

green christian

the magazine



Holding up the world

Our front cover is by a young Palestinian artist living in Gaza, Azza Shaikh Ahmad. It was painted in 2022 before the ongoing desecration of human lives and land. Could she still produce art so full of vibrant colour and hope now, I wonder? Not that she can paint as her home is destroyed; may she be safe.

All our articles in this issue point to darkening situations, whether it's from geopolitical instability and war, climate and ecological collapse, increasing inequality, the fraying of democratic rights. Can we keep holding up our world to the light? Can we ourselves reflect the light of Christ?

Chris Rose of The Amos Trust writes of the human and ecological cost of the war in Gaza. As he states, it's not enough to hope that things will improve, we must find our focus – where will we invest our passion and energy? Yet he writes: “We cannot fragment our desire for a better world for all are interconnected.”

This interconnection of all of creation, of all actions and issues, is a key message of the Pope's encyclical of 2015, *Laudato Si'* which 10 years on, continues to inspire and challenge. Martin Davis, a Green Christian founder member

celebrates its ongoing legacy in the Laudato Si' Movement, whilst wishing its message was more central to the Church's teaching. Whilst the Church is beginning to awaken to its prophetic calling to serve and preserve our world, is it too little, too late?

Other contributors echo this but give some wonderful examples of what some churches and groups beyond are doing to raise awareness and care for our world: whether lament for polluted rivers with bishops and Red Rebels, making Eco Church a reality, engaging in prophetic protest, and defending the right to do so.

Alan Heeks writes of the need for intentional communities existing beyond the established churches and this will be explored in a forthcoming online workshop. It will also be part of the discussion at our Annual Members Meeting on November 15th with the theme: **Building on the Rock – true resilience for stormy times.**

A vision of *shalom*, of right relationships within our interconnected world: with the divine, with each other and with all of creation, informs all we do within Green Christian. We provide resources and encouragement, fostering communities

that can support and inspire change. Finding our focus, as individuals, as an organisation, within our communities, in our churches, we must also recognise that we can't do everything.

I wanted to ask Azza about her painting and its possible meanings but she is currently uncontactable. To me, her painting says that we are stronger together – holding on, lifting up the world to the light, creating shelter, rejoicing in the joyful freedom of birds – and is that a dove of peace?

If it's possible for us, let's hold onto joy. As I wrote this, the Green Christian Chair, George Dow sent me “a wee Haiku, in these increasingly troubling times”

Tree Haiku

Amidst the chaos

Joyous branches dance skywards

Roots nestle in earth



If we can watch the trees dancing, and can walk freely in peaceful countryside; can we not also give support and speak out for those who can't be heard? Let's hold up the world to the light together. ■



Clare Redfern,
Editor

Green Christian

Published by Green Christian

Editorial Team:

Clare Redfern,
T: 07906 454771
E: editors@greenchristian.org.uk
Tanya Jones (Book Review Editor)
Angie Gibson
Judith Russenberger

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 text 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 Revive uncoated paper 100gsm. It is made from FSC recycled 100% post-consumer waste pulp, and is carbon balanced.

Magazine Distribution

Geoff Perrett,
T: 029 2070 5966

Design by

dbagraphics@gmail.com

Print production and mailing

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

©2025 Green Christian
ISSN 1364-3169

Green Christian is a registered charity

No. 328744

Company Registration No. 2445198

Next Issue

Copy deadline: mid-June 2025
Publication Date: September 2025

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.

