is a social-political and cultural construct, I want to attempt to apply it to capture the need for a global African theology I am calling Pan-African theology. The emphasis of the Pan-African theology I am constructing leans heavily in the direction of theology of justice particularly racial and climate justice concerns. A working definition of racial justice in this essay is, the strategic thinking and action to combat institutional, structural and personal racism that dehumanises people of colour created in God's image. Climate justice as used in this paper refers to our shared responsibility to speak up and take action to safeguard

the rights and dignity of those disproportionately affected by climate change. Climate change in this context is understood as the results from the impact of our actions and inactions on our world.²

Theological Reflection on Hebraic Identity

In order to begin to flesh out what a Pan-African theology could look like, I want to start my theological reflection on diasporic identity by looking at Hebraic identity in the scriptures. This is in the true fashion of African Theology which takes its point of departure from scripture. Hebraic identity in the Old Testament whilst not homogenous has a shared commonality in the centrality and worship of Yahweh (See Deuteronomy 6:4). Kingdom politics and tribal loyalties amongst other things led to a divided kingdom around 900 BCE with Judah in the South and what emerged to be Israel in the North. These two kingdoms had their distinctive identities in terms of government administration, religion and culture. Two centuries later, a powerful nation in the Assyrian empire conquered and exiled the people of the North, repopulating it with people from other cultures, thus Samaria, the capital city in the North was perceived by the Southerners as corrupt and confused (See 2 Kings 17). Around 586 BCE, the people of the South were also conquered and exiled by the Babylonians and later Persian Kingdoms. This created a sort of tripartite Hebraic identity with Samaritans (people of the North), Judah or Jews (people of the South) and those in diaspora who were exiled into Babylon and later Persia. These tripartite Hebraic identity is seen at play throughout the inter-testamental period otherwise also known as Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament. For example, when the exiles from Judah returned to rebuild the temple, city and walls, they were opposed by the Samaritans who do not share their loyalty (See Ezra 4-5;

Nehemiah 4-5). We also see similar tensions in the early church in Acts 6 when the Grecian Jews (Jews born in the dispersion) complained of being marginalised by the Hebraic Jews (Jews born in the land of Israel).

Clarification of Terms

I ought to say something about the word tripartite here and how I am applying it. The word tripartite in theological circles is usually associated and used in conjunction with the doctrine of the trinity as it pertains to the nature and identity of the Godhead being one in essence, purpose and unity, but three distinct persons. It is also used in Christian Anthropology to describe the composite nature of human beings in three distinct components but one: spirit, soul and body (See 1 Thessalonians 5:23). There are those who view and argue that human beings have two distinct nature: body and soul. I am using the word tripartite here to describe diasporic identities firstly applying it to Hebraic/Jewish identity and then to African identity.

African Tripartite Identity

In similar fashion to Hebraic identity, African traditional identity whilst not homogenous has a shared root on the continent of Africa. But again like the Jews due to conquest, enslavement, colonialism, migration and neo-colonialism, this heterogeneous identity on one continent was displaced so that the African diaspora was created in the West Indies as African Caribbeans and the Americas as African Americans. Paul Gilroy, a British historian drawing on earlier African American writers such as W.E.B Du Bois's double consciousness uses the transatlantic slave trade to highlight the influence of "routes"

on black identity. Gilroy's pioneering work on black diaspora argues and situates the creation of black cultures in the Americas and Europe within modernity thus displacing traditional notions of nationalism³. While Gilroy's work speaks of the hybridity of the black Atlantic, I am exploring how the trans-Atlantic voyage of Africans has created a fragmented African tripartite identity namely: Continental Africans, African Caribbeans and African Americans. The late Joel Edwards (1951-2021) observed the impact of this dislocation on African identity when he stated:

What is incredible is that despite Black Power, Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement and Marcus Garvey and Pan-Africanism, the issue of African identity remained a live issue. Caribbeans have been seeking cultural belonging in Africa now for decades through Rastafarianism, Nation of Islam, and the idealism of Africa as the mother country. Across the Caribbean ancestral interest and identity has increased significantly. Caribbean people are now comfortable with being called Africans. Indeed, many will insist upon it. And yet there remains a psychological chasm. African Americans and Caribbeans will appeal to Kwanzaa as a form of identity. Africans do not. We insist that we are Africans misplaced in America and the Caribbean whilst Africans identify principally with their tribe, language group religion or nation rather than African. Africans are content to allow Caribbeans to claim African while they pledge loyalty to their tribe religion or nation. Displaced African Diaspora are reaching out to Africa as an idea while Africans have not put out the welcome mat.⁴

If the dislocation and fragmentation of African identity has done almost a permanent damage, how does this African tripartite identity influence and shape our theology? Today we speak of theologies emanating from the African experiences as African Theology on the continent of Africa, Black Theology in the context of United States and Southern Africa, and Black British Theology in the context of African Caribbeans in Britain.

Is there a need for a Pan-African theology that recognises the distinctiveness and delineations, but also takes cognisance of the fact that there is a common identity and shared root? This Pan-African theology is similar to what Josiah Young argued in his book, *Pan-African Theology* on the need for an African approach to social and religio-cultural analysis that will require unique perspectives of both Black Theology and African Theology⁵. What is however missing in Young's analysis is the development of Black British Theology championed by African Caribbeans in the British context. A current movement that captures this development is the Transatlantic Roundtable on Race and Religion (TRRR). TRRR is a prime example of a movement that has invested in a Pan-African work and dialogue through their various global conversations and publications⁶, but I wonder if we need more of this kind of work in this current climate?

The current climate with the death of George Floyd, the case of Child Q and others are inspiring as it were a resurgence in Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement therefore necessitating a new kind of theological enterprise that is global, but also is epistemologically rooted in African identity and history. Although BLM has become heavily politicised and controversial, it is however affirming theologically what Paul speaks about in his body imagery and metaphor, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26 NRSV). If one part of God's family hurts, then the whole family is hurting. While this is applicable in countering those who fail to understand while Black Lives really matter, it is also useful in understanding African solidarity that shares the struggle and pain of the three distinct African families. In essence, if African Americans feel oppressed and marginalised because of racial injustice embedded in the American systems, continental Africans and African Caribbeans should feel this and respond in solidarity and action because after all, we are all Africans.

This is black consciousness and Steve Biko (1946-1977), the deceased political activist from South Africa has this to say about it:

The call for Black Consciousness is the most positive call to come from any group in the black world for a long time. It is more than just a reactionary rejection of whites by blacks. The quintessence of it is the realization by the blacks that, in order to feature well in this game of power politics, they have to use the concept of group power and to build a strong foundation for this. The philosophy of Black Consciousness, therefore, expresses group pride and determination by the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self.⁷

It is this black consciousness that underpins the philosophy of Pan-Africanism to which I shall now explore.

The need for a Pan-African Theology

Pan-Africanism is a philosophical idea rooted in the struggle of people of African descent to be liberated economically, politically and culturally. While the idea was crystallised and became a political movement in the twentieth century, its history goes back to the attempts of enslaved Africans to liberate themselves.⁸ There are Pan-Africanist such as Edward Blyden (1832-1912) and Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) who embody a vision of creating an African nation where all people of African descent can live comfortable. For these Pan-Africanist, conversations on reparations took the form of a reconstruction of home on the continent of Africa. There were also Pan-Africanist such as Jomo Kenyatta (1897-1978) and Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972) who fought hard for the independence of African nations from their various European colonial powers. But there are also Pan-Africanist such as Mojola Agbebi (1860-1917)⁹ and Du bois (1868-1963) whose cultural thinking saw beyond an African nation but more importantly developed

pride in African consciousness. It is this notion of African consciousness that I am seeking to apply a theological understanding that can help us to address collectively racial and climate concerns. This is because the transatlantic history that divided people of African descent is inextricably linked with the history of racism and that of the climate crisis in the African context. The transatlantic voyage and trade that economically exploited Africans is connected to the industrial revolution which functions on steam and water power. The enslaved Africans provided the raw material for industrial change and growth which consequentially increased air and water pollution. This is a double crisis. It seems to me therefore that we need a Pan-African movement rooted in faith that can develop a Pan-African theology that can speak prophetically like the Civil Rights Movement in the past into racial and climate justice issues. Such a theological enterprise will be broadly speaking into justice issues such as environmental, poverty, economic and social political concerns.

But before this can happen authentically, there is the need for dialogue among African Theologians and Black Theologians. The conversation started by John Mbiti and James Cone in the 1970s has to continue.¹⁰ In the British context some of these conversations have continued in Birmingham through the Black Theology Forum at Queens Foundation. The Sam Sharpe Project have also created spaces to reflect on this through their annual lectures. Finally, Centre for Missionaries from the Majority World have also facilitated such conversations, but more needs to be done to bridge the gap. This is because there is still the need to understand each other, particularly how the tripartite nature of African identity influences and shapes our work. The distinctions in African identity and how that impacts on our struggle is one of the central themes of the first instalment of the Marvel Universe Film Black Panther. While both the Black Panther character played by the recently deceased Chadwick Boseman and War

Monger, played by Michael B Jordan were Wakandans, one was continental Wakandan, that is, born and raised on the fictional continent of Africa, while the other was born and raised in the diaspora in the fictional United States of America. Their experiences and upbringing define their struggles and their approach to justice. This film narrates to some extent some of the struggles that Africans, African Americans and African Caribbeans face and therefore their approach to theology.

If we are going to speak on justice issues together we need to understand our roots and deepen our relationships without blurring our theological distinctions. Therefore, conversations and dialogue are needed to begin this process and the development of a Pan-African theology. One example in the British context, I am currently seeing this Pan-African theology develop is through the work of the newly formed Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF). Racial Justice Advocacy Forum is a racial justice movement which protests against racial injustice and speaks truth to power with churches.¹¹ The movement brings together different racial justice officers within the historic churches and para-church organisations and is acutely aware of the need to spotlight how racial injustice permeates and affects different spheres of society such as climate, education, health, policing and public policy.

One of the global crisis facing our world today is the concern of climate change. While African countries and the Caribbean islands are disproportionately the victims of environmental crisis, their voices on the subject are minimal or at best not well represented. This case is also reflected in the African and African Caribbean churches and their diaspora churches in Europe who are very slow at engaging the issue of climate justice. The effect is that while the problem appears to be brown, the advocates are usually white. While it is good that we have the likes of Sir David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg as global ambassadors speaking into the issues of how climate change affects us all, that is, human and the entire bio-diversity

in our world, I have often wondered what role African Christianity can play in addressing the issues of climate change and climate justice?

Towards Climate Justice

I am going to digress briefly to share my own experience and journey into climate justice to illustrate some crucial points. My experience of climate change started with the fact that I grew up in an area of Nigeria where flooding was a constant occurrence. The current flooding in Nigeria impacting about thirty-three states out of thirty-six demonstrates the ongoing effect of climate crisis in Nigeria. We played in it as we walked back home from school. Along the way I see bridges collapse, roads turn apart, shops destroyed and businesses disappeared as a result of these floods. The question why we had so much flooding in my area lingered in my mind as I grew up and was not fully answered. Later as a committed member of an African Pentecostal church in my area, our church including myself were pre-occupied with our spiritual and economic survival that issues that caused the flooding did not really surface in our conversations. While I continued to wrestle with why we have so much flooding, there were certain practices that my family and I engaged in which on reflection I did not realise what we were doing was being environmentally friendly or green. We planted our own tomatoes and we had our own poultry. I remember my first job was working for my mother on our poultry looking after chickens and collecting and selling eggs.

It was while studying Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan that I was introduced to African Theology and African Traditional Religions and culture. The implication of this exposure was that I began to realise that God cares for his creation and that we have a part to play. The introduction to African Theology and African religious worldview educated me

about the different West African names of God. What is striking about these names is that several African names for God demonstrates God as the creator of heaven and the earth, but more importantly they evidenced that he is involved in such a way that God cares for his creation. Biblical theology of creation affirms this because scripture says, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Some of the names even take a step further to assert that God cares and sustains his creation. Take for example, the Edo name for God *Osanobuwa*. This means, "the Source Being who carries and sustains the universe" Other African names for God such as *Olodumare*(Yorubas), *Ngewo* (Mendes), *Nyame* (Akan) and *Odomankoma* (Akan) all reveals that God really cares and is interested in maintaining the universe.¹² While African Cosmology is rich in an understanding that sees God as the creator and carer of his creation, African Newer Pentecostals are somewhat disconnected from this narrative because of colonial residue that sees everything African religions and spirituality as pagan. One of the consequences being lack of engagement with climate justice issues.

It is therefore exciting for me after being on this journey to be a part of the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum which is seeking to address climate injustice through racial justice. But before I comment on the significance of this work in regards to a Pan-African theology, my brief story serves as an example of an African that has experienced the effects of climate crisis but did not have the resources or enough understanding to deal with the issue. In a survey poll done by Christian Aid and Sevanta ComRes into the views and attitudes of Black British Christians on climate change, 66% of those polled are more aware that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect people from the Majority World (Africa, Caribbean, Asia and Latin America) compared to the British public at 49%. This is because being born in a climate vulnerable country, or through family connections boosts awareness of the climate

crisis.¹³ This data confirms my own experience but also raises the issue of why we are not visible when it comes to government policies and conversations on climate change? It is the poorer countries in the world that suffers more the effects of climate disasters therefore while animal conservation, protection of endangered species and our environment are all important in their own right, my approach to climate justice is the brown agenda and not the green agenda.

Brown agenda in this instance is understood as the impact of ecological degradation on people,¹⁴ particularly people of colour who have suffered from systemic and structural injustices such as colonialism and imperialism. In this respect, there is a connection between racial and climate injustice because people who suffers more the effects of climate crisis are usually communities that had being impoverished due to legacies of colonialism and imperialism. The green agenda in this respect is associated with “nature conservation and addresses specific issues such as the preservation of wilderness areas, endangered species, animal poaching, cruelty to animals, invader species, and in general, the impact of mining and industry, industrialised agriculture and urban trends on the habitats of plants and animals.”¹⁵ My observation is that it is easier for people who live in the West, particularly country side or rural areas to be green whereas for those who live in crowded urban centres will naturally gravitate towards the brown agenda. This is because of urban factors such as homelessness, deprivation, overpopulation, poverty and so on. To be green sometimes could also be expensive because you either have to drive a hybrid or electric car if you choose to drive. There is the option of cycling which a lot of people now do. Maintaining a healthy eating habits and lifestyle is not cheap, neither does living in an area that is reduced in terms of air quality or pollution. Across the world, being brown often means to live below the poverty line, have lack of resources,

options and lack of education. This is not always the case because not all people classified as brown are poor or uneducated. I am also aware that we need both agendas and that they are not always mutually exclusive. I am clarifying here my own approach to the subject based on my journey and experience.

Returning to the significance of the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum work, the objective of the project is to speak prophetically on behalf of black and brown Christians to the government on racial injustice challenges and reparations. The ecumenical group facilitated by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the Baptist Union is working on the understanding that racial injustice permeates different aspects of society and discourses such as climate, education, health, policing, criminal justice system and therefore impacts the lives of people of colour. The significance of this work for a Pan African theology is that firstly, it is ecumenical bringing different black Christians from diverse churchmanship. The group comprises of representatives from the following denominations and organisations. Ascension Trust, the Baptist Union, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance, the Methodist Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the Salvation Army, the Sam Sharpe Project, and the United Reformed Church. A second significance for a Pan-African theology is that the group consists of Africans and African Caribbeans. This has shaped how the group is structured and operates, for example, the two co-ordinators of the groups are Wale Hudson-Roberts who is Black British Nigerian and Richard Reddie who is Black British Jamaican. A third significance is that in its advocacy work through press releases, conferences and webinars highlighting and speaking into crucial public discourses, it has engaged Black theologians and African theologians. It has been a joy to participate in meetings where we hear the voices of African theologians advancing African theological framework as an

essential thinking in tackling racial justice concerns and in the same space hear the voices of Black theologians framing racial justice in liberative praxis terms. The work is still in progress but I offer this as an example of what a Pan-African dialogue on the issue of racial and climate justice could look like.

Concluding Reflections

This essay has examined the interconnection of African identity, racial injustice and climate injustice. This has been investigated through considering the impacts of the transatlantic slave trade on how it divided people of African descent so that today we can speak of continental Africans, African Caribbeans and African Americans. I have referred to this as the tripartite nature of African identity and have furthered explore how this shapes our various theologies. This tripartite nature of African identity is nothing new as we recognise similar patterns in Hebraic identity. The divided identity of people of African descent is also linked to the history of racism as well as that of the climate crisis that now disproportionately affects people of colour.

One of the key questions this essay has seek to address is despite the nuances and distinctions of our theologies being shaped by our geo-political positioning, how can we work towards a global African theology that is able to address racial and climate justice concerns? In answering this question, I have suggested the need for a Pan-African theology that does not blur the distinct theological contributions of African Theology, Black Theology and Black British Theology, but work in collaboration like Pan-Africanist intellectuals who had a vision of an African consciousness that is rooted in African heritage. This shared commonality is a missing factor in our current debate and conversations therefore we need authentic

dialogue that move us towards this goal if we are going to speak collectively.

Endnotes

1. Israel Olofinjana (ed), *African Voices: Towards African British Theology* (Cumbria, Langham Monographs, 2017). Also see Israel Olofinjana, 'Reverse Mission: Towards an African British Theology', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, Vol36, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 52-65

2. My definitions of climate justice and climate change has followed that offered by the Christian Aid Working Group comprising of Black Majority church leaders, theologians and activists.

3. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London, Verso Books, 1993)

4. In an informal conversation with Joel Edwards on the subject of African identity.

5. Josiah Young, *Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors* (Trenton, NJ, African World Press, 1992).

6. Trans-Atlantic Roundtable on Race and Religion <https://religionandrace.org/> (Accessed on 31st August 2020).

7. Donald Woods, *Biko* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 59.

8. For more studies on Pan-Africanism see J Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa 1900-1945* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973) and Ras Makonnen and Kenneth King, *Pan-Africanism from within* (London, Oxford University Press, 1973).

9. In 1894 Mojola Agbebi as a cultural nationalist changed his name from

David Brown Vincent to Agbebi and wore African clothing to show his pride in African culture. He also engaged in systematic study of African Religions and culture.

10. John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African theology Today* (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

11. Racial Justice Advocacy Forum website housed by the Baptist Union https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/365504/Racial_Justice_Advocacy.aspx(Accessed 25th November 2022).

12. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969. Omosade Awolalu and Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan, Nigeria, Onibonoje Press and Book Industries Limited, 1979).

13. Report on Views and Attitudes of Black British Christians on Climate Change, Sevanta ComRes and Christian Aid Survey Poll, 2020.

14. Ernst Conradie, "The Environment" in Sunday Bobai Agang, Dion A. Forster and H.Jurgens Hendriks (eds), *African Public Theology* (Plateau State, Nigeria, Hippo Books, 2020), p. 159.

15. Ibid., p. 159.

7.

'We Need Endarkenment for a While'

Why we Need to Build Theologies of Rage

Anupama Ranawana

Introduction

At COP 27, a historic 'loss and damage' deal was finally agreed upon to create a mechanism through which economically disenfranchised countries, those often facing the most significant impact of climate change could receive monetary assistance to cope with the impacts of extreme weather events.¹ In particular, this underlines the fact that countries with higher concentrations of poverty are further destabilized because of the impacts of extreme climate events. This deal was significant in several ways. Chief of this was the result of decades of campaigning by various activists and organisations of and from the Global South. It represented a kind of justice that formalized in policy a recognition that certain countries were more vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events than others. It was also significant however, in what it omitted. Loss and damage compensation does not include liability or compensation for past harm, only provision for unavoidable climate impacts in the present. This strikes a jarring note when we consider that, in 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)² finally recognised the link between climate change and colonialism. In section B.2, the report notes that colonialism

exacerbated the effects of climate change. In particular, historic and ongoing forms of colonialism have helped to increase the vulnerability of specific people and places to the effects of climate change. An excerpt from the section runs thus:

“Vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions (very high confidence), driven by patterns of intersecting socioeconomic development, unsustainable ocean and land use, inequity, marginalization, historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, and governance.”

This omission at COP 27 not only ignored the report of the IPCC as a scientific governing body, it also silenced the voices of activists, academics and entire communities for whom the role of colonialism in creating the climate crisis has been a significant part of the narrative. Aime Cesaire's *Discours sur le Colonialisme*² famously notes that,

“They talk to me about progress, about ‘achievements,’ diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out. They throw facts at my head, statistics, mileages of roads, canals, and railroad tracks. [...] I am talking about natural economies that have been disrupted – harmonious and viable economies adapted to the indigenous population – about food crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries, about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials.”

As the political geographer Keston Perry outlines, climate reparations are not a new concept, instead it is a wide-ranging and appropriate mechanism for recognising the magnitude of the climate crisis, as well as creating a response that centres

history and ethics.⁴ Perry's emphasis on the ethics of the issue is important, as it links well to an anchoring point for this paper. That is, that it is colonial logics that maintain poverty and exacerbate vulnerability to an extreme event, and that reparations form part of an important process of disrupting this. In doing so, all my work on ecological justice seeks to align with other interventions that sees reparations as a moral imperative and of fundamental necessity for the process of healing that must occur for formerly colonized nations. Bob Kikuyu, a theologian working at Christian Aid, argues that the goal of reparations is reconciliation, and in order to achieve this, there must be not only monetary reparation, but also a repairing of relationships, a recognition of the harm that we have done each other, and a repairing of the relationship with Creation.⁵ Reparations is the holistic healing of human relationships. The road to such reparations is a complex and challenging one, and cannot be achieved without a significant understanding of the multidimensionality of the justice needs required. It requires a recognition of the legacy of colonial constructions and the persistence of forms of racial difference and hierarchy in how our world is structured.

This paper, as other scholarly and activist interventions do, sees racism and colonialism as having an intertwined and symbiotic relationship that together maintain coloniality. Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, and define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. These are maintained alive in books, in the criteria of academic performance, cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In particular, the specific dimension of this that we pay attention to is power. That is, the way in which power maintains privilege and allows for the control of groups in society. This means also a need to

understand how structural whiteness influences the systems in which we live, particularly their moral dimensions, and specifically how authority, expertise and knowledge become racially symbolized. In short, we need 'endarkenment'.

'Endarkenment and Rage'

The title of this paper is taken from a quote in the text *Struggle to be the Sun Again*, by the Asian feminist theologian, Chyun Hyun Kyung. Kyung reflects that the way to 'really heal' the world is to engage with the 'wisdom of darkness'.⁶ By this, she means those who are pushed into the shadows, those who are dark skinned, those who are from the Third World. This, of course, is the Third World understood not in the pejorative, but the Third World understood as a political project, a 'third something', an alternative vision of the world to which the decolonized nations of the 1950s and 1960s aspired, a world that was mobilizing towards liberation. As a postulant theologian, I am haunted by this need for endarkenment, and the particular praxis that it suggests for theology. Seeking wisdom that comes from darkness, or perhaps what we may call 'Othered' spaces is fundamental for theologies that seek to center reparative justice. What we may find in these spaces is what I call a kind of generative rage, and it is this rage that is important as we look to heal and repair the injustices of the world we live in. Such generative rage is often found in the social movements fighting for ecological justice in the Global South (variously imagined), and is key to the demands for justice that they have been articulating for many years.

It is important here that I clarify that this paper pulls from a book project I recently concluded that argues the case for generative theological rage, as well as different pieces of ongoing work I am doing on reparations and global justice. I pull a few arguments from the book into this paper, but will

focus in a particular way on reparations. I wish to argue, as so many other have done, that it is important for churches not to shy away from using 'uncomfortable' language such as reparations, dismantling, and recognition- concepts that come from the generative rage of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements in Global South spaces. Such rage can mobilize the very urgent moral awakening that is needed. In using this language of urgency and morality, I reflect the arguments of theologians such as Ernst Conradie, who argues that the root of the matter is, quite directly, a spiritual problem that indicated a lack of moral energy. Conradie and others urgently call for repentance, that is, a "confession of human arrogance towards creation, and repentance for our desire for endless growth, our alienation from and our violence to 'our God-given home.'"⁷

What is required, then? The first need is one of ecological conversion. Ecological conversion tied to mourning and repentance may urge the necessary spiritual awakening that must be centered now. Going through such a process, and particularly a process of conversion that understands the legacy of colonial logics, and the embeddedness of racialized discourse event within environmental justice movements, helps us in the journey towards 'being angry' (Ephesians 24:6).

The second, and aligned need, is for our theologies to center the ideas and praxis of anticolonialism, paying particular attention to the rich variety and diversity of the movements that come under such a banner, and the kinds of resistance articulated by anticolonial thinkers. A significant aspect of the moral awakening that is needed is the building of a movement that resists Mammon, and anticolonial thinking can be a guide towards sustained movement building, towards being in a state of perpetual revolt.

Ecological Conversion

In a recent talk I gave to some young students on ecological conversion and repentance, there was a slight discomfort in the audience. One student asked if the conversion experience meant that they should 'feel bad' each time they used a non-disposable coffee cup. The question outlines the crux of the problem we face in our churches and academies, in that the conversation always rolls around to individual responsibility without focusing on systemic change. In the different movements and conversations I have had with activists in non-Western spaces, what I most see asked for is system change, i.e, the dismantling of 'death creating' structures. For example, a nun in Sri Lanka, a vocal opponent of rapacious development in the country noted that, such development, which only has the dominant model of development in mind, sees no immorality in unlimited production and the exploitation of natural resources is the certain opposite of this. Her argument was that for persons of faith, unlimited growth and exploitation of the Created world could only be viewed as a sinful occurrence. Such development is able to exist, she argues, because of the 'normalisation of a global model, that marginalises poor people ... what does this model do but pollute the air, the water, the soil and the people's lives'.

Another example comes from a recent study I did with a colleague at Christian Aid. In this study, we were examining the relationship between race and poverty, and this example highlights also the need for stronger global solidarity in our liberation movements. Research participants raised concerns with us regarding the unequal race relations between Chinese business owners and Black Zimbabwean workers within the mining and construction industries and how the imbalance of power between these groups exacerbates poverty outcomes. Research participants that we spoke to noted that there is a sentiment and perception of Chinese owned companies in

Zimbabwe as exploitative of the labour of black Zimbabweans, and referred to this as a form of neo-colonialism. Zimbabwean labourers working for Chinese firms are often underpaid and working in unsafe conditions, according to a Zimbabwean legislator who is challenging Chinese companies who are not adhering to local laws and abusing workers.⁸ Negligent mining and construction site practices in particular increase pollution and contaminate water supplies, which increases the risk of detrimental health outcomes and diminishes livelihood security.⁹ The rights of workers and residents are also not protected due to a lack of accountability within the national government.

Left unchallenged, inequality and unequal power relations based on characteristics such as race and colour work together to dehumanise and sustain exploitation. The racial inequality that has so greatly marked the national identity of Zimbabwe both before and throughout the colonial period now forms the building blocks of continual racial inequality evident today in the relationship between black Zimbabweans and Chinese business owners. Arguably, the negligence of rights and protection of black people in Zimbabwe by wealthy Chinese migrants is propped up by implicit racial hierarchy that perpetuates the exploitation, suppression, and oppression of black people, within Africa and around the world. In this situation, a critical question that a research participant asked in their narrative was this:

“What does the Black lives Matter movement and the decolonial journey mean for black people in Zimbabwe who are on the sharp end of poverty and racism? Does the movement run the risk of only meaningful for black people in Western contexts or is this an entry point to affirm the rights and resources of black people everywhere?” *ibid.*

Both of these examples point us to the problem of misused power, which is at the heart of the conversation surrounding

conversion. From a theological perspective, misused power is the outward manifestation of sin (individual and collective) which fracture relationships multidimensionally, that is, it is the embrace of Mammon and therefore turning away from God.¹⁰ We can see this expressed spiritually, relationally, and materially. What begins spiritually (in the hearts of humanity) as sinful desires to possess power and dominate, manifests through the relational dynamics, and eventually in the material through the unjust allocation of power and resources. This last is the way in which poverty can be understood in the spiritual sense, or rather a movement away from a justice centered spirituality.

The rejection of the likeness and image of God in *all* humanity and the reservation of value and goodness only to a certain section of humanity maintains a set of logics that has historically, and into the present, made some communities more disposable. There is much extant literature on how missionary society colluded with Empires to construct a racist hierarchy that was then imposed on African, African descendant, and also indigenous persons in the countries that were colonised by the European colonial project.¹¹ One example is the Dutch Cultivation system that was deployed in Java, Sumatra and Minahasa as a forced crop delivery system that extracted coffee, sugar and indigo in the nineteenth century.¹² Such systems stratified labourers into 'degenerate types' who were then subject to various systems of administration and instruction dependent on categorization.¹³ Jesse Mugambi, connecting colonial legacies to climate injustice, points to how this created a problem of 'imbalance' wherein it is not that there is ignorance of poverty, but the subsumation to a culture of disposability that ensures that there is no political or moral will to transform a system that keeps some poor and others rich.¹⁴

The abundant literature shows how complicit churches have been in propagating this system because of a political choice for the search of wealth and profit (Mammon), and thus turned away from the face of God. The

most horrendous manifestation of which was the Papal Bull, the Doctrine of Discovery, which established a religious, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians. Two papal bulls, in particular, stand out the first, issued by Pope Nicholas V “*Romanus Pontifex*” in 1455, granting the Portuguese a monopoly of trade with Africa and authorizing the enslavement of local people; and the second, issued by Pope Alexander VI, the Papal Bull “*Inter Caetera*” in 1493 to justify Christian European explorers’ claims on land and waterways they allegedly discovered, and promote Christian domination and superiority, and has been applied in Africa, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and the Americas. I turn to Zimbabwe again to show the lasting effects of this, where many institutionalised Christian churches have significant land holdings, with major investments linked to agriculture, as well as other businesses. Some of these holdings were inherited from the colonial era. This is only one example, and I refer the reader to the amazing work done by other scholars, particularly historians and theologians of colour in documenting this.

In 2023, a Pope ‘*desde el fin del mundo*’, the first Pope from the Global South, finally repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery. This was not something that the Vatican did of its own accord but was something that was lobbied for, for many years, by indigenous communities, especially in North America.¹⁵ It formed a key pillar of the commitments to reconciliation and reparation that were demanded for through the process of the Truth and Reconciliation commission in Canada.¹⁶ For Francis to do so, was also important to the commitments made by the Church in terms of ecological conversion. Although we see prominence of this concept in Francis’ *Laudato Si*’, it receives significant treatment and definition in the writings of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.¹⁷ The Patriarch notes that the fundamental reorientation we must undergo is a spiritual one, one that turns us to deeper repentance and a willingness to forgo.¹⁸ It is also, for the Patriarch, rooted in the experience of being believers, in the encounter.

“When we are transformed by divine grace, then we discern the injustice in which we are participants; but

then we will also labour to share the resources of our planet; then, we realize that eco-justice is paramount — not simply for a better life, but for our very survival.”

Francis grounds this conversion in the faith that we proclaim; that we have been saved by Jesus Christ. This profound encounter must be made evident in our actions, and, as such we are summoned. In as much as Christ’s body is blessed , broken and shared, so too are we called to become that which we receive. Becoming what we receive entails working for justice. The encounter anoints us, it sends us out into the world, with a gaze that is renewed. This is the gaze of Francis of Assisi, one that is alive with awe and wonder. We contemplate the beauty of Creation , thus moving our gaze from the technocratic to one of that is joyful, contemplative and *active*. This new ‘gaze’ is Christ-like (LS 97,99) and in this way we are charged towards a paradigm shift in which we, individually and communally must change at all levels, become conscious of a new awareness of seeking to be in right relationship with God, neighbour and creation. We turn away from Mammon, and towards God. If we do this ‘turning away and turning to’, we cannot then ignore the importance of ensuring the call for reparations is heeded.

