

Storm of hope

2020 Holy Resistance, with Green Christian

Strikes and demos for the climate

The past year has seen extraordinary acts of civil disobedience, non-violent direct action (NVDA) and weeks-long peaceful demonstrations highlighting the threats posed by climate change to Creation, and to individual species, habitats, weather patterns, and humanity. Some within Green Christian are in favour of this kind of action; others are not; many are undecided. *Storm of Hope 2020* explores what **Holy Resistance** means for Christians, and how we may respond to the Climate Emergency.

Holy Resistance: more than civil disobedience

The public has woken up to the twin emergencies of climate and extinction, due partly to David Attenborough's *Blue Planet*, and Greta Thunberg's indomitable campaigning – but due also to scientists who can no longer hide either their grief at what is being lost, or their despair at political and social inaction, to activists who have campaigned long and hard for the truth to be told, and to the clear and unequivocal evidence that the world's climate is changing because of human activity, and that the world is being badly damaged by the very creatures who have been given the responsibility and privilege of nurturing God's Creation. The naysayers are quietly decreasing in number, and the 3% of scientific studies which deny human-caused climate change have all been shown to be faulty in a number of ways (Professor Katharine Hayhoe, Texas Tech University, 2015).

So, this is a small victory, and we can and should rejoice. **Green Christian** and other environmental organisations have played an important part in getting to this point, but there is still much work to be done. Power resides largely in the hands of governments and big national and multi-national companies, which are slow to change their structures and business practices. The environment has been plundered and people exploited, and God asks us to change. The difficult work is yet to begin.

Yet Holy Resistance is more than joining marches and demonstrations, more than being arrested for non-violent direct action, although these actions have their part. Inspired by God, Holy Resistance is a deep, rich and constant theme among God's people.



Leah Namugerwa (centre) aged 15, Ugandan climate activist. Twitter: @NamugerwaLeah

Children worldwide are taking the climate and ecological emergencies seriously. In Uganda, Leah Namugerwa began a school climate strike in February 2019. "Children from the global south are already severely affected by the climate crisis and will continue to be hit the hardest if no serious action is taken. I am concerned that their voices are hardly heard and their actions not supported. Is this another kind of racism?" Leah encourages people to plant trees, clean up plastic waste, and strike for the climate. In December 2019, Leah wrote: "Fresh landslides in western Uganda have killed at least 12 people. Yesterday at least nine were confirmed dead in Eastern Uganda and many still missing. Last week the same areas were affected. Northern Uganda flooded on Monday. It's a serious #ClimateEmergency".

**Christ, alpha, omega,
avatar of hope,
whose heart in spite of all
hopes on in spite of us,
hopes on for us, in spite of us –
rain, rain on us
untamed, unconstrained
Your wildfire storm of hope.**

**From *That Intransitive Being*
by Daniel Berrigan**

Green Christian's Aims

We affirm our belief in God as Creator of all things and in Jesus Christ as Lord, looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance through the Scriptures, and seeking to hear God's voice in the challenges of the present time. We are responsible for our impact on God's Creation. Since 1982 Green Christian has been helping members to understand and relate our responsibilities to our faith. Green Christian supports Christians from all backgrounds and traditions. We offer insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and Churches, and we offer Christian insights to the Green movement.

Christine says:



Holy resistance means that I don't follow fashion but stay with Gospel values even if costly. To encourage change and awareness I have written A Heart for Creation, and our visitor garden mixes Christian spirituality and environmental ideas: reflectiongardens.org.uk. I love God's beautiful world, influenced by a bluebell wood and the war-devastated East End of London. I try to live gently on earth, our home is carbon neutral.



Holy Resistance among God's People

Throughout the Bible and since the time of Jesus, God's people have resisted evil and injustice in creative ways:

- The Israelite midwives in Egypt, ordered by Pharaoh to kill Israelite baby boys, lied and saved the babies – God increased the Hebrew nation;
- Moses, adopted into the royal Egyptian household, resisted Pharaoh and led the Israelites to safety;
- Rahab, a prostitute, hid two Israelite spies on her rooftop rather than surrender them to the king of Canaan, and became an ancestor of Jesus;
- Esther, plucked from obscurity to be the Queen of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes II), risked her life pleading for the lives of her fellow Israelites, and saved the nation;
- Jonah fled rather than go to pagan Nineveh, yet God pursued him, forgave him, and his powerful God-given words converted the whole city;
- When the first Christian martyr Stephen was about to be stoned to death, he not only refused to recant, but preached a powerful sermon before Saul, who later became Paul the apostle;
- Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns in prison, and did not flee when an earthquake broke their chains – their jailer and all his family were converted;
- Jesus practised Holy Resistance to both earthly and spiritual “powers and principalities”, and saved the world;
- Individuals within the Christian-led American Civil Rights Movement risked their lives, and helped to change their nation.

