

green christian

the magazine

"Through the creation...

to the Creator"

A deeper crisis within our hearts

Clare Redfern, Editor

A common thread, on the good and restorative use of land, runs through this issue. It contains calls to work to preserve and nurture biodiversity – acting, for example, through campaigning at local council level (see Dave Penney’s letter), also at church policy level, as outlined in Operation Noah’s recent report. At national level, land reform to enable more local food growing is advocated.

“Love the Trees!” commanded St Amphilochios of Patmos as he planted around the Cave of the Apocalypse monastery (see p18). Tree-planting, forest preservation, and the role – *and limitations* – of carbon offsetting is explored by David Oglethorpe. Meanwhile, on the Local Groups page, read how our members have, among other things, learnt about soil composition, and helped remove invasive Himalayan balsam from the Frome valley.

All these are addressing both biodiversity loss and climate change, yet change is clearly needed at a deeper level. Molly Scott Cato, in her Green

Christian conference talk (summarised on p16-17), described how the current economic system is not working to safeguard a habitable planet for anyone. She echoed the head of the UN, Antonio Guterres, who stated last year: “we are firmly on track to an unliveable world”, heading towards at least 3°C of global warming by 2100. He went on to urge people everywhere to demand an end to fossil fuel subsidies. This is one reason why Green Christian members are joining a peaceful protest at Westminster with others on April 21st.

Where do we draw strength to face these crises, with the hope of making a difference? Christopher Southgate in his article invites us as part of a sabbath rest to make time to try to hear the chorus of praise – and lament – that floods the Earth. For as Bishop Kallistos Ware (whose life is remembered by Elizabeth Theokritoff) put it: “the entire cosmos is one vast burning bush permeated by the fire of divine power and glory”.

Tanya Jones describes how the Borrowed Time projects offer an

opportunity for reflection and attentiveness, in the face of environmental breakdown – “not to make us feel better, but to make us feel deeper”, enabled to leave behind “our self-important burdens”.

Paul Bodenham calls us as an organisation to consider how open we are to change; how could we listen better and learn from others, the excluded or unheard. His article includes details of an online discussion in June for members to explore perspectives on race, diversity and privilege.

Paying attention more deeply, perceiving the Creator’s power and presence, can we be more alive to making change and being changed? I look forward to seeing you at Green Christian events. ■



Clare Redfern,
Editor



Green Christian’s newest Patron

We are delighted that Shilpita Mathews has agreed to become a Green Christian Patron. Shilpita is an environmental economist and an active member of the Young Christian Climate Network. She guest-edited our Youth Activism Issue of the magazine in 2021 and we hope she will continue to bring a youthful perspective to Green Christian’s activities. Shilpita says: “I am very excited to be part of Green Christian’s mission. The climate and biodiversity crisis are a reflection of a deeper crisis within our hearts. Green Christian plays a critical role in addressing these crises together.”

Green Christian

Published by Green Christian

Editorial Team:

Clare Redfern,
T: 07906 454771
E: editors@greenchristian.org.uk
Tanya Jones (Book Review Editor)
Frances EF Ward

Local Groups Contact:

Isobel Murdoch
T: 01790 763603

Submissions

Contributions should ideally be made by e-mail as attached files. Alternatively clear typescript is acceptable when negotiated with the Editors. Accompanying photos and drawings are encouraged. An early email or phone call to the Commissioning Editor, Clare Redfern, to indicate an intention to write is very helpful.

Editorial Policy

Green Christian is intended as a forum for Christians of all traditions to reflect on, and contribute to, current thinking and action in the Green Movement. The opinions expressed by guest authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors but are welcome for their sincerity and insight. Items mailed with *Green Christian* reflect the views of their authors or publishers and not necessarily those of Green Christian.

Paper Stock

This issue of *Green Christian* is printed on Claro Silk coated paper 100gsm. It is a carbon-neutral product and FSC Certified. Further details from the Editors.

Magazine Distribution

Geoff Perrett,
135 Westbourne Road
Penarth, CF64 5BR
T: 029 2070 5966

Design by

dbagraphics@gmail.com

Print production and mailing

Index Print, 7 St David's Close, Colchester,
Essex CO4 3BD

©2023 Green Christian

ISSN 1364-3169

Green Christian is a registered charity

No. 328744

Company Registration No. 2445198

Next Issue

Copy deadline: June 30th 2023
Publication date: Sept. 2023

Green Christian is an interdenominational UK Christian organisation for people concerned about the environment. It offers insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and Churches, and offers Christian insights to the Green Movement.

Basis of Faith

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 the Spirit in the challenges of the present time.

Co-Chairs of Green Christian

George Dow (Internal Chair)
E: georgedow@greenchristian.org.uk
Deborah Tomkins (External Chair),
E: deborahTomkins@greenchristian.org.uk

Treasurer

Eleanor Orr, 35 Kitto Road,
London SE14 5TW
E: treasurer@greenchristian.org.uk

Membership Secretary

Richard Kierton,
Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace,
Buxton SK17 6HS
E: membership@greenchristian.org.uk

Administrator, Press Office and requests for speakers and resources

Ruth Jarman, GC Admin Officer,
c/o 48 Morrab Road, Penzance,
Cornwall TR18 4EX
T: 0345 459 8460
E: info@greenchristian.org.uk

Patrons

Rt Rev James Jones,
Dr Shilpita Mathews,
Fr Sean McDonagh,
Sir Jonathon Porritt,
Prof Sir Ghilleen Prance,
Dr Elaine Storkey.

Privacy

We wish to encourage members to attend local events and contact other members within their area. We keep on computer the names and contact details of members but, in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations, we will only pass on your contact details to other members if you have indicated you are willing for us to do so. Let us know if you wish to be put in touch with other members in your area.

Green Christian is a registered trading name of Christian Ecology Link www.greenchristian.org.uk

Contents



Welcome to **Green Christian**

Issue 95

Easter 2023

FEATURES

4 Sabbath, psalms and eucharist

Christopher Southgate considers Christian perspectives on the climate emergency



P4

6 Colours of green

Paul Bodenham asks whether Green Christian could be more diverse



P14

10 Carbon offsetting – is it worth it?

David Oglethorpe explores why it matters

14 Church land and the climate crisis

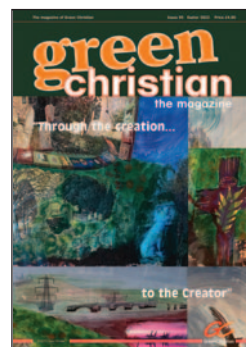
Sharon Hall issues a call to action for churches



P16

16 Peace, justice and joy: towards a green economy

Clare Redfern reports on Molly Scott Cato's GC conference talk



18 "Through the creation to the Creator"

Elizabeth Theokritoff remembers Bishop Kallistos Ware

20 Unhoused on the heath

Tanya Jones reflects on the experience of Borrowed Time

Cover illustration: Eco Church, based on a mixed-media collage by Graham Norman who says, "It is my expression of the joy of renewal, an honouring of the past and apprehension and uncertainty in the present." Visit the arts page on the website to see the original.

REGULARS

2 EDITORIAL

9 PRAYER

13 LOCAL GROUPS

22 POETRY

23 GC NEWS

25 REVIEWS

Sabbath, psalms and eucharist

Christopher Southgate considers Christian perspectives on the climate emergency



Photo credit: Dawn McDonald

In this brief article I want to explore the resources Christian thought might offer the climate emergency, and those frustrated by the slowness with which the generation with the power (my own) is addressing the huge challenges that are ever more evidently unfolding on our planet.

I talked about these themes at Lee Abbey, a stunningly beautiful place of retreat on the North Devon coast, last summer. I expected an element of climate change scepticism, but I need not have worried. The temperature touched 40 degrees that week, and it was very evident to everyone that the profound change to global climate is not some fanciful projection of faceless modellers, but a present and ever more disturbing reality.

So what distinctive contribution might a Christian thinker, puzzling over the ever-deepening crisis, add to the discussion? And at once I encounter the thought that actually some factors hold Christian thought back from envisioning the new future, a future that colleagues of mine at Exeter sometimes call Gaia 2.0.

These include a distrust, such as we find in the Hebrew Bible, of anything that smacks of nature-worship; a preoccupation with human beings and their salvation, such as dominates the New Testament; a suspicion of “the world” in some sections of the Gospel and Letters of John; and the Church’s historic focus on the status of the soul and its destination in heaven. I suggest that the New Testament writers, with their tendency to portray the end of the old creation as imminent, offer scant vision for the medium-term sustainability of human society. As a result, much of the worship and preaching in our churches completely ignores the ecological dimension of existence.

This deficit in our tradition is beginning to be articulated within mainstream Christian thinking. But my initial question returns with ever greater force – what does Christian belief have to contribute?

Here are a few outline thoughts:

We share with Jewish thought the sense of being created a *sabbath-keeping animal*. There is a rhythm to human life which

long working hours, ready-meals over Netflix, and over-anxious consumerism tend to blur out. But it is fundamental to our health and that of the planet. To make Sunday a true Sabbath day of rest is not necessarily easy, certainly not for those in ministry or a range of other types of work. But I have come to see Sabbath as whatever time there is in a week when one gets back in touch with the person one truly is, the creature one is in the world, and the soul one is before God. Many of us found that space in new ways over lockdown, and the challenge now is to retain those insights and practices and not let the “new normal” sweep them away.