Anticolonial thought

This portion of the paper might read as something of an aside, but I want to briefly note the importance of the ‘wisdom of darkness’, which here I name as anticolonial thought and mobilization. In the turn to thinking ‘postcolonially’ or identifying ourselves as postcolonials, I argue, perhaps incorrectly, that theology has lost a little of the generative rage that comes from anticolonialism. I have argued, as others do, that we still live in a world that is structured by colonial logics, and therefore, we cannot claim the ‘post’-ness of the

postcolonial when we still need to be agitators. In particular, I wish to argue for liberational theology to recapture or re-remember its anticolonial imprint and thus continue to maintain its identity as a movement of resistance and solidarity. In this, I am guided by a remarkable statement in Isaac Kamola's essay "A Time for Anti-colonial Theory". Looking at the ongoing work to recover the African anti-colonial archive, he notes that this work is important because

"These voices are poetic yet strident, theoretical but immediately practical to the particularities of struggle. These writings on colonialism, race, class, violence, and governance avoid abstract musing – and the polish and perfection of argument that goes along with it. Instead, they are timely statements made with great urgency. The assumed audience of African anticolonial thought was often not scholars, but rather one's immediate and intimate comrades. The horizons of these texts and arguments often contain futures filled with possibility, even if the specific outlines are not entirely discernible in the present moment."¹⁹

Anticolonialism is rage-fuelled. It is argued that anticolonialism did not begin with empire but originates in the resistance to it.²⁰ Anticolonialism is a space from which European, British and American empire is contested, challenged and refused. Though a concept and practice that existed before 1900, these forms of resistance had their most significant political impacts in the twentieth century.²¹ Anticolonialism is also quite diverse in how it manifests.²² In the main, what anticolonialism attempts to do in its multiple ways is to visualise, articulate, interpret, and centre the political struggles of communities that have been or are colonised. Anticolonial thought, in particular, looks to memorialize and analyse the subjective experiences of those who have suffered from colonial and imperial domination, whether it be economic, social, political, cultural or institutional.

Anticolonialism is at once a set of events, a historical process and several social movements, and employed diverse methods. Anticolonial thought allows for the analysis of those voices who articulate and graph this struggle through writing (both prose and poetry), art, song and drama.

In that sense, anticolonial thought brings together subjective experience and the ideas that come from such experiences in order to analyse the nature of domination and then from this, outline the political strategies necessary for confronting domination and moving towards liberation. In its physical manifestations, it also shows us how solidarity can be built and shaped. As an example, many African communist anticolonial intellectuals sought to build a Pan-Africanism as a way of building transnational anticolonial solidarity.²³ Such cooperation, they felt would allow for a conjoined effort to overthrow colonial rule. In South Africa, the end of the Boer War developed into the resistance movement against apartheid that finally concluded in 1991. In Latin America, these anticolonial struggles took a different shape.²⁴ As formal colonisation had ended in the 18th and 19th centuries, these movements defined colonialism as the ways in which their countries remained economically and culturally dependent on the Spanish or the Portuguese.²⁵ As such, what we have here is a particular critique of global capitalism rather than actively fighting occupation, as most famously seen in Zapata's 1910 revolution.²⁶ Once again, we see the influence of Marxism in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as a turn towards that 'tricontinental world' of Latin America, Africa and Asia that would stand in global solidarity against the economic might of the Global North. These are movements we need to recenter in our existence as global churches, especially as we look toward reforming the idea of mission into one of solidarity. We can take lessons from the generative rage of anticolonial thought in how to do this.

Reparations Now: Land Back, Oceans Back, Cultures Back

The most fundamental form of this solidarity must be reparations, and this is a call that churches can no longer afford to be worried to mobilise for. In writing this, it is important to note the generations of black and indigenous theologians, historians and church communities that have been mobilising for reparations for decades now. These mobilisations come from spaces of love and hope, but also generative rage, as I detail in the last chapter of my book project. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus instead on what reparations can look like, and in doing so I urge the reader to seek out the specific demands from different regions and movements as to what this should look like. For example, The Abuja Proclamation, born out of the first Pan-African Conference on Reparations held in Nigeria in 1993, called on the international community to recognise the “unique and unprecedented moral debt owed to the African people”. It served notice on all states that had participated in the enslavement and colonisation of African people to begin the process of conciliation through reparations. The Abuja Proclamation further urges the former Organisation for African Unity (now the African Union) to “call for full monetary payment of repayments through capital transfer and debt cancellation”.²⁷ In the Caribbean, there is a call for a moral reckoning, and I quote here the words of Mia Mottley:

“For us, reparations is not just simply about money, but it is also about justice... I do not know how we can go further unless there is a reckoning first and foremost that places an apology and an acknowledgement that a wrong was done.”²⁸

We must speak also of the importance of interpersonal repair. This requires significant levels of leadership but also

the key movement of repentance. Reparation here is a part of repentance and must be a restoration of whatever has been denied or taken away such as land, leadership, or individual rights. Here, reparation is also connected to the spiritual and the relational. Theologians from the Global South, as aforementioned, talk about the urgent call for confession of human arrogance towards creation, and repentance for our desire for endless growth, our alienation from and our violence to 'our God-given home'.²⁹ They challenge churches to educate and inform their members, to create liturgy to inspire new attitudes and behaviour. As such, the kinds of reparations that must be implemented will be rooted and suitable to each historical and contemporary context. The work of healing such relationships requires attention to the multidimensionality of poverty and an understanding, therefore, of colonialism, slavery and the attendant legacy of structural oppression, imperialism, extraction and exploitation.

In light of what the sinful system of racism has broken, what do reparations mean for persons living in poverty and what are the implications for development actors, especially those who are part of historically dominant 'mission' churches like the Roman Catholic or Anglican Churches? Robert Beckford, as part of a series of conversations in Christian Aid on reparations has remarked that we need to be aware of the crisis within humankind.³⁰ Beckford, in a similar vein to other liberation and black theologians, argues that for such reparative justice to occur, we need to transform current attitudes that look to 'producing more bricks for all costs'. Beckford connects this to Brueggeman's observation that slavery present in the book of Exodus was instituted because of Pharaoh's desire for cheap labour, and similarly, we see that same desire for cheap labour being played out in the example above regarding the cultivation system in Indonesia, and also in the example on Zimbabwean labourers. And most of all, faith should be the sphere where imagination can be so remade so that this kind

of real change, rooted in hope, is made possible.³¹ Reparations requires multiple forms of repair, and multiple means of mobilising our churches into diverse, anti-colonial, solidarity.

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8.

To Hope or Not to Hope

Arianne van Andel

Introduction

To hope or not to hope. In the discussions about the future in the face of the multiple crisis we are living, hope itself seems to be in crisis. What does hope mean or look like? After every lecture I give on climate change there will be someone who raises the question: Is there any hope left? In general, that question means: Is it possible that everything is gonna be alright? It is exactly that expectancy in the question for hope, that makes it ambiguous. Can we say there is any hope left, if it is sure that the situation is not gonna be all right anymore? And if we say there is hope anyway, are we deluding people? Or do we have the task to rethink hope with people, as well as we must reinterpret many other things?

Hope

What does hope do? Does it help us or work against us? In philosophy hope has been praised as the dream of the waking human being that can propel towards a better future (Aristotle, Bloch), but also despised as the worst of the human being in its tendency to staticism and demobilisation (Nietzsche).¹ Hope can be seen as opium of the people and as the source of

rebellion. Hope can be seen as an ally or an opposite of utopia, and, as Terry Eagleton puts it in his book *Hope without Optimism*, the Left's suspicion of hope is grounded in the fact that "images of utopia are always in danger of confiscating the energies that might otherwise be invested in its construction".² That's why Bruno Latour asks for a radical abandonment of (this kind of) hope to address the dire situation of our habitat, that is in his view well beyond crisis.³

In this confusion, it is important to replant what it means to "have hope". In the face of the climate crisis, hope has to navigate in between nihilism and idealistic optimism. Eagleton radically questions the connection between hope and optimism: "...there is a sense in which optimism is more a matter of belief than of hope. It is based on the opinion that things tend to work out well, not the strenuous commitment that hope involves."⁴ He therefore feels that optimism is more a conservative feature, whereas hope asks for change: "Only if you view your situation as critical do you recognise the need to transform it."⁴ In hope there is anticipation, because it intends on the possible, more than, for example, desire does. In that sense, hope has a rational component, although the odds are against it: "It is irrational to hope for the impossible, but not for the vastly improbable."⁶

All these reflections are relevant in the face of the climate emergency. More than ever are we confronted with the question if hope mobilises or paralyzes, and what kind of hope we foster. This question is of the utmost importance in Christianity, as hope is one of the three main virtues of our belief, together with faith and love. In this essay, I go back to the classic work *Theology of Hope* by Jürgen Moltmann, a protestant theologian also very much concerned about the ecological crisis, to weigh the possibilities and limits of his view in the light of the climate crisis. Subsequently, I will make his views dialogue with Joanna Macey's proposal from a more Buddhist perspective in her book *Active Hope*. Finally, I will

conclude with some reflections based on my experience in Latin America.

Moltmann's Eschatology

For Jürgen Moltmann, eschatology is at the heart of Christian faith, with hope as its essential element:

“Eschatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present”.⁷

Hope itself is not the problem, says Moltmann, but the way Christian doctrine has de-centralized eschatology and projected hope in a future beyond this world. Nevertheless, for Moltmann, Christian hope is founded in Jesus' God, who comes not from beyond time, but from a beyond **in** time. Moltmann says, with Bloch, that God has the future as his constitutive character:

“God whom we therefore cannot really have in us or over us but always only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future, and whom we therefore cannot 'have' either, but can only await in active hope”.⁸

Although our hope is directed to the transformation of the same world that we live in, according to Moltmann, it collides with everything we can experience in this world:

“Everywhere in the New Testament the Christian hope is directed towards what is not yet visible; it is consequently a 'hoping against hope' and thereby brands the visible realm of present experience as a god-forsaken, transient reality that is to be left behind”.⁹

If Christianity has lost the mobilizing, critical and

revolutionary potential of hope, it is because it has tried to find God in the present world and conformed with the status quo. The promise to which Christian hope is directed is the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Christ's future that is announced in this turn in history, but that is "not yet visible" in our world.

What strikes us is Moltmann's fervent stand against all theologies that find God in the present, or as the basis of an "eternal present". He stresses the importance of "promise" in the biblical narrative, as the way in which God announces his/her presence to come. Hope is a 'passion for the possible' (Kierkegaard), or for what has been made possible, in the promise of a new creation in peace and justice in Jesus Christ. This kind of hope is in constant tension with the world we live in:

"That is why faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the goad of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present".¹⁰

A Reflection on Moltmann in the Face of the Climate Crisis

Moltmann's position in a *Theology of Hope* represents a reaction to natural theology and certain currents of protestant liberalism after the Second World War and its permissiveness to fascism. He was very much concerned that theology should speak out against the immense suffering, injustices and poverty of his and all times, and hope could only be found if

it takes that reality seriously. This is the appeal of Moltmann's interpretation of hope, also in the wake of the climate crisis. He warns us of romanticising nature or putting our trust in all too human utopia, as the order of nature had been used to justify ethnic cleansing, and Hitler's Third Reich as a kind of utopia.

In the same sense, Moltmann rejects any way of naturalising the forces of evil as part of God's plan and returns them to where he sees their cause: in human sinfulness. Hopelessness for Moltmann is at the essence of this sinfulness:

"God honors him (the human person, AvA) with his promises, but man does not believe himself capable of what is required of him. That is the sin which most profoundly threatens the believer. It is not the evil he does, but the good he does not do, not his misdeeds but his omissions, that accuse him. They accuse him of lack of hope".¹¹

This disbelief comes in two different forms: in the idea that God's promise is already fulfilled (presumption) or in the conviction that this promise will never be fulfilled (despair).¹²

In face of the climate crisis this position is challenging. On the one hand, it does take the dire situation in which we are very seriously and invites to keep walking with the horizon open to unexpected possibilities, trusting in God's promise of a just and peaceful world. It also lays all responsibility for the crisis in human hands. On the other hand, it is quite an anthropocentric view, that does not regard the autonomy of other living beings. To be transformative in our context, it asks for the story of Jesus' cross and resurrection to be translated into a narrative that includes the salvation of life in general. In his more recent essay *Is there Hope for Creation*, Moltmann indeed interprets God's promise in that way: "The resurrected Christ is the cosmic Christ, and the cosmic Christ is the mystery of the world, that is present in all things".¹³ However, this passage somehow contradicts some mentioned texts that claim that this world is god-forsaken.

Another problematic aspect of the passages of the contrast of God's future with this world, is that Moltmann implies, in the tradition of Augustine, that nature itself is also corrupted and needs salvation. This reveals a certain dualism between moral right and wrong in nature, that may be complicated in our context. How do we protect a living world that we feel is in contrast with God's promise? How do we value and conserve nature if we feel that God cannot be found there? And which natural "evil" forces are actually caused by humans? Moltmann changes his position in his later work *God in Creation*, where he proclaims the presence of God's spirit in Creation, but his work doesn't escape from an ambiguous relationship between natural history and human history, that is challenged by the Anthropocene.¹⁴

What does it mean that God comes from the future? What is the future? In the imaginary of western industrial capitalism, a focus on a future horizon that promises a better world can easily confirm the concept of lineal development that Moltmann surely criticizes as well. How to avoid in our churches that they don't exchange a metaphysical otherworldly view of the eschaton for a horizon in the future associated with the belief in a better future in terms of progress and growth. Because, as Eagleton indicates: "The doctrine of progress reifies hope into an objective reality", which is a risk that is always there if we feel that hope is based in a future reality.¹⁵ (Eagleton, banality)

However, it is clear that the future unfolds in every moment that passes, and that Moltmann's view is meant to indicate the possibility of transformation while warning against the appropriation of any human construct as the beginning of the Kingdom of God. His theology reminds me of Galeano's famous quote: "Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may

walk, I'll never reach it. So, what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking."¹⁶

However, what happens if human scientific evidence tells us the future is at risk? What does God's promise mean in this situation: how far is it from becoming a delusion? Moltmann doesn't give up on this eschatological tension: "if we knew that we couldn't survive, we wouldn't do anything to avoid it; in return, if we knew we would survive, we wouldn't do anything either. Only when the future is open to both possibilities – and we are called, certainly, to do the necessary in this time that we call "today"- is it possible to change what can ensue for all."¹⁷ When he ponders the meaning of human existence in the face of possible collapse, he clings, with Hölderlin, to God's presence and promise: "Close is God, however difficult he is to perceive. But where there is risk, help also springs."¹⁸

Although this unconditional trust in the help of God can indeed sustain us in the most difficult times, Moltmann's future-oriented image of God, together with his focus on the contrast of this future with all that is in creation, may be complicated in the search for an appreciation of threatened life in its multiple forms. Moltmann's theology, as found in *Theology of Hope*, rejects the sacredness of nature and doesn't conceive circular time, which is one of the differences between Christianity and world views of indigenous people. A difference that still leads evangelical churches to accuse indigenous populations of animism or satanism.

In my own search for hope in our times, I have felt the need to complement Moltmann's view, so common in my own protestant tradition, with some of the insights of other spiritual thinkers. I concentrate on the contributions of Joanna Macy, Buddhist ecologist, and Chris Johnstone, in their book *Active Hope*.¹⁸ Macy is not a theologian, and her book is especially focused on our context, but gives other clues on hope than Moltmann does, also in his more recent work. I have found it nourishing to make these two positions on hope dialogue.

Joanna Macy and the Choice of a Different Story

The first approach that really helped me in Macy's book, is that she gives a lot of attention to the importance of narratives in hopeful action. Hope is not so much a result, or a future outcome, as it is an option for a different story. She describes the three stories of our time as: the story of "Business as Usual", the story of "The Great Unraveling" and the story of "The Great Turning". The first is the story that sees economic growth as essential, nature as a commodity, and consumption as the base of the economy. The second is the story that tells us about the situation of economic decline, resource depletion, climate change, collapse and mass extinction. The third, however, is the story of a cultural shift that is already happening, where people are holding actions to save ecosystems and species, rethinking our structures and systems and shifting consciousness. We cannot control which story will reign the future, says Macy, but we can choose in which story we want to participate. Hope is mostly a choice for a narrative, not the certainty that that story will prevail.²⁰

Dialoguing with Moltmann, this emphasis on choosing our story helps us to reinterpret the Christian narrative as well. More than the unfaltering belief in God's promise of salvation, we choose to be part of Jesus' story, which is a story of healing, feeding, loving, and of resurrection. We don't know if this story will win, but we put ourselves on that path, which in our times certainly is the path of the Great Turning towards an ecological society.

Secondly, where Moltmann describes despair as sin, Macy offers a different view on managing emotions. Although Moltmann may not judge despair defined as hopeless feelings because of the destruction of the earth, his texts do sound judgmental and strict in the face of doubt and anguish about

a threatened future. “God will fulfill his promise” can sound as not such a sound pastoral advice for someone confronted with eco-anxiety. In that sense, Macy and other women theologians make a very necessary complement to traditional protestant tradition that tends to be very rational. We need to take emotions seriously in the way they help us or paralyze us in hopeful action.

Macy spends a chapter on what is blocking us to act, and how looking away and hiding from fear paralyzes us:

“We can be caught between two fears – the fear of what will happen if we, as a society, continue the way we’re going and the fear of acknowledging how bad things are because of the despair that doing so brings up. If we listen to the first fear, it can provoke responses that aid our survival; but to benefit from this wake-up call, we will need to free ourselves from the stifling effect of the second fear. There are ways to do this”.²¹

Macy suggests honouring our pain about the destruction of the environment and express it. As we are an integral part of the web of life, she asks us to see the pain as the earth crying “through us”. She suggests ways to work with practices and rituals to manage grief, in order to release the energy blocked up in repressed emotions of rage, sorrow and powerlessness, and be able to act: “If the world is dying piece by piece without our publicly and collectively expressing our grief, we might easily assume that these losses aren’t important.”²² Moltmann might overlook the importance of a theology in which the sorrow and pain underneath hopelessness is recognized.

However, before Macy goes into the chapter of honouring our pain for the earth, she writes a whole chapter about the importance of cultivating our gratitude for the gifts of life: “Experiencing gratitude is a learnable skill that improves with practice. It isn’t dependent on things going well or on receiving favors from others. It’s about getting better at spotting what is already there”.

Macy shows how gratitude feeds trust, is a good antidote to consumerism and the advertising industry and motivates us to act. Within Moltmann's view of Christian belief being "in conflict with the world", the space for gratitude seems limited, as the focus is on what is NOT sufficient and needs to change. This is a very western and protestant focus, critical and eager to denounce, but not so useful to nurture reconnection with the web of life. It is absolutely vital in these times that we learn to thank for what supports us in live, so that we treat our surroundings with more respect, and are more motivated to protect and fight for it.²³

I believe Macy's spiritual view and Moltmann's prophetic view complement and are both opposed to the strategies of some theories surging in the face of the climate crisis, such as the Deep Adaptation theory by Jem Bendell.²⁴ His movement focuses on the story of the Great Unraveling to motivate people to adapt. Although it wants to stimulate actions that will help us survive civilization collapse, it doesn't focus on a narrative that could be an alternative to that collapse. Although hopeful and grateful narratives might be unable to counteract a certain kind of collapse of human civilization, they do offer another focus, as they choose another reference point.

Hope is not so much about what will happen, but about intention, and about the reference point we take. In the situation that we find ourselves in, it might be unwise to project all our confidence into the future. It can also demobilise us, as happens when people put all their hope in "the change next generations will provide". Declaring that collapse is certain is projecting into the future, and devaluating, somehow, the situations of collapse that many people are already living, and all the efforts people and organizations make today to change the course of history. As Egelton points out: "There may be no hope; but unless we act as though there is, that possibility is likely to become a certainty".²⁵

Adding to Unseen Change

In the face of climate change the “not yet” of Moltmann’s eschatological proposal, and the “already” of Macy’s writings need to be combined. We need to know the seriousness of the situation that we are in, and hope that God will come with help from the future in every move forward. On the other hand, we need to recognize the beauty of life when we reconnect with nature to be motivated to change our lifestyles.

Not all we need is activism. It is tempting to think that we, as Christians, should try and save the world. Although Moltmann would say that the future of the Kingdom is always on the horizon, and not in our power to construct, his call for transformation of this reality connects with activist hearts. In the idea of reconnection with nature that Macy proposes there is another aspect, that is less obvious for our Christian traditions: the idea of slowing down and controlling less.

What would doing less, and controlling less, mean in an economic system that doesn’t allow a moment of rest. What if slowing down, working less, consuming less, expecting less, and intervening less, is an option of protest too? What if we need to listen first, before we act: listen to our hearts, our bodies, our emotions, our connections, our real needs.

Macy invites us to let ourselves be caught by an inspiring vision and project to engage in one of the many possibilities to create a sustainable world.²⁶ She stresses the importance that this be a concrete project, workable, although it does not seem world saving in itself. If we don’t want to lose the spark of conviction that our actions can make a difference, we need to believe in discontinuous change, in not knowing what we saw, in believing that the Great Turning is happening through us, although we are moving through very dark times of uncertainty.²⁷

“Even when we don’t see a visible result from our actions, we may be adding to an unseen change that moves the situation

closer to a threshold where something crystallizes (...) Each time we take a step forward, we don't know how this action will interact with the actions of others to create an entirely new set of circumstances. (...) While we face the very real danger of catastrophic collapse, we can also be poised on the edge of a major evolutionary leap".²⁸

It is the awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependency that helps us to be able to take small steps without feeling we are not going to measure up. Moltmann's trust in God's help on every step towards the future is helpful, as is the recognition of all those small seeds of hope that are already there in the enormous resilience of life.

Experiences from Latin America

As a European living in Chile, Latin America, I have noticed how it is possible to live both paradigms of hope given in this article in combination. Environmental groups, women and indigenous peoples are very much aware of the colonial and unjust patriarchal power-structures, and the suffering that the climate crisis already causes for vulnerable communities. We don't have to prepare for a crisis that is coming: it is already here for a lot of people for whom their territories are contaminated by the mining and forestry industry, heavy industry and agrobusiness. The experience of contrast that Moltmann emphasizes is very much present in this region, where people keep on fighting with hope against hope, and trust in God's help from the future.

The churches have an ambiguous role in this reality, as many tend to fatalism and embrace chaotic and destructive forces as Apocalyptic signs of the desired Coming of Christ, who will lift up our souls to a reality beyond this material world. Moltmann's view is very necessary in these churches to stress the importance of the transformation of this Creation. God

comes from the future – not from a metaphysical reality, and this demands nonconformity with the destruction of this world.

On the other hand, interreligious groups, like the Interreligious and Spiritual Alliance for the Climate in Chile and ecofeminist groups, do take another stand. They find ways to combine advocacy and public outrage with the creation of new rituals that focus on gratitude and reconnection with the earth, supported by the wisdom of indigenous communities. Ecofeminist groups put emphasis on the importance of daily life and everyday necessities in spiritual reflection, which traditionally have been undervalued because of gender roles. Most of the time, it is in the defense of our daily bread, water and land that we are closest to cultural change.

The Alliance sees it as its primary role to create new inspiring contagious narratives of a world where people live in harmony with all living beings, and to try and live these narratives strengthening relationships beyond religious and class boundaries. I believe churches have that role too. We need to translate the story of resurrection into tales of hope for the future. Different from the Deep Adaptation movement in Europe, in Chile we don't feel it is necessary to prepare for collapse. In Chile people know about the interruption of their daily lives by recurrent earthquakes, and they are prepared on basic pragmatic levels, but people know that you cannot "be ready" for collapse, as it always comes in unexpected ways. People know that there are reservoirs of strength when disaster strikes; they trust that without controlling the future.

On the other hand, it is a spiritual and Christian option to put ourselves on the way of our future vision of the world we wish for. That possible world that has already been lived by peoples with a divine humanity in many of our traditions, gives us a point of reference, on the horizon, but also as a focus in the present. We are convicted that choosing this path of conversion, solidarity, and reconnection with nature and with each other will serve us to hold each other, also and especially

in the face of possible collapse. Active hope, more than a future result, is that possibility to contribute to a different story. It has given us joy and fulfilment, and we are sure it is meaningful and will be guarded in God's hands, whatever may come.

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9.

Running your Race

A Reflection on Decolonisation through the Response of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa's Challenge from African Literary icon Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Bob Kikuyu

Introduction: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Rejection of Christianity

When Ngugi wa Thiong'o was invited to be the guest speaker at the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) conference in 1970, it can be presumed that the invitation was done with the understanding that he was a Christian. But the invitation was also because of his famous literary scholarship within the East Africa region. Through his literary works that juxtaposed African and Western themes, Ngugi was speaking into a context in which the church was quite at the center. It was at this conference that Ngugi declared publicly that he was not a Christian, and subsequently abandoned his Christian name James. John Anonby, a student of theology and literature wrote,

“A convenient introduction to Ngugi's disenchantment with Christianity can be found in his widely publicized speech to the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in Nairobi on

March 12, 1970, which appeared in an essay entitled, “Church, Culture and Politics” in Ngugi’s *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology Homecoming*. In this address, he makes a number of sweeping indictments against Christianity, two of which are pertinent. He sees, first, a “contradiction” between Christianity, “whose basic doctrine was love and equality between men” and what he regards as its unholy alliance with colonialism, “which in Kenya was built on the inequality and hatred between men and the subsequent subjugation of the black race by the white race.” His second caveat is that “Christianity set in motion a process of social change involving rapid disintegration of the tribal set-up and the framework of social norms and values by which people had formerly ordered their lives.”¹

It was not just a matter of words. Ngugi wa Thiong’o practically responded to these sentiments by rejecting not only the colonial master’s name but also the English language in his writing, choosing to now write in his native language Kikuyu. “Ngugi’s insistence on using his mother tongue as the principal medium of his writing is not simply a reaction against Anglicisation; it is more about resurrecting the African soul from centuries of slavery and colonialism that left it spiritually empty, economically disenfranchised and politically marginalised. Ngugi believes that when you erase a people’s language, you erase their memory. And people without memories are rudderless, unconnected to their own histories and culture, mimics who have placed their memories in a “psychic tomb” in the mistaken belief that if they master their coloniser’s language, they will own it.”²

One can therefore see that decolonization was a subject that had occupied people’s minds as far back as 40 years ago. The issues raised were done so shortly after independence when colonialism and its effects were still lingering in many of the

former colonies. However, it seems that there was almost a generation in which the questions of decolonisation that Ngugi raised had become muted, or perhaps, we became numb to it as an issue affecting society. Or could it be, that just as Ngugi was forced into exile for his criticism of the government in his literary works, so too was the challenge to the state and us about who we were in the post-colonial dispensation. And with that, did the church miss an opportunity to reimagine a future for its people?

The scriptures record the need for us to be sensitive to the day and time for change, and to respond to the season. An example is there for us from the families and warriors who enlisted to join David after he was banished from the presence of King Saul. Each was listed with their qualities, but for one family a unique quality stood out, as 1 Chronicles 12: 32 puts it, "From Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command."

40 years after Ngugi wa Thiong'o spoke about decolonising the mind, we need people who not only understand the times, but people who also know how to respond to the need of the hour. Towards that end, this paper will build on three successive points.

1. The contribution of Christianity to Empire with a focus on East Africa
2. Attempts at decolonisation with the example of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa
3. Going forward—the importance of the Reformation and the impact of reconciliation

1. The Contribution of Christianity to Empire

In a somewhat apologetic treatise, and seemingly in defense of someone whom he seems to revere, Fidelis Nkomazana wrote,

“Livingstone believed that Christianity, commerce and civilization had interests in common, and could therefore unashamedly support one another. He argued that their united effect would improve the life and prosperity of Africans, stem the loss of population caused by slave trade, and transform the more violent institutions of African society. Christianity would provide principles for moral guidance, while legitimate commerce and education would encourage Africans to produce their own goods from their fertile soil to trade with Europeans. All this, according to Livingstone needed a good system of government, to ensure civil rights for the people.”³

This seems to have been a notion that was embedded in the minds of those who believed in the British Empire, and the church was right at the center of that belief. However, it is important to acknowledge that the church through mission societies helped to bring a level of transformation in many of the colonized states. As evidenced in many parts of Africa and particularly in the British colonies, mission centres provided hospitals and introduced an element of research in the quest to eliminate certain illnesses that had afflicted societies for a long time, such as malaria. If they consulted indigenous epistemologies that is yet to be determined, for this knowledge also existed. Nevertheless, mortality rates certainly dropped with improved care. Schools provided education that brought these societies into what can be considered the “mainstream” of modern education. Many of these centers became trading posts and eventually towns that provided and promoted trade, and in the process standardized the nature of trade and commerce. All these

had their benefits. But we must hear Ngugi and his rejection of Christianity alongside the other Cs and ask whether he had a point.

The missionaries seemed the most committed of the group in educating local communities in Africa. It was the missions who first started education for the African population during colonial times in Kenya because education was essential for their evangelical work and the training of Africans to take up proselytising. In the early days education varied from mission to mission because there was no government department to co-ordinate it until 1911. So the missions established their own board of education in 1908 and by 1913 they had adopted a uniform code regarding translations and school textbooks in order to avoid duplication.

It was not until 1909 that the government set up the first non-mission schools for Africans, mostly in areas where the missions had the least influence".⁴ In some areas, it was required that at least one child be sent to school from every family. This sector of the society became alienated from their culture. Not only did the language set them apart, but some the "learned" saw themselves as superior to other "uneducated" members of their communities. Later and into the attainment of independence, many of these educated folk went on to become civil service officials and wielded a measure of power over people they looked down on. The rift could only grow wider and more bitter. The missionaries educated for advancing their faith, and the colonial government for advancing their regime's administration. Ngugi reflected on this in a rather sour way.

"When the British imperialists came here in 1895, all the missionaries of all the churches held the Bible in the left hand and the gun in the right hand. The white man wanted us to be drunk with religion while he, in the meantime, was mapping and grabbing our land... completely cripple our mind with religion!"⁵

The missionaries seemed equally determined to eradicate from the local societies the traditions and practices they thought were counter to the Christian teaching. They directly opposed polygamy which can be argued was critical in the economic structure because the labour for creating and sustaining wealth came from within the family – whether in tilling the land or in caring for the livestock on top of other domestic issues. It should be noted that one did not marry plural wives if he did not have the wealth to take care of the wife and her children, and that they in turn became a resource for increasing the wealth of the family. On top of their opposition to polygamy, so too was the use of traditional brews which were such a critical function of social interaction, mostly enjoyed by seniors and the elders of the community. Drunkenness was frowned upon and the education during rites of passage was critical in teaching temperance in the use of alcoholic brews. The missionaries were vehemently opposed to alcohol for any who professed to follow the faith.

The net result was that a section of the community became alienated. In these societies, life was a communal affair and therefore social constructs were also communal. These functioned around rites and ceremonies, most of which revered or at least invoked the ancestors in worship. The process of Christianization sought to eliminate this connection, labelling it as pagan and contrary to the Christian way of living. Christianity through the missionary teachings introduced parallel ways of living and a separate set of rites, such as attendance at Sunday worship services which included sacraments such as the Lord's Table. These must have equally perplexed the local communities because the thought of drinking someone else's blood must have sounded very pagan too. With this the societal structures began to pull apart. It must have led to further divisions and a breakdown of societal and communal norms and structures that had previously held the community together.

There is no doubt that medicine has brought great strides in lengthening the average lifespan of many people as it did in the colonized nations of Africa. However, what it also undid

some good things. It slowly eroded the confidence of people in their traditional medicines and healers. These were people and institutions that had provided for their community's response to their needs over the ages. Natural roots and herbs were soon demeaned, and artificially manufactured medicines were introduced. Off course it provided a new market for the pharmaceutical companies that continue to accumulate enormous wealth as was evidenced during the time of COVID 19.