It's doubtful that any of these people – and countless others – could foresee the consequences of their actions, whether in the immediate future or centuries later. Yet even if they were terrified – and many were – all were obedient to the love, justice, and mercy of God, seeing with the eyes of faith, hope and love, and acting according to what they knew to be right. We are also called to obey our leaders, so the challenge is to discern between good and evil laws and practices.

An important principle is to speak truth to power, at the same time as praying for those in power. What happens when those in authority refuse to listen? When a government's laws or commands are in direct violation of God's laws, some may feel called to peaceful and respectful civil disobedience, as we have seen with Christian Climate Action and Extinction Rebellion in recent months, in order to encourage those in power to listen and to engage with important issues.

The theologian Walter Brueggeman has said: “Legitimate power always includes attentiveness to justice. When power is not attentive to justice it cannot endure. This is a summons to us to keep the agenda of justice for the vulnerable alive and front and centre, to maintain a kind of subversive stance toward power”.

In November 2019, the Anglican Diocese of Bristol, along with Salisbury and Birmingham, declared a Climate Emergency, the first Dioceses in the Church of England to do so. With 18,000 worshippers, Bristol's declaration includes a target of net zero by 2030, with a commitment to provide support to all Churches in the Diocese to transition to a low-carbon future as quickly as possible. This is more ambitious than the Church of England's proposal to support carbon reduction of net zero by 2050 “in line with Government policy”.

Words without actions are meaningless:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? ... Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them: ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ... Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2: 14-17).

Ways of Holy Resistance

Let's begin by rejoicing in Creation, and in all the gifts God gives us. We can refuse to believe the hype and propaganda, the adverts for must-have items ranging from toothpaste to cars, clothing to holidays. We can share our lives better with other inhabitants of the planet, both human and other-than-human, choosing to live as if we have just one planet to share, rather than infinite resources on an infinite planet, and choosing to model a generous and hope-filled way of living.

We can do our research and check facts, then write letters to those in power, join campaigns, sign pledges and petitions, join demonstrations and vigils, perhaps engage in non-violent direct action. We can hold people to account for destructive behaviours, whether friends and family, members of Parliament, or institutions or other organisations; and support campaigns financially and on social media.

We can live a low-impact life in food, clothing, transport and much more, gardening organically and allowing wildlife to thrive, growing food if we have space – even in front gardens! We can engage in non-judgmental and loving conversations, acknowledging that not everyone has reached the place where we stand, that not everyone has the eyes – the energy, the time – to see what we see.

We can remember that we are the Body of Christ, pray with faith and hope and love, and remember that “God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:7).



“Not quite sure about what this Christian Climate Action thing is? It's the beautiful collision of prayer, worship and action.”
christianclimateaction.org

Prayer is also an act of Holy Resistance



To pray, to celebrate Holy Communion, to sing hymns and Christian songs, to uphold love, peace, mercy, justice, and truth, these are profound acts of Holy Resistance in a world dominated by violence of all kinds (physical, psychological, emotional, moral, spiritual) and by the love of money and power. It doesn't matter where we are – at church, in our home, in prison, or on the streets, in a field or a garden, with others, or alone – this is powerful spiritual work which enables change.

Green Christian's legal position

As a charity, Green Christian is unable to promote or encourage actions that are or may be illegal, but we can inform members of actions that people are taking, and pray for those involved, some of whom are GC members who have taken a personal decision to act in this way. We also promote the use of legal means to highlight climate and ecological injustice, and the urgency of acting quickly and radically to safeguard as much of our planet's future as possible, as we have always done. We work closely with our sister charity **Operation Noah** (which campaigns on climate change), and our campaign to imagine and work towards an economy that supports human flourishing within planetary boundaries, **Joy in Enough**. We also work alongside and keep in touch with many other Christian organisations involved in this work, including A Rocha, Tearfund, Christian Aid, Christian Climate Action, the John Ray Initiative, and Climate Stewards. Keep an eye on our website and other publications for up-to-date information.

Borrowed Time: building pastoral care in the climate emergency

The human paradox is that we are made both in the image of God and from the dust of the ground; we are capable of marvellous and holy insights and actions, and also capable of getting things spectacularly wrong. As we work towards a better future, we are also aware that we have made many terrible mistakes in looking after Creation, sometimes out of ignorance, but sometimes deliberately, and that we need to grieve those mistakes and repent of them.