We also share with our Jewish friends the precious gift of the Psalms, the hymnbook and prayer manual of the ancient people of God, alas in decreasing use in most churches. My favourite psalm is Psalm 19 which begins: *“The heavens are telling the glory of God...”*.

It is endlessly intriguing how the praise of the Torah in verses 7-14 – a hymn to that sabbath-infused lifestyle I mentioned above – came to be attached to the opening section on creation’s praise of God. But it is verses 3 and 4 that are of such importance to us at present:

*“There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.” (NRSV)*

The chorus of praise floods the Earth. Yet human beings cannot hear it. We are such linguistic beings, and so bombarded with our own words, that we cannot hear this song. But how vital it is that we learn to listen for it, and for the groans of lament that accompany it where the non-human world is prevented from being itself by our carelessness and greed.

Again the lockdown experience of hearing birdsong anew is a vital clue. More generally the practice of making time to be still, to recover a sense of being part of creation, and created to offer our own song of praise, seems to me of the greatest importance.

That leads me naturally to my third insight. Human beings are not just praising animals, but worshipping animals, called to gather up creation’s praise and offer it to God as part of retelling the story of God’s ways with the world, and celebrating both the physical food and the spiritual food that comes to us from God. In short, *we are eucharistic animals*. This central act (for most Christians) is charged with ecological symbolism in its celebration of all creation, and of



The heavens are telling the glory of God...

Photo credit: Sven Pieren

the power of the Spirit to enter, bless and transform the taking of food and wine. Yet how we have tended to distort it by over-individualised and over-formalised spiritualities that attenuate the relationship between the liturgy and our practices of eating and sharing.

Had I more space in this article I would develop the theme of food production and consumption, a really difficult and polarising subject for Christians. That is for another time. I want to end by acknowledging how problematic this area of thinking is, not least because no-one, at least no-one in the developed world, is guiltless. We all have carbon footprints, and consume non-renewable resources. A wise quotation I often draw on is Wendell Berry’s famous observation that:

“To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.”

That is our ongoing challenge. I hope these brief observations offer you some clues, some threads you can follow into a more authentically sacramental life. ■



Christopher Southgate is a theologian based at Exeter University; he originally trained as a research biochemist and is also a published poet. His books include *Theology in a Suffering World – Glory and Longing* and *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil*.

This article is based on a talk that Professor Southgate gave at Green Christian’s Building Back Greener conference. The talk can be viewed on Green Christian’s YouTube channel.

Colours of green: ethnic diversity and Green Christian

Paul Bodenham shares some personal reflections and ideas for moving forward



Photo credit: Shutterstock

I have always felt welcome in Green Christian, and I hope everyone does. I'm a trustee, and as the Charity Commission points out, trustees tend to mould organisations into their own image. So I have it easy.

Like 82% of the UK population I'm also White and middle-aged. We don't ask members to declare their ethnicity, but my impression is that in Green Christian White people make up much more than that. With the other trustees over the last year I've been wondering why that is, and what should we do about it.

Perhaps the reality should not surprise us. Our members can mostly be found in the overlap between the Green movement and the churches, and they too are disproportionately White. In order to become more diverse, all of us, trustees and members alike, would have to take our share of responsibility for discrimination and exclusion in these sectors, and by implication in society at large. We would have to become an "anti-racist organisation".

We're a small player in the scheme of things and these are big questions to take on, but our partners in the churches and NGOs are asking them too. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests, there has been a ferment of debate around identity, racial justice and the legacy of colonialism.

It has been a truism for decades that rich nations are most to blame for climate change while poorer nations will suffer most. Climate change is now seen as a form of racial oppression with roots in colonialism. At COP27 after years of squirming and prevarication the richest countries bowed to pressure from poorer nations, and agreed to establish a fund for "Loss and Damage". Whether they will pay up remains to be seen.

In a seminar organised by the Wildlife Trusts in October 2022¹ speakers from minority ethnic backgrounds

¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=il6Bf5BisR4

commented that the environmental crisis is just too serious not to involve everyone, but for that to happen profound change is needed in the sector. They had little time for tokenistic actions, such as using stock photos of Black people or setting a target to recruit employees of colour. Cosmetic measures distract from the more fundamental, and more difficult, changes that are needed, and risk traumatising those being “used”.

The Trusts have developed a common “routemap towards greater ethnic diversity”. However its recommendations tend to focus on staff recruitment, which is of limited relevance to us as a grassroots, volunteer-led movement. Furthermore conservation organisations have the benefit of being place-based, able to introduce local people to nature in a way a national “belief-led” organisation like Green Christian cannot.

My trustee colleagues and I have considered reaching out to minority-led environmental projects, such as Christian Aid's Race4Climate network. But of course we cannot subcontract the work to them: we have to do it ourselves.

We have considered engaging with Black-led churches. But how? What right does a White-majority organisation have to tell a Black-majority church what to believe? There have been enough “white saviours” already – that's a clear message from *Our Prophetic Journey towards Climate Justice*², a collection of perspectives from Black Christian leaders gathered by Christian Aid.

Black British theologian Robert Beckford, one of its contributors, traces the “prosperity Gospel” characteristic of much Black Pentecostalism to the western missionaries whose faith was compromised by capitalism and the colonial venture. Two other writers, Gideon Commey, a Ghanaian eco-theologian, and Revd Israel Olofinjana of the Evangelical Alliance, show how environmental consciousness had been deeply embedded in the traditional practices and worship of African communities – until they were “converted”. Revd Alton Bell of Wembley Family Church recalls how the proceeds of slavery fuelled the twin projects of industrialisation and colonisation, an inescapable history which he says now obliges European Christians to campaign for eco-reparations.

If our moral capital is as debased as that, we have less to offer than we might like to think. *Black Lives Matter Everywhere*, also from Christian Aid, argues that a more authentic way for White-majority organisations to embrace

minority experience is to rethink our approach to campaigning. The report advocates that climate campaigns should be framed in terms of social justice and equality in preference to ecology and lifestyle. After all, whose lifestyle is the problem here?

Many of us belong to churches which took the British Empire as their mission field. Those nations have largely gained independence, but the colonial mindset persists not just in economic power-relations, but also, it is argued, in the inherited unconscious of the British people. The withdrawal of our troops was only the beginning; our own minds must now be liberated from its legacy.

Decolonisation is a powerful metaphor for calling out the inherited power and privilege we take for granted. We sometimes hear that climate change is an unprecedented existential threat, and I have said it myself. But as Sarah Jaquette Ray points out, such claims belittle the experience of those who have been through slavery, colonialism and ongoing police brutality³. She finds that climate anxiety is a mainly White phenomenon because White people fear losing their privilege.

Recent research casts doubt on this assertion: a survey of young people in 10 nations in all parts of the world found levels of climate anxiety were higher in the Philippines, India and Brazil than in, for example, the UK, USA and Australia⁴. However there still seems to be truth in it. Participants in Green Christian's own Borrowed Time programme, which started by offering pastoral care for those experiencing climate anxiety, have found it essential to reckon with their own inherited complicity. To face the future we will need to change morally and emotionally in equal measure.

I have work to do on myself and my inherited privilege, before I presume to “help” others. But it's hard to know where to start. Talking about these issues I have felt tongue-tied and nervous about “getting it wrong”. I have occasionally felt blamed, berated and resentful. If we genuinely care about diversity in our movement, we will have to expect difficult conversations and be kind to ourselves and each other. Our fragility and resentment can tell us as much as the words we hear.

So where do we go from here as members of Green Christian? First I think we have to talk about race. We might seek advice and input from people from ethnic minorities, but should not expect them to speak on behalf of others, nor to help us at their own expense.

² www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/get-involved/our-prophetic-journey-towards-climate-justice

³ www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety/
⁴ [www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(21\)00278-3/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00278-3/fulltext)

A good place to start would be to ask a person of colour, if we know one, for a conversation. As Green Christian members we might agree some common questions to explore, such as the following:

- Why do you care for the environment?
- What do you believe are the root causes of the crisis?
- How do you feel moved to act?
- How do you experience environmental groups?
- What would be your advice to Green Christian?

Before that, however, it seems right that we should reflect on the filters through which we ourselves will hear the responses we will receive. For that the Jesuit discipline of the “examen”, sometimes translated as “an examination of consciousness”, might help. I have sketched some questions below which might serve an examen of eco-justice.

And let me make an invitation. To set the ball rolling, I’d like to offer a space for conversation online on Wednesday 7th June. Everyone is welcome, even if, for now, the invitation is more limited than it ought to be. As we reach for words to build justice and respect, be assured that nothing will be the “wrong thing” to say. ■



What needs to change?

Photo credit: Mckenna Phillips

Colours of Green

Wednesday 7th June 2023, 7.00 – 8.30 p.m.

An opportunity for Green Christian members to explore perspectives on race, diversity and privilege, what they tell us as green Christians, and how we might respond together.

See the Green Christian website for details of how to register.

An examen for eco-justice

In what follows, “others” may refer to human lives outside my conscious experience, or whose experience is outside my own. It may also refer to non-human life. “Culture” refers to the choices, norms and assumptions in which I participate, particularly at national level. “Harms” refers to damage to the environment which prevent life flourishing as otherwise it might.