Chair of Green Christian

George Dow
E: georgedow@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 greenchristian.org.uk

Contents



Welcome to **Green Christian**

Issue 99

Easter 2025

FEATURES

4 We do hope

Chris Rose weighs the human and ecological cost in Gaza and beyond



P4

8 Lament, Red Rebels, and a river

Duncan Forbes asks why we are not appalled and repentant



P8

10 Why protest about protest

Judith Russenberger explains why she sat down in the road



P10

12 Laudato Si' 10 years on

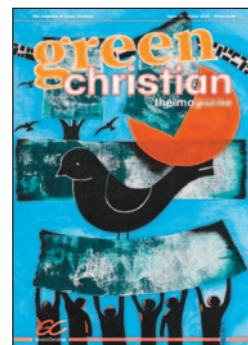
Martin Davis considers the legacy of the Pope's 2015 encyclical

14 Catalysing the change to a greener Church

Margaret Roberts shares some tips

16 For the spiritual thirst of our times...

Alan Heeks encourages us to be the leaven in our communities



18 Witnessing to Christ's love of all creation

Dave Penney wants us to speak out

Cover illustration is a painting entitled, *Hopeful* by Azza Shaikh Ahmad, a Palestinian artist. Forty-nine artists from Gaza, many unknown, took part in The Walled Off Gallery and Amos Trust's "Colours of Gaza" exhibition in Bethlehem in September 2022. Reproduced here with kind permission of the artist and the painting's owner.

REGULARS

2 EDITORIAL

7 PRAYER

20 POETRY

21 LOCAL GROUPS

22 GC NEWS

24 BOOK REVIEWS

We do hope

Chris Rose weighs the human and ecological cost in Gaza and beyond



Young boy in Gaza

Nick Welsh, Amos Trust

Amos Trust is a small creative human rights organisation that for 40 years has promoted the need for justice and hope. We are best known for our work in Palestine, where we deliver projects on the ground, campaign for Palestinian rights and celebrate Palestinian culture. We also have long-standing programmes calling for climate justice (based around our Latin American partners) and on creating opportunities for girls and young women whose lives revolve around the streets, with partners in Tanzania, South Africa, India and Burundi.

For many of us the last 18 months has felt like a long dark night, with the onslaught on Gaza being at the forefront of it. Whether the final death toll will be 46,000, 65,000¹ or 170,000 (when we include all those who have died through famine, disease and the destruction of Gaza's healthcare system), one life is one life too many, and we have all witnessed a genocide being streamed in real-time.

¹ [thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)02678-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)02678-3/fulltext)

The attack has been an onslaught on every aspect of life in Gaza and the environmental costs are staggering. The UN Development Programme said Gaza needs “approximately 80 years” to restore all the fully destroyed housing. 92% of Gaza's houses have been damaged or destroyed with 82% destroyed in north Gaza. A similar situation is true with the whole of Gaza's infrastructure including hospitals, schools, mosques. 68% of Gaza agricultural land has been severely damaged or polluted; 80% to 96% of Gaza's agricultural assets have been decimated.

There are over 50 million tons of rubble – 16 times greater than the debris from all regional conflicts in the past 16 years combined. This rubble is contaminated not just with body parts and waste, but also the remains of white phosphorus, irradiated shells and unexploded ordnance. There is an estimated 37 million tons of solid waste to be cleared in Gaza and 85 per cent of water and sewage facilities are either fully or partially non-operational.

In addition to this, in November 2024, it was reported that over 85,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on Gaza since October 2023, exceeding the amount of explosives used in World War II. It is just 365 square km. It is estimated that over 7,500 tons of unexploded ordnance remain scattered across Gaza; clearing these could take up to 14 years. Meanwhile the emissions generated during the first two months of the war alone were greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations.

Our anger at this and frustration in watching this unfold in real-time has swept so many of us up and fuelled a massively increased level of Palestine advocacy. Our disbelief that not one, but two UK Governments can do so little to protect Palestinians while continuing to arm Israel and criminalise protestors, has left us incensed. Yet we still hope that our government will open their eyes – but it seems that they won't.

While we have rejoiced in ceasefires and ongoing prisoner exchanges, it doesn't herald a new dawn. Over the next few years, in many ways the night is going to get darker and darker. Not just in Palestine but for us all. As Trump leads the new charge to the right he seeks to destroy environmental legislation and to "fix" Ukraine, Palestine, Mexico's border, China, Canada, Greenland and so on.

How do we respond?