Commerce meant that the demand for produce from Africa required larger tracts of land. A land that was tilled for what was needed when it was needed became scarred by plantations churning out tons of produce, and with it the quality of the soil was quickly degraded. Agribusiness may have been the single most contributor to the deforestation of Africa, and not for the local market but exploited for export. It should be noted that the land was not bought but forcefully taken when the local people and rightful owners were involuntarily relocated by the colonial government to poorer and less habitable places. Not only was their nutrition affected because Africans were moved to poor environments where they could not produce their local foods, but other foods foreign to the land were introduced, which affected the ecosystem, altering the balance of nature. Meanwhile, as new diseases struck, there were no places to turn to for medicinal roots and herbs. Elsewhere many of those indigenous forests and vegetation had since been destroyed to make way for plantations. On this score, colonisation affected the local people and environment and heralded a climate crisis such as the one we are facing today, a health crisis that came from diseases due to being relocated to inhospitable environments, and an inadequate indigenous medical response from a lack of access to indigenous resources. Colonialism slowly led to the death of indigenous epistemologies.

In writing *Decolonising the Mind* and in rejecting Christianity, Ngugi was reacting to the alienation that came with colonization, seeking to reclaim that which was fundamental to the African. In our current conversation on decolonization, the impact of indigenous people being alienated from their roots is clear and disturbing. Ngugi chose to reclaim that through expression by returning to his mother tongue. What and how far back should the return be for the colonized people, if at all?

Early Attempts at Decolonisation: The Example of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya

I am not certain there is a correlation between Ngugi's sharp rebuke and rejection of Christianity at its 1972 conference and the philosophy of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (Kenya) but there certainly are indications of their actions reflecting what was mentioned. The motto of the church is *Jitegemee*. That the motto itself is in Kiswahili rather than English speaks volumes about the church and how it wants to express itself. One would guess that this choice of Kiswahili was in a sense the rejection of English as a foreign tongue and as a vehicle of colonisation. Next, is the meaning of *Jitegemee* which is self-reliance. It seems the church wanted to be self-reliant in order to carry out its mission; not at the whims of their Scottish origins but from where the local church had agency to determine her affairs. How then was his reflected?

Finances: The Presbyterian Church in Kenya can be considered by some as much a business enterprise as it is a church. They own beach hotels, guest houses and schools to name but a few. They have also developed their worship sites to be multi use venues and generate income from these investments. What this has done is to reduce dependence on

external resources. Where many churches still pander to their colonial home churches, the PCEA pretty much determines its own agenda she has developed a measure of financial independence.

Language: This is the church that has arguably held longest to using vernacular in the urban areas. This is notable because many urban churches transitioned early into adopting Kiswahili and English as their languages of worship. Whilst the practice of using vernacular is slowly dying, there are still places in the urban areas where it is used in worship services. And one of the places where that is most likely to occur is the PCEA.

They have understood the power of language to communicate and to shape people. Through this they have been able to retain a core of their membership that feels both connected to the truth of God's word because it is delivered in a way that is authentic to them.

Rites of Passage: The late 90's saw the stirrings of a movement in the Kenyan church. Muhia Karianjahi who is an outdoor experience expert began to look at the impact of rites of passage in traditional communities and their role in shaping and transitioning age groups. He considered the loss and lack of these in contemporary society and began to ask if some of our identity crisis and displacement was due to their absence. That began the Rites of Passage Experiences (ROPES) programme in Nairobi churches that sought to bring the principles and ethics of the traditional rites of passage into the African church settings. The combination of scriptural teaching and traditional wisdom, including the place of community, was seen as a transformational revelation in the church.

The Presbyterian Church of East Africa was slow off the mark in embracing this new teaching. However, when the value of what it was and the connection between faith and culture proved to be effective, the Presbyterian Church took on a leading role. It embraced it whole heartedly and today it stands as one of the key drivers of the ROPES experience in the

country. This was partly due to the church responding to what I have earlier alluded to as the redemption of culture where those practices are used to serve the church and to reconnect with culture. This has enabled many young people to develop and strengthen their identity in Christ as well as their identity in their community and culture.

So, there were early attempts at decolonisation after all. These three ways show how a faith movement responded to the challenge thrown at it and have over the years been building their own identity and character. Whereas Ngugi wa Thiong'o outrightly rejected Christianity, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa seems to have engaged in deep reflection to develop its cultural and communal values alongside its biblical thrust.

Learning from the Reformation

The Reformation period which sparked in 1517 by the actions of Martin Luther has continued to have a significant impact on the church. The reformers were willing to stand out of line for what they believed. That belief was carried out after diligent study and deep engagement with the scriptures in a manner similar to what is said in Acts 17: 11, "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

There is hardly any indication that their intention was to start another wing of the church, nor that they wanted to be princes of the church. However, they held the strong belief in the supremacy of scripture and its transforming power and sought to place themselves at its disposal rather than to rites and traditions. But what seems to be of import, hopefully, is the willingness of the church to scrutinise itself.

"One of the principles that came out of the

Reformation is that a truly reformed church is always in need of reforming. That is not to say that churches should keep reforming for the sake of further change, as if change itself is virtuous. Rather, it means a church that is committed to the transforming power of the gospel and grounded in the supreme authority of Scripture will always be scrutinising its practices through these complementary lenses.”⁶

That is the position the church finds itself again today. Faced with the challenges of inequality and yet carrying the banner of, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all,”^{vii} is she willing to face herself in light of scripture? The Reformation taught us the way. And if the church is willing to do so once again, she can be assured of being surrounded by so great cloud of witnesses such as the apostles and reformers who have paved the way for us. It behooves us as Hebrews 12: 1 says, “to run with endurance the race set before us”.

Longing for Reconciliation

A prominent personality recently spoke about the challenge the human heart is facing in the world today, and how our generation is slowly losing its ability to empathise with the problems people are experiencing. Such a conclusion is understandable, when one considers the number of tragedies in the recent past and how frequently they occur. The February 2023 earthquake in Syria and Turkey had taken over 40,000 lives by the time of writing. This is almost 3 years to the date when COVID 19 was officially announced as an epidemic which at one point was claiming over 10,000 lives a day in some countries of Europe and North America. In between these two, Russia invaded Ukraine leading to a significant loss of lives and unquantifiable damage to the Ukrainian infrastructure. That in

turn led to global shortages of grain and a spike in the cost of gas, precipitating a global economic recession. Alongside it now is a famine in the Horn of Africa with loss of lives and livelihoods for many people in the region. With such a barrage of calamities, it is understandable that sympathy and empathy become a distant emotion, and yet that is partly what distinguishes us as humans.

We have instead been thrown on the other end of the spectrum. We have become more nationalistic to safeguard our boundaries, more racist to protect our identity, greedier to secure our future, and more entrenched in our positions. It has led to polarised global and local communities. And not even the church has been spared from this with some of the largest global communions suffering from possible fissures in their confederation. To bring it specifically to our subject matter, will our response to colonization be a rejection of all that it brought as Ngugi somewhat did in publicly revoking his claim to the Christian faith, rejecting his Western name and the Western language?

We then must consider the words of Paul in relation to Christ and His purpose.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”⁸

Decolonisation does not have to end up in division. It does not have to pit two sides against each other – one offended and one defensive. It does not have to focus on what one demands from or owes the other. I suggest it needs to lead us to the purpose of Christ – which was to create in Himself one new humanity

out of the two. That new humanity does not mean we forget the atrocities of colonialism by the British government which led to the death of thousands of people while fighting for freedom from colonial rule. That new humanity does not mean we ignore the cry for reparations to be paid for the loss of lives and livelihoods arising from colonialism and in some cases, slavery that was abetted by the instruments of the empire. It means that as we pursue justice through judicial and social means, we can see beyond that to a greater and more satisfying aim – a new humanity.

Christ came that we may experience the abundant life, as He says in John 10: 10, to live in just communities and with just relationships makes for a community that experiences the abundant life, fostering the shalom so longingly spoken about. And in a world torn apart by hardline positions, reconciliation could be what is needed as an endpoint to work towards in the building of just communities. Reconciliation needs to be considered not just as an endpoint but also as a methodology in the conversations around the contentious issues that bear on us in almost every conversation. And if Jesus sought “in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility” then we should consider the implications of the cross; the cross we bear carrying our pain from colonialism and racism, or the cross we bear carrying the shame for our actions of racism and discrimination, while at the same time looking to the cross of Christ by which He put to death our hostility!

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10.

Colonization and the European Christian message in Abya Yala

Yenny Delgado

Introduction

Over the last five centuries, the results of colonization and implications of Christianization has led to many detrimental losses to Abya Yala and its inhabitants. The pursuit of wealth buoyed by subordinated faith led to a loss of the practice of ancestral memories, a loss of native spirituality, and the loss of self-determination and ethnic identity. Christian missionaries brought the cross and sword to rule and order our land. An oppressed theology brought oppression for the native population, and its consequences included genocide, enslavement, separation of families, border schools, and environmental destruction.

The reductionist teaching of Christianity in Abya Yala removed any aspects of the liberating message inherent in the message of Christ. In a story similar to magical realism, the way to narrate fantasy, in recent years, the attempts to forget this horrifying history during colonization, the Church as the government jumped to post-colonial realities, forgetting the Native peoples in the continent were considered “paganism” without religion and need to be control and civilize.[\[1\]](#)

The governments during colonization and later in the republics have sought to erase traces or a sense of identity that connects the population with their ancestors and memories.

Instead, they have taught and projected messages of political socialization that seek greater affection for the created nation-states.

As a native descendant theologian who has experienced and felt the full impacts of the theological, political, and implications of colonization and the reductionist European Christian message implemented and taught in Abya Yala, this essay provides readers with greater context to understand and begins to develop opportunities for change and addressing the impacts of Christianity over native population and the environment.

Understanding Abya Yala colonization

Abya Yala comes from the Guna language and means “land in full maturity and land of vital blood.” The Guna people inhabit the meeting points of the north and south geographically, to represent the connectivity of the lands. In the 1970s, the term Abya Yala was adopted by many activists, historians, politicians, and theologians as the unified name instead of using North America (primarily English speakers) and Latin America (primarily Spanish and Portuguese speakers) that perpetuate colonial divisions.^[2]

For thousands of years Native peoples of Abya Yala lived well and prospered in practice that provided a unity between a naturalistic cosmology and spirituality.^[3] The practice of “good living” was possible through a symbiotic relationship with the environment and the abundance of fruit trees, plants, and extensive land rich in minerals and water.

On the other hand, Europeans suffer from lack of natural resources and looking for new routes to go to India, Asia. Essentially due to a geographic mistake they arrived in Abya Yala^[4] and saw this ‘new world’ as a new dream, a new start, and an opportunity in a ‘virgin land.’ Europeans Christians

viewed the land through a biblical lens in which they were the new people of God who had arrived in their promised land. From this vantage point they re-interpreted Numbers 14:8, "If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us." European Christians viewed themselves and the land as a result of a blessing from God and as part of God's plan for them to find or discover as they have continued this idea of discovery "a new world" that God would give them to live.

This view of controlling the land and owning it, was consistent in European Christian thought that came from an experience where the church and kings controlled and owned the land and its resources; on the other side, the population was the servants who had to obey. The land was envisaged as an opportunity to change the prospects of the vast majority of people in Europe that lived impoverished, uneducated, and living under the oppression of various kingdoms that oppressed and controlled their movement under the Christian religion divided between Catholics and Protestants.^[5]

The invasion of Abya Yala by Columbus and his crew of prisoners, merchants, and military motivated by the possibility of looting this new land has been painted in many stories. "Colonization led to enormous energy in the claim and occupation of western lands and, not surprisingly, to intense competition for control among the European powers.^[6]"

The targeted and deliberate decision to reduce the number of native people who lived in the continent for thousands of years was not by accident and not because of God's providence but just a cruel act of power. Developing a vision of the land as being "unproductive" ^[7] and empty, the ability to adapt a narrative of striving Europeans seeking freedom of life becomes a much simpler story.

Based on this historical context, colonization, and the European Christian message in Abya Yala started to show the

social and environmental consequences of the encounter and subsequent devastation of the motherland.

The Doctrine of Discovery and the Division on the Motherland

To provide a legal and ecclesiastical framework with God's blessing with a "new world" and "new land" Christian kingdoms and, by proxy, their army, and settlers needed to legitimate their right to oppress native population of Abya Yala. The Doctrine of Discovery or "doctrine of invasion"[\[8\]](#) was developed through a number of Papal Bulls during the 15th Century and made, it permissible for non-Christian people to be captured, vanquished, and have their possessions and property seized by the Christian monarchs.

In the XV Century, Spanish and Portuguese kingdoms divided Abya Yala and took possession under the Catholic church rules; native peoples received 'civilization' and were forced to convert to Christianity. The Church stole the land and demanded gold, silver, and other goods. As author Brueggemann in his chapter about relinquishing ethnocentric ideologies for sustainable societies, wrote, "The Doctrine of Discovery served to dispossess native people of their lands and resources and was especially important in the colonial practices...the doctrine illuminates our theme of superiority and supremacy." [\[9\]](#)

Later in the XVI century the English and French joined in the first great land grab and colonized the northeastern areas of the continent. British colonists re-created a new narrative appropriating the Hebrew Bible story and envisaged "America" as a new promised land; they took control of the northeast of the continent where the part was already colonized by Spanish and Catholics; "...for puritans were unsure initially about the

intended extent of the New Canaan and were inclined anyway to see the land beyond as a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.”[\[10\]](#).

At the time of colonization and expansion, the prevailing thought in European Christianity advanced the idea that that maintaining wild parts of nature was tantamount to savagery. This thinking led to a view that the environment and land were inexhaustible resources that could be repeatedly pillaged for one’s own benefit.

The Church and many theologians at the time chose not to read into freedom the work of Christ in society rather accommodated the sociological conditions that prevailed in the close to 1600 years early. Enslavement of native people was encoded by the law and supported by the theological construction and normalized by the Church “The codes determined that a child was born into slavery or free based solely on the mother’s status. They mandated slavery for life with no hope of emancipation and liberation. The codes deprived the enslaved of legal rights.”[\[11\]](#) Native people were forced to work in plantations and also on church lands and property... Though there was some dissent amongst smaller denominations and Catholic orders concerning enslavement. As theologian Tisby writes in his book “the Color compromise”: “The bodies of enslaved people had a measurable, monetary value.”[\[12\]](#)

Borders, Reductions, and Civilization

During the late 19th Century, most of the land was appropriated for the creation of the new republics and in process of exploitation for extract minerals and large agricultural monocultures. Native populations and their descendants were confined to “reductions,” “indigenous land” and new “borders” who was the least productive lands, with

lack of water, communication roads and easily flooded places. The governments and their institutions were run by European descendants, who for centuries continued to force cultural assimilation campaigns. Some institutions decided to civilize and Christianize the next generation of native peoples through forced removal of thousands of Native children to attend boarding schools run by for Catholics and protestants all over the continent.

Recently discovered mass graves showed another of the consequences of these schools in Canada, where hundreds of bodies of boys and girls have been found. Stories of rape, and abuse of power, among others, have been documented throughout the years. In recent history, there is still no sincere sample of what has happened with the schools and the children who were removed from their homes to receive “civilized education.” We can read, in an article from Henry Gass “more than 130 such schools operated in Canada from the 1870s to the 1990s; an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in them.”[\[13\]](#)

A similar policy was implemented in Peru, where the children of the Arakambut were sent to Catholic mission schools and taught Spanish. The Mission envisioned new forms of evangelization that would enable it to continue to accompany native children as they “converted” them to the Spanish and Latin culture. The ideology behind these schools was to teach the colonizers language and culture, but at the same time, Native population women and men were forced to cut their hair, change their clothes, and prohibited from speaking their native languages. “The hair of men and women was cut as a sign of enslavement, powerlessness, and humiliation to look more like the colonizer, look like a “human being,” something that the oppressor perceived as “civilized.” This was a tragic event for us. It took many centuries for the native population to

regain the right to bodily autonomy. Resistance was a way of living.”^[14]

In the schools, girls were taught to serve domestically, clean, iron, and preparing to service, while the boys worked on the lands that belonged to the Church to plant and harvest food. This free labor for the Church made a significant mark. Wealthy European families donated to the Church and picked up free service for centuries.

It is well documented that when missionaries traveled to ‘convert’ people to Christianity, these encounters were followed by private corporations and foreign government troops soon after.^[15] Christianity’s reduce and even simplify native cultures to force to everyone in Abya Yala to adapt and assimilate into a normative white Christianity. This reductionist teaching removed any aspects of the liberating message inherent in the words of Christ. Christian faith has become synonymous with colonization and oppression and is a critical characteristic of the white theological practice.

Ancestral Memory and Ethnic Identity for Native Populations

The loss of ancestral memory and identity was a deliberate and systematic effort by European colonizers to erase the native population’s identity and self-identification as the original people of Abya Yala. This erasure took place through various means, including the reclassification of native individuals as “hybrid people” or individuals of mixed heritage. The intention behind this classification was for Europeans to exert control and strip native populations of their status, culture, and connection to their heritage.

The consequences of this deliberate erasure were profound. It resulted in family divisions and a sense of disdain towards

ancestral origins among native communities. Furthermore, the erasure perpetuated a false narrative that portrayed Spanish grandfathers as the saviors of the family. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that many instances of these Spanish, French, Italian or English ancestors in family lineages were the result of non-consensual relationships, often arising from acts of rape during the colonial period.

As a result of this deliberate erasure, grandmothers with native roots were intentionally marginalized and excluded from family histories. Their connection to the native population was deemed shameful, and efforts were made to distance themselves from their native heritage. This erasure not only inflicted personal and familial pain but also contributed to a broader disregard for the consequences of border schools and the paper genocide can be observed in the loss of ancestral memory among native populations and their descendants. This loss includes the understanding of caring, “good living practices: for and protecting nature and the motherland. The aggressive extractive practices, driven by a massive demand for minerals, have resulted in water contamination, deforestation, and the unsustainable consumption of resources on an alarming scale. These practices amount to ecocide, threatening the fragile environment and endangering our biodiversity.

Understanding the historical context challenges the ongoing efforts to reclaim and celebrate native cultural and heritage. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all communities have had the same experience, and many have suffered from the erasure of their identity, causing profound harm and wounds within their native communities. The impacts on the environment, which was also colonized alongside the native population, are now becoming increasingly evident. It is imperative to recognize the suffering endured by native communities and address the environmental degradation resulting from colonization.

Conclusions

Colonization has inflicted immense pain and oppression upon the native population in Abya Yala. The European Christian message of control, deeply rooted in exclusion and denigration, has perpetuated the belief that the native people are savages, leading to devastating impacts on the social and environmental ecosystem. The colonization and white supremacy theology created an unequal society and resulted in the destruction of sacred lands, loss of biodiversity, medicinal plants, and ancestral memory for the indigenous communities. This exploitative and oppressive theology, viewing God's creation solely in terms of extractive productivity, has contributed to the current climate crisis.

However, there is an opportunity to challenge and transform the Christian message by incorporating native experiences and reinterpreting God's message. By doing so, we can acknowledge and condemn past injustices while embracing a more inclusive future that prioritizes care over control and peace over power. It is crucial for the new generations, who have grown up as Christians, to demand the decolonization of the Christian message from a native perspective. They understand the importance of preserving their ethnic identity and reclaiming their spiritual practices as a way of liberation.

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PART III

ECONOMICS,
EDUCATION, &
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE

11.

‘Take my intellect’

Winning Hearts and Minds in the Climate Policy Debate

Richard Lewney²

Introduction

This chapter seeks to motivate a Christian response to the climate emergency through engagement with *the economic ideas* that guide and constrain policy-makers and the *social and political changes* required to address obstacles to the path towards net zero. Economic ideas provide a justification for policy action but also constrain it. The most prominent ideas in mainstream economics understate the benefits from mitigation action and overstate the costs, leading to inadequate ambition for curbing global warming. The main obstacles to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 are social and political rather than technological. We are called to win hearts and minds to build a sufficient consensus for action, across the ideological divide.

Challenging the Economics

Economic ideas matter...

The economist John Maynard Keynes, writing at the time of a

different global crisis, famously emphasised the power of ideas to frame the thinking of subsequent generations of politicians and business leaders:

'[T]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed, the world is ruled by little else. Practical men [sic], who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.' (Keynes 1936, 383)

Clearly ideas do not have a life of their own but exist and gain or lose traction in wider society through a complex mix of social forces that condition the attractiveness and acceptability of any particular way of thinking. Theological concepts are subject to the same pressures: witness the 'Biblical' justification of apartheid offered by some Dutch Reformed Church theologians in South Africa and the later theological debate over the need for repentance (Ryrie, 2017). Ideas do not necessarily lead social change: the social conditions have to be right. But nor do they necessarily merely provide a passive rationalisation of a change that is already under way.

... and for the past 50 years have promoted a limited role for government...

Keynes' own ideas were of fundamental importance to the shift in policies to respond to mass unemployment in the western economies in the 1930s and continued to underpin the post-WWII adoption of macroeconomic interventionist policies in Europe and North America. But the pendulum swung back towards a more limited role for government in the 1970s and 1980s following the ideas of Muth (1961) and their development by Friedman (1968), Lucas (1970) and Sargent (1973). These emphasised how 'rational' agents (people and firms) would anticipate the impact of government actions and respond in a way that negated the intended effect. Initially this school critiqued the notion that governments could reduce

unemployment by cutting interest rates: in the long run the result would be higher inflation while the rate of unemployment would return to its 'natural level. This emphasis on the limited effectiveness of government action continues to be a strong theme in some parts of mainstream economic theory: proponents of so-called 'Ricardian equivalence' argue that tax cuts will not stimulate spending in the economy because people will anticipate that taxes will need to rise again in future and will accordingly increase their saving.

... and gave priority to individual freedom, even at the expense of social and environmental impacts

Naturally, the idea that government interventions are misguided and ineffective is attractive to those who espouse the neoliberal political agenda, with its commitment to low taxation and a minimalist state. In principle, attachment to that agenda does not preclude some form of action to mitigate climate change, but in practice that action turns out to be inadequate, or non-existent.

A key reason is the primacy that neoliberal philosophy gives to the individual as the arbiter of value and hence the overriding priority of individual freedom of choice. There are many circumstances in which that position seems reasonable, consistent with the Christian imperative to love our neighbour: we respect the other's right to make choices that we ourselves would not make. And there are also circumstances in which exercising my own freedom of choice harms others, notably in the case of environmental damage (whether local, such as the damage to air quality from the pollution emitted by the internal combustion engine, or global, such as the emission of greenhouse gases). Mainstream economics conventionally recognises the need for some kind of policy intervention to correct for the 'externalities' (effects on others) of environmental damage. But neoliberal philosophy regards individual freedom of choice as so precious that damage to others would have to be enormous to be worth the sacrifice

entailed by government-imposed limitation of choice. How else are we to understand the unwillingness of segments of the US population to accept gun control, despite the large number of gun-related murders each year? From a European standpoint, this looks like idolatry.

Where your treasure is

Of course, the scientific consensus is that global warming is the preeminent example of individual choices having very large environmental damages. If neoliberal philosophy allows for any case where diminution of freedom is a price worth paying, it is surely this. But here another Christian principle comes into play: ‘where your treasure is, there your heart will be also’ (Matthew 6.21, NRSV). Our thinking, decision-making and moral frame of reference (our ‘heart’) is heavily conditioned by what we want (our ‘treasure’), which is why Jesus emphasises the importance of pursuing the right kind of treasure. Otherwise our moral compass may not point in the right direction. The validity of the findings of the scientific consensus on the extent and drivers of global warming are not a matter of political preference, and yet the prevalence of climate scepticism is strongly correlated with preference for freedom from state intervention (Yan et al, 2022). Indeed, a meta-analysis of a number of studies testing for an association between individuals’ characteristics and climate scepticism concludes:

‘the data suggest that “evidence” around climate change is searched, remembered, and assimilated in a way that dovetails with people’s own political loyalties and their worldviews. For some, this may lead to a disregard for (or misunderstanding of) the scientific consensus around climate change.’ (Hornsey et al, 2016, 626)

In short, tribal identity conditions our ability to hear what the scientists are saying.

When it comes to global warming, mainstream economics understates the cost of damages and overstates the cost of mitigation

Mainstream economics adopts a cost-benefit approach to many questions of public policy. An intervention should not go ahead if its costs exceed its benefits. If there are two ways of doing something, the one with the superior benefit to cost ratio should be preferred. It is recognised that 'costs' and 'benefits' should include both items that are readily given a monetary value (for example, the expenditure required to build a new road) and those that are not (for example, the value of the journey time saved, the additional noise and pollution for those living near the road, the loss of habitat for wildlife and the impact on biodiversity, and the impact on greenhouse gas emissions). Two obvious difficulties arise. The first is how to place a value on the difficult items (notably environmental costs and benefits). The second is how to add things up when costs are borne by a different set of people from those who enjoy the benefits.

These difficulties are thrown into sharp relief when the cost-benefit method is applied to climate change mitigation, exemplified by the work of William Nordhaus who shared the 2018 Economics Nobel Prize (for example Nordhaus, 2018).

The benefits of mitigation are the reduction in damages associated with global warming (say, by limiting warming to 1.5°C instead of whatever temperature increase is predicted without further mitigation intervention: 'business as usual'). There is considerable uncertainty about the scale of damages and their impact on economic activity, quite apart from any other impact (e.g. on biodiversity). One method (for example,

Burke et al, 2015; Burke and Tanutama, 2019) that has been adopted has been to look at differences in 'productivity' (GDP per worker) between hotter and cooler locations today. If hotter places suffer a productivity deficit compared with cooler places today, we might assume that any place that becomes hotter in the future will suffer a similar productivity deficit compared with a future in which its temperature increase is curbed by mitigation policy. But this estimate of potential damage can only be part of the story when it comes to global warming: comparison between places with different temperatures today does not capture the damage associated with wider effects, such as sea-level rise and more energy in the climate system (leading to more frequent and more violent extreme weather events). If the consequences of a high increase in global temperatures are catastrophic, the benefit of mitigation (i.e. of avoiding those consequences) must be huge.

The costs of any particular set of mitigation policies are calculated as economic activity (GDP) that has to be 'given up' in order to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Why must GDP be 'given up'? Because it is typically assumed that under 'business as usual', people and firms make choices that yield the best feasible outcome for them (leaving aside the impact on climate damages, which the benefits calculation is supposed to capture). If a mitigation policy forces them to curb emissions, that must be more costly by assumption: otherwise they would have chosen that path anyway. But this ignores the impact of mitigation policy on the cost of low-carbon technologies. The reason that solar panels and wind turbines are much cheaper to produce today than 20 years ago is that mitigation policy (especially in Europe) subsidised the initial R&D and created a market for the products, leading to further innovation and cost reduction due to economies of scale in production. Ignoring this stimulus to innovation inflates the estimated costs of mitigation.

The final, and particularly controversial, element in the cost-

benefit calculation is the 'discounting' of costs incurred and benefits enjoyed in future years. In a conventional cost-benefit calculation, it is assumed that a benefit enjoyed today is worth more than the same benefit enjoyed tomorrow. This may make sense in a narrow comparison of alternatives. If there are two options to build a cycle path which cost the same, we would prefer the one that delivers benefits sooner. And we can see that people are willing to incur an interest fee to buy something on credit now rather than wait until they have saved enough to buy it later. So a cost-benefit calculation gives less weight to ('discounts') costs and benefits expected to occur a decade or more away compared with those expected in the near future. But the case of global warming policy stretches that logic too far. Most of the benefits of mitigation (the climate damages that would otherwise occur) will accrue in the very long term. Even large (but not infinite) numbers (say, large damages) become negligible when discounted over, say, 100 years. Does that feel right? And those benefits will be experienced by future generations: most people would be uneasy with the argument that an improvement to their wellbeing should be valued less than the same improvement to our wellbeing today.³

By framing the analysis in this way, biasing down mitigation's estimated benefits and biasing up its estimated costs, the cost-benefit analysis concludes too modest an ambition. For example, Nordhaus (2018) recommends an 'optimal' path that leads to 3.5°C of global warming, far above the scale that the UNIPCC has consistently proposed and the ambition of 'well below 2°C' embodied in the 2015 Paris Agreement. To be useful, credible and relevant, mainstream economics needs to give way to other voices (Lewney, 2020). To adapt Keynes' aphorism, 'practical people' should avoid being unconsciously enslaved by misleading ideas.

Challenging the Politics

The most difficult challenges are social, political and behavioural

Some of the key technological challenges to support climate change mitigation have been, or are on the way to being, addressed. The cost of electricity generation from renewables has fallen sharply over the past 20 years. The cost and performance of battery storage have improved. A wider range of electric vehicles is being produced and the availability of heat pumps has increased. Many technological challenges remain of course: decarbonising air and sea transport and HGVs; dealing with intermittency in renewables generation and seasonal variations in energy demand; carbon capture, usage and storage and carbon dioxide removal. But the larger challenges are social and political: bringing about the changes in behaviour to curb emissions, the take-up of available low-carbon technologies that are realistic alternatives to the way we presently use energy, and achieving a Just Transition so that the burden of change does not fall on those least able to act.

Our political advocacy of the changes needed to get to net zero has two targets. We need to keep up the pressure on governments, to raise their ambition and, as important, to match their ambition with action, monitoring and transparent reporting. In the UK, the Climate Change Committee (an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008) plays an important role in this respect, as do the range of NGOs that lobby on this issue. We also need to win hearts and minds at the grassroots level to strengthen the support for politicians, and advisors within governments, that are arguing for change, and to promote the behaviour change that governments have limited power to bring about.

Giving priority to the main obstacles to achieving net zero

We can distil policy priorities by considering what a path towards net zero emissions will look like and then identifying the obstacles to accelerating progress. The following are key ingredients.

- **a higher price for fossil fuels**

This is the mainstream economist's favourite, and sometimes only, policy prescription. A sustained higher price provides stronger incentives for reducing consumption, switching to non-fossil-based alternatives, and innovation to create new and cheaper opportunities for those choices. It provides the rationale for cap and trade schemes, the largest of which is the European Union's Emissions Trading System.⁴

But we cannot and should not rely on higher prices alone. As the surge in oil and gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown, many people have limited opportunities to adapt easily to higher prices and have been pushed into fuel poverty. If you do not own your own home, you have little or no power to improve its insulation or change its heating source. If you live in a place that is poorly served by public transport, you continue to rely on a car for essential travel and you may not be able to afford to switch to an electric vehicle. The social consequences of sole reliance on a higher fossil fuel price would be grossly unjust and completely undermine public support for the whole net zero programme. The biggest fear for European climate policy-makers currently is the rise of right-wing populist parties that feed on the anger aroused by high energy prices and who stoke opposition to mitigation policies. The first key element of a Just Transition is to incorporate accompanying measures to protect those most vulnerable to higher energy prices.

Another social and political obstacle to higher fossil fuel prices in countries that adopt ambitious targets is 'carbon leakage': firms within those countries see costs rise compared with competitors in countries with less ambition and lose market share. The result, for example, is the closure of steel firms in the ambitious countries and imports of steel from countries with continued large greenhouse gases emissions. Typically, therefore, countries with ambitious cap and trade policies seek an accompanying increase in tariffs on imports from less ambitious countries, to maintain (as they see it) equal treatment of firms. The EU is about to introduce such a 'Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism', although it remains to be seen how effective this will prove and whether it will be challenged through the World Trade Organization.

- **energy efficiency**

A key way of maintaining living standards while cutting fossil fuel use is to improve energy efficiency. The energy efficiency of cars in the EU has been driven by regulation: tighter standards for vehicle emissions and hence fuel use. The biggest obstacle is the huge scale of investment required to renovate the housing stock, and the standard of the UK's housing stock is particularly poor (Hodgkin and Sasee, 2022). Standards are gradually being raised for new homes, but these are a small part of the entire housing stock. If the policies advocated in initial 'Green New Deal' proposals at the time of the global financial crisis (Simms et al, 2008) had been implemented over the past 15 years, Britain's poor households would have been in a much more resilient position to face the current energy crisis.