- In the choices we make, how am I and my culture complicit in harm to those beyond it?
- What have I inherited from my ancestors that they gained at the expense of others?
- Who is today experiencing those harms in which my ancestors and I are complicit, and how?
- How well do I and my culture understand their experience of harm?
- What needs to change so I can be released from the patterns of harm I cause to others?
- What do I owe by way of an apology or reparation? How might I deliver it?
- What may be necessary in order that I can be forgiven?



Paul Bodenham is a recent Chair of Green Christian, co-founder of Operation Noah and Borrowed Time, and officer for social action in the Catholic Diocese of Nottingham.

Further reading: *Climate Change Is Racist: Race, Privilege and the Struggle for Climate Justice*, Jeremy Williams (Icon Books, 2021)

Jesus, Saviour, Healer, Transformer - thank you that your kingdom is at hand. Keep us from despair; open our hearts to the possible. Help us to play our part in the transformation of this world. Amen.

Prayer by Gideon Heugh/Tearfund, reproduced with permission

For our leaders

God of blessings,
the universe sings of your glory.

Deepen our gratitude for all you have made
and awaken in us a renewed commitment
to care for the Earth and each other.

Inspire leaders with openness to listen to those most in need
and with courage to act urgently and wisely,
so that our Common Home may be healed and restored
and all people, and generations to come, may delight in it.

An end to waste

Let us pray for an end to the waste and desecration of God's creation
For access to the fruits of creation to be shared equally among all people
and for communities and nations to find sustenance
in the fruits of the earth and the water God has given us.

Almighty God, you created the world and gave it
into our care so that, in obedience to you, we might serve all people.
Inspire us to use the riches of creation with wisdom,
and to ensure that their blessings are shared by all;
That, trusting in your bounty, all people may be
empowered to seek freedom from poverty, famine, and oppression.

(from www.jesuitresource.org – Free Online Resources, with permission)

Advices and Queries No. 42 (from *Quaker faith and practice*, reprinted with permission)

We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will.
Show a loving consideration for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty
and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature
is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's
continuing creation.

Carbon offsetting – is it worth it?

David Oglethorpe explores why it matters for individuals and churches

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggests that global carbon emissions need to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest to avoid runaway global warming. We must press governments, companies and others to make the choices needed to reduce global warming, but we cannot just leave it to them. Our own choices matter too, both as individuals and as church members. One such choice is whether to engage in carbon offsetting – paying for projects to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere as compensation for the greenhouse gas emissions (or “carbon footprint”) of an organisation or individuals.

Carbon offsetting can be used to achieve net zero by balancing greenhouse gas emissions with greenhouse gases reduced. Many offsetting projects also have additional co-benefits such as reducing biodiversity loss (for example through tree-planting) and providing employment in low-income areas. So, should we offset to achieve net zero?

One argument against, is that this is a distraction from the real solutions to climate change, and can be merely a public relations stunt, or “greenwashing”. Offsetting projects to date have not been sufficient to stop global warming and future offsetting projects alone are unlikely to be sufficient either. Offsetting may have a role, but the world needs emissions to be drastically reduced rather than just compensation to be bought for them, so it is right to challenge those who use carbon offsetting to mask the emissions reductions they should make.

Although not legally required, investors and other stakeholders are beginning to expect large corporates to have plans to achieve net zero in line with the Paris Agreement to keep the rise in mean global temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, preferably limiting the increase to 1.5°C. The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) has developed a standard¹ for how large corporates should set net zero targets. Their guidelines describe a “mitigation hierarchy”: a priority is to set short- and long-term targets for rapid and deep reductions in carbon emissions (at least 90% from current levels), with clear strategies to

achieve these targets. But the SBTi standard says companies should go further than just reducing emissions and advocates investment in offsetting and carbon removal technologies from the date the targets are set.

The Church of England’s “Routemap to net zero carbon by 2030”² accepts that offsetting will have a role in offsetting what we cannot reduce, but only “towards 2030”. As we are already in a climate crisis, my personal view, more akin to SBTi’s standard, is that those of us causing more than our fair share of emissions should not just make serious emissions reductions but also start offsetting now without delay. Issues of affordability arise, and whether the cost of offsetting will reduce the ability for some to afford changes to reduce emissions. But maybe we should ask ourselves whether we are using that as an excuse.

We need to constantly review our progress and plans for genuine emissions cuts, for example, asking what is meant by reducing what we “can”. Taken literally, that might mean churches ceasing to use buildings and things like reducing lighting in the evening at home. I don’t think that’s what is really intended, but what is? Avoiding the trap of greenwashing does not mean avoiding offsetting.

So how can we offset?

Carbon offset projects may comply with a variety of international standards endorsed by The International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (“ICROA”). These include the Gold Standard, the Plan Vivo Standard, the Verified Carbon Standard and the UN’s Clean Development Mechanism. ICROA’s code of best practice requires projects to be “real, permanent, independently verified, unique and additional”³. Interestingly, the “do no harm” principle regarding environmental and social impacts is only an optional criterion. Projects providing carbon offsets may seek to remove emissions, such as tree planting, or avoid emissions, such as forest preservation, solar and other energy projects and cook stove projects supplying stoves to reduce wood burned on open fires and improve health.

¹ www.sciencebasedtargets.org/resources/files/Net-Zero-Standard.pdf

² www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/net-zero-carbon-routemap

³ www.icroa.org/



Nepalese family with a clean cook stove funded by offsetting through Climate Stewards

Photo credit: RID Nepal

The requirement for offsets to be real and verified is understandable, but means that it is difficult to buy carbon offsets from projects using emerging methods such as carbon capture and storage and “blue carbon” such as mangrove and seagrass protection and planting. Also, the offsets are only released for purchase once the emissions have been reduced, so what your money actually goes towards can be difficult to determine.

The cost of offsetting varies by project and is typically in the range of £10 to £20 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalents (“tCO₂e”). Considering WWF suggests the 2022 UK average yearly footprint is about 9.5 tCO₂e⁴, the apparent offsetting cost is surprisingly low. Good measurements must be difficult but are key – not only of the emissions removed or avoided, but also of the baseline – what they would have been if the project had not happened. Even with independent verification, there is clearly a risk of error, and of abuse incentivised by the value of the offsets.

Are there other offsetting options?

There are numerous other organisations engaged in emissions removal or avoidance operating outside the voluntary carbon markets. Those not offering independent verification of offsets will have a continuous challenge to measure and report their impacts and demonstrate effectiveness and trustworthiness – like most charities.

Climate Stewards, a UK charity promoted in Eco Church

material, has its own “Seal of Approval” framework for which it quotes a third party endorsement as an “effective, streamlined standard assessing net carbon mitigation for community-based projects in the developing world.” With a cost of £25 per tCO₂e, it promises, rather boldly, “we guarantee that your money will be used to remove an equivalent amount of CO₂ from the atmosphere.”⁵

Offsetting via UK charities has the advantage of attracting Gift Aid for UK tax-payers. Churches may also feel more comfortable offsetting via non-profits rather than via private companies. The Woodland Trust ought to be a good option for tree planting and woodland preservation. They don’t offer carbon offsetting as such, but do state that “every £100 donated will help us care for enough woodland to capture and store around four tonnes of carbon”⁶, suggesting a cost of around £25 per tCO₂e.

Tythe, a UK charity set up by the EQ Foundation, offers a different approach. It selects climate action charities that it believes have a high impact and groups them under six headings: carbon reduction, marine conservation, forest conservation, climate resilience, food & agriculture, and education & advocacy. It charges no fees for its work, and encourages donors to set a budget for regular donations to these causes. The EQ Foundation stated in June 2022 that an offset price of around £20 per tCO₂e is unrealistic and suggested a more realistic budget of at least £80 per tCO₂e. It further suggested using about 25% of this budget on “high

4 www.footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/

5 www.climatestewards.org/carbon-calculators/

6 www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/give/personal-carbon/



Church tree planting in Kenya

Photo credit: WEC Kenya

quality offsets and the balance to support charities that are seeking to achieve structural change in environmental behaviour and/or promoting the development of new technology”.

Conclusion

There is much scope for disapproval of offsetting as well as uncertainty over its effectiveness. But no organisation or project is perfect. I recommend aiming for ambitious emissions reductions and constantly reviewing progress and plans towards net zero, alongside offsetting in whatever reasonably considered way you are willing to give. ■



David Oglethorpe is a retired Chartered Accountant, with a Masters degree in Theology from Cambridge University. He has experience of working in a FTSE plc, as well as the Church of England and other charities, and auditing both in the UK and Ghana.

LETTERS

Dear Green Christian,

Thank you for the latest issue of *Storm of Hope* which focuses on the biodiversity crisis and its link with the climate emergency. A crucial element does not appear to be emphasised though – the fact that we depend on biodiversity for human life on earth. It is in our interests and those of future generations that we protect and enhance biodiversity. One of the reasons why the Creator brought human life into existence was to care for his creation. We do not own it to dominate and destroy it.

Scientists from Albert Einstein to Maurice Maeterlinck and Rachel Carson (in *Silent Spring*) believed that human life would become extinct if pollinating bees died out. No more bees, no more pollination, no more plants, no more animals, no more humans. Biodiversity is interdependent. We are all linked to this interwoven web of life and we are dependent on these links in the chain being connected for life to flourish.