Well first of all it's important to be real. Taking a deep breath

and keeping going again, and again, and again is not going to be enough – we will just hyperventilate and get even more worn out. Nor will it be enough to "hope" that things must improve to offset our despair or to repeat the mantra that *"the darkest hour is the one before the dawn"* as it keeps getting darker. Not will it be enough to strategize our way forward – even if we were all members of Mensa. Too often the strategy and the action become far too estranged.

We clearly need to stop. To breathe deeply and take our next step forward. We need to think through and develop how we will respond, in the short term and in planning for the future beyond the next four years. And we need to remind ourselves that hope is a discipline that we work on daily. But we also need to decide what we will focus on and not just get blown around by the latest headlines and the far right's desperate desire to suck out all the oxygen.

When we look for even a flicker of conscience in our politicians, it helps to recognise the shoulders on which we stand. We stand in a long line of very normal, remarkable people who have done very normal and extraordinary things. Whether it be those leaders who have inspired our activism or the person who lives next door. We need to be inspired by and to learn from them as the situations they faced felt just as extreme.

Secondly, we must be clear on what we long for. Amos Trust takes its name from the Old Testament prophet, and particularly from Martin Luther King's favourite verse, Amos



Aerial drone view of North Gaza, March 2024

Photo Credit: ImageBank4u/Shutterstock

5:24: *"Let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like a never-ending stream".*

The waters rolling down that Amos is picturing are not those of a gentle flowing river; that would have been alien to him. You only have to visit Teqoa, where Amos came from, to realise that. Teqoa is five miles southeast of Bethlehem on the West Bank. There is an Israeli settlement on one side of the dried Wadi, on the other the old Palestinian village. Yet when it rains just even a mizzle, that dried Wadi changes into a roaring river that takes out rocks and boulders and anyone stupid enough to get in its way. We are not wanting justice to flow like a meandering river but to roar through, getting rid of everything in its path. We want it to come from a never-ending spring, gushing out.

We cannot fragment our desire for a better world. I honestly don't believe we can really love anything if we don't in some way love creation and want an end to the massive injustices which dominate so many lives. Even if our campaigns must be fragmented, we must not lose sight of what we long for most. I passionately long for most pesticides to be banned. I have done remarkably little about it but am very glad that others have done a lot more. At the moment I am delighted that so many have joined the Palestine campaign, but to quote MLK, *"No one is free until we are all free"* – not just Palestine.

That does, but should not, sound daunting. One of the shoulders I am often perched on is that of North American historian and civil rights activist, Howard Zinn, who said: *"To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness. What we choose to emphasise in this complex history will determine our lives."*

If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places – and there are so many – where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory."

So let's look into the darkness – and decide what we choose to focus on.



Tanzania Women's group

Photo credit: Christoph Stulz

A little over a year ago at Amos Trust we decided to focus on, not just Palestine, but also our Climate Justice projects in Central America. Along with our projects in Africa and India, we saw these as a sign of hope when Gaza was so hard. In that time our longest standing partner CEPAD² in Nicaragua, which specialised in empowering local communities (particularly women) to respond to the impact of climate change, was closed down by the Nicaraguan government. Despite operating closely with the regime for over 50 years they found themselves, together with 1,500 other NGOs, on a list of organisations ordered to cease trading. They are still trying to work out how they might respond and if they will be able to operate at all in the future.

Yet our climate fellowship, which annually supports a cohort of 12 young female climate activists in Mexico and Central America, has flourished. These young women are seeking to respond to their communities' needs in highly sexist environments against vested interests, corruption, cartels and a legislature which often cares little for the environment.

They face huge challenges and our desire to create a network of young female activists who can support one another may seem far too little. Yet, ultimately, we choose to either celebrate the light or wrap ourselves up in the darkness. There really isn't any choice. ■



Chris Rose is the Director of Amos Trust, a creative human rights organisation that promotes Palestinian rights, creates opportunities for girls and young women whose lives revolve around the streets and calls for climate justice. Chris has travelled extensively to Amos partner projects and led many trips and activities with them. He co-founded the Street Child World Cup in South Africa in 2010 and led Amos' Just Walk from London to Jerusalem in 2017.