- **electrification and decarbonising electricity**

The 'clean fuel' alternative to fossil fuels is typically renewables-based electricity, implying major changes both to our

electricity system and to our energy use, notably in transport and heating. We need to avoid investing in infrastructure that relies on fossil fuels and which has no future in a net zero economy: in the UK new housing developments are still being built with gas supplies. The challenges associated with intermittency and the cost of storage mean that the system will be cheaper if we can smooth peaks in hourly electricity use (in winter, in countries like the UK), reinforcing the case for investing in an energy-efficient housing stock.

- **supporting transition in places specialised in fossil fuel extraction**

The second key element of a Just Transition is to support workers and households in locations that have traditionally specialised in fossil fuel extraction. The UK experience of closure of coal mines provides a warning about the consequences for local communities whose social and economic life have been torn apart the loss of the main employer, with deprivation continuing across generations (Beatty et al, 2019). A recent study examining what a Green Transition in South Africa might look like found that new jobs in sectors supplying low-carbon technologies could match the job losses in coal, but the new jobs would likely be in different locations and require very different skills compared with coal extraction (Kiss-Dobronyi et al, 2021).

- **more sustainable lifestyles**

This is the most fundamental of all the changes, and the most demanding in terms of winning hearts and minds. Currently, it is hard to see how some obstacles to achieving net zero (such as curbing methane emissions from livestock) can be tackled without changes in our behaviour (reducing dairy and meat consumption). And the scale of the measures described above,

notably investing in new infrastructure, the production of low-carbon fuels and new types of energy-using equipment, can be reduced if we curb and reorient our consumption patterns (as highlighted, for example, in European Commission, 2018). New investment, even if it has a low-carbon supply chain, typically worsens other environmental pressures: we need to find ways of curbing global warming that does not provoke a different kind of environmental crisis.

Conclusions

Anthropogenic climate change presents a challenge to human society greater than any we have yet faced. Do we have the capacity collectively to choose a different path from the one that we have been following since the Industrial Revolution? The IPCC has managed, in the face of strong pressures from those unwilling to countenance change, to deliver a clear message about the urgent need for action (IPCC, 2023). As Christians committed to responding to the crisis, we are called to use whatever agency and power we have to defend the vulnerable and to care for world entrusted to our care: in debate, in lobbying, in protest and, perhaps most of all, in winning the hearts and minds of those who are starting from a very different ideological standpoint from our own.

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Endnotes

Title: From the hymn "Take My Life and Let It Be", Frances R. Havergal.

2. The author is chair of Cambridge Econometrics (www.camecon.com).

3. One argument in favour of discounting assumes that future generations will be richer than we are. A given increase in income is usually regarded as making a bigger difference to wellbeing for someone who is poor compared with someone who is rich. So a benefit enjoyed by future, richer generations

would be worth less to them than the same benefit enjoyed by us today. But if global temperatures increase greatly, future generations may not be 'richer' (even in GDP terms, let alone on broader criteria) than we are today.

4. The UK was a major supporter of the development of the ETS when it was a member of the EU, and has continued with a comparable domestic system since leaving the EU.

12.

Ecologic and Economic Injustice

The Zambia Perspective

Daimon Mkandawire

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the numerous environmental challenges faced by Zambia, a country endowed with abundant natural resources of Zambia, abundant wildlife, forests, and minerals that are crucial for sustaining the economy and supporting rural livelihoods. However, Zambia's environmental challenges include mining-related pollution, climate change, and illegal wildlife trade, which threaten the sustainability of these resources. The country's over-reliance on copper mining and the challenges faced by the agricultural sector pose significant economic challenges that hinder its development and growth. To address these challenges, the contribution argues for the development of a theology of ecological and economic justice that is culturally relevant to Zambian communities. It suggests that the church, given its influence on personal moral development, is well-positioned to shape ecological and economic justice in Zambia. The chapter concludes that religion has a mandate for environmental care, economic justice, and sustainability and that preaching ecologically sensitive sermons could make a difference in shaping an ethos for earth keeping.

Background

Zambia is endowed with rich natural resources, including vast forests, abundant wildlife, and fertile lands, making it one of the most ecologically diverse countries in Africa. However, the country faces numerous environmental challenges that threaten the sustainability of these resources.

Zambia's environment is characterized by diverse landscapes, ranging from the vast savannah grasslands of the central plateau to the lush forests of the north-western province. The country is home to numerous rivers, including the Zambezi, Kafue, and Luangwa rivers, which are essential sources of water for both humans and wildlife.

The natural resources of Zambia include minerals such as copper, cobalt, and gold, which are the backbone of the country's economy. The country also has significant forest reserves, which are crucial for maintaining ecological balance and supporting the livelihoods of rural communities.

Environmental and Economic Challenges

Despite the abundance of natural resources, Zambia faces numerous environmental challenges that threaten the sustainability of these resources. The country's mining industry, which accounts for a significant portion of the country's economy, has resulted in environmental degradation and pollution. The mining activities have led to soil erosion, deforestation, and water pollution, which have had significant impacts on the health and well-being of local communities and wildlife.

Climate change is another significant environmental challenge facing Zambia. The country is experiencing increased temperatures, reduced rainfall, and prolonged

droughts, which are affecting agricultural productivity and exacerbating poverty levels.

Moreover, the country's wildlife is under threat due to poaching and illegal wildlife trade. The population of elephants, lions, and other iconic species has declined significantly, threatening the country's tourism industry and the survival of these species.

Zambia's economy is heavily reliant on copper mining, which accounts for about 70% of the country's export earnings. The country is also a major producer of other minerals, such as cobalt and emeralds. The agricultural sector is another critical component of the economy, with the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming.

The Zambian government has made significant efforts to diversify the economy by promoting other sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and construction. The government has also implemented various economic policies aimed at promoting private sector development and foreign direct investment.

Despite the efforts to diversify the economy, Zambia faces numerous economic challenges that threaten its development and growth. One of the significant challenges is the country's over-reliance on copper mining, which makes it vulnerable to fluctuations in international copper prices. The global economic downturn and the recent drop in copper prices have had a significant impact on the country's economy, leading to job losses and reduced investment. These are not the only problems that the Zambia government faces, it also has a lot of corruption within its governance of the natural resources.

Corruption within the governance of natural resources in Zambia has been a significant issue for many years. Zambia is a resource-rich country with abundant reserves of copper, cobalt, and other minerals as I have already stated, making it an attractive target for exploitation and financial gain.

Unfortunately, the mismanagement and corruption surrounding these resources have hindered the country's development and deprived its citizens of the benefits they should derive from their own natural wealth.

It is a known fact that in Zambia you will find the following issues about corruption within the governance of natural resources in Zambia:

1. **Illegal mining:** One major issue is the presence of illegal mining activities. Some individuals or groups exploit mineral resources without proper licenses, resulting in revenue losses for the government. These illegal miners often operate outside regulatory frameworks, avoiding taxes and environmental regulations.
2. **Revenue mismanagement:** Corruption within the revenue collection and management systems has been a significant problem. There have been instances of embezzlement, bribery, and diversion of funds meant for public projects or social development programs. This mismanagement deprives the country of vital resources that could be used for infrastructure development, education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation.
3. **Lack of transparency:** Transparency and accountability are crucial in the governance of natural resources. However, opacity in the awarding of mining licenses and contracts has been a common concern in Zambia. Non-disclosure of beneficial ownership and secretive deals have created an environment ripe for corruption, where well-connected individuals or companies can exploit resources without proper scrutiny.
4. **Weak regulatory framework:** Inadequate legislation and weak enforcement mechanisms contribute to corruption. The legal and regulatory frameworks governing the natural resource sector may have gaps or lack stringent measures to prevent corruption effectively. This allows for

rent-seeking behaviour, where officials exploit their positions for personal gain.

Additionally, the country faces challenges such as high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, which are exacerbated by limited access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure.

We find ourselves at a time when we need a significant and credible theology of ecological and economic justice that is culturally relevant to Zambian communities. Developing such a theology could promote a purposeful ideological orientation for sustainable ecological and economic justice praxis.

The modern Eco-Justice movement has encouraged a profound shift toward science, technology, and policy to solve large problems. Yet, environmentalists are increasingly aware that our current climate crisis will require more than just solutions based on hard science: these efforts must be accompanied by a widespread and deep-rooted change in individual norms and behaviour. Framing environmental action as a moral necessity is particularly important considering that many national and international agreements on climate change have stalled. The problem of ecological and economic injustice can create a platform for collaboration among diverse people. Fighting for people to live in a healthy environment is a moral and civil rights issue. It is important to reconnect all communities to nature and provide them with good reasons to be engaged.

To this effect, the church is well-positioned to shape ecological and economic justice due to its influence over personal moral development. Zambia's majority is religious. John Mbiti shared this unitary view of the pervasive religiosity of African traditional society. He wrote that Africans were reputed to be "notoriously religious" and asserted that they deserve this reputation, for they had traditionally been, and still are, "deeply religious," lived in "a religious universe," and

possessed “a religious ontology.”¹ He claimed that “religion permeates all the departments of life [in African societies] so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.” Moreover, he added, “religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.” Africans, therefore, were religious beings: “it is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being.”⁴

Religion for an African and a Zambian in particular, therefore, has a mandate for environmental care, economic justice, and sustainability. In the case of the Christian faith, the church’s mandate can be drawn from a biblical text in Genesis 2:15, where the human is charged to take care of the garden or, simply put, the environment in which he or she was living. Kuzipa Nalwamba shares a similar thought when she says, “we cannot underestimate the power of sermons [religion]. The ... impact of churches in Zambia preaching ecologically sensitive sermons ... could make a difference and shape an ethos for earth keeping.”⁵

The natural environment is the major domain and the source of livelihood for all human and non-human living things. It is from the environment that we get the fundamental prerequisite and essentials for life, such as air, water, food supplies, shelter, and clothing. Again, it is within the boundaries of the natural environment that we obtain medicinal supplies to treat the many sicknesses and diseases that have afflicted and plagued humankind over the years. The environment is also a source of employment in the sectors such as agriculture, forestry, mining, quarrying, and fishing. The extent to which proper attention is given to the environment will determine its sustainability.

Throughout history, most religions or traditions in Zambia have traditionally expressed some ethical concerns for the environment and its creatures. Greed and destructiveness

toward creation are condemned by most religious traditions. This view is reflected in their historical teachings, even if they are not put into practice. Traditionally, various cultures have highlighted ecological and economic justice. Proverbs, folktales, myths, legends, taboos, and ritual practices in Africa and in Zambia in particular focus on preserving and conserving the natural environment. There are rules and regulations on farming, fishing, hunting, the felling of trees, and sanitation. Stringent adherence to these traditional orders goes a long way in preserving some rivers, lagoons, trees, fish, and many other aspects of creation. Those who abuse them are sanctioned.

However, with the rise of modern society, these concerns have been fading. With the influx and development of modern science, economic and political institutions have taken the place historically accorded to religion, and traditional religious attitudes toward nature have largely disappeared. Yet, in other sectors, some religious leaders in Africa have returned to their origins to recover the pre-modern teachings to present them as religious environmental ethics. Perhaps it is time for the church in Zambia to join in the fight against environmental degradation. Jonathan Kangwa suggests that religion – in particular, Christianity – “plays a major role in shaping people’s perceptions and attitudes. Especially the Bible as a sacred text may influence how people see the environment and the natural world.”⁶ The biblical mandate of the church for environmental care is to commit to the task of promoting a sound and healthy environment and to care for people, the poor, the marginalized, wildlife species, and plants. It links environmental concerns with social justice issues. The two purposes of this care are sustainable development and environmental integrity.

What is the Role of the Church?

Ian Bradley, in his book *God Is Green: Christianity and the*

Environment, opens chapter 5 with an interesting question: “Does Christianity offer distinctive insight into the proper relationship between human beings and the rest of creation?” He goes on to ask, “Do Christians indeed have a special contribution to make to the Greenmovement and the battle to preserve the natural environment from the many threats that are now facing it?”⁷ To both these questions, the answer is a strong “yes.” As part of the human race, Christians can do their part by consuming less energy, going in for organic gardening, recycling their waste, and embracing any other environmentally friendly practice to reduce their carbon footprint. In this essay, I argue that these individual lifestyle changes are just a first step. Christians must use their collective power as an organized church to bring about structural changes. Christians are thus called upon to live the change that they would want to see in this world.

Kuzipa Nalwamba says, “That absence of the Christian ‘voice’ in regard to the eco- crisis the nation [Zambia] faces can be attributed to the fact that Zambian Christianity still espouses biblical anthropology that regards human beings to be at the pinnacle of creation.”⁸ The involvement of the church in addressing issues of ecological and economic justice is key. In many African countries, churches command a lot of respect in terms of the number of loyal adherents, regular meetings, moral leadership, and, at times, the financial capacity to help come up with mitigation measures. “On purely pragmatic and functional grounds, the role of the church in general and religion in particular, cannot be ignored in addressing issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, health care to the vulnerable, gender-based violence, food security or environmental sustainability.”⁹

The church’s call to service must be directed toward the life-affirming substance of all God’s creation. Kuzipa Nalwamba and Teddy Sakupapa¹⁰ note that a damaged and exploited earth is an unjust world: it calls for the church’s hope and action. Environmental degradation that has led to the suffering

of creation itself, economic disparity, and climate-induced migrations of people and animals, among other effects, calls for a reassessment of the Christian community's self-understanding and ways of being. An over spiritualized expression of the Christian faith that ignores the physical world of nature and the false dichotomy often drawn between the spiritual and the temporal stand radically challenged.

In radically challenging economic and ecological injustice, the church must realize that these problems of economic and ecological injustice are closely related; realistic solutions must tackle both simultaneously. This means the church must be ready to speak far beyond paper recycling and lead-free petrol and work toward a major shift in the balance of economic power between rich and poor nations. The church must play its prophetic role in speaking truth to power and be able to speak for and with the poor. The poor contribute less to the damaging of the earth, and so the richer nations should be held responsible. Who is better positioned to speak for and with the poor than the church?

Conclusion

The church in Zambia is in a good position to bring about ecological and economic justice, owing to the fact that 96% of the population professes to be Christian. This is an opportunity for the churches, regardless of denomination, to instil the values and earth-keeping ethos in the masses that belong to the church. Behavioural change is assured when the church develops a theology that seeks to bring about justice. The church is a moral force with spiritual energy which can contribute to long-term solutions to our complex environmental issues. The ecological and economic problems must be dealt with, but not only because of the chilling prospects of environmental degradation on the horizon; the real motivation must be the quest for authentic world-wide solidarity inspired by the values of charity, justice, and the

common good. Advocating for ecological and economic justice in this sense is a response to God's command to till and keep the land (see Gen. 2:15) that God has entrusted to humanity, and it must serve to reinforce the covenant between human beings and the environment – a covenant that should mirror God's, creative love.

Endnotes

1. John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Kuzipa Nalwamba, "'Spirited Bodies' as a Prerequisite for an Earth-keeping Ethos: A Juxtaposition of the First Creation Story of Genesis with Ubuntu Cosmogony," MA thesis, University of Pretoria, 2013, 194. https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/40334/Nalwamba_Spirited_2013.pdf?sequence=1
6. Jonathan Kangwa, "In Search of Indigenous Knowledge Systems for Ecological Justice: A Gendered Ecological Reading of Genesis 1–3 in the Context of the Tonga People of Zambia, PhD diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014, 18–23, http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/12056/Kangwa_Jonathan_2014.pdf;sequence=1
7. Ian Bradley, *God Is Green: Christianity and the Environment* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), 90.
8. Nalwamba, "'Spirited Bodies.'"
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.

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13.

Economy, Ecology and Christian Ethics

Why Rethinking our Economics will help us Solve the Climate Crisis

Simeon Mitchell

Introduction

The climate crisis presents humanity with an urgent global challenge. The headlines from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are stark and clear. Climate change is an ongoing process which is having and will continue to have adverse effects on people throughout the world. It is also clear that these effects are focused on those already impoverished, exacerbating already increasing divisions in global wealth and resources. Global temperatures have increased by at least 1°C since pre-industrial times, and are currently on track to rise by 2.8°C by the end of the century. In order to limit the devastating effects of climate change on communities and our environment, drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are needed.

Alongside this, overexploitation and pollution of areas of our planet are having global and possibly permanent effects on biodiversity, desertification, and acidification of our seas.

This much is uncontentious, if grim. What is less widely recognised, but is becoming increasingly obvious, is that these

environmental impacts are being driven by our current economic model. Or to adopt the phrase coined in American politics in the 1990s, “it’s the economy, stupid”. Market capitalism has an inbuilt drive to perpetual growth in economic activity, demanding ever greater levels of production and consumption. The ways we currently measure economic success do not take account of its implications for the natural world, or value the things that are important for human flourishing. For both within nations and across nations, the fruits of economic activity are unfairly shared, bringing consequences of poverty, inequality and indignity, alongside environmental harms.

There is therefore a strong case to be made for re-examining and transforming our economic approach. This paper argues that we cannot solve the climate crisis without looking at the economy, and that Christianity has valuable perspectives and resources to bring to this urgent task.¹

Economics is a Spiritual Concern

It is easy to believe that economic rules are like the laws of physics, unchanging and set in place by a higher power. To many people, that makes economics seem impenetrable and off-limits. However, through history societies have always made and remade the basic rules of the economy to reflect what was important to them. The Bible provides numerous examples, from the instructions found in the Book of Deuteronomy for the Israelites to follow when they returned from slavery in Egypt onwards.

The economy is currently designed in ways that are damaging to both people and planet, and run counter to a Christian vision of the flourishing of all life. This makes economic questions a concern for everyone, and particularly people of faith.

Christine Bainbridge and Jeremy Williams argue that “As Christians, we know that the relationships between ourselves and other humans matter, and so does our relationship with the planet. It matters enough for the Creator to have jumped right into the middle of it all in the person of Jesus Christ, becoming human, becoming part of our living planet in all its interdependence. So how we live together, work together, manage our resources together, it all matters to God. Economics is spiritual.

“Many of us have considered economics to be boring, irrelevant, and best left to the experts. We might think that the church and the Christian faith have little to do with it. But if our economic system is unjust, we can challenge it. If it devalues people made in the image of God, we can correct it. If it celebrates fame and excess while disregarding the poor, we should refocus its attention. We think economics is the work of everyone, not just the experts.”²

In this task, it needs to be recognised that most of us are not apart from the system being critiqued, but a part of it. It’s almost impossible not to be. The greater our privilege, the more enmeshed we are likely to be, whether through how we earn a living, or shop and eat, our travel choices, financial products, and what happens to our waste. For all its problems, the current economic setup also brings some of us many benefits, and shapes our mindset, so we need to acknowledge this as we reflect on how it might change, and our role in that.

Grounding Theological Principles

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the current economic system, this paper offers four principles, drawn from scripture and theology, which provide the grounding for a Christian approach to these issues.

1. We live in a world of plenty

The witness in Genesis says that God created the world with plenty for all. The Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann puts it like this: “The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis 1 is a song of praise for God’s generosity... it keeps saying, it is good, it is good, it is very good. And Israel celebrates God’s abundance (Psalm 104). The power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolise the world’s resources, it is in the hands of those who trust God’s abundance.”³

2. We were created for community

God created us to live together, in communities, and economic activities are a vital element of almost any healthy common life. They are not good or bad in themselves. Humans are dependent on each other and all have different skills, resources and needs, and at a basic level, an economic system is simply a way of working through our interdependence for the benefit of all. It is notable that much of what Bible has to say about economics, as seen in places like Proverbs, is about fair trading – honest exchange so that both parties get a just deal.

The origins of the term economy are in the Greek word ‘oikos’, meaning house – so it’s about housekeeping. And as Rowan Williams has observed, “a household is somewhere where life is lived in common; and house-keeping is guaranteeing that this common life has some stability about it that allows the members of the household to grow and flourish and act in useful ways.”⁴ Economics is therefore a part of our common life.

3. God desires the flourishing of all life

Christians believe that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, infinitely precious and part of God's creation, and as such we are invited to embrace God's abundant offering of 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10b). Flourishing happens when broken relationships are put right and people can fulfil what they were created to do.

To this must be added a growing understanding that the flourishing of individuals and communities can only fully take place in the context of the flourishing of all life in creation, which is also desired by God.

As the World Council of Churches points out, "The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God's will and works together to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and diversity of God's household (oikos)."⁵

Genesis 1:26 speaks of humans having dominion over the rest of creation, but as theologian Richard Bauckham argues, "The dominion is a special role of responsibility that humans have, but it's a role within the community [of creation], a role in relation to other creatures. If we forget our own creatureliness, our creaturely limitations, our interdependence with other creatures, if we think of ourselves as demi-gods, that's the way the dominion goes wrong."⁶

Understanding this biblical vision of salvation being about the flourishing of all life will help us as we wrestle with the ways in which our economic systems enable or inhibit this flourishing.

4. We will be judged on our choices

If economic relationships are neither good nor bad in themselves, human beings give them their moral content. As

with many areas of moral choice, the message of scripture is that God expects – even demands – justice, and will hold those with power accountable for their actions. The Old Testament prophets reserved their deepest anger for those who profited from injustice that had been embedded in systems and institutions. Werner Jeanrond and Doug Gay from the University of Glasgow point out that “The experiences of Exodus and Exile involve naming and opposing the oppressive power of Egypt and Babylon, but the prophets also name and oppose those within Israel who oppress and dispossess their neighbours.”⁷ Perhaps the deepest expression of that prophetic anger at systemic economic injustice was when Jesus overturned the tables in the temple because the moneychangers were fleecing ordinary people.

So, having acknowledged that the world is gifted with abundance, that we are created for community, that God longs flourishing, and that we will be judged on our choices, we move on to examine the nature of our current economic system and the reasons why it is driving the climate and ecological crisis.

How our Economic System is driving the Ecological Crisis

The dominant economic model in the UK and most Western countries for the last 40 years has been a form of free market capitalism. This is defined as an economic system in which businesses and industries are privately owned and operated in pursuit of profit. There are three features of this system to highlight, in particular, because of their impact on the environment.

1. It has an inbuilt need to grow

The first point to make about this system is about growth. Any system that has a drive towards profit also has a drive towards growth. An ever-increasing volume of goods and services needs to be produced and consumed so that capital can be accumulated and profit generated. Our current economic system relies upon stimulating this drive for more.

In the UK, there has been much talk about economic growth – or the absence of it – by businesses and political leaders of all parties over recent times. Economic growth has long been a central policy aim of governments across the world. The opposite of growth – recession – has been a watchword for economic failure.

One of the reasons that economic growth has been sought-after is because it is hoped that, as more is produced, there will be less scarcity and people will enjoy a higher standard of living and greater wellbeing. In places where people have very little, such as many of the world's poorer countries, this is broadly correct: economic growth can often bring benefits to the whole population. There is a clear link between the per capita wealth of a country and measures of human development such as health, education and life expectancy. However, in richer nations, such as the UK, the link between growth and human wellbeing is much less evident; how wealth is distributed within society is a much more significant factor.

A big problem with this obsession with economic growth is that it is having major consequences for the environment. Since the 18th Century, industrialisation, sometimes supported by a ready supply of natural and human resources through colonialism, led to a huge surge in economic growth which formed the foundation of the prosperity enjoyed by many European countries, including the UK. But these economic activities produced increasing amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in such quantities that they went beyond the ability of natural processes to constrain them. The

result has been global temperature rises, and the devastating and widening impacts of climate change.

insert graph

This graph shows how since the middle of the last century, global economic growth (shown by the bars) has been tightly coupled to rapid increases in the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) (shown by the line). The countries with the biggest economies, with few exceptions, also have the highest carbon emissions per person.

Up until now growth has always gone hand in hand with increased production of physical goods and increased pollution. There is much talk of ‘decoupling’ the link between production and emissions, and finding ways to produce more goods with fewer emissions, yet this will still involve producing more. Supporters of the idea of ‘green growth’ argue that technological change will allow economic growth to continue while climate change is brought under control. However, this is a colossal task, and one which we do not even know to be possible in the fast-closing window before catastrophic temperature rises are triggered.

It is also important to recognise that greenhouse gases are not the only pollutants which are linked to increased economic activity, and nor are they the only ones with global reach. Human activity has a huge impact on a number of interlinked environmental systems. Biodiversity loss, land conversion, phosphorous and nitrogen loading are all at levels which cannot be sustained if the earth is to remain as habitable to humans as it now is. Plastics which are now found polluting every known habitat on earth are another example. Their production has risen inexorably since their introduction in the 1950s – increasing 45% over the past decade to over 380 million tonnes per year.

The sheer scale of human industry’s ability to extract,

produce, use and dispose means that we now have global effects that previous generations could not comprehend. Our levels of production and consumption threaten to damage the earth irreparably. The American academic Kenneth Boulding sums up the problem when he observed: “Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist”. Boulding happens to be an economist.

Never-ending growth is not possible within the boundaries of the planet. But an even bigger question is whether such growth is even desirable, if growth does not necessarily lead to flourishing of human or other life. Setting growth as an objective is simply aiming for ‘more’, without asking the important question ‘more of what?’

This is where a theological perspective can bring insights. Jesus’ parable of the rich man who built bigger barns (Luke 12:15-21) warns that an obsession with accumulation not only risks missing the point of life – for as Jesus says, “life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” – but may ultimately prove destructive. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams has written about the dangers of seeing ‘growth’ as “an unexamined good. Growth out of poverty, growth towards a degree of intelligent control of one’s circumstances, growth towards perception and sympathy – these are all manifestly good and seriously ethical goals,” he says, “and there are ways of conducting our economic business that could honour and promote these. [But] A goal of growth simply as an indefinite expansion of purchasing power is either vacuous or malign – malign to the extent it inevitably implies the diminution of the capacity of others in a world of limited resource.”⁸

Williams points out that there is a marked contrast between the Biblical promise of abundance for all and the basic tenets of capitalism, of presumed scarcity which encourages unlimited human greed.

2. How it measures value

The second, linked feature of the free-market economy which is a driver of environmental destruction is the way in which it assesses value. The most widely used measure of the size of a national economy is Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is usually defined as being the value of all the goods and services produced within it. GDP is arrived at by adding up everything that is spent or traded within and by each country, by individuals, businesses and the government. Changes in GDP are used as the principal indicator of economic growth. So if more trading is done than in a previous period – or the value of the goods traded are higher – then the economy is said to be growing.

The way that GDP is calculated means that it includes everything that is traded in an economy, regardless of their utility – not only foods and medicines, but illegal narcotics and even trafficked humans are all included at their market value. Because GDP measures activities, pollution-creating activities increase GDP, as do the activities that are needed to deal with that pollution. The measure takes no account of the natural resources that are consumed or destroyed in the production process.

GDP also does not include human activities that aren't bought and sold – such as the work of caring for family or neighbours in need. It excludes much of the work that was traditionally done by women, as well as providing an incentive to move those activities from the family sphere into the commercial one. Yet it does include the unpaid work that an owner-occupied house does in providing you with shelter.

GDP also doesn't tell us anything about how wealth is distributed across the population, or how it is being used, further limiting its value as a measure. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, recently observed, “in the face of

climate change, vast wealth won't save us unless it serves the population of the world.”⁹

In fact, Simon Kuznets, the economist who devised GDP as a measure 90 years ago, was so conscious of its flaws that he argued it shouldn't ever be used. Yet despite it being so problematic and loaded with judgements about value, today it is the key economic indicator of growth.

3. Its narrow understanding of freedom

Economic freedom is a central concept for proponents of the current neoliberal economic model. The idea is that government intervention in the economy should be minimised, so that markets can operate freed from constraints as far as possible, to enable the greatest economic growth. Following this approach, since the 1980s many governments have chosen – or been forced – to deregulate economic activity, lower taxes and tariffs, and privatise previously publicly owned utilities and services.

The problem is that this has resulted in the removal of many environmental protections and powers that states had to limit the activities of businesses that could be damaging to people or planet – or indeed to encourage alternative approaches with more positive impacts. By allowing such destruction, economic liberalisation potentially limits the freedom of future generations to thrive.

A 2014 statement from the World Council of Churches expressed concern that “The liberalisation and deregulation of markets over the last three decades as part of the

sweeping processes of neoliberal globalisation have allowed the build-up of a system which promotes insatiable consumption of human and natural resources and thus ever-growing economic, social and ecological imbalances.”¹⁰

The pursuit of unconstrained free markets rests on a narrow understanding of freedom which has no basis in Christian ethics, where freedoms and rights are always balanced by responsibilities.

The Sabbath and Jubilee laws set out in chapter 25 of the book of Leviticus offer insights into how this balance should be struck in an economic system, reflecting a biblical understanding of the fundamental relationships between God, the land and the people. The land is acknowledged to be God's – so people can only ever be tenants of it. While the right to use it can be bought and sold, in the year of jubilee it returns to its original holder. This assigns the tenant a duty of care towards the land, and the responsibility to ensure it remains usable by future generations. As one Jewish commentator describes it, “Leviticus 25 intervenes in the free market by establishing “unalienable rights” exempted from the rules of a market.”¹¹

Towards an Economy that Enables the Flourishing of All Life

If these central features of the current economic model are contributing to driving the ecological crisis, where should we begin in seeking the transformation of our economic system?

A first step is to believe that change is possible. The fallacy that economic rules are unchangeable and ‘there is no alternative’ allows ideas like “it is inevitable that there are huge inequalities in wealth” or “greater consumption leads to greater happiness” or “an economy must always grow” to be so pervasive that they go unnoticed and unchallenged. These assumptions need surfacing and questioning.

A second task is to reclaim the idea that the goals of economic activity should be the subject of civic discussion and democratic decision-making. If we begin to view the economy

as something that exists to serve human wellbeing in ways that are environmentally sustainable, then that will transform the way we think about the objectives of economic policy. We need no longer be slaves to the economy, but can build an economy that serves all life. Justin Welby recently observed that “an industry or nation that serves not people but the economy is idolatrous. It is confusing means and ends.”¹²

Twenty years ago, a global listening and reflection process led Reformed Churches to make a powerful and prescient call to action for economic justice, the Accra Confession. It made the bold and theologically-rooted declaration that: “We believe the economy exists to serve the dignity and wellbeing of people in community, within the bounds of the sustainability of creation.”¹³ Imagine the positive transformation that could come from rebuilding our economic approach with this as the starting-point.

This points to a third step, which is to draw on the biblical insight that the undoubted abundance of the world needs to be managed with human restraint. The one rule of the Garden of Eden was about putting in place limits. The Jubilee laws were about recognising that we need restraining systems to keep inequality from spiralling downward into a cataclysm. This restraint honours God and one’s relationship with one’s neighbours – and is crucial if we are to prevent environmental catastrophe.

It is encouraging that new economic ideas are emerging which reflect this wisdom and the goal set out in the Accra Confession. The most famous is perhaps Kate Raworth’s ‘Doughnut Economics’ model, which is a visual representation of sustainable development, made up of two circles – one, the inside edge, represents the social foundation which includes everything that humans need in order to thrive, while the outer edge represents an ecological ceiling which should not be

breached. Between these two rings – in the dough – is what the author terms “a safe and just home for humanity.”¹⁴

The focus for policymakers, this suggests, should be putting in place mechanisms and institutions to ensure that those social foundations are provided and those environmental boundaries are honoured.

Fourth, new economic measures need to be developed which reflect what society actually values, and the reality that “the economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment”, in the apt phrase of pioneering ecological economist Herman Daly. Rather than prizing GDP and growth, economies should be assessed on how far they deliver on urgent and shared goals around wellbeing, flourishing, and the achievement of net zero carbon emissions.

There can be no certainty that taking these steps and reorientating our economic model in these directions will prevent climate catastrophe. But without attempting such a transformation, failure is surely guaranteed.