This truth should compel Christians do all they can to protect nature where they live from “biodiversity loss” and enhance it by “biodiversity gain” with measures that combat climate change, reduce our carbon footprint and help achieve the target of halving carbon emissions by 2030 locally.

The UK's biodiversity is in crisis; nearly half of its biodiversity has been lost since the 1970s, much of this caused by loss of

habitat to commercial farming and construction. The UK ranks in the bottom 10% in the world for biodiversity loss and the worst among G7 nations.

Members of the Pendle Climate Action Group have submitted 14 Proposals to their local Council to achieve the goal of caring for life-giving biodiversity. There are sound legal grounds for doing this; most Councils are committed to a sustainable future, addressing DEFRA's requirement to minimise impacts and provide (measurable) net gains for biodiversity in their Local Plans. Globally, the UN COP15 Biodiversity Conference agreed to a Global Biodiversity Framework to address biodiversity loss, restore ecosystems and protect indigenous rights by 2030.

Can I suggest that Green Christian Groups and Members adopt the same strategy and ask their Local Councils to incorporate biodiversity projects as a priority into their Climate Emergency Action Plans? Pendle's 14 Biodiversity Proposals could be a possible guide. ■

Revd Dave Penney, Colne, Lancashire

(Pendle Climate Action Group's 14 Biodiversity Proposals can be found on the Green Christian website).

The path leads onward

Isobel Murdoch, Local Groups coordinator, reports on their activities

At this unsettled time, in the UK and worldwide, it has felt as if governments' will for climate action is ebbing away. Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) has grown, while war and economics have overshadowed any focus on the planet. All the time, Green Christian's local groups and contacts go on flying the flag for awareness and action, even against this background.

Some groups have got involved with other local initiatives. Green Christians in **Reading** cooperated with Zero Hour in campaigning on the Climate and Ecology Bill. The group also took part in Reading Climate Festival, sharing church resources developed by a group member and arranging a well-attended online workshop on "Joy Fuelled Activism". **Sheffield** Green Christian sponsored a tree at Sheffield Cathedral's Christmas Tree Festival, decorating the tree and inviting people to add prayers of lament and hope.

Colchester Green Christian ran a stall at an event run by Chelmsford Churches Together in the autumn and plans a Day Retreat this summer.

On the Global Day Of Action for COP27, **Worcester** Green Christian held a prayerful Walk of Witness through the city centre, delivering a letter (signed by local faith leaders) to the Mayor of Worcester. This was well reported by the local media.

The **Frome** River Action Group, run by Dorset Christian Fellowship, recently became a Green Christian group. Working in cooperation with Dorset Wildlife Trust,

they're focusing on clearing Himalayan balsam, an invasive species, from the Frome River so the ecosystem can thrive. It's great to hear about this kind of practical conservation work going on.

Have you heard of the Coat of Hopes? Green Christian's local contacts in **Lincoln** brought this patchwork pilgrimage coat to the county for a fortnight in early autumn. It toured venues large and small, from Lincoln Cathedral to The Hub National Centre of Craft and Design in Sleaford and local schools, and hundreds of people tried it on. Green Christian contact Sandie wrote: "How is success measured with such an exceptional project? Not, I believe in numbers so much as the chance it gave to the wearers and witnesses to pause and ponder their role in the climate and ecological crisis."



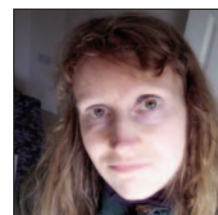
Coat of Hopes at Lincoln Cathedral
Photo credit: Sandie Stratford

In October, **Rugby** Green Christian held a talk and discussion evening on how to make your home carbon-neutral, which was attended by 45 people. **Clun** Green Christian arranged two film screenings of

H₂O: The Molecule That Made Us, and held a talk about whether hydrogen was the fuel of the future.

Cheltenham Green Christian holds fortnightly online Climate Prayer, led by different denominations. Members also attended a screening of the new film *The Letter* (www.theletter.org/) arranged by the local *Laudato Si'* circle. **Hereford** Green Christian held a demonstration of soil analysis, which was described as visual and memorable. The group also arranged a talk by a local writer, Richard Priestley, whose book, *System Change Now*, promotes a radical and thought-provoking (secular) model. Meanwhile, **Nailsworth** Green Christian ran *Plenty!* (Green Christian's sustainable economics discussion programme) earlier in the year and the group leader has now been asked to lead this again for other people in the area.

When I recently came across this line in Psalm 25 – "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths" (Ps 25v4) – it stood out for me. We all wonder which paths to take and how to build momentum once again. It always strikes me how Green Christian's groups and contacts find new, imaginative and creative ways to act, year by year. Could you try doing just that in *your* area? ■



isobel.murdoch@greenchristian.org.uk
01790 763603

Church land and the climate crisis

Sharon Hall reports on Operation Noah's call to action on managing church land



The Old Church of St. Martin, Martindale, Cumbria

Photo credit: Johnny Briggs on Unsplash

Did you know that UK churches and Christian organisations together own around 1% of land in the UK? A recent report by Operation Noah¹ explains how churches could manage this land for the good of people, nature and the climate, recognising that land can be both a source of greenhouse gas emissions and a carbon sink.

This land isn't just made up of churchyards and plots around other church-owned buildings, but includes land held as investments. For example, the Church of England's Church Commissioners own 98,000 acres of rural and strategic land – that's a combined area larger than the Isle of Wight. There's also 70,000 acres of glebe land owned by individual dioceses and 30,000 acres in Church Commissioners' UK forestry and smaller areas owned by individual CofE churches.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said that for the world to have a chance of limiting global heating to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, global greenhouse gas emissions must be nearly halved by 2030. This will involve a rapid reduction in emissions from the burning of fossil fuels – the driving cause of global heating – but also increased nature-based solutions in order to remove carbon already present in the atmosphere.

While the Church of England has adopted a 2030 net zero target, its landholdings are outside the scope of this target. Furthermore, the Operation Noah report finds that agricultural land owned by the CofE is likely to create more greenhouse gas emissions than all CofE church buildings combined. The report makes clear that rapid and radical action is needed to better manage church land, particularly by protecting and extending natural carbon sinks such as woodland, peatland, grasslands and salt marshes. If landowners protect the natural carbon sinks on their land, or extend them,

some land has the potential to produce net negative emissions; action in these areas also needs to promote local biodiversity and recognise human needs as well.

Operation Noah's three key recommendations are that the Church:

- extends tree-growing on its land;
- takes steps to protect and restore areas of peatland; and
- works with farmers, supporting them to reduce emissions.

Tree growing

Trees are a significant carbon sink, as well as providing habitats for wildlife and humans to enjoy and also providing shade and flood protection. Currently the Church of England only has around 4% tree cover on its land in England, compared with 15% on Crown land and 10% on RSPB land. We are calling on the Church Commissioners to increase tree cover on their land to 10% by 2030. The Communion Forest initiative, launched at the Lambeth Conference in August, provides opportunities for growth in this area, both for the Church Commissioners and CofE dioceses.

Trees can be incorporated into housing developments and can provide shelter and boundaries within farmland. New agroforestry schemes are another possible development where trees are interspersed among other crops and pastureland. It is important to plant suitable trees in the right location and at the right time of year.

¹ Church Land & The Climate Crisis: A Call to Action www.brightnow.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2022/09/Church-Land-and-the-Climate-Crisis.pdf



Photo credit: Richard Bell on Unsplash

A case study in the report reviewed the success of a mixed plantation of native broadleaf trees on A Rocha's Foxearth Meadows nature reserve on the Suffolk/Essex border. While not all of the trees survived, the mix of native species and care taken to manage the trees has led to thriving woodland birds and an area enjoyed by visiting groups.

Protecting and restoring peatland

Remarkably, degraded peatland in the UK is the source of 4% of our greenhouse gas emissions. The government has recognised the vital need to restore and rewet peatland, so that it becomes a carbon sink again, and there are a range of schemes and projects which churches can join to do this.

One example of good practice can be found at Wybunbury Moss, an area in Cheshire where peat-adjacent land owned by the Church Commissioners has been leased to Natural England in order to help protect the rare subsidence mire. This peat habitat includes sphagnum lawn, reed swamp and fen woodland, and is host to wildflowers, harmless grass snakes, lizards, woodcocks and rare leaf beetles.

Supporting farmers to reduce emissions

The third area of focus recognises that a large proportion of church-owned land is let to agricultural tenants and includes important crop-growing areas. We recognise the vital contribution that farmers can make to reducing emissions and farming more sustainably, which is already starting to happen in some areas. Key recommendations include promoting the use of farm carbon audits, so that farmers can assess their greenhouse gas emissions and find suitable ways to reduce the impact of their farms. Church landowners have an important role to play in supporting tenants to make the changes they identify.