2 CEPAD Council of Protestant Churches of Nicaragua cepadnica.org

Affirmation

We believe
That justice is how love looks in public
That hope is a song in a weary voice
That stumbling is not falling
Together we can be the change we long to see
We believe
That peace is the apology of the strong to the weak
That faith is being sure of what we hope for
That we all come from the Creator
Trailing wisps of glory
We believe
That if we have eyes to see
That if we have ears to hear
That when we least expect it, hope bursts into life
Stable walls echoing to a baby's first cry.

from Amos Trust amustrust.org/resources/words-of-hope/tuesdays-at-five/, with permission

After Psalm 19

The sky does it simply, naturally
day by day
the sun does it joyfully
like someone in love
like a runner on the starting line
the sky, the sun,
they just can't help themselves
no loud voices, no grand speeches
but everyone sees, and is happy with them.

Make us like that, Lord
so that our faith is not in our words but in our lives
not in what we say but in who we are
passing on your love like an infectious laugh:
not worried, not threatening, just shining
like the sun, like a starry night,
like a lamp on a stand,
light for life -
your light for our lives.

From *The Pattern of our Days*,
ed. Kathy Galloway (Wild Goose Publications 1996) with permission

Photo credit: Wally Hicks

Lament, Red Rebels, and a river

“Why are we not appalled?” asks **Duncan Forbes**



Red Rebels, silent lament

Photo credit: David Spicer, Witney Photo Group

Who speaks for the polluted brook by which I have just walked, its waters flowing greasy brown and covered with scum? Who speaks for the mature cherry tree close to home, now to be felled to make way for two new houses? Who represents the colony of sparrows whose chatter enlivens our winter days, now under threat from the same development?

Isn't this how we should love the created world – by being its advocate? Yet how little we hear from lectern and pulpit. Should we not be lamenting week by week what we have done and are continuing to do? Why are we not as churches appalled and repentant at the casual violence that we inflict daily on

the uniqueness and beauty of all that surrounds us and sustains us?

As Western Christians, we no longer know lament in our worship – lament as the Hebrew scriptures portray it. The shattering losses of the temple destruction and the Babylonian exile echo through our Old Testament. Our planet is now suffering losses on a far greater scale, and still we don't lament.

There is a group that does, though: the Red Rebels, founded in Bristol in 2019. The Oxfordshire Red Rebels and their friends bear witness to the climate and ecological emergency. They wear red to denote the lifeblood of all species and their make-up enables emotion to be clearly seen. They move silently and

peacefully as they beg our leaders to act urgently to save our planet from drought, scorching temperature, floods, pollution and environmental collapse. They invite us to act too. In Creationtide last October, their lament formed part of our worship.

The river Windrush flows through the town of Witney, Oxfordshire, where I live. Less than 20 years ago its waters ran crystal clear and were full of life. Older residents remember the joy of swimming in it in summer. Now it runs grey and almost lifeless on its journey to join the Thames a few miles downstream. The ways in which England's water companies have presided over the almost universal degradation of our rivers, streams and lakes has become

widely recognised. A major contribution to media and public awareness has been made by a local group, Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP), whose members have painstakingly gathered data and evidence over several years. These facts have provided an unanswerable basis for the campaign to rebuild and maintain an infrastructure to the standard which will enable our river to recover.

As is becoming increasingly acknowledged, though, we will not find adequate answers to our environmental predicament through technology alone, essential though this is. Learning how to live within the ecological niche where we find ourselves, understanding its boundaries and its opportunities, is a fundamentally spiritual task. It is no coincidence that the church season of Creationtide was launched in 1989, just as environmental destruction was becoming more generally known. This season from September 1st - October 4th each year was intended as a time to renew our relationship with our Creator and all creation through celebration, conversion, and commitment together. In the 35 years since then, though, the necessary and radical reassessment by Western Christians of humanity's role in God's creation has been patchy and slow, to say the least. Many churches still barely acknowledge Creationtide.