In Green Christian we think the climate and ecological emergency is probably the greatest mission challenge the Churches have ever faced. We want to create places where people can meet together for a journey through climate grief and eco-anxiety. It's work which requires new skills, new insights and new ways with words.

That's why we are establishing **Borrowed Time** – a new project to help Churches to:

- provide circles of support and public rituals where people can work through the emotional, existential and spiritual challenges which now confront us
- forge new understandings of human purpose and identity which might unlock urgent political action and economic change
- form moral pioneers committed to a civilisation of love, amid growing turmoil and disorientation, and potential collapse.

We believe that this kind of response is also Holy Resistance: being prayerfully and thoughtfully prepared for a future outside anything we have known.

If you'd like to know more about how to get involved, Paul Bodenham would be pleased to hear from you, especially if you have skills in: Psychology and therapeutic disciplines; Bereavement counselling; Palliative care; Climate science; Academic humanities; Pastoral care; Social change; Theology and spirituality; Creative arts; Project development. paulbodenham@greenchristian.org.uk

Donations to Green Christian are always welcome, to help finance our efforts to reach out to new members and the wider world with our message. Please click the Donate button on our website to contribute through CAF Donate.

Helen says:



For me Holy Resistance means God-centred contemplation and action, in spaces where the sacred is challenged and violated, or where that discussion is taking place. It means holding firmly to peaceful protest and finding a place deep inside my own being where I can mine for courageous advocacy. It means standing alongside others who are holding firm to love. My experience of Holy Resistance is that it creates Holy Ground.

Join us

Since 1982 Green Christian has been working with Christians, Churches and the Green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

We welcome new members. Membership online starts at just £2 a month. Please go to greenchristian.org.uk/join-us/. Or use the form below to send your details to: Green Christian Membership Secretary, Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace, Buxton SK17 6HS.

To find out more visit our extensive website: greenchristian.org.uk. Sign up for our free monthly news email, *Prayer Diary* or *JiE News*, or contact us for a free introductory pack.



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Key Green Christian events in 2020

Green Christian On The Road Together regional events. A series of days exploring Green Christian's ethos and work, including the Way of Life, Joy in Enough, and Christian Climate Action. Open to all. Days currently being planned in 2020 for **Norwich** and **Leighton Buzzard**. greenchristian.org.uk/on-the-road-together-running-a-local-green-christian-event/ If you would like to host a Green Christian day, please get in touch!

1 Feb 2020: Green Christian "Way of Life" Day, London. For members of Green Christian.

Navigating Ecological Tragedy: "Beyond Hope and Despair" 6-8 March 2020, near Doncaster, a collaborative inquiry with Buddhists and Christians. A weekend event with Gomde UK Tibetan Buddhist Centre in association with Green Christian's Borrowed Time project. **Open to all.** gomde.uk/navigating-ecological-tragedy

"Ways, Means and Marvels – Christian Responses to the Ecological Crisis", Saturday 28 March 2020, 10.30-4pm, Exeter. In collaboration with the Iona Community in SW England. To find out more or to book, contact David Osborne, drosborne2@btinternet.com

Green Christian Retreat: 23-25 October 2020, Ringsfield Hall, Suffolk, NR34 8JR. **Open to all.**

Annual Members' Meeting: Saturday 7 November 2020, 1pm-5pm, St Aloysius, 20 Phoenix Road, Euston, London NW1 1TA. Shared lunch, meeting, and talk. An opportunity to contribute to the work of Green Christian, and to gain inspiration for your own. **Open to all.**

Please see the website for more information on all these events and more, or sign up to our mailing list: greenchristian.org.uk/connect/sign-up/

Green Christian brings together people in the UK and beyond who seek to tell a new story for our times. We offer:

Gatherings: conferences, retreats and workshops every year.

Local groups: 12 groups directly affiliated to Green Christian. We offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: a daily *Prayer Guide* available by email or on our website (published monthly).

Campaigns: **LOAF** promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded.

Joy in Enough promotes an alternative economy free from growth, debt and the obligation to consume. joyinenough.org

Way of Life Community: a dispersed community which values and lives by the disciplines of Daily Prayer, Living Gently on the Earth, Public Witness and Encouragement.

Green Christian Magazine: a full-colour magazine published twice a year, packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews of books and other media, and resources.

Exhibition materials: a range of leaflets, banners and posters giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics.

CELINK: a discussion forum and social network for members for the exchange of news and advice.

E-news: regular emails for members and non-members on events and resources from Green Christian and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: greenchristian.org.uk

Further details at greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at 10 Kiln Gardens, Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, RG27 8RG info@greenchristian.org.uk

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