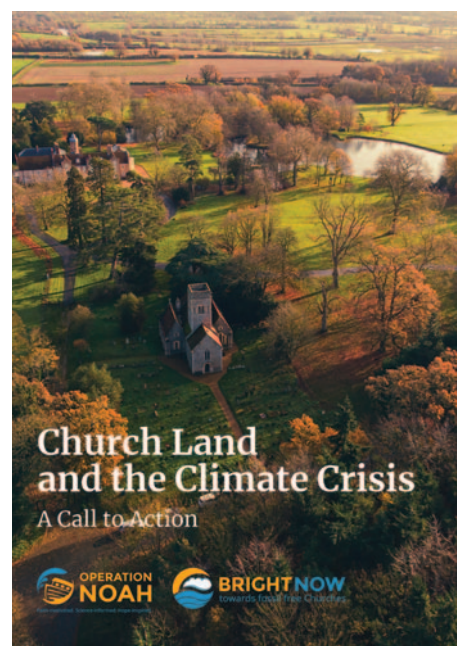
For example, tenant Paul Temple, based at the church-owned Wold Farm on the East Riding estate, describes using "conservation agriculture" principles and the importance of carbon accounting. They use a no-till approach which limits disturbance of soil carbon, and even have a wind turbine. These practices need to become mainstream.

The role of the Church

Throughout history, people of faith have recognised the splendour of the natural

world and what it reveals to us about the one who created it. This is seen from St Francis of Assisi, who saw God reflected in nature, to the Church of England, which recognised the "Care of Creation" as the Fifth Mark of Mission in 1990.

The Church must demonstrate leadership in supporting a fair and fast transition away from investment in and use of fossil fuels, reducing emissions in all its various activities, alongside promoting sustainable choices and low-consumption lifestyles. This must encompass the use and management of church land.



Operation Noah hope that readers of the report will use the influence they have for positive church land use at local, diocesan and national level so that church land can be used prophetically for the benefit of climate, nature and people. ■



Sharon Hall is Bright Now Campaign Officer for Operation Noah, a Christian charity working with the Church to inspire action on the climate emergency. She is author of their *Church Land and the Climate Crisis* report which can be downloaded from Operation Noah's Bright Now website. Visit www.brightnow.org.uk

Peace, justice and joy: towards a green economy

Clare Redfern reports on **Molly Scott Cato's** talk at the Green Christian conference

Our current economic system is not working to safeguard a habitable planet for anyone. It is clearly not bringing justice or peace or joy.

Whilst it's undeniably true that economic growth over the past 40 years has lifted millions out of extreme poverty, providing benefits such as electricity and clean water, the Earth's parameters for a sustainable future are being increasingly overstepped. With biodiversity loss, deforestation, climate chaos, water and soil pollution due to intensive agriculture and more besides, we are inexorably creeping beyond safe limits for planet Earth. And all these problems are caused by our economy and the lifestyle that goes with it.

But the economy is a social system, and we could change the way it works!

So claimed Molly Scott Cato, Professor of Green Economics and former Green MEP, in an inspiring talk for the Green Christian conference last year. She went on to outline how we could design things differently: to minimise our use of energy and resources, instead of the current model, which is designed to maximise profits.

So what does a green economy look like?

"It's about quality not quantity", Molly stated, and a radical adjustment in thinking is needed. Social innovation is required as much, if not more than, technological innovation. The school pedal-bus was given as an amusing example of sustainable school transport.

It's niche maybe, but it illustrates the co-operation, dedication



The S'cool pedal bus

Photo credit: Emilie Sfez



A community agriculture day in France.

Photo credit: Frédéric Sultan Creative Commons

and humour that alternative ways of living might both generate and require. Pooling our energy and talents within communities would be an important aspect of beginning to live within the limits of sustainable consumption.

Different modes of ownership must be developed too, said Molly, for example, car-share schemes and better public transport, rather than more electric cars. The development of local industries and supply chains is vital too. Of course, improved energy efficiency in products, further developing renewable energy and alternative heating systems are also important; we already have all the technology we need to create warmer homes and schools, but these must be publicly funded for the poorest so it's not the wealthy alone who benefit.

Molly also stressed the need for "land reform", advocating a redistribution of land as crucial. This would go hand in hand with the need for reconnection with food growing and green spaces, increasingly recognised as essential to wellbeing. Land could be allocated to those who want to work it to produce vegetables securing supplies of locally grown food, not those making huge profits.

"There is no wealth but life" said John Ruskin – this could be the motto of the green economist! So much of our human potential is being missed out on because we are too busy pursuing nebulous ideals of acquisitions, gadgets and novelty. A new ethic of consumption is required which satisfies our human needs rather than the obsession with status symbols manufactured by adverts.

Molly suggested that the biblical concept of "Jubilee" could be reclaimed; this was when every 50 years, the land was rested, debts had to be cancelled and wealth (and this included land) was redistributed. In Old Testament times, it seems it was clearly understood that wealth accumulates and the most vulnerable suffer as a result, so the Jubilee year was the way that redistribution of land and economic wealth occurred.

We must surely draw on such wisdom to develop inspiring ways that bring justice with flourishing for all. Connecting to our local place, knowing where we belong, finding joy in community; this is the spiritual wealth that people seem to be searching for right now. Molly's final recommendation came from her favourite part of the Quaker Advices and Queries which tells us that we should: "Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation." Amen to that! ■



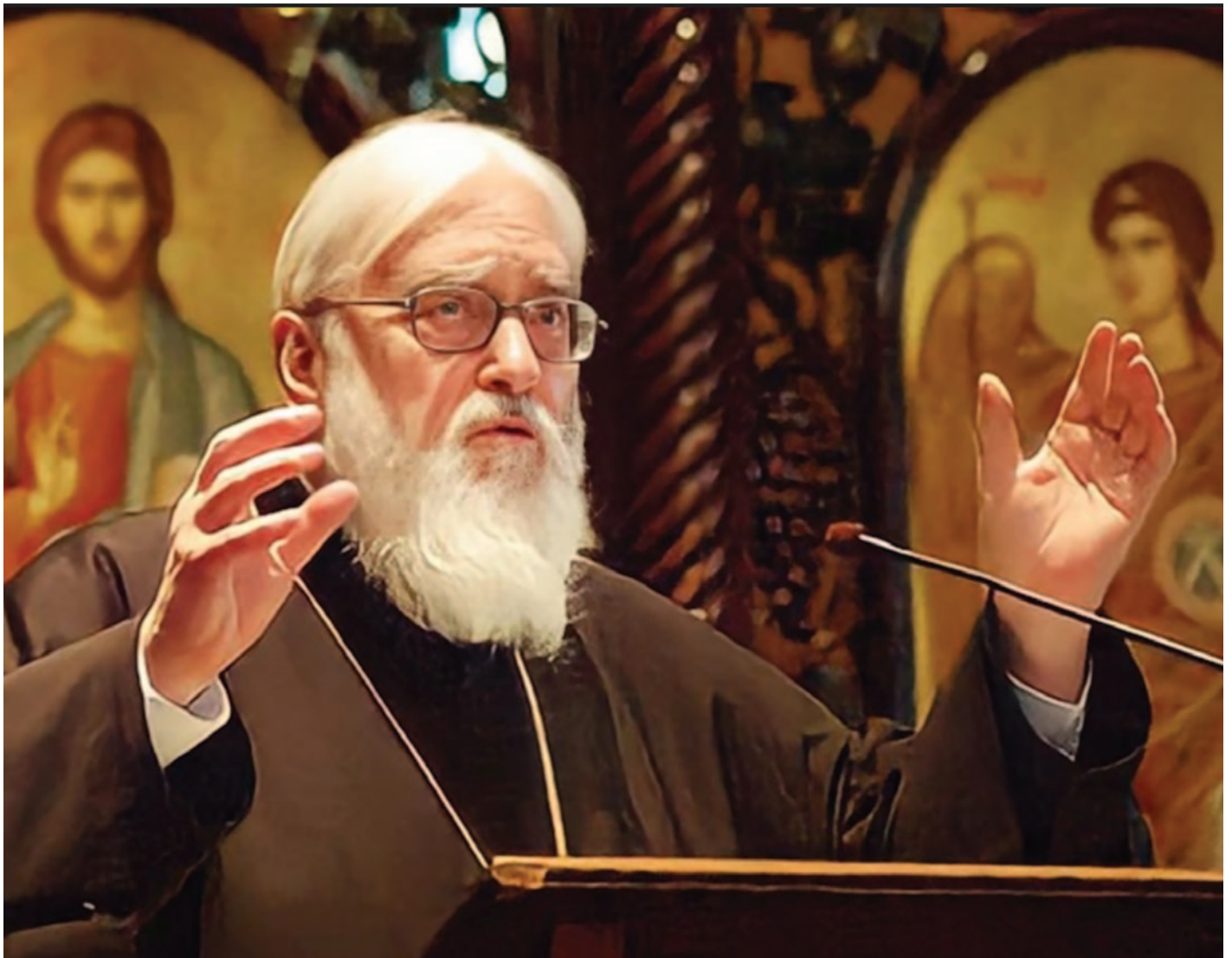
Molly Scott Cato is Professor of Economics at Roehampton University and a former Green MEP. Her complete talk from Green Christian's Building Back Greener conference can be found on the Green Christian YouTube channel.



Clare Redfern is editor of Green Christian magazine.

“Through the creation to the Creator”

Elizabeth Theokritoff remembers Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia (1934-2022)



Bishop Kallistos Ware

Photo credit: Bradley Nassif

In the environmental world, there are the campaigners and the activists. There are loud, impassioned voices. And there are also quiet voices that transform our vision.

Among the latter, undoubtedly, was Kallistos Ware, a bishop in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain – and one of the most acclaimed and respected teachers, preachers and theologians of the Orthodox Church worldwide. Serving as Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox theology at Oxford 1966-2001, Metropolitan Kallistos was also supervisor, mentor and continuing friend to many of today's most influential Orthodox scholars and church leaders.