St Mary's Witney sought on Sunday 6th October last year to make a very public demonstration of how our worship and our discipleship are inseparable, and how together they are a response to the universal call to seek a just and sustainable world where the whole of creation can flourish. We held a "River Blessing" service, widely advertised through the town and local media. Part of the morning worship, after communion, was a time of lament for our world and what we are doing to it. A representative of WASP spoke briefly

and movingly about how she had given up her work to dedicate her time to work for the recovery of our river. This was followed by verses read out from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations on the theme that *"The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants"* (Is. 24:5). In silence, dramatic and unannounced, a group of Red Rebels entered the church, slowly going to the altar, where they formed a tableau expressive of the distress found in the readings. They then moved to the font, where another tableau reflected the powerful words of Amos: *"...let justice roll down like waters..."* (Amos 5:24).



Red Rebels at St Mary's Witney

The Red Rebels passed silently out of the church, followed shortly afterwards by the congregation led by our Area Bishop and church choir. A ten minute procession through Witney to the River Windrush was followed by a short service on the bank, the Bishop standing on a footbridge. Words of blessing spoken by the Bishop over the water acknowledged the damage we had done, prayed for those people working to rectify it, and asked God to *"Bless this river and its waters. Give us a vision of a future where pure flowing water is a sign of healing and renewal...God of life, let waters flow and wash away injustice"*. A small cross made of willow cut from the



Bishop at Windrush lament Photo credit: David Spicer, Witney Photo Group

riverside was cast into the water and carried away by the stream.

The Witney Benefice Environment Group, which planned the event and devised the liturgy, acknowledge the inspiration provided by St Mary's Teddington, a Thames-side church which has been holding a river blessing on Sea Sunday for a number of years. We are grateful for their welcome and hospitality. We are also grateful to the Red Rebels for agreeing to be such a powerful part of our worship, and to Bishop Gavin for presiding and for being so welcoming of the idea.

In our seeking to understand God's continuing work of creation in all its fullness we learn how to participate most fully in the divine purpose. Should not Creationtide in our time be as important a season as the other major Christian ones? Perhaps it can be a time where we can also learn how to lament. ■



Duncan Forbes is not a Red Rebel, though he often feels both red and rebellious. In the last few years he has been one of the team developing Green Christian's "Cloud and Fire" programme.

Why protest about protest

Judith Russenberger explains why she sat down in the road



Protesting about the right to protest

Photo credit: CCA

I'm a Green Christian, part of Christian Climate Action and a lay Franciscan member. My faith informs and shapes the way I live. Around me I see many things that I feel are at odds with the values of the Kingdom of God. I try to highlight these, to speak truth to power, as a way of effecting change.

When it comes to taking a stand – or sitting down – I think about what Jesus did in his ministry. One story that particularly resonates is Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. A visible action that drew a crowd. I can imagine the slow moving column of people filling the streets and effectively blocking the regular flow of business. I can imagine how it captured the attention of the ordinary people as well as those in power. And I hear clearly Jesus's response, "If they ..(that is, his disciples)..

are silenced, then the very stones themselves will shout aloud" Luke 19:40.

On 30th January, over 1000 people sat in the road outside the Royal Courts of Justice to protest at the deliberate diminution of the right to protest in the UK. Inside the Courts, an appeal was being heard, brought by 16 climate protesters challenging the severity of the sentences they had been given.

As we sat in silence on the road in three orderly lines back to back, police officers walked up and down the lines, stopping to address individuals asking them to move. "We recognise your right to protest but this is a live road." "What can we do to make you move?" "Please move to the designated protest area

in between the church of St Clement Dane and the court house.” “A section 14 notice may be imposed on this section of road and then we may arrest you.” “You might spend hours in a police cell.”

This was a silent vigil so most chose not to respond to the police. Instead maintaining the silence with eyes downcast, we resolutely continued to sit in the road.