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Endnotes

1. This paper draws extensively on a publication from the Joint Public Issues Team, ‘Turning the World Upside- Down: a conversation starter’ (2020), available at: jpit.uk/economy

2. Christine Bainbridge and Jeremy Williams, ‘Let’s build a bridge: bringing theology and economics together’ (Green Christian, 2018): <https://joyinenoughblog.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/lets-build-a-bridge.docx>

3. Cited in Rebecca Dudley, 'Between WORLDLY and WORM: Trade and faith in the gap' (unpublished presentation for Christian Aid, 2001)

4. Rowan Williams, Faith in the Public Square (Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 227

5. World Council of Churches, 'Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call to Action' (2012)

6. Richard Bauckham, 'The Community of Creation' (2012): <http://therhino.org.uk/other/bauckhamwp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Community-of-creation.pdf>

7. Werner G. Jeanrond & Doug Gay, "The economy is for God which means it is also for my neighbour and it is for my neighbour which means it is also for God" (paper for Church of Scotland Commission on the Purposes of Economic Activity, 2012)

8. Rowan Williams, Faith in the Public Square (Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 220-1

9. Justin Welby, speech to Lord Mayor's Banquet (29 November 2022): <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishop-justin-speaks-lord-mayors-banquet>

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11. Noam Zion, 'Balancing Social Responsibility with Market Economics', TheTorah.com

12. Justin Welby, speech to Lord Mayor's Banquet (29 November 2022): <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishop-justin-speaks-lord-mayors-banquet>

13. World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 'The Accra Confession' (2004), paragraph 22

14. Kate Raworth, Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist (2017)

14.

“For us, it is a Crisis!”

Mia Mottley and the Caribbean Revolt against the Climate Crisis

Anna Kasafi Perkins

Overview

Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Barbados, has a powerful presence and global voice that she deploys in challenging and combating issues of social justice. Her nation's first and only female leader, she revolts against climate injustice, which is placing the lives of Caribbean people and others in the Global South in peril. She denounces the “faceless few” whose decisions are forcing the world towards a climate catastrophe. She is forthright, therefore, in admonishing that it is not enough to speak of “climate change” as “for us [Caribbean people], it is a crisis”.

This presentation explores Mottley's “empire-subverting” “talk” as evident in her Summit of the Americas 2022, COP 26 and COP27 advocacy as well as the “walk” of her policy and engagement, inspired as it is by the revolutionary dimension of Caribbean popular culture and the liberative dimensions of various religio-spiritual traditions, which undergird that culture. She harnesses the power of the music of Eddie Grant, Bob Marley and others while engaging the spiritual and liberative elements of the religious traditions of the region,

especially Christianity, to ground and frame her analysis and action.

She lays out steps that we must take now that go beyond the ineffective attempts of governments and big business that, arguably, ignore, excuse, extend, and deepen the climate crisis; these include targeted investments focussed on solving troubling climate problems, while striving to fix the international financial system that has dominated world affairs since World War II to the detriment of the Global South.

Introduction

“The climate crisis, and I don’t say climate change, the climate crisis is real. And a time for climate justice is also upon us. Because if we are going to do the things that are necessary to adapt to this new reality, it takes time and it takes money.” Mia Mottley, *Time 100 Summit 2022*.

Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister, Minister for National Security and the Civil Service, and Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and Investment of Barbados, has a powerful presence and global voice that she deploys in challenging and combating issues of social justice.¹ A versatile, charismatic personality, Mia can as easily address world leaders wittily and powerfully, fiercely rebuff condescending questions posed by journalists or drink a beer with ordinary Bajans about whose interests she will declare “we care” (Robertson 2023; BBC Global Questions August 2021). “As prime minister, she is often seen at food trucks and is known as Mia to cabdrivers and reporters” (Lustgarten 2022, no page). Mottley’s words are widely circulated on social media and replayed on numerous sites as she garners attention for the Caribbean not seen since the independence movement in the 1960s.

Her nation’s first female prime minister, she revolts against

climate injustice, which is placing the lives of Caribbean people and others in the Global South in peril. To that end, she forthrightly denounces the “faceless few” – those who put profits over people – whose decisions are forcing the world towards a climate catastrophe (UN General Assembly 2021). She fearlessly condemns “strong men of the Age of Populism,” who bully smaller nations not realising they need a multilateral world as much as anyone else (Mottley 2019). Mia is outspoken, therefore, in admonishing that it is not enough to speak of “climate change” as “for us [Caribbean people], it is a crisis”.² Her indefatigable advocacy is demonstrated in her 2021 Address to the 76th United Nations Assembly, where she forthrightly and passionately asked her fellow world leaders in the words of Bob Marley, “How many more...must die, etc.” before they act? Indeed, Mottley excels at public shaming (Lynch 2022) as she calls out world leaders for broken promises leading to lost lives and livelihoods. At the same time, “She’s really been able to tell the compelling story that knits all the[...] different issues from finance to climate to debt to justice to real people issues, not some amorphous ideas” (Sally Yozell, director of the Environmental Security programme at the Stimson Center in Lynch 2022).

Aims of the Chapter

This chapter explores Mottley’s “empire-subverting” “talk”³ as evident in her COP 26, Summit of the Americas 2022, and COP27 advocacy as well as the “walk” of her policy and engagement, inspired as it is by the revolutionary dimension of Caribbean popular culture and the liberative dimensions of various religio-spiritual traditions, particularly Christianity, which undergird much of Caribbean culture. To make the changes necessary to move the world to a new place post-pandemic, she declares, “the world had to get to a new place

in spirit. It had to fill some gaping moral cavity” (Lustgarten 2022, no page). A humanist⁴ with an openness and respect for the religious and cultural diversity of the Caribbean (King 2020), she is inspired by and harnesses the power of the music of Eddie Grant, Bob Marley, Black Stalin, Jimmy Cliff and others while engaging the spirituality of the Caribbean and the moral imperative of the need to repair damage caused to ground and frame her analysis and action. During the Covid Pandemic, Mia called upon the inspiration of Calypsonian Black Stalin’s “Better Days are Coming” to encourage Bajans “to stay the course and to keep [their] heads above water” (Mottley 2023, no page).

The ideas expressed in her brief impactful talks on the global stage are fleshed out in other longer talks as well as her writings such as the important 2019 discussion on “Vulnerability and opportunity,” which sets out many of the ideas presented in bite-size for these public speeches. These writings will be drawn upon to deepen her voice.

Introducing Mia Amor Mottley

Mia Amor Mottley, MP, QC is a woman of firsts in her homeland, the Caribbean island of Barbados: the first woman to be prime minister (2018-2022, 2022-), first woman to lead the Opposition (2008-2010, 2013-2018), and the first woman Attorney General (2001). Mia has served as a member of parliament for twenty-nine years and has held several cabinet posts, including minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture (1994). She remains the youngest Barbadian ever appointed to a ministerial position. She led her party to a landslide election victory in 2018, with the Barbados Labour Party taking all 30 seats in the country’s lower house of Parliament.

Importantly, she is lauded for leading the constitutional changes necessary for Barbados, often styled as “little England,” to abolish the British Monarchy in November 2021,

moving her nation to being the Caribbean's and the world's newest republic. In celebration of that republican status, Mottley designated Barbadian pop star, entrepreneur and official ambassador for culture and youth, Rihanna (Robyn Rihanna Fenty), as National Hero of Barbados. All of this was to advance her "decolonial paradigm," which, despite talk of postcoloniality in other Caribbean countries such as Jamaica, has not led to formal separation from the British Monarchy (Boyce-Davis 2022).

In the political trenches in Barbados, Mottley, who hails from a political family, has had to face significant obstacles both inside her political party and outside, especially as a single-woman, whose sexual orientation is often questioned (Boyce-Davis 2022; Hagan 2022; Safi 2021; Casell 2018). At home, Mottley has been criticised as "aggressive" and even been called "a despot" by her former political mentor (Robertson 2023). Jamaica's first and only female prime minister Portia Simpson-Miller ("Sista P") was also mistreated but in different ways. Simpson-Miller was looked down upon for her class origins, which, in being grassroots, are different from Mottley's (Thame 2018). Both women shared the experience of being demeaned as their capacity as women to function in politics was called into question (Boyce-Davis 2022; Thame 2018).

In 2009, while deputy prime minister and attorney general, Mottley shared that when she entered political life as a young woman, she felt that nothing could stop her from being a politician. Yet, while she did not contemplate being a woman as a stumbling block, people did view her differently as a woman politician.

I have come to understand that whether I like it or not or whether I do not see a difference, people view me differently as a woman politician. The mere fact that how I choose to wear my hair can become the subject of a calypso in circumstances where a male colleague's hair will not be the subject of calypso, is indicative of

those things that people consider. There is also the fact that people comment on why the four ministers who were women (there are now five) in the Barbados government are all single, without commenting on the fact that there was an equal number of male ministers who were single or speculating as to why this is the case. So that there are real differences in how people view you. (Mottley 2004, xxx)

This has not prevented Mottley from political successes, including repairs to the country's sewage system, which threatened the tourism industry, Barbados's primary source of income (Hagan 2022). Even though the opposition party did try to turn this discussion about the sewage system into one about sexual orientation because Mia and the Barbados Labour Party favoured a more tolerant stance towards same-sex orientation, identity and relations (Hagan 2022), which culminated in a December 2020 announcement at the opening of Parliament that same-sex civil unions would be recognised. Two years later, the Barbados High Court gave a landmark ruling that decriminalised consensual same-sex relations (Cabrera 2022; Hagan 2022).

Boyce-Davies (2022) ascribes the success of Mottley's political leadership to her use of a transformational feminist model, which focuses on economic, social and political transformation (a commitment to an agenda for social change) as well as remedying gender inequality.

Mia on the World Stage

Since becoming PM in 2018, Mottley has addressed several fora of world leaders, gaining much notice for her outspoken style (Robertson 2023). In so doing, she lives up to the promise she made herself as a young woman entering politics that when she spoke, she would speak only what she truly believed and

would speak from the head and the heart, rather than from a prepared speech on paper (Mottley 2006). What she truly believes resonates in the common themes that run through her several addresses, including: the presence and impact of multiple and interlinked crises; the immediacy of the crises; the external nature of the crises imposed on former colonies; practical global response required, especially in the way of a reform of international finance architecture, and a rejection of “the construct of the old imperial order” with its inequalities (Summit of the Americas 2021). Armed with relevant figures and a knowledge of world finance structures, Mottley is able to critique existing unjust structures which have contributed to the original vulnerability of nations of the South such as those in the Caribbean, and their current inability to respond and rebuild after climate and other crises. Indeed, Colum Lynch (2022) says of her:

But what sets Mottley apart from other charismatic climate firebrands is her nerdy grasp of opaque international financial instruments. She comes to the table with a battery of painstakingly fashioned investment proposals to solve thorny climate problems, while striving to radically overhaul the international financial system that has dominated world affairs since World War II.

Mia, therefore, constantly calls out discriminatory practices against smaller nations and rules imposed upon them without their participation (Mottley 2003). She calls for the precept of fairness to be applied (2003). From as far back as the Bush Presidency, Mottley was forthright in her stance on negotiation and double taxation and the right to fairness:

And just because we may not always vote with you does not mean we are not friends. It simply means that we are not lackeys. We feel that the framework must also be fair. If you are going to set international standards then all of those who are affected by those

standards must be brought to the table in order to negotiate in good faith. And to have persons subject to rules, the negotiation of which they had no part of, is unfair even among children far less countries. (Mottley 2003, 423)

This concern with participatory justice on the global stage is reflected in local policy, leading a social partnership in which she foregrounds participation, especially by those marginalised based on race, class, age or gender.

The point of participation is one that is key, for we do not want to continue a process that says what is best for a group without reference to members of that group who understand what is best for themselves. They must have the opportunity to speak for themselves. Thus, people as agents of their own development must be central to the process, particularly in the area of gender. (Mottley 2004, xxvi)

Likewise, on the global stage, she brings an approach that is pragmatically solutions-oriented. Indeed, Mottley has two rules for maximising such high-profile appearances: “Always make a big ask, and never leave the podium without offering a solution” (Lustgarten 2022).

Mia Makes Her Case on the Climate Crisis

A former jazz band manager and self-proclaimed “Apostle of Bob [Marley]”, Mottley quotes from his revolutionary songs frequently in her speeches; indeed, she opened and framed her Summit of the Americas presentation with Marley’s 1970s hit “So much Trouble”, which is in the style a biblical lamentation, as she identifies and describes the troubles facing the peoples of the world. Marley’s lyric: “Bless my eyes this morning. Jah sun is on the rise again. The way earthly things are going, anything can happen” is her opening line. She then

moves to address individually the UN Secretary-General and other excellencies telling them repeatedly, “there is so much trouble in the world”. Yet a lament is not simply hopeless; it is also hope-filled for a divine intervention, for joy to come in the morning.

Evoking the imagery of a medical emergency, reminiscent of the Code Red alert she issued at COP 26, Mottley again outlines as she did then three global crises any one of which “is sufficient to bring us down”: 1) the climate crisis which *hurts* the inhabitants of California (the site of the Summit) through fires, the Caribbean people “through the *heart attack* of hurricanes,” and others through the *chronic NCDs* of water crises and droughts or floods; 2) the covid pandemic which is slowly descending into the *slow onset pandemic of antimicrobial resistance*⁵ fueled by how we farm, the abuse of antibiotics and how things flow into our environment and contaminated water system; 3) the debt crisis and an economic crisis precipitated by the high prices of food, fuel and fertiliser. At COP26, she delivered a call that “was so powerful that it circulated worldwide and captured the strength of the challenge along with the determination to enter history in a way that is ethical, politically wise and unafraid with decolonial fervor” (Boyce-Davies 2022, footnote 1, 215). In that Glasgow address, continuing her reliance on the Bible, she alludes to Matt. 13.16 and 11.15 as she issues a Code Red alert: “For those who have eyes to see, for those who have ears to listen and for those who have a heart to feel...” In adding her own twist about those “who have a heart to feel”, Mottley tries to pull on the heart strings of those who “are so blinded and hardened that [they] can no longer appreciate the cries of humanity” (COP 26).

Similarly, at COP 27, in November 2021, she invoked Bob Marley and the Wailers’ 1973 hit anthem, “Get Up Stand Up”: “Who will get up and stand up for the rights of our people”?, she asks. Lynch (2022) notes that her “Get Up Stand Up” petition underscores her:

...knack for harnessing the power of popular language, song, and culture to tackle a crisis generally communicated in the stilted jargon of climate science and diplomacy — a life or death matter that often gets lost in abstruse discussions about loss and damage, mitigation, adaptation, and de-risking. (Lynch 2022, no page)

At COP26, she called upon Guyanese-British songwriter and performer extraordinaire Eddie Grant's 1978 hit "Living on the Frontline" to ask, "Who will mourn us on the frontline"? The "us" are those who literally live on the frontline of the climate crisis – Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific.

She continues again at SOA quoting Marley's "So much trouble": "You see men sailing on their ego trip. Blast off on their space ship, million miles from reality. No care for you. No care for me". She tells her audience of mainly white and male leaders, with whom she naturally claims equal footing, that she does not need them to join her in singing the lines, but to join in a "chorus of action that our people need, not want. Our people need immediate intervention."

Developing countries are facing a double jeopardy, she maintains. Developing countries had their wealth extracted in order to build the developed world. Once those countries became independent they were left with no compact or funds to finance basics such as education, housing and health. Even as they fight to make these basic provisions available they are confronted by climate crises, not of their making, which force them to use such funds as they have to recover. "The double jeopardy comes because it is the very industrial revolution that the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors financed, that is now causing us not to be able to respond to the needs of our people in the most basic of ways that humanity requires" (IX SOA 2021). "Postcolonialism barely had a chance to take hold before it gave way to climate colonialism" (Lustgarten 2022).

This message of reparatory justice is central to her efforts to

resolve the issues of the economic gaps created by colonialism, which are currently faced by Caribbean nations. In her participation in other fora such as the Reparations forum in July 2020 and her role as Chair of CARICOM, she has represented the interests of the Caribbean community in relation to the economic redress foundational to the debate on reparations. There too she emphasised the lack of any compact after emancipation, which left the region with “flag independence” (Boyce-Davies 2022).

In Los Angeles, she directly addresses each group of political leadership starting with the Secretary General of the Americas, addressing all as “My friends,” drawing them in and forming bonds of solidarity, reinforced by her demonstration of the impact of climate change on their lives and livelihoods as well. Similarly, she points out that the solution to the crisis has been arrived at together – “We think we have found a solution”. However, she calls for proactive rather than reactive financing to treat with the climate crisis. This includes reform of the international financial institutions architecture to truly finance and reconstruct, particularly from the climate crisis, and towards climate vulnerable countries. The Organisation of American States also needs reform to truly change the economic possibilities of people of the South. Alluding perhaps to Luke 9.62, she called upon the OAS to put their shoulder to the plow [and not look back].

Notably, in response to her SOA Address, moderator, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, also drew upon Marley, saying, “In the words of Bob, no woman, no cry, don’t shed no tears. Let’s act. We can sing a redemption song together”. However, for Mia these were empty references if changes do not occur in the global financial architecture. As reported in Babacarie (2022), she notes the entire global financial architecture requires radical redesign in order to reflect the existence and participation of the Global South. She called out especially the cycle of aggressive interest rate increases which

dramatically increase debt-servicing costs and raise the spectre of a debt crisis in the global South. Furthermore, the combination of crises – or poly-crises – is set to hit the poorest people the hardest, pushing hundreds of millions deeper into poverty. The current system operates to the disadvantage of Caribbean and African nations. Their unique circumstances are not accounted for.

Concluding Thoughts: A Folding Chair

Mia Mottley, ever the pragmatist, lays out steps that we must take now that go beyond the ineffective attempts of governments and big business that, arguably, ignore, excuse, extend, and deepen the climate crisis. "That we are more concerned with generating profits than saving people," she said, "is perhaps the greatest condemnation that can be made of our generation" (Lustgarten 2022). Her solutions include targeted investments focussed on solving troubling climate problems, while striving to fix the international financial system that has dominated world affairs since World War II to the detriment of the Global South.

At COP 27, Mottley shared her Bridgetown Initiative, named for the capital of Barbados. In it, she proposed the reform of the IMF and World Bank and a reshaping of the global financial system that was created in the waning days of the Second World War (Gelles 2022). Mottley also elaborated on the necessary reform of the global financial architecture in the Babacar Ndiaye lecture, which was held on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank meetings in Washington in October 2022. The lecture, an initiative of the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), was entitled, "The Developing World in a Turbulent Global Financial Architecture".

As she repeats time and again, eighty-plus years on, this global financial system is failing poorer countries such as

Barbados and Jamaica, which are battling the effects of the climate crisis. Poorer countries borrow at higher interest rates and only a fraction of the financing needed to adapt to the climate crisis is available. Compounding this is the fact that when developing countries do take on loans they are forced to undertake measures that compromise their ability to meet the basic needs of their people.

Even as she laments, "I'm saying the same things over and over, over and over. . . You begin to feel as though you're going crazy" (Mottley in Lustgarten 2022), she is indefatigable in her pursuit. "Climate does lead to serious issues that can lead to a failed state and climate refugees in large numbers...we've been saying all along, draw brakes. We didn't cause these greenhouse gas emissions to explode through the roof, but we are on the front line of it" (Younge 2021, no page). She draws again on Marley to reinforce her point in an interview with the New York Times reporter, Abraham Lustgarten (2002), "My belly full but me hungry/A hungry mob is an angry mob" (Bob Marley and the Wailers, "Them Belly Full (But We Hungry)"). Her point was that the continued colonial vestiges playing out via the climate crisis is a life and death issue for a Caribbean that is becoming increasingly unlivable; an unlivable Caribbean "could become a source of potential destabilization — and mass migration — right at America's door" (Lustgarten 2022, no page).

Mia's story of decolonial advocacy and revolt against climate injustice is an ongoing one as she continues her work; she has much more to contribute to the remaking world. In so doing, Mottley is clear that small island states like Barbados have something to teach the world about opportunity as well as vulnerability (Mottley 2019). "Her legacy will be of knowing how to walk the talk of getting serious on the why and how of tackling the climate crisis..., putting climate justice at the heart – not the periphery – of the global policy response" (Mariana Mazzucato, economist, in Gelles 2022). Indeed, Mottley has a

deep sense of urgency about her task and the odds at play. Of her role she says, “It is a folding chair that I’ve brought to the table...And I may well have to walk away with it when my time ends” (Younge 2021, no page).

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Endnotes

1. Mottley was on the cover of TIME magazine's 2022 edition of "100 Most Influential People" for her outspoken advocacy on climate change. She's the first Barbadian to have been so featured. Other awards and recognition included: the United Nations Foundation annual Global Leadership Awards, honouring her as "Champion for Global Change" in recognition of "her exemplary leadership in fighting for a just, equitable, and sustainable world" (November 2022); the BBC's 100 Women list as one of the world's inspiring and influential women of the year,[44] and by the Financial Times on "The FT's 25 most influential women of 2022" (December 2022).

2. The title is drawn from a quotation by Mottley, which was tweeted in 2021 on the announcement of being chosen as an Earth Champion for Policy Leadership: "I don't call it Climate Change, it's change for those who are not affected by the crisis. For us, it is a crisis"! (UNEP 2021).

3. "When Mottley talks about economics, it's partly her thinking — she is indisputably the boss and has a striking fluency in policy minutiae — but almost always partly [Avinash Persaud's], too. He writes many of those speeches. If Mottley is the decisive leader, Persaud is the fount of possible solutions, churning out or delving into economic innovations he thinks might save the world". (Lustgarten 2022, no page)

4. She was taken to task by Bishop Joseph Atherley, Opposition Leader and sole member of the Opposition, for

using the phrase “Creator” instead of God in the Charter of Barbados, drafted in preparation for the transition to republican status. See Anesta Henry (2021).

5. Mottley is also co-chair of the World Health Organisation’s global leadership group on antimicrobial resistance.

15.

Faith-Driven Social Action: Lessons from Jewish Education

Matt Plen

Jewish social justice education is an active and growing field of practice, encompassing a diverse range of agendas and practices: teaching Jewish texts and values around issues of refugees, human rights and environmental justice; organising members of the Jewish community to oppose the occupation of the Palestinian territories and support the Israeli Left; advancing gender equality and LGBT+ inclusion within the community through informal education and training; engaging Jewish students in volunteer service-learning projects to alleviate poverty in the developing world; building inter-faith coalitions to work on local agendas such as housing, crime and healthcare; encouraging a culture of charitable giving and volunteering among Jewish young people; and mobilising Jews in the national and international political arenas around issues such as racism, police brutality, gun violence, climate change, immigration and antisemitism. This work is taking place within synagogues, schools, youth movements, cultural events and adult education programmes in Jewish communities around the world, led by rabbis, teachers, informal educators, political activists, and a plethora of charities and NGOs.

My PhD research¹ and the resulting book on Judaism, Education and Social Justice² are devoted to describing and subjecting to philosophical analysis the approaches articulated

by thinkers and practitioners who consider themselves to be part of the 'Jewish social justice education' enterprise. This paper draws on my attempts to construct theoretical foundations for the enterprise of Jewish social justice education. I hope my suggestions will stimulate discussion on Christian and other faith-based approaches to social justice education, and to environmental justice education in particular.

Before embarking on an exploration of Jewish approaches to social justice education, I want to begin with a short discussion of two topics on which the body of this paper relies: the hidden curriculum and the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

The Hidden Curriculum

The hidden curriculum is a term coined by Philip Wesley Jackson to describe everything students are taught in school alongside the official or explicit curriculum. Jackson argues that the hidden curriculum often dominates learning within educational

institutions. While children are ostensibly learning maths and English, what are they really being taught? Jackson gives the following examples:

'Consider, as an instance, the common teaching practice of giving a student credit for trying. What do teachers mean when they say a student tries to do his work? They mean, in essence, that he complies with the procedural expectations of the institution. He does his homework (though incorrectly), he raises his hand during class discussion (though he usually comes up with the wrong answer), he keeps his nose in his book during free study period (though he doesn't turn the page very often). He is, in other words, a 'model' student, though not necessarily a good one [...]

As a matter of fact, the relationship of the hidden curriculum to student difficulties is even more striking than is its

relationship to student success. As an instance, consider the conditions leading to disciplinary action in the classroom. Why do teachers scold students? Because the student has given a wrong answer? Because, try as he might, he fails to grasp the intricacies of long division? Not usually. Rather, students are commonly scolded for coming into the room late or for making too much noise or for not listening to the teacher's directions or for pushing while in line. The teacher's wrath, in other words, is more frequently triggered by violations of institutional regulations and routines than by signs of his students' intellectual deficiencies³.

When doing social justice education, it is not enough to focus on the explicit curriculum or subject matter: information about the climate crisis, racism or homelessness, or even the moral and religious values we are trying to teach. We also need to reflect on the hidden curriculum we are bringing to bear and the impact this has on our students' development. This includes behavioural expectations, institutional arrangements, assumptions about teacher-student relations and the nature of learning.

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy

How do different modes of learning affect the process of social justice education? Brazilian educator and seminal critical pedagogue Paulo Freire answers this question by proposing a distinction between two fundamentally different models of education.

Freire terms traditional liberal education which aims to impart a given body of knowledge 'banking education,' in reference to the idea of teachers making deposits in the empty minds of receptive students. Freire claims that this model of education dehumanises its students while legitimising and perpetuating unequal and oppressive social conditions. In Freire's words,

'[B]anking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction [between teacher and student]

through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

- (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- (d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
- (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects⁴!

Banking education therefore inhibits creative, critical thinking and insists on habituating human beings to an oppressive reality which is synonymous with the natural order and to which there are therefore no alternatives. Banking education also models authoritarian power relations between teacher and students while masking its own socially oppressive nature and presenting itself as scientific and ideologically neutral.

Freire developed a radical antidote to banking education in the course of his work with illiterate Brazilian peasants in the 1950s and 60s⁵. Rather than teaching reading and writing in the traditional manner, Freire set about creating 'culture circles' in which participants were encouraged to discuss their day-to-day reality and to critique the world around them.

Participants went on to learn to read and write a core vocabulary, grounded in their immediate experience and formulated so as to contain the basic phonemes of almost every Portuguese word. Within as little as thirty hours, previously illiterate students were able to articulate thought-out opinions about political and social questions, both orally and in writing. Freire attributed the success of his literacy programme to the fact that people were learning to 'read the word' by 'reading the world,' that is by critically engaging with subject matter that was inherently meaningful for their lives.

This model – 'problem-posing education' – which has since been applied to other curricular areas both in the developing world and in industrialised countries⁶, rests on several guiding principles. Rather than presenting learners with a static picture of a distant reality, it enables them to interpret and reflect critically on their world. Learning is presented not as the transfer of knowledge but as the creation of knowledge, as teachers and students participate together in a process of discovery. Problem-posing education humanises learners, posits current reality as one of a range of possibilities and therefore as amenable to intervention and change, and models democratic, egalitarian social relations.

Writing as a democratic-humanist Marxist, Freire claims that problem-posing education is a crucial ingredient in the struggle for human liberation. While conceding that social transformation can only be achieved through political and economic channels, he argues that revolutionary change must be based on praxis – intervention in reality, which springs from critical reflection on that reality.

Jewish social justice education – signature pedagogies

The connection between Freirean critical pedagogy and social justice education speaks for itself. However, its correlation with Jewish learning is less straightforward. Traditional Judaism

incorporates what Freire would term an authoritarian, banking model of education. Starting with the biblical commandment to study ('Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up' – Deuteronomy 6:7), moving through the laws of Torah study presented in the Talmud and by medieval authorities such as Maimonides, the textual tradition is marked by the assumption that the aim of education is the clear transmission of Torah from teacher to pupils, using coercion where necessary to achieve this goal⁷.

However, Judaism also reflects pluralistic, anti-fundamentalist views of truth and learning. Lee Shulman, for example, understands Jewish studies as a process of vocational education in which learners take part in activities that enable them to 'profess' Judaism⁸. On this basis, Shulman suggests three signature pedagogies for Jewish education. The first is *dvar torah* – literally 'a word of Torah', used generally to describe a sermon or teaching moment in which the lessons of Jewish texts are applied hermeneutically to the real-life situation of the audience. This requires the student to build a dialogue between the tradition and contemporary concerns and to share the resulting insights performatively.

The second signature pedagogy is *hevruta*, the practice of studying in pairs. *Hevruta* study is characterised by 'mutual and reciprocal coaching, scaffolding, challenge, and debate' but more importantly by the setting in which it takes place: not two students sitting over a page of Talmud, but 'dozens of dyads filling a noisy *beit midrash* [study hall]' (p.11). The third signature pedagogy is *mahloket* (debate or controversy), a value drawn from rabbinic literature which ensures learning processes enable grounded, rational disagreements and arguments, and challenge students with competing interpretations and analyses. For Shulman, a pedagogy based

on dvar torah, hevruta and mahloket is a Jewish pedagogy because it develops the habits of mind, practice and heart that in his view construct a coherent and well-integrated Jewish identity.

Shulman focuses on religious and cultural questions: what kinds of Jewish life and practice are shaped by different versions of the Jewish educational hidden curriculum? However, his formulations also have social and political ramifications. The pedagogical model of dvar torah, hevruta and mahloket implies a set of practices that engages learners with real-world moral and political issues, grants them agency in the learning process, builds egalitarian, communal social relations, and recognises the nuanced, complex nature of reality in which critical thinking is vital and in which there are no straightforward right or wrong answers. It therefore provides a potential foundation for a Jewish critical pedagogy in the Freirean sense.

Case studies

How do these approaches to Jewish social justice education play out in the practices of real-life activists and teachers? In the following section I present extracts from interviews conducted with three practitioners. Sally (all personal names are pseudonyms) is head of informal education at a Jewish secondary school and runs volunteering and charity projects; Shalom is an Orthodox rabbi who manages local interfaith and social action projects and runs sessions on social justice in Jewish schools; and Tamar runs an organisation advocating for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Leveraging experience

Sally emphasises the centrality of giving students a particular set of experiences to the teaching and learning process. Thinking about her school's charity and volunteering projects,

for example taking students to visit elderly residents of care homes, she reflects that the school's aim is for them:

'... to have that experience in their bank of experiences.... So the experience of giving time to others; feeling valued or appreciated for giving the time; being... like being not about themselves; being not about... You know? And also valuing people for being... not for being... you know, it's... not for getting the best grade, or not for not getting detentions. You know, we don't... we take the naughty kids, we take whoever wants to come. And often it is, it's a different kind of demographic from the ones who get valued at school. So you know, I want them to feel valued, but I want them to have the experience as well, to have the same experience that I have, which is like, 'Oh, this is really nice. This is really nice. And I've done something valuable today'....'

It is noteworthy that Sally's notion of a 'bank' of experiences gels, at least linguistically, with an educational model that Paulo Freire and other critical pedagogues consider to be oppressive. However, here, the subject of 'banking' is experiences rather than knowledge and, as we will see below, Sally demonstrates a commitment to the dialogical unpacking of these experiences with her students as a means of developing their own, inherent identities and potential.

This tension between a habituated or socialisation-type model and a person-centred approach focused on realising the unique potential of each individual is also evident in relation to a charity fundraising project where students researched charities and 'pitched' them to their friends with the aim of securing cash prizes for the winning causes. On one hand, Sally suggests that the goal of this activity was to induct students into the habits of charitable giving and fundraising, but at the same time she emphasises the importance of the intimate

connections between the programme and the biographies and inner worlds of the participants:

'[O]ne kid in particular came into my office in a break time, and he was like, 'I really need your help', he was like, 'I'm trying to research charities that deal with domestic abuse, but I can only find ones that deal with domestic abuse for women, and I want a charity that looks after domestic abuse for men'. And it was just like he... something he'd really... I don't know if there was like a personal connection, but he'd really thought about it, and thought about why he wanted to do it, and then he like... we gave him the tools really, and the opportunity to find out about it, and then to talk about that to his peers.... So I guess because it's like student led, and it's following their interests, it's following their passions.'