Few would describe Metropolitan Kallistos as an “eco-theologian”. That was his strength: he could not readily be pigeon-holed according to a particular interest group. He is best known for his still-authoritative introduction *The Orthodox Church* (1965) and for his part in the five-volume translation of the *Philokalia*, the classic eighteenth-century anthology of spiritual and ascetic writings. That monumental collaborative effort has introduced to the English-speaking world strands of the Christian tradition almost wholly unknown in the West, not least to those who turn to non-Christian spiritualities in their quest to reintegrate the material world with the spiritual. It is a tradition in which progress in spiritual life means perceiving ever more clearly

that “the entire cosmos is one vast burning bush permeated by the fire of divine power and glory”.

So says Bishop Kallistos in a 1995 lecture, “Through the creation to the Creator”,¹ where he sets out with characteristic precision and nuance how the Christian understanding of the Earth differs from paganism, ancient or modern: not pantheism, but panentheism, as he would often say. As environmental issues gained prominence in the 1990s, his sermons would often make connections, pointing out the ecological message of feasts in the church year. But his awareness of the “ecological” aspect of Christian faith went back long before such language was fashionable. Professed a monk in 1966 on the island of Patmos, he was privileged to meet the holy elder St Amphilochios (+ 1970), known for his saying that Christ gave us an additional commandment, “Love the trees!” The saint’s influence is evident in the transformation of the once-barren hillsides of Patmos – a powerful witness that Metropolitan Kallistos would often recall. So it is unsurprising to find the young priest-monk speaking already in 1970 about the “value of material creation”,² of rediscovering matter as a sacrament of communion with God.

Metropolitan Kallistos’s work on the *Philokalia* – some of it carried out in monasteries on Mount Athos – also gave him first-hand experience of the transfiguration of the world through human holiness. He would credit his collaborator Gerald Palmer with opening his eyes to Athos as quite literally a Holy Mountain, where “the very rocks and earth..., with all its flowers, shrubs and trees, possess an intrinsic sacredness”.³

Metropolitan Kallistos was a great story-teller; and the vision of the world in stories such as these left a profound mark on the thousands who heard and read him. It reveals environmental destruction as not simply a practical danger: it is a theological error, a travesty of God’s creative will. But there is a message of hope, too. We are not doomed to destroy: we are created to transfigure. ■



Elizabeth Theokritoff is an associate lecturer at the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge. She is the author of *Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology* (St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009) as well as numerous articles.

1 Reprinted in *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Environment, Nature and Creation*, ed. John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 86-105.
2 *Sobornost* 6:3 (1971), pp. 154-165.

3 Gerald Palmer, *the Philokalia and the Holy Mountain*, Friends of Mount Athos Annual Report 1994.



Cave of the Apocalypse Monastery, Patmos

Photo credit: Felipe Tofani from Fotostrasse.com

Unhoused on the heath

A reflection by **Tanya Jones**



Photo credit: JD Designs on Unsplash

Borrowed Time is a Green Christian project providing resources and spaces, including two specific programmes, to support the work of opening to environmental breakdown. **Deep Waters** is a faith-based programme to enable people to express their feelings about climate change and biodiversity loss. It can be used in a church context and seeks to be a practical resource for pastoral needs. **Cloud and Fire** is a programme developed with particular focus on the needs of those in leadership and spiritual direction roles. Through the model of a retreat in daily life, it explores new dimensions of what it means to live in faith through the Anthropocene and in the shadow of climate risk and ecological degradation. This short piece is my personal reflection on what these spaces might contain for us.

In Act 3, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Lear, with his Fool, is out on the heath, in a raging storm. Faced with the disintegration of his own status and relationships, in physical and psychological distress, Lear, for the first time in the play, becomes aware of the reality of social injustice, from which his rank has previously blindfolded him. He speaks.

Poor naked wretches, wherso'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O! I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, Pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.

(28-36)

Borrowed Time, for me, begins on that heath.

I imagine it as a makeshift or a natural shelter, in the eye of the storm,
only temporarily shielded from its most unrelenting force.

It is a place for former kings, for fools, priests, and poets, for me, for all fortunate misfits.

It is a place to come into from the clamour of opinions, not least our own;

To leave at the threshold our self-important burdens, the arrogant weight of privilege and assumption.

It is a place to pass through, not a place to dwell;

to recognise that what is new to us may not be a new thing;

to acknowledge that the world is not our backdrop.

It is a place, not to make us feel better, but to make us feel deeper;

to listen and to get lost;

to move from indifference or guilt to responsibility;

from individualism to solidarity; from centrality to periphery.

A place in which to think seriously,

disentangling the threads of harm in histories, geographies, ecologies and theologies;

to hold tensions without needing to reconcile them;

to find our own framings and to lay them aside.

It is a place to go out of with the energy of agency, patched up and back on the road.

(For there is a road to be travelled by each, and work to be done, whether exterior or interior.)

And a place to be healed, but only just enough, keeping that ragged hole in the heart,

the climate wound through which the light, the wisdom of the wretches, gets in, and abides.

*To find out more, including opportunities to join Deep Waters
or Cloud and Fire programmes, please visit*

www.borrowedtime.earth/



Tanya Jones is a researcher for Green MSP Maggie Chapman. She lectures in green criminology at Abertay University and is researching for a PhD at the University of Dundee in restorative climate justice. She is a Quaker attender, book review editor for Green Christian, and has a longstanding involvement in the Borrowed Time initiative.

And with my body

On contemplating what others have done and what I might do. And time.

Tic the clock tock in the town square
Time for work time to be there
Tick the clock tricks toc in the town square
Be on time that's fair

Tic toc ticking to the belching urgent smoke
To the evenings entertainment the life ignoring joke
Tic toc ticking to the oozing slime of fate
Tic the masquerade of progress toc a crime that cannot wait

It's a crime that ticks within and consumes
Life now beats to the spewing of the fumes
Who shall save us from this body of death
Who inspire us with holy human breath?

And with my body I lay me down

Bouncing softly off the rhythms of the sun
Hot sun cold sun suns gone nights come
Rolling softly with the seasons of the sun
Rolling gently as the rhythms run

Until the stillness
And with my body I lay me down

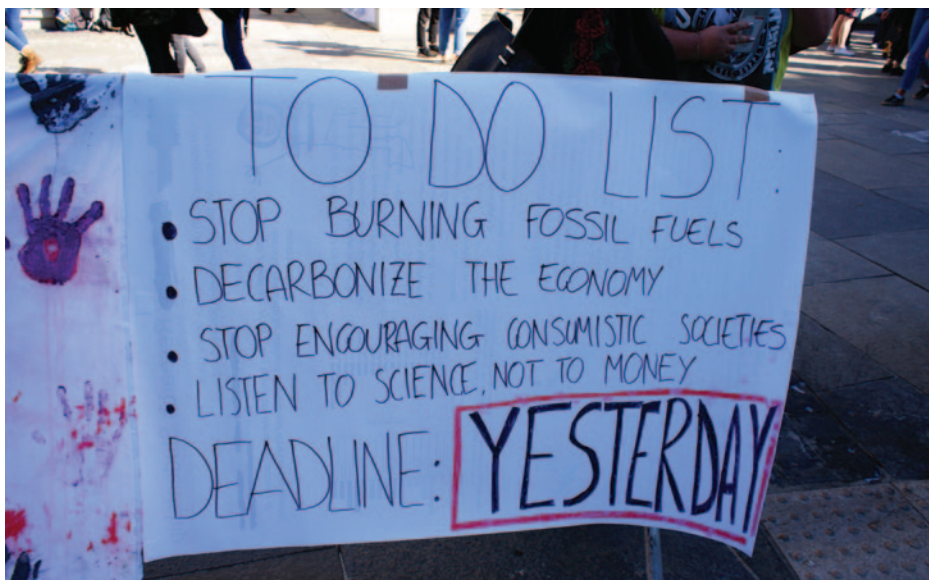
Let me lay down in penitence and faith
Let me lay down undeserving of the grace
Let me lay down with the healing of the leaves
Let me lay down with the friendliness of bees

Lay down on the tanker
Lay down at the gate
Lay down before the running clock
That says you're late, too late.

Lay me down in the stillness
Lay down in the cell
Lay down in the prison
With all things shall be well.

Let me lay down, lay down, lay me down
With my body I lay me down.

Jim Green June 2022



No More Fossil Fuels - Amen!

Photo credit: Gavin Kelman

No More Fossil Fuels – Amen!

Green Christian is joining forces with many other charities in supporting “The Big One” climate protest in Westminster on 21st April. Our ask is our prayer: No more fossil fuels – Amen! The protest is being co-ordinated with the London police force.

On Friday 21st April we are gathering in the garden of St John’s Church, Waterloo from 11am for worship at noon led by Engage Worship and, we hope, The Salvation Army. This will be followed by a walk of pilgrimage at 1pm to “The Big One” protest outside Parliament.

Christian Climate Action are leading gatherings for worship at noon on the other three days of “The Big One”. On Saturday 22nd the focus is on racial and climate justice, led by friends from Black Majority churches, plus a Catholic Mass at 3pm. Sunday 23 April to be led by young people whose future is in the balance, also with an Anglican Eucharist at 3pm. Monday’s noon worship will be led by Christian Climate Action. The details about these other days will be on the Christian Climate Action website. More details can be found on the Green Christian website.