Sitting in the road with placards showing imprisoned climate protestors on January 30th, 2025
Photo credit: Christian Climate Action

Yes we were blocking the road. Yes we were preventing vehicles from using that section. Why? Because – yes – this was a protest. And what is a protest if it does not cause some degree of disruption? The reason for any protest is to raise awareness – to draw people’s attention to an issue in order to effect change. This protest was about the failure of the system to allow justifiable and reasonable protest.

Over the last few years the right to protest has been crushed and demonised by the government through new laws, by judges using punitive interpretations of laws and sentencing guidelines, and by corporate interests through their ability to drop quiet words into significant ears and their ability to afford the cost of legal actions and injunctions.

Where once walking peacefully along a street was considered a valid means of protest, it is now designated as “public nuisance”. Where once sitting and blocking a road was

considered a valid means of protest, it is now designated as a “disruption of national infrastructure”. Have we reached a situation where you can only protest by staying quietly on the pavement, well away from anyone or anything you might disrupt?

Protest is meant to disrupt. It is meant to irritate. It is there to draw attention to a situation that needs to change. Yes, protest has to be proportionate. Yes, protest has to target the appropriate audiences. Yes, protest has to be based on valid claims.

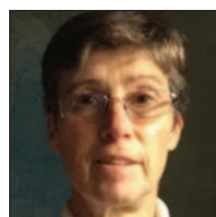
This protest was about the failure of the system to allow justifiable and reasonable protest.

The climate crisis is the biggest existential crisis that we humans have ever faced. A delayed car journey diminishes into insignificance compared with the potential loss of life of millions of people. The climate crisis has no favourites; it can and will continue to affect us all. There is no audience that can argue that it doesn’t threaten them. The climate crisis is a scientifically modelled and proven crisis. There is no valid data that proves otherwise.

And yet since the rise of Extinction Rebellion in 2018, and then groups such as Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil, governments, judges and the Criminal Prosecution Service have gone out of their way to refute that the actions being taken by these groups represents genuine protest. I intend to keep sitting in the road if it’s needed.

Protesting about the right to protest is vitally important in an era when we face not only the existential crisis of climate change but also the threat of oppressive right wing politics that is beginning to dominate the world. ■

This article first appeared on the Green Christian website as a blogpost and is part of an article appearing in the Irish Jesuit magazine in April.



Judith Russenberger is a member of Green Christian and Christian Climate Action. She writes a blog, *The Green Tau* (greentau.org) which is full of ideas, reflections and prayers for living sustainably, protecting the Earth and loving God.

Laudato Si' – a decade on

Martin Davis considers the legacy of the Pope's 2015 encyclical

In the Summer of 2015, Pope Francis launched *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* – the first encyclical (or papal letter) entirely his own. The title, not the traditional Latin, is Umbrian, the language of Francis of Assisi: his *Canticle of the Creatures*, dating back 800 years, opened with those words *Laudato Si'*, meaning *Praise be to you* (God, Creator of all).

"Mother Earth," Pope Francis wrote, "...cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her... We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth."

Laudato Si', a "joyful and troubling" reflection, was the longest papal letter ever to date, and fully complex. Has it made a difference?

In many ways, Yes! The encyclical had an immediate impact: the Pope's appeal for "an integral ecology" was received, not just broadly in the Catholic Church, but throughout the faith community, as indeed it was by world leaders, and in the scientific community (of which the Pope, once a chemistry technician, could call himself a member).

Its publication accompanied and sparked the growth of a global network, the *Laudato Si'* Movement: it embraces nearly a thousand Catholic organisations with some 12,000 trained "Animators" – grassroot leaders forming 58 national Chapters and more than 200 Circles. I am just one of several Animators within our Cheltenham *Laudato Si'* Circle, which happily includes not just Catholics: the Pope after all addressed his message to "every person living on this planet... I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home".

There's an international *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, a *Laudato Si'* Week in May each year, and more and more frequent ecumenical events arranged for the annual Season of Creation (from September 1st to early October). There are *Laudato Si'* centres and academic institutes in several countries. The Movement gave rise to the widely-acclaimed film, "*The Letter*", telling the story of the encyclical and illustrating its message: watch free via YouTube. And the Pope specified that *Laudato Si'* should now be added to the body of the Church's social teaching.