This focus on the genuineness of the students' response is matched by an emphasis on the authenticity of the experience itself. Sally comments:

'I think they really, really felt like they underwent a connection with the real world. There was something ... in it, and I'm not sure what it was, but there was something in it that took them out of the classroom and into the real world. Maybe it was the cash... There was a lot of web-based research.... We let them come into the office and phone the charities... You know, it was really about them reaching out and touching the outside world... But there was something in that process when they realised it wasn't an exercise... They were trying to get that money for something that they felt passionate about.'

Shalom, an Orthodox rabbi, employs a similar educational strategy in a different context. When working with secular or progressive Jewish students, he builds on their existing commitments to social justice to show them the value of

Jewish tradition which, unbeknownst to them, also contains these principles:

‘What’s my aim by going in there? I would like to say that they’re hearing something unique about a Torah perspective on responsibility. It’s not just why Fairtrade is good but why as Jews they should take Fairtrade seriously. So they’re proud about their Judaism, they’re now ingrained with something about their Judaism. I’m proud to be a Jew because it says something meaningful about eating Fairtrade chocolate.... So for that one it was all about just using a couple of quotes from Isaiah, you know, just in case you thought Judaism was all about ritual, small ritual acts, prophetic voices saying ‘feed the poor and clothe the naked man’ kind of thing, and that’s a really important piece, and yet you probably don’t know about this so let’s have an educational session about Isaiah.’

In his book *Judaism and Justice*, Sid Schwarz formulates the relationship between experiential and textual Jewish education somewhat differently⁹. He describes an unplanned meeting between young people on a Jewish social justice educational programme and a group of homeless people who had organised themselves into a community on the streets of Washington, DC. Having heard the homeless people’s stories, the students articulated for themselves the justice values that happen to lie at the heart of Judaism. Schwarz, as the group facilitator, supplied the students with biblical and rabbinic concepts to match, and the young people were amazed at how these ancient texts spoke directly to their situation. Schwarz describes this process as ‘street Torah’ and reports that it burst the young people’s bubble and propelled them into social action. In other words, the kind of real-world experience employed by Sally helped students shape or clarify their own

values, which the educator – echoing Shalom’s manoeuvre – was then able to root in Jewish tradition.

Conversely, when teaching in an Orthodox framework where students have a prior commitment to traditional Jewish law and practice, Shalom leverages this in order to convince them that it is important, for example, to recycle.

You can do a whole class on bal tashhit [the commandment ‘do not destroy’], from the Torah to the Gemorah [Talmud], the Shutim [Responsa literature], and just begin to explore what the rabbis had to say about this important issue, about not wasting. And then you hold a plastic bottle at the end and you say ‘what shall we do with this, le-fi halakhah [according to Jewish law]?’ And hopefully that whole sense has led them on this journey where they’re caring about a plastic bottle that would have not been an issue now becoming a Torah issue. It can’t go in the rubbish because bal tashhit would say not to.

Confronting complexity

Tamar, the director of a ‘pro-Israel, pro-peace’ organisation, seeks to challenge the political views of the participants on the trips she runs to Israel and the West Bank. Echoing the Ignatian see-judge-act pastoral cycle, Tamar sums this up as a three- stage process: exposure to new facts and experiences stimulates reflection and intellectual or ideological change which leads to political action:

So the educational stuff is giving people the opportunity to actually look at the complexity more broadly: speak to people and meet with people they wouldn’t normally get to hear. That might be everything from Palestinian and Israeli human rights activists to former heads of the Shin Bet inside Israel, the security services, and have a critique of the direction of travel of the country, and we are keen to mobilise people to be more vocal about that. And to actually physically get people out on the ground to see things and take people beyond the Green

Line that everyone talks about, to actually go into the field and actually see for themselves.

This educational process means helping learners replace what Tamar sees as their incomplete or biased perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with more complete ones. For example, she reflects on the reaction of two teenagers to a daytrip organised by her organisation which took place in the context of a month-long Israel tour:

‘There were a couple of kids who took real exception to the content of the programme, and in the end the guide said to them ‘did you go to Tzfat [Safed]?’ Yeah, yeah, we learned about the kabbalists, we learned about the sixteenth century, we learned about the Inquisition. He said ‘did you talk about the Palestinian population though, that existed before 1948?’ Blank faces. ‘Did you talk about the fact that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, came from Tzfat?’ Blank faces. ‘Did you talk about the fact that he went on television a few months ago to say, ‘I know I can’t return to this place as anything other than a tourist even though it was my family home?’ Blank faces. He turned round to the kids and said, ‘look I’m not going to pretend that what I am trying to teach you does not come from a specific perspective, that it has its own biases and its own subjectivity in it, but what I am trying to explain to you is that everything else you have done on this tour has brought bias in another direction. I’m just asking you to expand your possibilities.’ What he was saying is it’s not that what you learned in Tzfat is not true, all of it is true, but there is more to that story than the bit you learned.’

Tamar does not naively assume that there is an inadequate, biased view of reality which needs to be replaced with an objectively true one (although her use of terminology such as

'myth-busting' reveals some ambivalence on this score). When asked 'do you think there are more and less true ways of seeing reality? Or is everything narratives basically?' she responds:

'I think it is all narratives. I think the challenge is how do you hold multiple narratives. So the narrative of 'this country is deeply insecure, and we need to protect our borders and these people hate us and want to kill us' is not untrue. I mean I would question the validity of those big phrases in particular. But existing alongside that narrative is one that is equally true which says 'we've occupied a people for forty-seven years, we've denied them their basic human and political rights, we're making our world and probably the wider world unsafe because of it, we're making it impossible to build different regional alliances in the Middle East, which can dramatically change the status quo, and we are destroying the moral fibre of Israeli society'. That is equally true. The problem that I think we have is that everyone wants their version and their narrative to win.'

Building relationships

Alongside this strong, cognitive thrust, the educational process Tamar describes also involves an emotional journey. While emotional baggage can hold back the planned process of intellectual change, emotion also plays an important role in personal transformation. Tamar implies that experiencing feelings of distress in response to their encounters with abuses of Palestinians' rights and the harsh facts of the Occupation is a vital part of her participants' learning journey: 'Actually I saw ... a tangible sense of emotional breakdown over everything they were seeing, and then a twenty-four- hour period where we saw some good positive stuff and people built their world view back up a little'. She comments on the feelings of shock

and embarrassment experienced by one family who, after participating in her organisation's programmes, became deeply involved as activists:

'I suspect they were always sympathetic-ish, but they have gone from being sympathetic-ish to being 'this is not something we can stand back from and we are going to do everything we can to help ... and to expose the voices of the people we met to more of our friends, we're going to host events in our homes and going to get more people on these trips'. I think that came down to 'I can't believe I've never seen this before, I can't believe in all my life, all the times I've spent in Israel...'. Interestingly it has happened to people who have homes and spend a lot of time there – 'that nobody ever showed me this'. Sometimes that is about a slight element of personal embarrassment, and 'am I really that person that is so blinkered?'. I can't believe that I have lived here all these years of my life and there is a bit of, 'I want to compensate for that'.

When does emotion stop being an obstacle to transformation and become a positive part of the learning process? Reflecting on the experiences of a women's trip she organised, she reports:

'...the thing that changed their lives is that I took them to meet a group of women who are big activists in this new organisation Women Wage Peace. They were Tel Aviv-ian middle class, met them in a nice art gallery in Tel Aviv and I think our women looked at them and went 'you are like me, I could be you,' whereas there was an element of everyone else they had met were not like them.... But they were like these nice middle-class women who were saying it's not really okay to occupy people, and we are going to march from Jerusalem to tell people that. They [the participants] thought 'oh I could do that'.

The transition from a situation of discomfort and danger to one of familiarity and safety supported the movement to a sense of optimism and activism within the participants.

The ability to identify with a group of not-too-different role models also seems to have been an important aspect of the learning process. Tamar makes this explicit when she reports on a visit she arranged for the women's group to hearings involving teenage Palestinian defendants at an Israeli military court in the West Bank:

'[W]ith the women there was a lot of 'as a mother' and there was an element of imagining what it would be like as a mother for your fifteen-year-old son to be arrested in the middle of the night by someone you don't know and taken away from you. I think they did identify with that narrative even though these women couldn't be more different from them. MP: What do you think that did to them? Tamar: I think it really screwed with them. They found it traumatic because they could imagine it. They were thinking about the idea of your children being taken in the middle of the night, tied up and blindfolded and that you wouldn't be able to locate them because they are in some police station that you can't get to, and they are not allowed to call you. The terror, there was a sense of 'I can imagine the terror you would feel as I would feel that same terror'. MP: What do you think the impact of that is on the people? Tamar: On our people? I think it is massive because it becomes about being a human being and it takes away... back to the subjectivity/objectivity thing which is you see it for what it is. Whether this kid has thrown a stone or a knife they are still a kid and he will be traumatised for the rest of his childhood as a result of that experience and I wouldn't want my child to go through that.'

Conclusion

The approaches presented by Sally, Shalom and Tamar all

echo Lee Shulman's signature pedagogies. Leveraging participants' experiences and connecting these with Jewish values echoes *dvar Torah*, confronting complexity and debate evokes *mahloket*, and building relationships dovetails with *hevruta*. All three practitioners claim, implicitly or explicitly, that their educational methods successfully inspire learners to social and political action, while sustaining the values of pluralism and democracy, and avoiding the pitfalls of banking education.

It is important to remember, however, that the connection between education and politics, between conscientisation and political-social revolution, is not self-evident. Despite being a pedagogue, Freire limits the role of education and gives precedence to politics, which he understands as action intended to take state power. He writes that awakening critical consciousness is a condition of social change but is not emancipatory in and of itself.¹⁰ Freire argues that education is unable to generate social change precisely because of its potential power to do so. Schools do not determine the shape of society, the reverse is the case: the authorities in an unemancipated society will not permit education to threaten their status.¹¹ Yet despite his assumption that political change must precede any deep educational shift, Freire believes in the possibility of ideological change before the structural transformation of society. This change cannot be sharply distinguished from the material transformation but constitutes its initial stage; altered consciousness is the first step in problematising existing reality¹².

As faith-based, social justice educators, we cannot be satisfied with teaching and learning. The fundamental question is how to do education in a way that is rooted in our faith traditions, that generates a truly progressive politics and that plays a role in processes of material, social change.

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Notes

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3. Philip Wesley Jackson, *Life in Classrooms*. New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1968. 4 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1988, 57-74.

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10. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 52–56; Miguel Escobar, *Paulo Freire on Higher Education: A Dialogue at the National University of Mexico* (SUNY Press, 1994), 149–51.

11. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985), 31–32

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PART IV
ENVIRONMENTAL
PRAXIS

16.

Holy Anarchy as an Alternative Ecology of Living Possibilities

Graham Adams

Overview

First, 'holy anarchy' is alternative language for 'the kingdom of God': not replacing 'kingdom', since this alternative *basileia/kingdom/empire* is loaded with theo-political significance, but 'holy anarchy' affirms three things about it – its commitment to anti-domination, its chaotic disruption of boundaries, and its presence in ambiguities. Secondly, this is relevant to the ecological catastrophe: we must challenge dominating approaches to life (in the economy and its prevailing demands of the Earth); our responses may be appropriately chaotic (creation groans in varied ways, so our responses can be wildly diverse); and our efforts may not be pure or neat, but in their ambiguity, there is truth and vitality. Thirdly, this represents a shift from the presumption that 'there are no alternatives' to a necessarily global movement of 'several alternatives': an ecology of living possibilities, a green solidarity of the multitudes, a coalition of chaos.

Introduction

The nature of the ecological challenge and our responses to it

can be understood in different ways. In this chapter, I suggest that the lens of 'Holy Anarchy', a particular envisioning of the kingdom of God, can illuminate these dual concerns. Essentially, if the goal is to re-embed in our attitudes, actions and structures ways of honouring the richness and dynamism of Earth's ecosystems, then it is wise to understand both the problems and solutions as being necessarily 'ecological' by nature; that is, they are not singular but part of a web of interactions. 'Holy Anarchy' is an approach which values and advocates such a dynamic web.

Holy Anarchy

In the book of that title,¹ I follow Andrew Shanks² in proposing that the kingdom of God may fruitfully be called Holy Anarchy, broadly for three reasons. First, 'anarchy' incisively captures the main dynamic in the alternative realm which Jesus proclaimed. If 'archy', from the Greek *arche*, is about a relationship of rule-over – as in monarchy (rule-over by one), oligarchy (rule-over by an elite), or patriarchy (rule-over by men) – then this new reality is reflected in Jesus' subversion of such patterns. He challenged those who were puffed up with privilege and he raised up those who were downtrodden, neglected, marginalised, poor and dis-eased. For him, as for Christian anarchists since, 'the last shall be first and the first shall be last', which is a programme of perpetual political upheaval; after all, those who move to the front must keep being humbled, and those left behind must keep being invited forwards. Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan suggest 'this kingdom is better understood as an anti-kingdom',³ precisely because it is not like the kingdoms of the world; it is starkly different, distinctly subversive of prevailing patterns, and not something that can be contained or measured by normal geo-political spaces, authority or relationships. The term, or our experience of, 'Anarchy' may not

perfectly reflect this, but arguably it is closer to the alternative reality *as Jesus lived it* than is the notion of kingdom, especially with the weight of history overlaying our sense of what kingdoms are like.

Secondly, 'anarchy' is a better notion than 'kingdom' because the Greek term, *basileia*, translated as kingdom, also means 'empire'. Now of course, that echo was clearly meant to be there, in the gospels, when Jesus proclaims the alternative, because it is also a counter-imperial message about the true 'Empire' in the face of the Roman Empire. Caesar is not Lord, here; rather, God is. The subversive politics of the language is vital. But the problem, again, is the subtlety of giving allegiance to 'an empire that is like no other empires', when empires are intrinsically about domination, control and power. After all, Jesus once again shows us that this empire is profoundly different – it is focused on the last and the least, it is about service not lordship, it transgresses the boundaries of civilisation and cleanliness, it receives wisdom and gifts from those regarded as outsiders, it sees value in what is small and unworthy. These contrasts reflect what postcolonial thinkers describe as ambivalence: that is, as in the case of the 'double vision' which Homi Bhabha identified,⁴ and which Rieger develops in *Christ and Empire*,⁵ it is important to see how the very same term can be used both to defend Empire and to subvert it. So, here, the notion of 'the kingdom (or empire) of God' is both deeply subversive, since it illuminates how all other empires are corruptions and distortions of what God would intend, and simultaneously runs the risk of being used to uphold imperial dynamics. It is that heightened risk which makes it difficult to use the term exclusively, especially when all our reference-points for empires are far from holy. Other language may more helpfully capture the sort of politics which Jesus demonstrated: politics of equality and justice, mutuality and empathy, giving and receiving, upheaval and

transformation, inclusion and diversity – all of which are reflected in anarchy.

Thirdly, it is good simply to offer new terms for old ideas, to see how the effects unfold in emerging insights and dimensions. The risk of using the same words indefinitely is that they become stale, losing their impact and becoming weighed down by layers of conservatism. In the case of 'kingdom' or 'empire', there are twin dangers: on the one hand, we can overlook or ignore the politics in question, so failing to use God's alternative as a basis for critiquing existing dynamics and systems; and we can overlook how existing kinds of politics inadvertently inform how we think of God's (alternative) kingdom, so building a reality in the image with which we are familiar. So by using a different term, perhaps even a term that unsettles us a little, it may help to puncture any complacency and enable us not to overlook the politics in question.

So, the kingdom of God *as holy anarchy* has a resonance with the promise and pattern of Jesus' ministry, reflecting the upside-downing which he envisaged and fostered. There are three particular dynamics within it worth naming.

The Dynamics of Anarchy

The first, as I indicated above, is the focus on subverting rule-over. Another way of putting this is to speak of anti-domination. The anti-kingdom of God, or holy anarchy, is always against domination. After all, domination distorts all concerned; both those who suffer at the raw end of it and those who exercise it. Human identity and wellbeing are damaged through habits, patterns and structures of domination. Fullness of life is impeded. Shalom is obstructed. We are intended for free relationship with one another as neighbours, giving and receiving in dynamics of love and justice. Domination, then, must be called out and transformed. Whether it is the

domination by the wealthy or exploitative, by patriarchy, systems of racism, ableism, heteronormativity, or indeed by human exploitation of the Earth and its ecosystems, it is always to be called out and transformed.

Such dynamics are the drivers of all other distorting and damaging habits and patterns. It is within the context of power imbalances that all other unneighbourliness is framed. What I mean, there, is that even though indignities and cruelties can be and clearly are perpetuated by people further down the pyramids of power, the context for them is the asymmetric relationships and systems which shape us. This is internalised coloniality; the living out of attitudes and actions which are conditioned by patterns of rule-over. This is why the Bible, for instance, is concerned repeatedly with the behaviour of the rich, the monarchs, the rulers, the Temple elite, because powers-that-be bear greater responsibility. Even though we are actually entangled in very complex systems, which mean that our location is relative and dynamic in relation to others, the truth is that some people are consistently higher up the pyramid than most people. Intersectionality helps to explain the ways in which wealth and class, gender and sexuality, racialised identity, disabilities, and age interact with each other, such that the relationships are complex – but that does not take away from the fact that patterns of domination are themselves the issue here, distorting both our human relationality and our ecological relationality.

It is the language of Empire which captures this well. That is to say, whether or not a particular nation-state is ‘in charge’ in the ways they used to be, there are still pervasive and insidious systems at work which are very much like those of Empire. There are those with considerable vested interests and then the multitudes with relatively little voice at the table. There are economic patterns, supported by legal frameworks, which enable a few to become very wealthy while millions live in insecurity, desperation and ‘bare’ life.⁶ It is, in fact, this system

which fuels the consumption of the Earth. Research shows that the countries of the global North are responsible for 92% of global emissions in excess of planetary boundary fair-shares.⁷

Historically, colonialism was the means by which the capitalist economy was embedded in the patterns, for instance, of India, where intentional policies of the British Empire resulted in 100 million excess deaths.⁸ Contrary to the propagated view that capitalism enhances human welfare, data indicates during imperial expansion in the 16th century, capitalism worsened welfare, whereas it is the later social movements campaigning for reforms which resulted in its enhancement.⁹ In fact, the very growth which is sought and celebrated in the global North would not happen were it not for a net *appropriation* of labour and resources from the global South, depriving poorer countries of the means to focus on human welfare;¹⁰ that is to say, the Empire is certainly alive and kicking.

The first task, then, of Holy Anarchy is to expose and address the systems of domination – in personal or social relationships, in political and economic structures, and in our approach to the Earth.

The second dimension of Holy Anarchy is its awkwardness. It is not simply a matter of one community identifying all that is wrong with the world and perfectly demonstrating the alternative. All communities remain affected, even infected, by the very dynamics they seek to transform. Our efforts are both impeded by our own flawed diagnosis and prognosis, and thwarted by systems which act against our best intentions. The point is not to despair about this struggle, but to reckon honestly with it. The church, for instance, is not the epitome of God's new realm; rather, we seek – and struggle – to witness to it. We are a sign of it, pointing imperfectly to its manifestations wherever they may be, sometimes within us but often outside of us. We are a foretaste of it, a first course but never the whole banquet, because we understand our complicity with systems which prevent everyone from feasting fairly. We are an agent

of it, working for it, in partnership with others, but never the goal in ourselves. We can indeed be bold, because we rightly discern how Empire obstructs fullness of life for all creation. But we must also be humble, because we do not exemplify the undoing of Empire or the demonstration of fullness of life. We are significantly more limited in our achievements, because the false God of Empire has held us enthralled and colonised our psyche and our systems.

The point is that Holy Anarchy is necessarily awkward because it takes root even amongst communities which fail to reflect it fully. It does not wait for purity; it does not wait until our whole house is in order. In fact, it disorders our sense of good order, because our neatness or purities can so often be ways of claiming to contain, or presuming to restrain, God's creative movement of love and justice. We assume the role of guardian of the kingdom, so ironically overlooking where this anti-kingdom is actually alive and well. We want to be innocent, as though not corrupted by imperial systems, and we want to be the takers of initiative, the doers of good, so we fail to notice how Holy Anarchy bursts to life even in contexts of impurity, mess and disorder, beckoning us to join in.

Holy Anarchy is awkward precisely because it cannot be contained; it disrupts our desire for orderliness; it grows like a mustard seed – an unwanted and invasive weed – in the cracks of the system, and in the cracks in our own attempts to control it. Or it is like yeast 'that a woman took and mixed ... throughout the dough' (Luke 13.20-21), to indicate how it works with and through the very 'impurities' (like fungal yeast) to bring transformation, in and amongst the very stuff of everyday life rather than aloof or divorced from it all. It is, then, a movement of im/purity, because, as we see in the ministry of Jesus, the neat boundaries we create around God's activity are thoroughly subverted by God's neighbourly love for all sorts of people.

Thirdly, this flows into an explicit transgression of norms and

practices concerned with insiders and outsiders. It is not only that the church's own efforts are flawed, but that we must learn to see God's activity amongst people, communities and movements outside of us. This does not mean it is automatically everywhere, of course; if it were, it would be failing to make any distinctions (between justice and injustice, love and non-love) or it would neglect to take sides (whereas it does indeed take sides with those who have been silenced, scapegoated and sacrificed by systems of domination). Nevertheless, it erupts unexpectedly in all sorts of places, amongst even those who often thwart it, because its very goal is the emergence of deeper neighbourliness. Holy Anarchy is a good term for this kingdom, therefore, because it will not be contained by our presumptuous orderliness. It calls us to love the stranger, and it tells us that God comes to us in the stranger, with gifts for us to receive – gifts of rich experience and wisdom.

These, then, are the dynamics of Holy Anarchy – dismantling patterns of domination; alert to the ways in which even alternative communities are never the whole answer but can witness to it; and appreciating how it takes us by surprise in countless sites of unexpectedness.

Anarchy and Ecology

These dynamics of Holy Anarchy can now be applied to the ecological crisis, to illuminate its nature more incisively, and nourish our responses to it.

So first, we see the predominance of patterns of domination which drive the crisis, or the knot of interconnected crises, in all its complexity. It is the global economy, engineered to satiate the demands of the gods of growth and consumption, which dominates the issue. The lens of 'holy anarchy' can therefore play its part in helping to focus our attention and analysis on

these prevailing structures and activities, their asymmetries in power – that is, the power of market-states and trans-national corporations over the interests of indigenous peoples, workers of the land, and sustainable patterns of living – and their exploitations of Earth and people.

Holy Anarchy, as a vision of God's alternative anti-kingdom, exposes the systems of Empire and dares to envisage their undoing through five marks of anti-imperial mission,¹¹ which I summarise here as:

1. Hear the groans of creation as exploited by systems of Empire; expose, subvert and transform these systems;
2. Hear the cries of the oppressed as damaged by systems of Empire; expose, subvert and transform these systems;
3. Attend to the needs of those bruised by Empire, worn down, wearied and unwell;
4. Build alternative communities in which we mutually teach and learn how to decolonise from such systems;
5. Witness to the undoing of Empire in the stories we tell, of good news rooted in the awesome weakness of God.

There we see how attentiveness to the groaning of creation is the first mark of mission, because Empire's obstruction of Holy Anarchy is pervasive and insidious in the damage done to the very ecosystems of life. Fullness of life, its feeding and flourishing, is therefore only possible if we recover our connectedness within and celebration of the whole 'household of life'. After all, since the Greek *oikos*, or house(hold), is at the root of our 'ecumenical' vision, to be truly ecumenical is to be concerned with the many dimensions of the household of life – in the 'economy' and 'ecology', all those terms sharing that same root.¹² This is the very foundation, or soil, of mission, because unless we get to grips with the way in which imperial economics condition us to exploit and destroy the ecosystems of life, we cannot expect to respond justly to human suffering,

or build alternative communities; these aspirations are necessarily interconnected.

Understanding oneself, as humanity, to be integrated within a wider network of life, rather than standing over it as its dominator, is essential, and this involves the reaffirmation of an alternative vision in which systems of control, exploitation and consumption are transformed. For Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, the Christian call for 'neighbour-love' entails relating to the Earth itself as our neighbour,¹³ and without such ecological embrace in our very identity as followers of Jesus, we defy the God who loves the world. To unearth, so to speak, how the significance of all life on Earth has been buried to us, within communities of faith, is also to see how its exploitation causes disproportionate harm on Black and brown bodies and on women, bearing the cost of ecological crises. So to rediscover the Earth as our common neighbour, as well as our common home;¹⁴ to see what it means to take seriously its wounding at the hands of our imperial economics; and to reckon with the ways in which such harm works its way through in other aspects of our dominating structures and relationships, is to respond to the call of God whose vision is *Holy Anarchy on earth as in heaven*.

Secondly, the vision of Holy Anarchy calls forth bold communities, such as the church, to witness to and embody the alternative horizon which we glimpse and pursue. In other words, it is integral to the life of the church to pursue these marks of mission, putting creation-care at the centre of our worship and discipleship. But the fact that the church is shaped in the light of God's desire for Holy Anarchy also means that there is room for ambiguity in our efforts; for it would be naïve, even unhealthily perfectionist, to imagine that our commitments and achievements will be entirely pure. We do not exactly embody the ecology of life; in fact, there are many ways in which we remain deeply complicit with the very patterns which we judge as imperial and exploitative. We may well seek to make appropriate changes, in our fuel use, in our

endeavours to shift towards sustainability and ecological integrity, but it is a long journey, riddled with contradictions. We may be 'wilding' in some respects, as we create room for old species to re-emerge, but we also inhabit concrete and brick, we travel and consume, our finances are 'complicated', even as our hearts are well-meaning – there are no easy resolutions for communities longing to understand reality more fully and change it more completely.

To the extent that we witness to and embody Holy Anarchy, we should never see ourselves as a space of innocence, where we are free to judge and reject those whose actions or intentions are insufficiently pure. Instead, it is a space of learning; a community-on the-move in which we are being shaken open, not as such by each other, but by our attentiveness to reality and the groans of all creation. It is an awkward conversation between our deep entanglement with the systems of Empire and, on the other hand, the vision of decolonial freedom, mutuality and renewal. It is a meeting in which life-as-we-know-it is illuminated by the alternative horizon, making clearer the depths of the challenge and the possibility of change.

Al Barrett and Ruth Harley's *Being Interrupted* is brilliant at capturing some of these ambiguities and using ecological language to reinterpret the mission of the church. They ask us to imagine what it might mean figuratively to occupy the 'ecotone',¹⁵ the 'edge-places' that are neither, for instance, lake nor meadow, or meadow nor woodland, but in-between space, sites of potential and possibility, where there is new growth, the mingling of varied species, and lifegiving interaction. This is a helpful analogy for the church in its engagement with creation-care precisely because of its subversion of purity, because if we do not act until all our efforts are perfectly pure, we will delay far too long, and we must make strides now.

This vision of the church engaged in ecological empathy, understood through the lens of Holy Anarchy, holds together

two vocations: first, the need for lament in the midst of complicity and struggle, which is to say, since we cannot achieve perfect actions, we can express regret but not resignation – because our laments or regrets do not stop us from acting, but enable us to be honest about the contradictions as we strive to move towards new models, and about the reality of hopelessness where ecological breakdown already grips Earth too tightly. Secondly, then, there is the need for visionary commitment, tempered by honest awareness that we thwart our own goals, and have already missed various tipping points towards dangerous outcomes, but nevertheless determining to venture forwards, away from fossil fuels, ecocide and many more elements of ecological degradation.

The ‘ecology’ of the church’s life, a rich interplay between worship, pastoral care, governance, mission and so on, is to be rooted in the anarchic aspiration for a world, represented by smaller communities, in which imperial systems are undone, smallness is reaffirmed as beautiful (despite a world telling us to grow and grow), and new life can be rewilded in the boundary zones of possibility.

Thirdly, though, it is crucial that no single, flawed community pretends that it can make this journey single-handedly. Not only are we embedded in broader social patterns which do harm, but it is also only through proper appreciation of broader patterns of connection that our own efforts and trajectories can be sustained, challenged, stretched, deepened. Again, Barrett and Harley’s ecological language is helpful here: for example, where they affirm how ‘trees function less as individuals, and more as nodes in complex networks’, that have been called ‘the wood wide web!’¹⁶

The point is, we need to be rooted in networks which help us to understand the issues and the potential solutions more deeply. We need to see ourselves, as churches, not simply as Christians committed to creation, but as human beings in solidarity with other human beings, and in solidarity with other

parts of the rich ecosystems of Earth. We need to appreciate our mutual interdependence in the cause of a more sustainable future, even as we struggle to live with the damage done to our collective future. We are twigs in a forest, plankton in an ocean, and so on, though not without power; rather, like the humble, fragile butterfly of chaos theory, closely aligned with Holy Anarchy, we may nevertheless play a small part in a larger rippling of changing patterns, even as we are harmed by the figurative and real hurricanes which have already resulted from accumulated Earth-damaging acts.

Coalition of Chaos

The thing is, however, that our contributions to a more sustainable future will not all be the same. Many of them will be flawed and profoundly inadequate, but nevertheless small steps in the right kind of direction, even with some unintended consequences. There is not one single alternative to the economy of death, but a multiplicity of possibilities, even if those possibilities are reduced due to our slowness to act which has made some options no longer viable; so it is right to affirm that our insights and responses will not be identical, but can still contribute to the whole.

But the point is not to excuse ourselves for the half-heartedness or contradictions in our endeavours; rather it is to recognise both the limitations in what we do and the diversity, an apparently chaotic coalition of contributions. More than that, though, there remains a determination to be alert to the asymmetries in our collective efforts, recognising where more of the responsibility lies, together with more of the resistance, because of considerable vested interests, weighty inertia, and a moral imaginary which is conditioned to be focused on the short-term.

Chaos is significant, here: both as the expression of divine

activity, doing chaos¹⁷ in the midst of a system of supposed order, that is, to disrupt and decolonise imperial dynamics which otherwise dominate our ecologies of life, and as the vocation within which we are called to participate, bringing a multiplicity of insights and responses to the cacophony of creation's groans. We can be fearful of chaos, which is why the sea and chaos have been associated with each other – a place of danger and destruction, rooted in a common unpredictability. But 'blue theology' affirms the sea;¹⁸ after all, the sea is flow, lifegiving, connectivity, buoyancy, depth – and indeed, its chaos can be re-embraced, since 'blue' is needed together with 'green' within the rainbow coalition of theologies and practices. This solidarity of different movements goes to the heart of Holy Anarchy, its non-perfectionism, its relishing of diversity, its pursuit of a deepening solidarity amongst varied communities and movements who seek justice, peace and healing. It is an unpredictable reality, an unpredictable force, which, even in the weakness of a butterfly, or the fragile new growth within an ecotone, has the capacity to evoke the emergence of surprising changes.

Faith and Practice as Ecology

I have attempted to show that Holy Anarchy, an alternative vision of God's (anti-)kingdom, has significant resonances with ecological vocation. It represents the holding together of living possibilities: attuned to critique of imperial systems, alert to the legitimate awkwardness in our efforts to subvert and transform them, and attentive to the networks of agents and interests which are diverse but seek deeper solidarity. Ecological language, including the language of possibility and chaos, has this capacity to nourish our pursuit of the horizon to which God orientates us, while also exposing and subverting, or

illuminating and transforming, the ecological catastrophe we participate in.

With what shall I compare the kingdom of God, then? It is like holy anarchy, an ecotone of potential, a butterfly of unpredictability, a tree network, a fungal system, a shore-line of land-sea interaction, a flow of maybe, a depth of lament, a growing wave of something coming, a solidarity of inter-species conspiracy, an alternative ecology of living possibilities.

