

It is no longer possible to make a pilgrimage to Israel by surface travel but, in 1984 Bettina Selby³, then middle-aged, cycled to Jerusalem via the Bernina Pass to Venice. There she joined a ship for Istanbul and from there she crossed into Asia. She then rode along the coast of Turkey visiting Pergamum, Ephesus and Tarsus. Entering Syria she stopped in Aleppo and Damascus before crossing into Jordan where she visited Krak de Chevalier and finally, after much official obstructionism, she crossed the Allenby Bridge to enter Israel. After visiting all of the New Testament sites and some Crusader castles, she finished her four month pilgrimage tour at Acre whence she left Israel by sea.

Today it should be possible to arrive in or depart from Israel via Haifa but it might be necessary to use a cruise ship which would have a somewhat sybaritic on-board lifestyle for a pilgrim and Selby's account suggests that she did not really enjoy her trip from Venice to Istanbul on a Russian cruise liner. In fuel consumption terms, ships are far superior to land or air traffic but they often give rise to a good deal of pollution by sulphur dioxide.

Finally it is important to ask whether a pilgrimage to Israel is either necessary or even desirable. First, these ancient sites have all been modified by centuries of development by different Christian sects and all are subject to the blight of

mass tourism. From 30,000 feet the pilgrim can learn nothing about the lands and peoples over which she is flying which nullifies much of the value of the journey. Seeing is not essential to believing as St. Thomas was told.⁴

Climate change is real and Pope Francis has described how it causes poverty and displacement among the poorest in our world.⁵ While he does not suggest any simple solutions it is a fact that all of us contribute, in some way, to climate change so we need to be careful in our choice of actions. Travel has an impact on our carbon footprints so we need to choose the least polluting modes and, perhaps, we should revive the use of the wartime slogan "Is your journey really necessary?" ■



Alexander Kennedy is a retired NHS Pathologist with a lifelong interest in transport issues; he remains an active cyclist. He is a volunteer for the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and is a member of the Eco-congregation group of St. Andrew's Psalter Lane Church, Sheffield.

References:

1. Climate Stewards climatestewards.org/
2. Airliners.net
3. Selby, Bettina (1985) *Riding to Jerusalem*, Richard Drew, Glasgow.
4. St. John 20: 27-29
5. Pope Francis (2015 Encyclical) *Laudate si' o mi Signore*

To Fly or Not? What Would Jesus Do?

Caroline Pomeroy of Climate Stewards believes offsetting can play a useful role

Alexander Kennedy's article *The Price of Pilgrimage* raises an important question about whether it is ever right for those of us who are concerned about climate change to fly. Are there times or occasions when we can justify flying, or should we stay firmly on the land? And if we do decide to fly, does offsetting "work"?

Recently @climatestewards has been involved in an interesting Twitter conversation over the rights and wrongs of academics flying to environmental conferences. Some climate science academics have formed a group called #flyingless to encourage others to "greatly reduce" flying. Others have challenged this, saying that for junior

academics in particular, face to face contact, and the informal chats around the main conference events, are vital to make progress in their careers. And if climate change research (and the conferences that go with it) means that we understand more about climate change and how to tackle it, surely that is a Good Thing? Others in the conversation have advocated more video conferencing, and driving rather than flying (most of these academics are based in the USA and Canada where public transport doesn't even get mentioned).

Over the years I have had many conversations with people eager to justify their flying – to train medics/ teach

teachers/ spread the gospel/ "save the world" on a gap year /visit relatives /attend weddings or funerals /care for ageing parents /take a well-earned holiday /attend a meeting – the list is endless. Ultimately, of course, the decision is a personal one, and we will all have different "flying threshold". Some will choose not to fly at all, while others will decide differently. I fly rarely, but for various reasons have chosen to fly a handful of times in the last few years.

Climate Stewards' motto is "Reduce what you can; offset the rest". We recognise that people will need or want to fly for a multiplicity of reasons. We support higher taxes on flying, investment in land-based

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Tree Planting by Jean Winter (with artist's permission)

transport, and anything which gives us all pause for thought. But we recognise that we live in a global village and ultimately it is up to each individual to wrestle with his or her own conscience, and God, in choosing whether to fly or not.

And if we do choose to fly, should we offset our carbon emissions? Does offsetting work at all? Can it make any realistic contribution to tackling climate change? Doesn't it cause more harm than good? Would Jesus offset?

Carbon offsetting relies on careful use of data, robust analysis and caution both in calculating the carbon footprint of our lifestyles, and working out how much carbon is mitigated by a project. Carbon calculators, such as the one on the Climate Stewards website, are based on annually-updated emissions factors published by the government for all forms of transport, including vehicle efficiency and average occupancy. For flights, the figure includes an 8% "distance uplift" to

reflect the reality that planes do not always fly on the most direct route. It also includes a CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions factor to reflect influences such as water vapour, contrails and nitrous oxide at high altitude (these effectively increase emissions by 90%).

Climate Stewards, like all reputable voluntary carbon offset organisations, requires that all the projects we support not only mitigate CO₂, but bring local benefits to the communities where they are situated, helping them to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In Uganda, we partner with A Rocha Uganda who construct and train people to use bio-sand water filters. Each filter will save over 10 tonnes of CO₂ emissions from burning charcoal or wood over its life. It will also save people time and money previously spent on buying or collecting fuel to boil water, and bring improvements to health as harmful emissions are reduced. All our projects

are based on careful baseline and monitoring assessments, conservative estimates of carbon savings, and long-term support and monitoring to ensure that communities are well-supported as they adopt new technologies.

Our tree-planting projects in Ghana, Mexico and Uganda are designed to bring community and environmental benefits, including sources of income from forest products, and improvements to soil and biodiversity, as well as sequestering carbon. Projects are required to deliver permanence (through strong community relations and robust, sustainable mechanisms to deliver payments for ecosystem services), additionality (evidence that the trees would not have been planted without the scheme), and no leakage (so people don't cut down trees elsewhere to replace the land used for tree planting). Detailed baseline and monitoring surveys of projects enable accurate calculations of carbon mitigation potential, and are tempered by risk buffers to take account of the vagaries of weather, fire and disease.

Carbon offsetting does not mean that we can appease our guilt and keep on flying; we need to reduce our demand for travel, innovate and switch to renewable sources of energy. But offsetting can be one part of the solution, reducing overall CO₂ levels in the atmosphere, giving us a little more time to breathe as we transition to a clean economy, and helping communities most affected by climate change to adapt. ■



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