But the fact is that within many Catholic parishes, when *Laudato Si'* is mentioned, blank looks are returned, and the

LAUDATO SI' GOALS



In the spirit of integral ecology, hope for the Earth and the Poor.

reason is that we hear little about Catholic Social Teaching generally in church from Sunday to Sunday. So what are the core messages of Pope Francis that are still not being passed on?

At the outset, the press seized upon quotes such as, *“Climate change is a global problem... human causes... produce it.”* *Laudato Si’* was dubbed the Pope’s eco-manifesto. However, Francis himself describes it, not as an environmental encyclical, but a social one: its subtitle, *On Care for Our Common Home* speaks as much of concern about us humans living on Planet Earth (and the way we do so) as of concern about the Earth itself. Global warming is a symptom of a greater problem: the world’s indifference to poverty and pillage as people pursue short-term economic gains. We need to see everything as interconnected, and all of creation – us included – as one universal family.

Francis appeals: Hear the cry of the poor! Defend not just the hungry, the homeless and those seeking refuge from conflict, but all human life, from womb to tomb. And generations to come.

Alongside is the appeal: Respond to the cry of the Earth! It’s begun to happen, but not fast enough: as the Pope wrote in *Laudate Deum*, the 2023 follow up to *Laudato Si’*: *“our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing the breaking point.”*

And acknowledge that the economy must serve human society, not the other way round.

Adopt a sustainable lifestyle, is a fourth core message – for individuals, families, church communities (of course). Refuse unneeded stuff, reduce waste, recycle, resist overindulgence and unnecessary journeying.

For better understanding of ways to meet all the core messages, we need, fifthly, ecological education. *“It is my hope,”* Francis writes, *“that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world.”* (In rethinking education, what a wonderful example we have in Mary Colwell’s campaign for a Natural History GCSE.)

In *Laudato Si’* we hear several times the call for “ecological conversion”, a deeper spiritual awareness of God in all things. This comes through prayer – both community (for instance, Stations of Creation – the photo illustrates a group in Cheltenham setting off to walk round a neighbouring park) and contemplative. Francis urges us to *“stop and give thanks to*



Starting a prayer walk in Cheltenham around a local park

Photo credit: Martin Davis

God before and after meals. I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. That moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life.” Ecological spirituality is the sixth *Laudato Si’* goal.

And finally, as important as any other message of *Laudato Si’*: be a prophetic voice, become involved – engage with and take part in what’s going on already in your own church groups, ecumenically and within the wider community. Advocate and campaign.

These seven goals overlap and interconnect: we can’t all do everything, but each can do something, and acknowledge the link between what we do and our mission: to live in Gospel hope, for *“we know that things can change”*.

So it is not enough just to be celebrating the 10th birthday of *Laudato Si’*. The time has come to heed the Pope’s appeal for *“obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers”* to be replaced. *“We require a new and universal solidarity... All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents.”*

If you would like to become part of the global network of Animators, trained to bring Pope Francis’s message into their communities, the annual online training course (it’s free to join) starts on 28th April and is now open for registration: see <https://laudatosianimators.org/the-program/>. ■



Martin Davis was one of those who convened the first meeting of Christian members of the Ecology Party in 1981, out of which grew Christian Ecology Link, now Green Christian. He is convener of Cheltenham *Laudato Si’* Circle and of Green Christians in Cheltenham area (cheltlaudatosicircle@gmail.com).

Catalysing the change to a greener Church

Margaret Roberts shares some tips



All Saints Church, Glossop, part of the wildflower churchyard

Photo credit: Margaret Roberts

"We don't have a right to ask whether we're going to succeed or not. The only question we have a right to ask is, 'What is the right thing to do? What does this earth require of us if we want to continue to live on it'" Wendall Berry

At the Green Christian Annual Members Meeting in November I shared some ideas that our church developed as we moved through the Eco Church programme to gold and beyond. The **A Rocha Eco Church** programme is an excellent device to get congregations thinking about climate awareness. Most churches are now familiar with it and it's common to be part of it. But it functions best as a tool to bring the congregation with you and not as a tick box exercise for a few keen individuals to push through.