Endnotes

1. Graham Adams, *Holy Anarchy: Dismantling Domination, Embodying Community, Loving Strangeness* (London: SCM Press, 2022)
2. Andrew Shanks, *Hegel versus 'Inter-Faith Dialogue': A General Theory of True Xenophilia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 150, 152, 162.
3. Joerg Rieger and Kwok Pui-lan, *Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefields, 2012), 74.
4. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 88.
5. Joerg Rieger, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 11.
6. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998)
7. Jason Hickel, "Who is responsible for climate breakdown?", Alja Zeera, 4 Apr 2022 <https://t.co/uUn47ff1Jr>
8. Dylan Sullivan and Jason Hickel, "How British colonialism

killed 100 million Indians in 40 years”, Alja Zeera, 2 Dec 2022
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10. Jason Hickel et al, “Imperialist appropriation in the world economy: Drain from the global South through unequal exchange 1990-2015”, Science Direct: Global Environmental Change, Volume 73, March 2022 <https://t.co/FWDS4jVr0e>

11. Adams, *Holy Anarchy*, 121.

12. Adams, *Holy Anarchy*, 90-91; see also Upolu Lumā Vaai, ‘Lagimālie: Covid, De-Oneification of Theologies, and Eco-Relational Well-being’, in Havea, J. (ed.), *Doing Theology in the New Normal* (London: SCM, 2021), 211-12. who critiques ‘oneification’, the imperial pressure towards ‘one answer’, whereas true ecumenism fosters a solidarity between many interconnected acts: see

13. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 15.

14 Francis, *Encyclical letter Laudato si’ of the Holy Father Francis: On Care for Our Common Home*. 1st ed. (Vatican City:https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html 2015).

15. Al Barrett and Ruth Harley, *Being Interrupted: Reimagining the church’s mission from the outside, in* (London: SCM Press, 2020), 142-4.

16. Barrett and Harley, *Being Interrupted*, 119.
17. Or for Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'God becomes chaos': see *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 92.
18. (Blue theology)

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17.

Christian Climate Action

Lessons for the Wider Church?

Kate Chesterman

Overview

The climate crisis is an emergency of the greatest magnitude – the most profound crisis ever to be faced by humanity since the Fall. The imbalance between our sin-driven lust for domination and the resources available to us in creation is now threatening everything that is sacred and the future existence of all inhabitants of our Earth.

Established in 2012, Christian Climate Action (CCA), which has a close affiliation to Extinction Rebellion, was founded on the premise that the unparalleled evil that unpins the climate crisis and the deadly social and global injustices to which it is giving rise, demands a radical response – one that, to coin a phrase used within climate activist circles, “is commensurate” with the scale of the crisis. Frustrated by the lack of success over four decades of trying to influence Government policy through the usual democratic processes, and inspired by the rich history of protest as a successful means of bringing about rapid social change, CCA members believe that nonviolent disruptive protest and civil disobedience is now a Christian duty. Despite all the scientific evidence about the damage, suffering and death that will be caused by ever-rising CO2 emissions in the

atmosphere, Governments and corporations continue to profit from the production and use of fossil fuels.

Drawing on a series of interviews with its administrators and members, this paper examines the work of CCA, its motivations and the methods it employs. It also explores why, more generally, the Church hasn't embraced nonviolent protest and civil disobedience as a response to the climate crisis. Drawing on the Apostle Paul's masterly profile of true Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13, as well as his observations about subjection to the authorities found in Romans 13, the author asks 1) are current Christian attitudes with regards to law-keeping consistent with those espoused and expressed by the early church and whether 2) churches of the global North need to rediscover a culture of radical love.

Introduction

In the summer of 2022, men, women and children were impeded from going about their business. People already struggling with cost-of-living rises were unable to get to the jobs that put food on their family's table. For those in lower paid jobs, not making it to work even once could mean job loss. Children were unable to get to school, disrupting their education. There was confusion, anger and blame.

Does this sound familiar? In the UK, we don't tolerate much disruption. We get angry at any interruption to our "right" to go wherever and whenever we want or have to, labelling those who disrupt us as antisocial troublemakers. Usually, the words used are cruder than that. But this disruption wasn't in the UK. The people to whom I refer were in Pakistan. They were flooded out their homes, communities, workplaces and schools, out of the fields that fed them, flooded out of everything they knew and everything they had ever worked for. There were 33

million of them, covering a third of Pakistan. 1700 hundred of them were washed out of their very lives Now, months later, 10 million of them remain displaced, including 4 million children in danger of starvation and disease.

These people aren't experiencing inconvenience, but catastrophe. The rain and glacial melting that led to those floods was made five times more likely by climate change which we in the global north, have had a disproportionately large role in causing.

For over 40 years, Governments across the world have refused to heed the warnings from scientific experts about the threat posed by increasing levels of CO2 in the atmosphere. Ironically, some of the earliest and most accurate predictions about the effect this would have were made by scientists employed in the well-funded leading-edge research teams of major oil corporations. Those companies then suppressed their findings so that fossil fuel production could continue unhindered.¹

The intervening decades have been lost in disinformation and delay, with those seeking to surface the truth treated as extremists or crackpots. Nearly 20 years passed in this century before the climate crisis suddenly exploded in the popular consciousness, through a combination of the work of the UN, pressure groups like Extinction Rebellion (XR) and the documentaries of popular naturalists, most notably Sir David Attenborough.

It is the work of the pressure groups that I want to address and one group in particular – Christian Climate Action (CCA). I want to tell CCA's story and explain the motivations of some of the individuals within it. What I want to consider is, what do these stories have to say to the wider Church at a time when the humanity faces the biggest single crisis in its entire history?

Christian Climate Action: Beginnings

In 2012, Ruth Jarman, Reggie Norton, Phil Kingston, Wesley Ingram, Caroline Harmon, Fr Martin Newall and Holly Peterson founded CCA. Years of “conventional” campaigning in Christian environmental charities had convinced them that there was no longer any effective democratic channel for holding the Government to account for their inaction on climate change and that time was running out. Given biblical teaching regarding love for one’s neighbour, the sacredness of life and the need to be responsible guardians of God’s creation, they felt they had no choice but to act radically and urgently. They were inspired by the successes which had been achieved by nonviolent direct protest and civil disobedience social justice movements of the past in bringing about large-scale social change in a relatively short space of time, notably under the leadership of Gandhi and Luther King.

CCA defines itself as follows:

We are a community of Christians supporting each other to take meaningful action in the face of imminent and catastrophic anthropogenic climate breakdown. We are inspired by Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. Following the example of social justice movements of the past, we carry out acts of public witness, nonviolent protest and civil disobedience to urge those in power to make the changes needed.²

Guided by Martin Newall, a catholic priest who had experience of the Ploughshares anti-war and nuclear disarmament movement, the group trained in nonviolent direct action techniques. Early actions in 2013 included attending Reclaim the Power (an antifracking camp) and holding vigils at proposed fracking sites, activity that led to arrest alongside Green Party MP Caroline Lucas. They also engaged in “actor-vism”, carrying out symbolic plays in areas of fossil fuel significance.

With its sizeable investments in fossil fuels, the Church of England (CofE) was inevitably a focus for CCA. In 2014, CCA visited the CofE Synod and dropped a banner calling for divestment. It was not to be their last visit to Synod. Other early key targets included the Government Department for Energy and Climate Change, which CCA visited on the first day of the Paris climate conference in 2015, whitewashing their walls and signage and rebranding it the “Department for Extreme Climate Change”.

CCA was engaging in creative and symbolic nonviolent direct and arrestable action six years before XR arrived on the activist scene. However, they remained a small and niche group until 2019 when XR’s massive impact brought a step change. The obvious connection in the values and *modus operandi* of the two groups led to formal association between them and, through this, an increasing number of Christians heard about and joined CCA. During 2019, CCA members were involved in some of XR’s more controversial actions, including climbing on the top of DLR trains in Canary Wharf, for which they were arrested and charged. More than two years later the protesters were acquitted of these charges by jury.

CCA has a statement of principles and values upon which its work is based. Its starting point is:

“Our God is loving” “and We act in love as we are called to participate in bringing about a renewed world.”

Other values include:

“Our allegiance is to God and where there is a choice between obeying God and obeying the law of the land, we chose to obey God...We are called to be faithful, not successful...We take action in a spirit of repentance acknowledging that we are part of the problem that we are fighting against...We avoid blaming and shaming” and “We are a nonviolent network...”³

Within that framework, CCA offers those who associate with it freedom of conscience regarding which actions they

undertake. As well as supporting XR actions and CCA itself, some members have also participated in the Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil campaigns. This sometimes causes tensions, when the statements and actions of those groups have challenged CCA's values. However, the high level of spiritual maturity and the real commitment to love and shared community within CCA, means that members work hard to find ways forward that avoid division and splits.

Spread widely across the UK, CCA's community life is fed through numerous chat groups, daily online prayer and a regular Saturday online meeting for planning, teaching, or discussion. Direct action is itself community building. CCA follows XR's model of having a Police Station Support team backing those who are in action, locating the police stations to which arrestees are taken and making sure someone is there to meet them on release. There is also practical and prayer support for those facing court and for those in prison and, sometimes, financial assistance for those who are fined.

Motivations for Direct Action

Inevitably, the testimonies of CCA activists reveal some common themes:

- a deep awareness of the totality and urgency of the climate crisis.
- a conviction that Government and corporate inaction is objective, monumental evil.
- an experience of failure in addressing the problem in any other way
- previous experience of other nonviolent direct action movements or the belief – based on historical precedents – that direct action can bring about the rapid and large-scale social change we need now.

The above are common to people across the activist community. But for members of CCA, there is another dimension – a strong sense of sacred calling and the belief that the foundations of the climate emergency are so explicitly evil that proactive resistance is an inevitable expression of Christian life.

Sue: 66 years old and a writer says:

“Once I began to appreciate the terrible urgency of it [the climate crisis], I knew that what love requires of me is living it – which is not at all the same as taking it seriously. In my six decades my faith has grown, wavered, surged and resisted labels...What I assent to, what I believe in, is the love Jesus lived...I think it’s easy to forget the fundamental rebelliousness and peaceful resistance of Jesus’s life and teaching. He didn’t just overturn the tables in the Temple but the values of society and the meaning of power. What my faith teaches me is the truth that justice is love in action.

Michelle 55 and a healthcare administrator:

“My ultimate motivation to take part in nonviolent civil disobedience was God’s revelation and calling...”

She describes her first experience of participating in direct action in 2018 and the spiritual affirmation that followed:

“...sitting in the road outside 10 Downing Street, knowing whole-heartedly that the XR folk surrounding me were my tribe; and followed the next morning by a church sermon from my ex-Minister on Ezekiel’s three birthday gifts – ‘Accepting the burden of the Lord; this will lead you into fearful places, where people will reject you, but it will also lead you into joyful places.’...”

Bill 67, a retired Church of England (CofE) vicar:

“There was a craze among young Christians in the 1990s to wear a wrist band reading WWJD. It stood for ‘what would Jesus do?’ What would Jesus do in a world where scientists are being ignored, where low lying

islands are condemned to drown, where the pollution of lifestyles only the rich can afford is destroying our planet; where lies are propagated to serve the interests of the wealthy; where the prime minister says one thing at a climate conference and then does the opposite as soon as he has flown home? What would Jesus do? The main example we have in the Bible is the trashing of the market in the temple, the stalls of traders who had been allowed to occupy the only space accessible to foreigners for prayer. This was dramatic, risky, direct action...And so [at a meeting] early last year I said: "This is the first time I have said this out loud but I am willing to be arrested and, physical and mental health permitting, I am willing to be arrested multiple times. I will serve time if necessary. I'm scared, but determined."

Rosemary, 66, a retired music-teacher, who provides support to activists:

"I was brought up (in a committed Christian family) to conform – be a good girl, do what you're told. I don't think for one minute I would have engaged with nonviolent direct action or nonviolent civil disobedience unless I had become convinced it was intrinsic to my being a disciple of Christ. I had understood Jesus' behaviour in the Temple as justifying "righteous indignation" but now I understand it as Jesus standing up to unjust practice by community leaders, civil disobedience against unjust laws, and an expression of God's all-inclusive love."

Steve: 67, a retired designer and plumber:

"I took part in the April 2019 uprising and subsequent actions from a logical, scientifically informed and justice-based mindset but soon found that my faith was also calling to me to be more empathetic to those worst affected and this issue went deeper into my being than

just a sense of righteous indignation. I started seeing it as a living of Gospel values.”

He describes how witnessing the sacrificial actions of others led him to risk more:

“I have subsequently engaged in more serious actions with harder consequences than I would have otherwise, but this is what we are called to do as Christians; to stand up for the truth and justice, to empty ourselves for others.”

The consequences of direct action are very real. Between 40 to 50 CCA members have been arrested, many multiple times. Scores have been convicted for their actions, eight have been imprisoned. Fines imposed vary from a few hundred to many thousands of pounds, and life impacts have included restrictive bail conditions, tagging and curfews, the cancellation of home and car insurances, verbal abuse and even mild physical assault.

Church and the Climate Crisis

So, what of the wider church in the face of climate catastrophe? Despite the significant decline of the UK church, 27.5 million people still described themselves as Christian in the England and Wales Census 2021.⁴ The Church remains a major property and land owner, controls significant investments, while the CofE – rightly or wrongly – has a formalised place within our systems of Government. Just from the perspective of the assets and immediate contacts available to it, the Church has an enormous role to play in affecting perception and behaviour in relation to the climate crisis. But of course, as witnesses to God’s Gospel on Earth, our role is even more important.

The values that have nurtured the climate crisis are those to which you would expect the church to be diametrically opposed: over-prioritisation of the economy, including the dual

myths that economic health is the source of wellbeing and that economic growth can and should continue forever, rapacious consumerism that the world's resources simply can't sustain and greedy, self-serving profiteering. In pursuit of these goals, we colonise and exploit the resources of other countries, leaving them impoverished. By reason of geography, those same states are among those facing the earliest severe impacts of climate change. All of this is perpetuated by vastly wealthy corporations who brainwash us with advertising, green-wash their operations and buy influence with governments thereby remaining unaccountable for the destruction they wreak.

I spent much of last year employed by *Just Stop Oil*, an activist group calling on Government to stop licencing new fossil fuel exploration and production projects. My role was to try to connect churches with that campaign, by means a talk called *Our Christian Responsibilities at this Time*. Led by Christians, the talk outlined the scale and urgency of the climate crisis, explained the aims of the campaign, and called the audience to *consider* becoming involved. Working through a list of 500 ministers who had signed an open letter to Government, criticising their climate strategy, and a list of churches with eco-awards, I spent each day ringing round asking churches to host the talk. 257 calls resulted in 75 direct conversations with vicars, ministers, priests, CofE diocesan environmental leads, and eco-church group leaders. 9 ultimately agreed to host a talk. From the rest I encountered the following barriers:

- they were too overwhelmed by their existing programme of activities to take on any more commitments;
- they believed their congregation was unlikely to act, either by reason of age or political persuasion;
- they believed doing eco-church was a sufficient response;
- they perceived direct action as negative, believing that it was the church's role to convey hope;

- they believed that breaking the law was wrong, so they wouldn't consider hearing from a group involved in arrestable actions;
- unclear – after asking me to email more details, they never responded again.

Just Stop Oil is a controversial brand, so perhaps I had an uphill task. But the Church has other ways of responding meaningfully to the climate crisis, for example by withdrawing investment from fossil fuel companies. At national level most non-conformist denominations have done this, but the CofE and Catholic Church remain divided on this: some dioceses and archdioceses have divested, some haven't. The CofE Church Commissioners have millions of pounds of pension funds invested, arguing that holding shares in fossil fuel companies gives the CofE an opportunity to influence their corporate behaviour.

Many Christians within CCA find their churches/church leadership disengaged and disinterested in the climate crisis. Ministers in CCA speak of trying to drag an unwilling congregation along with them and difficulty of engaging their ministerial colleagues on climate issues. Faced with an existential threat, institutionalised social injustice, profound greed and environmental destruction, the Church response is inconsistent and/or wavering. It pleads that it is too busy, or too old, or too law abiding for radical action, contenting itself with eco-church initiatives, appointing eco-champions, signing letters and petitions and Sunday prayers about the climate.

Why is the Church's response – dare I say the URC's response – to the climate so anodyne, so measured and – above all – so compliant with the status quo? Writing letters telling Government you don't think they are doing enough, or signing multiple petitions, doesn't mean you're not compliant. I would go further: you can do this and still be *complicit* in some truly dreadful acts of state.

We have the awesome privilege and terrible responsibility of living in one of the most crucial points in human history and what we desperately need at this time is for the Church to reconnect with its ultimate mission: living and proclaiming the transformatory love of God in a broken world. Why we are failing to do this? I think there are three reasons.

Firstly, I believe we have lost a clear understanding of our identity in the world. The Early Church knew themselves to be “aliens and strangers” as the Apostle Peter puts it in his first epistle. Becoming a Christian then meant entering into something so out of step with society that converts had to accept the real prospect of imminent death. Just being a Christian was an affront to a state centred around violent military conquest and worship of the emperor.

By contrast, both the established and the non-conformist wings of the UK church have lived in a democracy for some time and we have been well-schooled in the teaching of Romans 13:1 – 5, 1 Peter 2:13 – 15 and Titus 3:1 – 2 which instruct us to submit to, and pray for, the authorities because they are established by God. The effect seems to have been that we now view anything that seriously challenges the authorities as wrong, undemocratic or extreme. But even in democracy Christians should surely still find themselves to be “strangers and aliens”? Democracy isn’t the Kingdom of God – it’s perfectly capable of corruption that leads to a civilised tyranny. Neither is protest undemocratic – it’s essential to democracy. When voices and opinions that should be heard are lost, protest provides a channel of last resort by which they may be heard. We should be worried when nonviolent protest starts being characterised as undemocratic or anti-social. It can be those things but, fundamentally, what it should be is a checks and balance mechanism that keeps society and its governance healthy.

I wonder if having lost our identity and becoming too comfortable in the state system might have led us to put

disproportionate emphasis on the civil obedience demanded by Romans 13 *et al* whilst also ignoring the small but significant phrase included in Romans: “For the one in authority is your servant for your good.” A social contract is in view here, one in which the state acts for our good and we obey it. But what if the state seems hell bent on pursuing policies that are effectively genocidal and that risk the very future of life on God’s planet?

At its best, the Church has understood that Christian obedience to the authorities legitimately stops when state law contradicts God’s moral law, as made explicit in the Acts of the Apostles Chapter 5 when High Priest forbids the apostles to preach in the name of Jesus and Peter responds: “We must obey God rather than men.” The co-option of the church by the state under Theodosius and Constantine, and later under Catholicism and Protestantism, inevitably created problems here, hence the rise of non-conformism. But ultimately, this same perspective came to underpin the modern civil rights movements. Henry Thoreau, one of the founders of the modern concept of nonviolent civil disobedience in response to an unjust state, was arrested for refusing to pay his taxes to the state of Massachusetts because of its support for the American-Mexican war and because it condoned slavery. In his *Letter from Birmingham City Jail* (1963), Martin Luther King defended the civil rights movement’s willingness to break some laws on the basis that laws which were degrading to human personality itself (such as the laws on segregation) were out of line with God’s moral law and could therefore be deemed inherently unjust.

I believe losing sight of our Christian identity allows us to be blind to the indirect evils our Government is committing. I say “indirect” because the climate crisis isn’t simply summed up in a law or number of laws that we can clearly define as unjust. In 1960s America it was unlawful for two people of different races to even sit together on the same bus. That law could be

directly challenged and was by the Freedom Riders who sat, black and white together, on interstate buses travelling into the most viciously racist states in America. The personal price they paid was huge – assault to the point of hospitalisation and imprisonment – but their bravery secured the repeal of that law. But for us, the climate crisis isn't defined in specific laws in quite that way and “lawbreaking” feels more complex and even unthinkable.

In reality, the concept of “lawbreaking” has some flexibility. Being arrested is not synonymous with guilt. Arrested climate activists are not always charged and, when charged, are not always found guilty. There is the protection afforded by the rights to freedom of assembly and of expression enshrined in the Human Rights Act which, depending on the facts of the case, may legitimately take precedence over the rights of others to go about their lawful pursuits. Some laws are, therefore, discretionary and need weighing by a judge or jury. In February, I was convicted with four other protesters of Wilful Obstruction of the Highway. We were only half of the team who were involved in that action. Our fellow protesters were tried two weeks later by a different judge and found innocent. Exactly the same action, but two different determinations in law. A more extreme – and sobering – example of the fluidity of state law is found in Bertrand Russell's essay *Civil Disobedience and the Threat of Nuclear War*:

“In the Nuremberg trials war criminals were condemned for obeying the orders of the state, though their condemnation was only possible after the state in question had suffered military defeat. But it is noteworthy that the powers which defeated Germany all agreed that failure to practise civil disobedience may deserve punishment.”⁵

In the context of a democracy that is failing (as I believe ours is) and where the state is facilitating great and irreparable evil, engaging in nonviolent protest, even if it breaks laws that

in and of themselves are not unreasonable or unjust, may be the only way to register effective and meaningful dissent. Depending on the spirit in which this is done, I believe that, while such action may not comply with the authorities in the strictest sense of obeying the letter of the law, it may be possible to do this and still be in submission to the authorities in the sense intended by Romans 13 *et al*, because what is actually aimed at is still Government's highest good. Such protest is actually appealing to authority to facilitate change for the good of its citizens at a level at which only authority can – there is only so much we can do about the climate crisis as individuals. One's true submission to the authority is further demonstrated by acceptance of any penalty imposed by the state for that civil disobedience.

Such a situation is not ideal or clear cut and you may accuse me of "situational ethics". But real life is grey and true spirituality, as the Gospels illustrate repeatedly, is not slavish obedience to a book of rules, but constantly grappling with what the spirit, not just the letter, of the law requires of us. We may face situations where there are no good options. In 2022, catholic theologian Dr Carmody Grey was giving a talk entitled *The Ethical Basis for Civil Resistance* at St George's Church, Bloomsbury and was asked this question by a member of the audience: "I am due in court soon as a result of civil resistance. Am I guilty?" She responded as follows:

"It's extremely apparent that, while on the one hand, law and the institutions which express and enforce it are necessary for our life (I do believe that and I'm not an anarchist), and while social order is a condition of our flourishing (we know that from seeing societies with no social order with no law in them and no law enforcement), while they are goods, they are not absolute goods. They express or represent certain values and when those values are wrong it becomes obligatory to resist the laws and their enforcement and a large part

of what I would think of as ethics, is about knowing how to discern when that is the case and there are loads of grey areas...However, there are also many instances in recent history that we can all think of...when, as we look back, we can see that it was absolutely clear that to cooperate with a given form of social order and a given form of political order and a given form of legal order was an absolute betrayal of humanity itself and that when that becomes the case, we break the law in order not to be guilty.”

Asked about the harm that civil disobedience can cause to others, Dr Grey referenced Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor who opposed the Nazi regime and was ultimately hung after being implicated in a plot to assassinate Hitler:

“Bonhoeffer was one of the Germans who noticed that the social and political order of his time was representing an objective evil and that to cooperate with it was to cooperate with evil. He noticed, at some point, he would have to become guilty by the standards of that order in order to represent real humanity and he did. And although in one limited sense that represented real guilt, in another sense it was the only form of innocence available: non-compliance...But he also went a step further...by noticing that it wasn't enough to just refuse to comply, he had to take – in his view – an action which made him in some sense even more guilty because it was not just passively suffering by refusing to comply, it was actively obstructing and in some sense directly causing suffering...⁶

The second reason I believe that the Church's response to the climate crisis is so anodyne is, perhaps, more serious than the first. If our challenge to the state over its contribution to the climate crisis isn't characterised by risk or sacrifice then, perhaps, we have to ask ourselves a painful question: are we sufficiently loving? Because love is characterised by both of

those things (while, at the same time, without love both risk and sacrifice become valueless).

1 Corinthians 13, verses 1 – 7.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

And the all-important verse 13:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.⁷

The Church doesn't just need to have faith in the redemptive purposes of God as we head further into the climate crisis, it needs to act in love. It shouldn't focus on dispensing hope to the exclusion of everything else – especially unwarranted hope – it needs to act in love. Consider Jesus, the embodiment of love. Was he passive, inoffensive, measured, compliant? Did he relate to authority in a way that was safe? On the contrary, Jesus was the most revolutionary force to have ever lived, a person whose love so effectively challenged the values and societal and religious structures of his day that the authorities had to assassinate him. He deliberately healed people on the Sabbath when he could have done it any time, turned over the tables in the temple, touched lepers and mixed with “sinners”.

Scripture is littered with examples of love-inspired, life-risking law-breaking: the midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh's command to kill Israelite baby boys in Exodus 1, Esther

breaking the law by going to see King Xerxes without being summoned by him in order to plead for her people, Daniel's openly praying to the God he loved, when only the worship of King Darius was allowed, the believers in Acts who abetted Paul's escape from prison by lowering him over a wall.

In our current situation, Government's response to climate change is a dereliction of its duty to protect its citizens. Its own Climate Change Strategy has been ruled unlawful, it has a policy to licence over one hundred new fossil fuel exploration and extraction projects and it massively subsidises major oil companies who make enormous profits. Government policy is killing people as surely as if they had put a bullet through their heads. And there is no limit to the damage their policies will cause in the future. Lots of Christians express concern about climate change, but as I quoted from Sue Hampton earlier: "...what love requires of me is living it – which is not at all the same as taking it seriously." How can we be loving and remain so passive when such danger faces so many and when the future of our own children is at stake?

A Radical Response to the Climate Crisis

I believe a radical, Spirit-led response to the climate crisis by the Church should start with deep, church-wide repentance for having failed to understand who we are in Christ: aliens and strangers in this world. We have allowed our thinking and values to be shaped by society around us when we should be influencing society. We need to think seriously about what Christ says about the uselessness of salt that has lost its saltiness.

Part of that repentance, perhaps public repentance, must be for having adopted attitudes regarding lifestyle, money and consumption that have led us to being effectively complicit with state-led genocide. Our lifestyles harm other people and other nations. God forgive us, we are sacrificing the futures of our own children on the altars of our three gods: Prosperity, Comfort and Anything-for-a-quiet-life.

As a Church together in prayer, we urgently need to seek God to fill our hearts with sacrificial love and to be given an attitude of resistance to what is happening. We need inner transformation. Such repentance and transformation should lead us to candid and public opposition to Government inaction on climate crisis and the corporations that continue to profit from it.

Our opposition should include developing, or supporting, communities of resistance because some of us will be called to nonviolent civil disobedience. We should recognise this calling within the Church, not criticise those who walk this path. We should accommodate them by praying for actions, practically helping those who are fined or imprisoned and by offering pastoral support to those in action and their families. We should provide safe houses during actions and places activists can stay overnight during trials.

Don't doubt that for doing all of this, we will be ridiculed, vilified and maybe prosecuted.

We need to become much tighter church communities, not simply meeting politely, but becoming intimately practically and financially involved, helping each other to simplify our lifestyles and reduce our consumption. This will involve complete paradigm shifts in our thinking about how we view possessions and the sharing of our resources and how we invest our money.

We need to think about how to assist those already experiencing loss from the climate crisis abroad, how to support increasing numbers of desperate migrants who come here to us for help and how to resist the already pernicious Government policy of demonising them.

And we need to start preparing for difficult times. How we can help each other and the community around us, to relearn skills that will help us maximise what will become scarcer available resources and how can we provide practical support,

comfort and refuge in a world that becomes increasingly chaotic?

Maybe, when we have given and loved sacrificially, when we have put the community and God's world before ourselves, we will have the right to tell others of the love that God has put in our hearts and how, through Christ, He has set us free to live as strangers and aliens in this world, confident that – whatever happens – there is a better one to come.

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18.

El Bosque Atlántico en Misiones

Relato de la Cultura mbya Sobre el Cuidado de la Creació

Mariana Malgay

La Tierra sin Mal

La provincia de Misiones se encuentra en el noreste de Argentina, cerca de la frontera con Brasil y Paraguay. Es una de las provincias más pequeñas en términos de superficie, pero es una de las más densamente pobladas. En esta triple frontera se entremezclan culturas, identidades y lenguas, de origen nativo, guaraní, polaco, alemán e italiano.

Misiones es conocida, entre otros motivos, por lo que queda vivo de su exuberante Selva Paranaense o Bosque Atlántico, que forma parte de la región del Gran Chaco y es el hogar de numerosas especies de animales y plantas. Además, por las famosas Cataratas del Iguazú, una impresionante cascada de agua que es considerada una de las Siete Maravillas Naturales del Mundo.

El Bosque Atlántico esconde en su espesura una sorprendente biodiversidad, que se despliega en la costa oriental de Brasil y penetra tierra adentro hacia Argentina y Paraguay. Son más de ciento cuarenta y ocho millones de personas las que se nutren y dependen, tanto social como económicamente, de los servicios que brinda el Bosque

Atlántico, como la provisión de agua, energía y protección del suelo. Este tesoro natural, además, es hogar de una gran variedad de vida, que comprende el siete por ciento de las especies de plantas y el cinco por ciento de las especies de animales vertebrados del mundo. Muchas de estas especies son endémicas, lo que significa que no existen en ninguna otra parte del planeta, lo que lo hace aún más valioso y digno de proteger.

La historia cuenta que los pueblos guaraníes, originarios de esta región, creían en un dios llamado Tupá, quien habría creado una tierra perfecta para los seres humanos, donde no había dolor, sufrimiento ni enfermedades. Sin embargo, los humanos, alejándose de los mandatos divinos, perdieron el acceso a esa tierra perfecta y cayeron en un mundo de dolor y sufrimiento.

A pesar de ello, los y las guaraníes siguieron creyendo en la existencia de una “Tierra sin Mal”, un lugar sagrado donde los seres humanos podían vivir en armonía con la naturaleza y alcanzar la perfección. Y fue en la provincia de Misiones donde encontraron la tierra más cercana a ese ideal. La belleza natural y la biodiversidad de la región eran tan extraordinarias que la identificaron como una extensión de la “Tierra sin Mal”.

Hay una cruda realidad. La pérdida de biodiversidad, la deforestación desmedida y la expansión de la frontera agropecuaria en Misiones plantean un fuerte contraste con la imagen del paraíso terrenal que se asocia con esta región. La pobreza afecta a más de la mitad de la población en la provincia, arrojando una sombra oscura sobre el escenario. Así, la necesidad de proteger y conservar la selva paranaense, no solo como un patrimonio natural, sino también como un sustento para las comunidades locales, se vuelve imperante. Solo así se podrá preservar la riqueza biológica y cultural de esta tierra, y construir un futuro sostenible.

Los saberes ancestrales de los pueblos originarios pueden aportar mucho a la protección de la casa común, entendida

como la Tierra y su ecosistema. Estos pueblos han desarrollado conocimientos y prácticas a lo largo de siglos de interacción con la naturaleza, y conservan una cosmovisión de armonía entre los seres de la que cristianos y cristianas tenemos mucho para aprender.

El Monte como Aula, es Vida y Alegría

Santo es docente auxiliar indígena hace más de diez años. Trabaja en la escuela intercultural Takuapí, donde habita la comunidad indígena homónima, unas cuarenta familias mbya, en las afueras de Ruiz de Montoya, un pueblo agrícola y forestal, a unos ciento cuarenta kilómetros al norte de la ciudad capital de la provincia, Posadas.

En Misiones, más de trece mil personas se reconocen como pertenecientes a pueblos indígenas, según datos oficiales de 2010. De ellos, casi siete mil cuatrocientos se identifican como mbya-guaraní, pertenecientes al tronco lingüístico tupí-guaraní. La antropóloga Morita Carrasco precisa que hace más de cinco siglos, estos pueblos se asentaron a lo largo de los ríos Amazonas, Paraná y Paraguay, en lo que hoy son los estados de Brasil, Paraguay, Argentina y algunas zonas de Uruguay. Ellos y ellas tuvieron los primeros contactos con los conquistadores españoles durante el siglo XVI, mientras que la Compañía de Jesús comenzó la conquista religiosa de este pueblo en misiones y reducciones en la República del Paraguay, el sur de Brasil y las provincias de Corrientes y Misiones. Sin embargo, la expulsión de los jesuitas en 1767 provocó la dispersión de los mbya por la selva.