Let's get together to call for change

Photo credit: Callum Shaw

Green Christian Online Workshops and Talks

We have two different monthly Wednesday evening Zoom events for you to choose from, both usually run from 7pm to 8.15pm. Our Joy in Enough monthly talks on the third Wednesday are by experts on themes of the environment, the economy and faith, with Q&A at the end.

Our 2023 series of Green Christian workshops take place on the first Wednesday of each month and are more interactive, practical and may involve breakout groups. Forthcoming workshops are:

Wednesday 3rd May, Prof Tim Cooper, “Faith in fashion? Christian perspectives on unsustainable clothing practices”. Tim is internationally recognised for his research on the life-span of consumer durables and has led several research

Join Now

Membership on line starts at just £2 a month.

Please go to

greenchristian.org.uk/join-us/

Or use the form below and send with your remittance to:

Green Christian Membership, Richard Kierton,
Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace,
Buxton SK17 6HS

Please tick:

- ☐ Standard Membership £30
☐ Joint/Family £40 Corporate £60
☐ Green Christian (the magazine only) £20
☐ Church Membership (recommended) £60

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____
(GC95)

projects on sustainable clothing funded by Defra and WRAP.

Wednesday 7th June, Paul Bodenham, "Colours of Green". See Paul's article in this issue of the magazine. This will be an opportunity for Green Christian members to explore perspectives on race, diversity and privilege, and discuss how we might respond together.

Details on the upcoming talks and workshops are on our website. All our talks and workshops are on our YouTube channel.



Having fun at last year's Othona Green Weekend



Photo credit: Lea Williams



Photo credit: JunCtions under Creative Commons

Deep Waters

The next eight-week run of Deep Waters will be in September. It is a gentle and safe exploration of difficult emotions surrounding climate change. It consists of reflections and discussion in small groups using Zoom. Deep Waters is also available for churches to run themselves, as it is suitable both for in-person groups and online. See the Green Christian website for details of how to take part.

Festivals!

Othona Green Weekend is from 28th April to 1st May at Othona, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex CM0 7PN, on a theme of "Time for Climate Change Action". Green Christian member Edward Gildea will be speaking. You can see some of Edward's blogs on the Green Christian website.

Cliff Festival 2023, 26th to 29th May takes place at Cliff College in the Hope Valley, Sheffield and has the theme: "Eden Restored". Green Christian members Catherine Fish and Colin McCulloch are leading workshops. The weekend will explore significant "garden encounters" in Scripture, from the garden of Eden to the restoration of all things in Revelation, and reflect on the meaning of how we care for God's creation. Cliff Festival is one of the most affordable Christian festivals in the UK. Please see their website for prices of day and weekend tickets, accommodation and camping pitches.

Greenbelt Festival 2023, 24th to 27th August, Boughton House, nr Kettering. Celebrate the 50th anniversary festival with a weekend of music, comedy, craft, theatre, dance, food, spirituality, talks, provocation and more. Come and visit our stall.

On the Road Together Days

Since 2018 Green Christian has been running regional days with Green Christian and local communities to deepen ecological discipleship, mobilise for change, and build common cause for creation. We would love to run more such days in 2023.

Each day usually includes a session on The Green Christian Way of Life, a session on Joy in Enough, and more recently, a session with a speaker from Christian Climate Action. Other activities take place according to the local interest of the local group co-hosting the meeting. Could you consider hosting an *On the Road Together* event in 2023? If so, contact Isobel Murdoch isobel.murdoch@greenchristian.org.uk 01790 763603

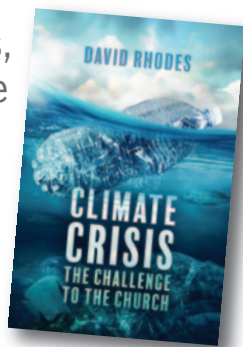
Leaving a legacy gift to Green

Christian will help ensure the work we do lives on. When writing or amending your Will you need to make a note of our official name (which is still CEL), our registered address and our charity number:

Christian Ecology Link,
35 Kitto Road, London SE14 5TW.
Charity No. 328744.

Climate Crisis, The Challenge to the Church

David Rhodes
April 2020
Kevin Mayhew
ISBN: 978-1-83858-081-0
164 pages
RRP £10.99 (paperback)



If you are looking for a book that addresses the important role which the Church could play in engaging with the climate crisis, and share the author's sense that the Church has become lost in its own preoccupations, then this short book is for you. David Rhodes introduces its focus: "The Church has ignored the Jesus vision of radical social justice summed up in the call to love our neighbour. It has buried him under a mountain of religion, blinding us to his message of love and liberation".

He begins by recognising that the climate crisis overshadows all the poverty, injustice and racism that blights the world, before arguing that some basic theological assumptions are blocking the ability of the Church to engage with that crisis. What is lacking is not the necessary technology but the political will to make the changes required. But he believes that the Church must change before it can support the radical social change needed globally. "To play its part in halting climate disaster, the Church needs to recalibrate its understanding of why it exists. To lay aside the comfort blanket of religion and get down and dirty in the political arena – as Jesus did."

Rhodes, a former journalist before becoming a parish priest, with a gift of being able to say important things simply and powerfully, has produced a book which will be accessible, engaging and helpful for many Christians. It is not a comfortable read. He means to challenge the reader, and does so with startlingly fresh readings of some of the more difficult parables. He asks whether in the parable of the workers waiting to be employed in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), Jesus was actually confronting the poor with the injustice which kept them in

poverty and whether, in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), the third servant, burying his money, reveals how the rich man ruthlessly exploits those who are economically vulnerable.

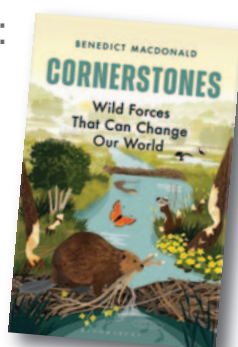
I did feel uncomfortable with Rhodes' combative journalistic style. To say that the Church has buried the real Jesus under centuries of dogma and tradition is true in some respects, but it also minimises how dogma and tradition in their specific, culturally-bound ways, actually witness profoundly to the real Jesus. It is, after all, the Church which has given birth to Christian Aid, CAFOD and so many local projects.

I would have appreciated a more balanced treatment of theological sources. Rhodes criticises St Augustine's "command and control strategy" as a bishop, and his abrasive thinking about original sin. But it was Augustine who wrote: "What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear sighs and sorrows. That is what love looks like." As Rhodes himself writes, "The Church treats love as an abstract noun but, for God, it is an extremely active verb. Love means much more than having a kindly and sympathetic disposition towards another person. It is a social and therefore political activity."

Andrew Norman

Cornerstones: Wild Forces that Can Change Our World

Benedict Macdonald
July 2022
Bloomsbury Wildlife
ISBN 978-1-4729-7160-9
256 pages
RRP £17.99 (hardback)



Benedict Macdonald is a conservationist, naturalist, producer and writer, who is currently Head of Nature Restoration for Real Wild Estates in the UK. In this book, he identifies a number of key

species of UK flora and fauna as "cornerstones"; ecosystem engineers which actively create and shape the ecosystems in which we live. Macdonald convincingly argues that these cornerstone species are essential to restoring biodiversity, identifying not only the obvious but also the unexpected benefits which these valuable species bring to our environment.

Each chapter looks at a particular "cornerstone" and the valuable roles that each plays in restoring our somewhat depleted natural landscape. For example, wild boar help to produce an ideal environment for dwindling colonies of butterflies, so the reintroduction of the Tamworth pig in Sussex (as it is illegal in the UK to reintroduce wild boar) has led to a direct increase in the number of Purple Emperors.

The beauty of complexity within relationships in nature is also explored. Macdonald looks at the new field of phytoacoustics – the ability of flowers to "hear" when a bee is approaching, in order to raise sugar levels in nectar. This is absolutely fascinating and, in my opinion, mind blowing. Humans still have a lot to learn about these mutually beneficial relationships within creation.

The book covers issues around rewilding and looks at the impact of projects across the globe including the reintroduction of wolves within Yellowstone Park in 1995, with its unanticipated effects on the landscape and wild inhabitants. Countries like France, Portugal and Spain are seeing the positive effects of protecting, nurturing and embracing these cornerstone species, but this isn't always the case in the UK. In discussing the limited reintroduction of the beaver in Devon, Macdonald notes the resentment and fear of this creature, often based on baseless myths and "medieval levels of misinformation".

Full of fascinating facts and engagingly written, this is a good read which shows ways in which the balance can be restored in nature, if only we are willing to share stewardship of our environment with our natural partners.

Angie Gibson

Zero Altitude: How I learned to fly less and travel more

Helen Coffey

May 2022

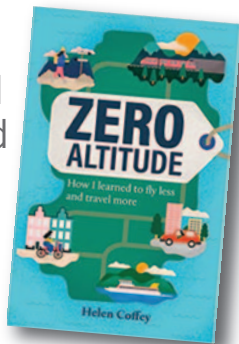
Flint

ISBN:

978 0 7509 9572 6

288 pages

RRP: £16.99 (hardback)



Until May 2019, Helen Coffey, as travel editor of *The Independent*, was a frequent flyer. Then she stumbled across the Swedish Flight Free Movement, and the many prominent people going “flight free” for environmental reasons. This book describes Helen’s experiment going from frequent flyer to abstinence. Flight-free journeys are described in amusing detail, as expected from a leading travel journalist, but there is much more to the book than a series of travelogues.