“Santo, es un santo. Como su nombre lo indica”. Así lo describe la directora de la escuela, Alicia Novosat. Recientemente participó de la creación de un manual bilingüe para enseñar el alfabeto junto a la docente Karina Schmidt y el docente indígena Mario Acosta. Cuando relata lo que sintió al

ver su nombre en la tapa del material educativo, sonrío y casi no encuentra palabras. “Es una satisfacción para nosotros, para trabajar mejor con los chiquitos”.

Santo piensa en el monte y explica lo que significa para la cultura mbya de un modo elocuente. “El monte para nosotros es una vida. No solamente la vida humana, sino que a los animales, a los pajaritos. Y es una alegría. Sin monte no podemos vivir. Yo siempre guardo esa frase que me decía mi abuelo, desde los doce años: ‘el monte es una vida’”.

Santo piensa en el futuro como vive el presente: con esperanza en los niños y las niñas. “Hoy, como docente, estoy tratando de enseñar esas cosas a los chicos para que ellos también sepan cómo cuidar lo que hay en el mundo.”

Habla con voz serena y llena de sabiduría ancestral. “El árbol tiene su Dios. Cada animal tiene su Dios. Por eso nuestro abuelo nos enseña también que si nos vamos al monte tenemos que cuidar y tenemos que ir con cuidado.”, explica: “Si yo agarro el machete y voy, tengo que sacar lo solo lo que necesito, no ir y cortar y cortar, porque al espíritu no le gusta. Hay que pedirle al espíritu: “hoy voy a cortar esta madera porque necesito ocupar de algunas cosas”, cuenta.

Sus ojos brillan con tristeza al hablar de la deforestación y la pérdida de la naturaleza en su tierra. “Lo que a mí me preocupa es que a veces los dueños vienen y desmontan, cortan los árboles y no queda nada.”

Pero su esperanza sigue viva. “Mi deseo es que sigamos con fuerza y sabiduría para que algunos de los chicos de esta comunidad salgan con un ejemplo. Que no se olvide de su cultura, aunque sea por más que sea, salga un profesional de una escuela.”, y reflexiona: “Que luche, haciendo la lucha como que están haciendo ahora los mburuvicha”.¹

Santo, un guardián de la naturaleza y portador de saberes ancestrales, nos recuerda la importancia de cuidar y respetar el equilibrio de la vida en la Tierra. Sus palabras nos invitan a reflexionar sobre nuestra relación con el medio ambiente

y cómo podemos aprender de las culturas originarias para proteger y preservar la casa común que compartimos.

El Agua, Fuente de vida y Espiritualidad

Las gotas de lluvia caen suavemente en la aldea Ko'eju Mirí, una de las dieciséis comunidades indígenas mbya guaraní alcanzadas por el proyecto Tape Porã de la Fundación Hora de Obrar en la provincia de Misiones. Gracias a este proyecto, recientemente se llevó a cabo una mejora en la obra de protección de la vertiente y se instaló el tendido eléctrico.

La consulta previa fue esencial en este proceso. Se trata de un derecho mediante el cual se busca obtener el consentimiento libre, previo e informado de los pueblos originarios en relación a cualquier medida o proyecto que pueda afectar sus territorios, recursos naturales o formas de vida. Es por eso que se realizó un diagnóstico participativo sobre el acceso a los servicios básicos y en base a los resultados se presentó una propuesta a la comunidad para trabajar en conjunto.

“Los indígenas mismos, están trabajando y acompañan al proyecto y eso es importante. Uno tiene un conocimiento y uno lleva la necesidad, una preocupación, se presenta y se hace entre todos juntos el proyecto”. Francisco Medina, integrante de la comunidad, recuerda cómo fue el proceso sentado en el interior de un aula con techos de chapa, donde se escucha el sonido del agua. Sabe muy bien la importancia que tiene respetar este derecho específico de los pueblos originarios: “Pasamos muchas promesas de no indígenas que no se llegan a concretar. A veces aceptamos un proyecto con dudas”.

También sabe que ese agua que hoy llueve y que también brota del suelo es vida y hay que protegerla. “Hoy en día ya no podemos tomar de un arroyito, que viene ni sabemos de dónde. El agua se viene contaminada, se viene con muchas enfermedades. Por eso peleamos por el agua; para que la

familia y la comunidad tengan su propio agua mejor, más sana. Eso es lo que más necesitamos en la comunidad.”

La vertiente se encuentra alejada de las viviendas, a unos ochocientos metros de distancia. Durante años, las mujeres de la comunidad caminaban cotidianamente hasta allí en busca de agua para satisfacer sus necesidades más básicas: beber, lavar la ropa o limpiar los alimentos. Con baldes llenos de agua en las manos, en ocasiones, debían hacer el recorrido varias veces al día.

Pero la vida de la comunidad cambió con la obra de agua y luz. Sandra Benítez, una de las integrantes de la comunidad, sonríe al recordar los días de antes y celebra la mejora para la vida cotidiana de las mujeres. Ahora puede usar las piletas cercanas a su hogar y no tener que recorrer tantos metros para abastecerse de agua. “Las mujeres en la comunidad están más felices. Yo veía que alguien pasaba con un balde y yo automáticamente agarraba y me iba porque teníamos la costumbre de ir todos juntos a buscar el agua. Por lo que veo están bien, felices, contentas, de tenerla en casa.”

Recuerda también cómo era su propia vida antes: “Iba muchas veces a buscar agua. Cómo mi marido trabaja y viene al mediodía se me dificultaba muchísimo. Hoy, tener en casa la verdad me facilita mucho.”, celebra: “Mi vida me mejoró”.

Sandra sueña ahora con un espacio comunitario donde las mujeres puedan cocinar juntas y compartir tiempo con sus hijos. “No sé por qué tengo eso de querer siempre juntarnos entre mujeres y tener un lugar para cocinar todos juntos y estar con los chicos. No sé por qué tengo ese pensamiento de querer tener eso”, expresa con nostalgia y esperanza en su voz.

***Acerca de la Fundación Protestante Hora de Obrar**

Hora de Obrar trabaja para el desarrollo social y ambiental en Argentina, Uruguay y Paraguay. Es una iniciativa de la Iglesia Evangélica del Río de la Plata, inspirada en un compromiso de fe por un mundo más justo, equitativo y solidario. Por eso, desde 2014 desarrolla y acompaña proyectos sociales y ambientales, para promover y defender los derechos de las personas en situación de mayor vulnerabilidad y preservar el ambiente para las generaciones futuras. Hora de Obrar trabaja a partir de 5 ejes temáticos: desarrollo comunitario, justicia climática, pueblos originarios, justicia de género y fortalecimiento diacónico.

Más información en www.horadeobrar.org.ar

English Translation

The Atlantic Forest in Misiones: a Tale of the Mbya Culture about the Care of Creation

The Land without Evil

The province of Misiones is located in northeastern Argentina, near the border with Brazil and Paraguay. It is one of the smallest provinces in terms of area, but one of the most densely populated. In this triple border, native, Guarani, Polish, German, and Italian cultures, identities, and languages intertwine.

Misiones is known, among other reasons, for what remains

alive of its lush Selva Paranaense or Atlantic Forest, which is part of the Gran Chaco region and is home to numerous species of animals and plants. Additionally, it is famous for the Iguazu Falls, an impressive waterfall that is considered one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

The Atlantic Forest hides within its thickness a surprising biodiversity, which unfolds on the eastern coast of Brazil and penetrates inland towards Argentina and Paraguay. More than 148 million people are nourished and dependent, both socially and economically, on the services provided by the Atlantic Forest, such as the provision of water, energy, and soil protection. This natural treasure is also home to a great variety of life, which includes seven percent of the world's plant species and five percent of vertebrate animal species. Many of these species are endemic, which means that they do not exist anywhere else on the planet, making it even more valuable and worthy of protection.

The story goes that the Guarani peoples, native to this region, believed in a god named Tupá, who had created a perfect land for human beings, where there was no pain, suffering, or disease. However, humans, by straying from divine mandates, lost access to that perfect land and fell into a world of pain and suffering.

Despite this, the Guarani people continued to believe in the existence of a "Land without Evil," a sacred place where human beings could live in harmony with nature and achieve perfection. And it was in the province of Misiones where they found the closest land to that ideal. The natural beauty and biodiversity of the region were so extraordinary that they identified it as an extension of the "Land without Evil."

There is a harsh reality, though. The loss of biodiversity, excessive deforestation, and expansion of the agricultural frontier in Misiones pose a stark contrast to the image of an earthly paradise associated with this region. Poverty affects more than half of the population in the province, casting a dark

shadow over the scene. Thus, the need to protect and conserve the Selva Paranaense, not only as a natural heritage but also as a livelihood for local communities, becomes imperative. Only in this way can the biological and cultural richness of this land be preserved, and a sustainable future be built.

Their ancestral knowledge can contribute greatly to the protection of the common home, understood as the Earth and its ecosystem. These indigenous peoples have developed knowledge and practices over centuries of interaction with nature, and they maintain a worldview of harmony among beings from which Christians have much to learn.

The Forest as a Classroom is Life and Joy

Santo has been an indigenous assistant teacher for more than ten years. He works at the Takuapí intercultural school, where the homonymous indigenous community lives, composed of about forty Mbya families on the outskirts of Ruiz de Montoya, an agricultural and forest town about one hundred and forty kilometers north of the provincial capital city, Posadas.

In Misiones, more than thirteen thousand people identify themselves as belonging to indigenous peoples, according to official data from 2010. Of these, almost seven thousand four hundred identify themselves as Mbya-Guarani, belonging to the Tupi-Guarani linguistic trunk. Anthropologist Morita Carrasco explains that more than five centuries ago, these peoples settled along the Amazon, Paraná, and Paraguay rivers, in what are now the states of Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and some areas of Uruguay. They had their first contacts with Spanish conquerors during the 16th century, while the Society of Jesus began the religious conquest of this people in missions and reductions in the Republic of Paraguay, southern Brazil, and the provinces of Corrientes and Misiones. However, the

expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 caused the dispersal of the Mbya throughout the jungle.

“Santo is a saint. As his name indicates,” says the school’s director, Alicia Novosat. He recently participated in the creation of a bilingual manual to teach the alphabet together with the teacher Karina Schmidt and the indigenous teacher Mario Acosta. When she describes what she felt upon seeing his name on the cover of the educational material, she smiles and can hardly find words. “It’s a satisfaction for us to work better with the kids.”

Santo thinks of the forest and explains what it means for Mbya culture in an eloquent way. “The forest for us is life. Not only human life, but also for the animals, for the birds. And it is joy. We cannot live without the forest. I always remember the phrase my grandfather told me when I was twelve: ‘the forest is life.’”

Santo thinks of the future as he lives in the present: with hope in the children. “Today, as a teacher, I’m trying to teach these things to the kids so that they also know how to take care of what’s in the world.”

He speaks with a calm voice and full of ancestral wisdom. “The tree has its God. Every animal has its God. That’s why our grandfather also teaches us that if we go to the forest, we have to take care and be careful,” he explains. “If I take the machete and go, I have to take only what I need, not go and cut and cut, because the spirit doesn’t like it. We have to ask the spirit: ‘today I’m going to cut this wood because I need it for some things’,” he says.

His eyes shine with sadness as he talks about deforestation and the loss of nature in his land. “What worries me is that sometimes owners come and deforest, cut down trees, and nothing is left.”

But his hope is still alive. “My wish is that we continue with strength and wisdom so that some of the kids in this community set an example. That they don’t forget their culture,

even if one of them becomes a professional from a school,” he reflects. “That they fight, doing the fight like the mburuvicha¹ are doing now.”

Santo, a guardian of nature and bearer of ancestral knowledge, reminds us of the importance of caring for and respecting the balance of life on Earth. His words invite us to reflect on our relationship with the environment and how we can learn from indigenous cultures to protect and preserve the common home we share.

Water, Source of Life and Spirituality

Raindrops fall gently on the Ko'eju Mirí village, one of the sixteen indigenous Mbya Guaraní communities reached by the Tape Porã project of the Hora de Obrar Foundation in the province of Misiones. Thanks to this project, a recent improvement in the spring protection work was carried out and the electrical wiring was installed.

The prior consultation was essential in this process. It is a right that seeks to obtain the free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous peoples regarding any measure or project that may affect their territories, natural resources, or ways of life. That is why a participatory diagnosis was carried out on access to basic services, and based on the results, a proposal was presented to the community to work together.

“The indigenous people themselves are working and supporting the project, and that is important. One has knowledge and brings the need, concern, and together we develop the project.” Francisco Medina, a community member, recalls the process while sitting inside a classroom with corrugated metal roofs, where the sound of water can be heard. He knows very well the importance of respecting this specific right of indigenous peoples: “We have experienced

many promises from non-indigenous people that have not been fulfilled. Sometimes, we accept a project with doubts.”

He also knows that the water that rains today and also springs from the ground is life, and it must be protected. “Today we can no longer take water from a stream that comes from who knows where. The water is contaminated, and it brings many diseases. That is why we fight for water; so that families and the community have their own better, healthier water. That is what we need most in the community.”

The spring is located away from the houses, about eight hundred meters away. For years, women in the community walked daily to the spring to get water to meet their basic needs: drinking, washing clothes, or cleaning food. With buckets full of water in their hands, they sometimes had to make the journey several times a day.

But the life of the community changed with the water and electricity works. Sandra Benitez, one of the community members, smiles when she remembers the days before and celebrates the improvement for the daily life of women. Now she can use the nearby fountains close to her home and not have to travel so many meters to get water. “Women in the community are happier. I used to see someone passing by with a bucket, and I automatically grabbed one and left because we had the habit of going together to fetch water. From what I see, they are doing well, happy, content, to have it at home.”

She also remembers what her life was like before: “I used to go many times to get water. It was very difficult for me since my husband works and comes at noon. Today, having it at home really helps me,” she celebrates. “My life has improved.”

Sandra now dreams of a community space where women can cook together and share time with their children. “I don’t know why I always have this thought of wanting to gather among women and have a place to cook together and be with the kids. I don’t know why I have that thought of wanting to have that,” she expresses with nostalgia and hope in her voice.

*About the Hora de Obrar Protestant Foundation

Hora de Obrar works for social and environmental development in Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. It is an initiative of the Evangelical Church of the Río de la Plata, inspired by a commitment of faith for a fairer, more equitable, and supportive world. Therefore, since 2014, it has developed and supported social and environmental projects to promote and defend the rights of people in situations of greater vulnerability and to preserve the environment for future generations. Hora de Obrar works based on 5 thematic areas: community development, climate justice, indigenous peoples, gender justice, and diaconal strengthening.

More information at www.horadeobrar.org.ar.

1. “El mburuvichá (comúnmente llamado cacique) (...) es su líder político. Son jefes de familias extensas y al ser hereditarios son prácticamente representantes de linajes. Ellos se encargan de las actividades que hacen a la vida material y al bienestar de los miembros de la aldea y sobre todo mantienen la relación con los no aborígenes.” Morita Carrasco en *Para una justicia con enfoque intercultural en Misiones*.

1. “The mburuvichá (commonly known as cacique) (...) is their political leader. They are heads of extended families and, being hereditary, they are practically representatives of lineages. They are responsible for activities that contribute to the material life and well-being of the members of the village, and above all, they maintain the relationship with non-aboriginals.” Free translation: Morita Carrasco in “Towards intercultural justice in Misiones.”

19.

The Sleeping Cobra

Nicolás Rosenthal

Is the world in civilizational crisis something new? No, we have been warned about it for 50 years. But it was not only the Club of Rome or the Stockholm Conference that warned about the “limits” of development. There were those who warned of a much deeper crisis, of a reversal of the values that had accompanied us until then, that we were crossing “critical thresholds”, points of no return. I am referring to the radical thinker and writer Ivan Illich, criticizing the capitalist and communist systems alike for their industrial instrumentation that made human beings slaves to their tools, and proposing instead a new conviviality.

Fifty years later, we find ourselves here analysing our contextual reality, the situation around us: a pandemic, a war, inflation, tremendous inequalities and a climate change that makes vast portions of the planet uninhabitable. That is what is evident, what we see on the surface.

But as any elementary school child knows, the earth is flat, we are on a plate. What’s underneath it?

The answer is obvious: elephants!!! The world rests on several elephants! Do you know what these elephants are called? Let me introduce them to you:

- The international financial system, born in Breton Woods.
- The military/industrial complex
- The chemical/pharmaceutical industry
- The drug trafficking and the war on drugs

- The extractive industries: minerals, fossil fuels, grains (water too?)
- The use of fossil fuels + environmental pollution

– The international financial system, born in Breton Woods: a system of eternal debt, at the level of people, at the level of companies, at the level of countries, with a series of very astute players who cheat the majority and keep their profit (surplus value). From the days of banana and cotton plantations and sugar mills, to our days of mortgage payments and external debts. The interest system is absolutely arbitrary, for the benefit of a few who rotate on both sides of the counter. The idea is not that debts should be paid; the idea is that they should be eternal and speculators should live off our interests. In fact, the entire U.S. economy is based on the idea of an unpayable debt.

– The military/industrial complex: Eisenhower already denounced it at the end of his presidential term in 1961. And it has not stopped growing, both legal and illegal, which is intimately linked. The number of weapons in the world, both personal and weapons of mass destruction, exponentially exceeds the supposed need for them. It is a totally unbridled apparatus, which creates its own needs, its own artificial conflicts, be they military conflicts or wars against drugs, to use its products and make it necessary to expand its production, which we all pay for through our taxes.

– The chemical/pharmaceutical industry: 50 years ago, Ivan Illich, in his book *Medical Nemesis*, already denounced how the pharmaceutical industry, a deified medical profession and a culture of painkillers had distorted the concept of health, surpassing a critical threshold which, rather than protecting people, attacked them, disempowered them and even made them sick. This has not improved, as we could even see in the recent pandemic and the inequitable access to vaccines. But today, not only personal health is being bombarded by tons of painkillers and overprescription drugs, but also the

environment in general, the food we eat and the water we drink, due to the overabundance of agrochemicals that the pharmaceutical industry itself produces, with dire consequences on human health.

– Drug trafficking and the war on drugs: the war on drugs is another human construct that has passed a critical threshold, producing more victims than consumption itself. As during Prohibition in the United States, illegality only makes the business flourish, establishing monopolies, fixing prices, encouraging illegal financial circuits and strengthening corruption. The growing experiences of legalization of certain drugs with state control have been much more effective and allow social support for those suffering from addiction, as was already happening with other legal drugs such as tobacco, alcohol and even medicines.

– Extractive industries: is it necessary to describe them? I believe that most people are aware of the high polluting effects of most mining extractions, which also use large quantities of drinking water and poison their environment. Perhaps fewer know that most of these exploitations leave little profit to the populations where they are located or even to the countries that host them, being exported both the minerals and the profits they generate, due to an intricate but oiled system of corruption and lobbying that obtains the permits, with a strong press apparatus that promises jobs and local development that rarely is such.

Fossil fuels, which we will also discuss in the next point, generate somewhat more development, but rarely do their profits actually return in the form of benefits for the population of the country that extracts them, concentrating instead in a few hands, in addition to also consuming huge amounts of water, as in fracking.

The production of grains, generally transgenic, destined especially to feed overcrowded and flue prone pigs in Europe and China, requires enormous quantities of carcinogenic

agrochemicals that contaminate even the water table, raising cancer and autism rates in the surrounding areas several times above the average, in addition to leading to deforestation, due to the constant expansion of the agricultural frontier. They are also a source of corruption and smuggling circles, as well as currency leakage, to hide profits.

And finally we see increasing private competition for pure water sources.

– Fossil fuel use + environmental pollution: at this point in the soirée, the contribution of fossil fuel use to the greenhouse effect is undeniable. But instead of curbing their use, their exploitation is increasing, with the help of a colossal lobby, now reinforced by the excuse of the conflict with Russia and the need to generate “energy independence”. But it is not only the negative effect of the burning of these fuels, but also the frequent ecological disasters generated by their extraction or maritime transport, or the terrible human rights violations that energy companies promote, such as the appropriation of indigenous ancestral territories or the murder of environmental activists in various parts of the world.

Added to this is industrial pollution in general, which is poorly controlled or slowed down due to the effects of the strong lobby that seeks not to reduce profits.

These six elephants, and surely several more that readers can add, are characterized by having crossed what we have already mentioned before and that Ivan Illich called “critical thresholds”: their development has passed a point of no return in which the initial positive effects have been overcome by the subsequent negative effects and they no longer fulfill the social function for which they were created, but only serve to maximize profits in a suicidal way for a few.

Now, do those six elephants float in space? Obviously not! As any pub regular knows, all those elephants are standing on a big tortoise!

That tortoise is patriarchy, a form of exploitation not only of

one gender over others, but also of a small group of people over a large majority. It is a brutal, cruel, greedy, and absolutely destructive patriarchy. In the global South we live this patriarchy and the six elephants it sustains as colonialism, or neocolonialism, even in this 21st century. But the North also suffers from it, has been taken hostage by patriarchy and experiences a gigantic Stockholm syndrome.

But as every good Hindu knows, not everything ends with the tortoise. She is resting on a giant sleeping cobra.

And who is this great cobra? All of us! The 8 billion inhabitants of the planet. All these systems and devices work because they ride on us, because we feed them, something like the Matrix of the movie. They can function because they have colonized our consciences, as the World Alliance of Reformed Churches denounced at its General Assembly in Debrecen in 1997. They have domesticated us, they have accustomed us to an excessive comfort, they exploit us.

It is necessary to wake up the cobra, it is necessary to set it in motion so that it shakes off the tortoise and its elephants. And who can do it? Surely our Christian faith, our prophetic voice, cry out loud, says the Lord my God Jehovah. This is the fast pleasing to the Lord, we find in Isaiah 58, to loosen unjust chains, to untie the bonds of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break all yokes; to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor; to cover him whom you see naked and not to be unconcerned about your own flesh. Love your neighbour as yourself, Jesus says, and he makes it clear that whatever we do to one of his least brothers and sisters, we do to him, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was passing through and you gave me lodging, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me, in prison and you came to see me. A faith that is not put into action is a dead faith, James urges us. A radical community, a reversal of the current system, a revolution.

If we go to the primitive Christian community, which moment in history seems to be more closely related to the present one? For me, that of the catacombs, that of the community of resistance: small, but confident, forceful, risking their lives peacefully. It happened a little less than 2,000 years ago, is that a long time? Do you sometimes wonder why precisely that historical moment to incarnate? And the answer is simple: because the “Jesus event” is now, the advent is happening in our time. Two thousand years are the blink of an eye in the history of homo sapiens on the globe. God did not choose a moment far from all of us, he chose the NOW. Jesus appears in the midst of the Empire, is killed by the Empire and is resurrected in spite of the Empire. The Kairos of revolution in the face of the Empire is now and Jesus accompanies us with his Holy Spirit. Only a revolutionary and resilient grass-roots conviviality and global advocacy will allow us to maintain hope against all hope, a search for the kingdom of justice where life is dignified and abundant for all.

Endnote

You may wonder why I choose to highlight Ivan Illich (1926-2002), author of such books as *Deschooling Society*, *Medical Nemesis* and *Tools for Conviviality*. Well, there is some family pride there, as Ivan was my uncle, second grade, the direct cousin of my mother, who with 86 years still has fond memories of him. As we are approaching his 100th birth anniversary, together with many members of the family we want to highlight his visionary work, always controversial but trying to shake us out of our comfort zone to confront the high risks before us. I strongly recommend to visit or revisit his writings. Thanks!

20.

Climate Justice in South America

Actions for Creation Care in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay

Romario Dohmann & Jorge Weishein

Climate justice is a broad concept that refers to fairness in the distribution of the negative effects of climate change and the responsibility to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. Faith-based organizations and churches have an important role to play in promoting climate justice and taking concrete actions to address this global problem: OK.

As churches we feel a concern for the welfare of the most vulnerable and marginalized in society, and climate justice fits in with this concern: OK.

Our task is to promote climate justice by educating and sensitizing our communities about the effects of climate change among the most vulnerable. We must also advocate for policies and practices that address inequality in the distribution of climate change impacts and encourage reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

As mentioned above, we also generate our own actions, concrete measures to reduce our own institutional carbon footprint, such as implementing sustainable practices in our own operations and buildings or temples. The Foundation has supported communities affected by climate change, providing resources and assistance to mitigate the effects through the programmes “Pastoral Ministry for the Promotion of Creation

Care”, “Grow the Misiones Rainforest” and the preparation of local capacity for “Natural Disaster Risk Management”.

Pastoral Ministry for the Promotion of Creation Care

Churches clearly emphasize their call to proclaim the Gospel to all people equally. However, the understanding of the oral emphasis of the task detracts from the practical importance of diakonia, and the poor understanding of the other creatures of creation as neighbours often hinders this divine mandate. What is the mission to which we are called in the midst of the exploitations of today’s capitalist system? The extractivist system squeezes the soil to the limit. Private property as an absolute right over resources, land, living beings and people has nothing to do with caring for the Earth, which generously gives us life.

Nevertheless, in dialogue with civil society organizations, thoughts have been emerging on the prophetic role of faith communities in the midst of these realities that deepen injustice, exclusion and violence.

Taking into account important antecedents and different experiences of environmental projects with agricultural schools, nurseries, productive transitions, and resistance to polluting energy projects, among many other initiatives, the Evangelical Church of the Río de la Plata (IERP) began 10 years ago to develop a “Pastoral Ministry for the Promotion of Creation Care” (PPCC) through the Protestant Foundation of Diakonia “Hora de Obrar” (Time to Work). The IERP initially proposed a process of reciprocal listening, respectful dialogue and attentive accompaniment of the Districts, Congregations and Communities of the Church. This dialogue took place in relation to the consequences of the productive system in which we

live, the demands of productive practices in rural areas, consumption in urban areas and its effects on human health and the environment. This process led to a slow and active awareness in faith communities of our responsibility to “promote creation care.”

The proposed pastoral initiative is essentially centred on three axes:

The first was to agree on a Church-wide policy of care for creation: this was made possible by the fact that the Church's statutes state that the preservation of the environment is an inherent task of the Church. This led to agreement with the various regions of the Church on a working committee with representatives from each region with a Church-wide mandate. Through various training courses for catechists, two catechetical manuals on the care of creation were developed with them and distributed for catechetical work throughout the Church. On the basis of the dialogues, international consultations with ecumenical eco-theology referents and articulations with various environmental organizations, we developed an online course for faith communities with theological and technical contributions with an emphasis on ongoing transformative practices. The platform of the Ecumenical Network for Theological Education (REET), of which the IERP is a member, adopted creation care and eco-theology as a transversal pedagogical axis. REET, together with PPCC and with the support of various social, environmental, indigenous, producers' and ecumenical organizations, published an Ecotheology Manual, with which they work on the dissemination of creation care. In some districts, ecumenical celebrations are held in relation to environmental situations in order to make them visible and reflect on them from a Christian faith perspective.

The second objective was the promotion of production methods that are friendly and caring for the environment and human health, such as agro-ecological and organic methods.

The development of this objective allowed motivating the families of 31% of the IERP congregations to use different elements of agroecology and that the families of 70% of the ecclesiastical regions of the church participate in the exchange between conventional and agroecological producers. In its development, the PPCC works with 19 state bodies; 12 social, environmental, indigenous, producer and ecumenical organizations; 8 universities; 7 theological training institutions; 7 spaces for citizen participation; 6 FBOs, among other contact spaces in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. In the social networks of the faith communities we recorded that 80% of the participating communities disseminate PPCC activities. The IERP headquarters refurbished its facilities with environmental and energy sustainability criteria.

The third objective was to encourage responsible, conscious consumption and healthy eating. Thanks to this objective, families from 51% of the IERP congregations are in regular contact with small agro-ecological farmers, consume and promote their products and offer the community areas as a marketing area. The interest and commitment of children, adolescents and young people in the consumption of healthy food and the promotion of care for creation in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay is remarkable.

In the three axes, an essential dialogue with other interdisciplinary knowledge and experiences is sought, which will necessarily include various specific theoretical and technical contributions (from the field of environmental and health sciences, agronomy, economics, etc.).

Crece Selva Misionera: Grow the Misiones Rainforest

The church aims to design, encourage and accompany

initiatives that promote sustainability and climate justice because it is a fundamental part of its mission. In recent years it has worked to identify areas of action where it can make a difference through awareness-raising, advocacy and planning projects in partnership with other organizations.

The current situation of the Paraná Jungle or Misiones Rainforest, a source of biodiversity, water and carbon fixers, is really critical: only 7% of its original area remains. While in Paraguay and Brazil it has been practically destroyed, most of the remaining area is in the province of Misiones, Argentina.

One method to reverse the damage caused by deforestation is reforestation, which consists of planting native trees where there are few or none left, taking care of them so that they develop properly and can regenerate a forest. Reforestation in our daily life is an essential operation for the survival of living beings.

It is precisely in this context that the project “Grow the Misiones Rainforest”, designed and implemented by the Hora de Obrar Foundation and supported by Bread for the World, has been created. This project aims to reforest the banks of watercourses and fields in the province of Misiones, Argentina, with native species, as well as to raise awareness of the importance of actions to reduce deforestation and to promote the care of biodiversity.

Through the initiative, we have always sought to coordinate with different non- governmental institutions as well as with the State at different levels in order to make the best of each instance to achieve the actions. As of December 2022 we have planted 179,000 native trees of more than 30 different species. The seedlings were planted with more than 350 producers, as well as with 12 Mbya Guaraní indigenous people communities. In addition to the reforestation, environmental education meetings and workshops are being held with churches, schools, clubs and municipalities, which are the most

frequently used and necessary spaces for dialogue on the care of our common home.

As strategies for public advocacy and involvement and awareness-raising of society in general, since 2021, twice a year massive plantations are carried out where between 3000 and 5000 trees are planted in a single day, organized by the local congregation, with the whole community and environmental organizations.

Risk and Disaster Management

Disasters, both natural and man-made, are increasing worldwide. In our region, too, we are experiencing the presence and impact of floods, forest fires and droughts. This is due to various factors, including climate change. To prepare for these emergencies and help prevent disaster situations, it is important to improve understanding of risks, act on vulnerabilities and increase capacities. The aim is to save lives, reduce damage and build resilience.

For this reason, we provide training and awareness-raising to learn about hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities in our territory and accompany with technical advice on concrete actions to prepare for a disaster, respond effectively or reduce the risks of future disasters in the communities.

The actions consist first of visiting and getting to know the different communities of faith, together with the invited stakeholders. In this instance, a survey of the most frequent climatic catastrophes in the area is carried out. This diagnosis of hazards, vulnerabilities, risks and capacities is carried out with the congregation, together with different actors in society (municipality, fire brigade, police, civil defense, hospital, etc.). In this dialogue, experiences about the impact of climate change are shared. Secondly, work is done on the disaster management cycle: response, rehabilitation, recovery,

preparedness, early-warning and prevention. In this stage, possible intervention strategies are constructed with different civil society actors. In the third stage, risk management addresses risks in a prospective, corrective and reactive manner; in coordinated action and in an integrated process. From the first meetings in the communities, it is clear that the most frequent climate change events in the IERP congregations are: floods, droughts, fires, lack of water, strong winds, etc.

This project provides risk management training to other public institutions such as the technicians of the INYM (National Institute of Yerba Mate) in Misiones. In the summer of 2022, a church-wide campaign was carried out to support volunteer firefighters in Misiones, Argentina, in the face of fires ravaging the jungle and agricultural areas. This campaign succeeded in collecting donations of drinking water, food and even fire fighting equipment and clothing for 10 fire stations.

Conclusion

The IERP is taking up with Hora de Obrar its mission of promoting creation care through education and working together with a wide range of actors. Climate justice is a challenge that its communities have become increasingly aware of. The reality hurts, at times it causes despair, but we proclaim hope in a permanent way.

God calls us as human beings. We have the capacity and the responsibility to protect the planet and all its inhabitants, including future generations. This spirituality offers us a different view of the world than capitalism. We do not see commodities, we see creatures. The motivation and inspiration needed to work together in creation is not the price or value of things but the promise of a more just and sustainable world for all people equally. This is the world we live and work for every day.