Chapter 1 starts with useful current statistics about the climate impact of flying as compared to other forms of travel. A key message is that individual actions do matter; the influential Swedish Flight Free Movement seems to be responsible for a reduction of nine per cent in flying from 2018 to 2019. As Coffey says: “You are voting every time you open your wallet”.

Many of the journeys described in the book coincided with the pandemic, and the concept of “staycation” is represented by trips to the Highlands and Scilly Isles. Before setting off on a rail tour of Europe, Coffey seeks the advice of Mark Smith, aka “The Man in Seat 61”, who gives practical advice, and Anna Hughes, the founder of Flight Free UK, who suggests “...there has to be a slight shift in mindset”, though I might quibble with the use of the word “slight”. Coffey then undertakes a European rail tour taking in Paris, Munich and Rijeka. Other non-flying journeys described include London to Oxford by hitchhiking, and a Camino pilgrimage using ferry and rail. There is even a journey to another continent, arriving at Tangier without flying. The descriptions of the trips are enjoyable, with much practical advice and sustainability

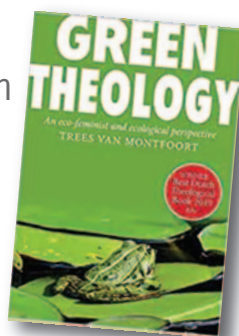
assessments. There are chapters on the benefits and downsides of tourism, and on new technology intended to make airline travel more sustainable.

Coffey shows she fully understands our current environmental and economic context. Indeed, in this pre-Covid description from May 2019, she could be writing for a *Joy in Enough* module: “Growth, growth and more growth. Ever expanding, no slowing down. This was true of world economics, of consumption — and, of course, of flying. Despite promises of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050, airlines were doing little to curb that growth.”

The book grapples with the climate implications of our everyday travel choices in an enjoyable and accessible way, with the technical background relatively easy to grasp, some interesting mathematical tools to calculate climate impacts of travel and detailed references. These travel questions are rarely asked, even by committed Christians, and very rarely by those organising pilgrimages. Even enlightened Green Christian members might benefit from reading this book.

Stephen Retout

Green Theology – An eco-feminist and ecumenical perspective.



Trees van

Montfoort

January 2022

Darton Longman & Todd

ISBN: 978-1913657284

368 pages

RRP £19.99 (paperback)

This is an ambitious book, aiming to “render theology greener and show the environmental movement how theology substantially contributes to ecological sustainability”. Each of the four chapters: *Theology and sustainability*; *The different worldview of the Bible*; *Issues in eco-theology* and *Insights from eco-feminist theology worldwide*, covers a vast

territory and inevitably there is an introductory feel to the subjects.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the scope of the current ecological crisis, revealed through the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. This crisis, according to van Montfoort, is not just a practical problem to be solved but requires a shift in seeing, escaping from the sway of the market driven, technocratic world, which has generated the problems. “The ecological crisis necessitates a deconstruction of the present world view”, she writes and it is there that theology can contribute.

This leads to an analysis of Biblical texts; reading from an ecological perspective means a shift from a preoccupation with individual salvation and personal growth. There is a lengthy look at particular scriptures, drawn from the opening chapters of Genesis, Deutero-Isaiah, Proverbs and the Psalms and some from the New Testament. As the author says, an alternative world view can be found in the Bible, but equally, the status quo can be confirmed.

Next, van Montfoort addresses some important issues in eco-theology. Stewardship is closely considered, along with other major biblical themes including liberation and redemption. The divide between God and nature is examined and the reader introduced to Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*. All interesting, but I think that opportunities to make links with current issues are missed. For example, a hard look at what sustainability means at a time of corporate greenwashing would be useful, as would the concept of Sabbath rest as an interrupter of the pressure to produce and consume, particularly in the context of the attention economy.

The last chapter introduces the reader to the work of four theologians: Sally McFague, Ivonne Gebara, Catherine Keller and Elizabeth Theokritoff, each representing a different perspective within the Christian tradition: Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox. This was the chapter I enjoyed most, as each gave helpful insights.

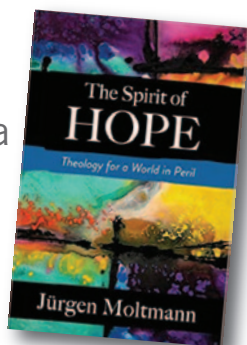
The scope of this ambitious book, and its consequent introductory nature, are

valuable in themselves and will provide readers with a springboard for further reflection. Its themes could perhaps be connected especially with local communities, as the author herself highlights in her concluding reflection of participating in a Harvest Thanksgiving.

Jonathan Morris

The Spirit of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril

Jürgen Moltmann
Westminster John
Knox Press
November 2019
ISBN: 9780664266639
230 pages
RRP £20.99 (paperback)



Moltmann opens this book, a sequel to his *Theology of Hope*, with the challenging statement “We live in troubled times; one can affirm without exaggeration” and questions how we can guide our lives in such a perilous context. However, if the reader expects to find a practical handbook then they will be disappointed. This is Moltmann offering a theological and philosophical perspective on the current global crisis in his own distinctive style. His concern is that humankind is a destructive force, no longer living in harmony with the natural rhythms of the Earth. Moltmann’s approach is essentially Christian but he includes perspectives from world religions which reflect the nature of humanity.

We are told that “today we stand at the end of modern age” and it is now time to reaffirm humanity’s role in a world of God-created habitats. The supreme spiritual being who is present in all of us gives us an inborn love of life and a rejection of those negative notions which bring us to death and destruction. We have thus a common bond in our world religions which, together with our sharing of finite space and resources in our global village, and inevitable interaction in both economics and politics, are a potential basis for global collaboration. The example for such a constructive scenario is the human act of mercy,

modelled by the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan.

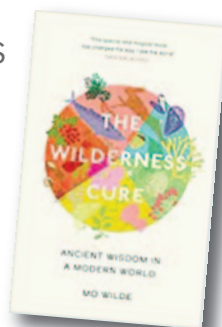
Moltmann stresses that the world which we share is an unfinished act of creation, completion depending upon human inputs, which should be based on the foundation of the inherent spirituality within us, and not upon secular priorities. He suggests that hope in our future world may be found in living together with common purpose.

When training for ordination, I found Moltmann’s writings invaluable, but I question whether the journey expounded in this book, in essence a journey into the mind, represents a more promising solution than hands-on practical action.

Rev Dr S John Harrison

The Wilderness Cure

Mo Wilde
June 2022
Simon and Schuster
ISBN: 978-1398508637
368 pages
RRP £16.99 (hardback)



This book is a record of the author’s decision to eat only food foraged from the wild for a year. Wilde is generally vegetarian, but recognises that to have enough calories in the winter she will have to eat meat and fish; these are hunted or fished by friends.

She starts in November, without having decided at a time when she could have preserved more summer and autumn foods, but as she says, she is impetuous.

What follows are descriptions of foraging and her joy at being out in nature, along with some tantalising menus. These include: squirrel marinated in sea buckthorn juice and wild raspberry vinegar; acorn and chestnut flours used for batter and biscuits; vinaigrette of elderberry vinegar and birch sap syrup; haw ketchup, sea arrowgrass and Few-flowered leek tarts, with shells made of acorn and chestnut flour bound with deer fat. She collects, prepares and uses

many more ingredients, along with a wide variety of mushrooms. Looking at the names conveys the amount of time and energy that has gone into searching for and preparing the food. She has researched which plants can be used as food or medicine, and their locations – no small undertaking.

Alongside these descriptions of food and foraging are reflections and information on diet, Stone Age practice, and some consequences of the way we live today. She loses considerable weight in the year, and reflects on the hormones of leptin and ghrelin that suppress or increase appetite, in a healthy way for hunter gatherers, but not for us today. We also learn of the struggle, particularly in February with no green leaves to pick, concerns about running out of certain foods, which our ancestors would have known well, and her longing for some foods she cannot have by foraging. She gives love and care to the process of skinning animals, using Stone Age type tools, trusting that their deaths are not wasted. For Wilde, the connection with nature is tangible and spiritual and feeds her soul. She encourages this life-giving contact, underlining the care foragers must give to not depleting the plants they take.

At the back of the book is a list of edible wild foods, but with no pictures, so I was left thinking that two companion books are needed with the *Wilderness Cure*: one of the plants, with pictures, habitat and descriptions, and another of her recipes, including how to prepare the wild food for use. This is a fascinating book describing an alternative way of life that will either have you wanting to try some of the ideas, or else be very grateful for the work of farmers and availability of convenience food.

Chris Polhill

Please email our Review Editor,
Tanya Jones
tanyajones@greenchristian.org.uk
with your ideas for future reviews,
and also if you would like to join
our regular reviewers’ list.



NO MORE FOSSIL FUELS. AMEN!

**APRIL 21-24
100,000 PEOPLE
HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT**

**Gathering on 21st April at St John's Waterloo
from 11am for worship
From 1 pm, pilgrimage to Parliament Square**

Check
www.greenchristian.org.uk/the-big-one/
for details