Here are some suggestions for how to do this:

Finding support

- Get a group around you: as the "Eco Church team", you will have an official voice.
- Make sure that embarking on Eco Church is passed by your PPC, church council or governing body. Then announce that the church at local and higher level are really supporting this!
- Get environment, biodiversity and climate added as a standing item on your PCC agenda. Even if you have nothing to specifically report, this keeps it in the foreground and it can be an opportunity to highlight environment issues and initiatives nationally and globally at each meeting.

Communicating change

- Take photos of everything you do and slot them into categories later.

- Find easy wins and celebrate those! Examples could include switching to bamboo toilet paper or LED lights, creating a wildflower garden, toilet twinning, putting in a bike rack, changing the cleaning products. All little changes can be magnified by mentioning them within the church and the wider community.
- Keep the congregation informed at every step. Use the church newsletter, notices in church, the notice board, webpages, social media.
- Keep it varied, highlighting social and global initiatives as well as individual actions.
- Give out small green hearts. Ask people to be thankful for creation and open to changes they can make and actions they can join whenever they look out for it.
- When you move on to the more challenging Eco Church stages, ask the congregation for help and ideas.

Join community initiatives

- What organisations within your community and beyond have a sustainability focus? Become part of it and feed back regularly to the congregation. Encourage others to do the same.
- Where is there a gap? Could you fill it? For example, could the church be a recycling collection point: blister packs, candles, spectacles, bras!
- When the occasion arises, whatever you get involved in locally or nationally, represent your church and the wider deanery or circuit. For example, at Lent vigils, mission planning, biodiversity and/or climate

marches. Act on their behalf and tell them you will be, or have been there as their representative. Assume they want you to do so until you are told otherwise. Ask for others to join you.

- Use your community space: church railings, wildflower churchyard or pots, notice boards, bells (see below) to share concerns, successes and ideas.

Use the church format and calendar

- Have climate related prayers and liturgy somewhere every week. You may need to raise this first with the PCC and persuade them why it is so important. Remind them of the 5th Mark of Mission¹ (if you are Anglican); and share with them the Eco Church section on the importance of worship and teaching. Warning: this may require some theological reassessment – so find helpful support amongst congregation or clergy with this.
- Use Creationtide (September 1st to October 4th) as a focus, but make sure it's not just a once a year box-ticking exercise.
- Incorporate Christian festivals and national days by either a service or a notice. Examples could include: St Francis, St Patrick, Rogation Sundays, the festivals of the Celtic year, pet blessings, a day of lament for lost species, Earth Overshoot Day (we tolled the bell for that one) and so on.
- Be creative and crafty – people like making things.
- Keep mentioning that Climate Care is missional. Tie it to missional activities, for example, as a focus of youth work that reaches beyond the church; ensuring that food served at outreach events is at least vegetarian to highlight the church's commitment to lowering its carbon footprint;



Preparation for a Llammas celtic gathering

Photo credit: Margaret Roberts

adding a green pledge to the baptism service.

Become members of synods or equivalent

- Governing bodies of churches and districts are in favour of care for creation so it would be difficult for them to refuse an offer of keeping the members informed.
- We have a Climate Care Team on our local deanery synod. We have a slot for updates every meeting and a mailing list. We highlight local and national events and encourage individuals and congregations to become involved.

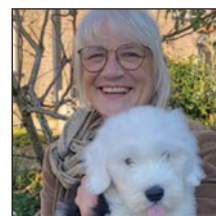
Be an outward facing church

- We have found the best way to encourage people into church is to go out and join in with other things. People are drawn to our message when they can see we are informed and active about the issues that concern them.
- The aim is to normalise climate talk

and help people join the dots. Look for what your church does and link it to climate. For example, food banks link to global food insecurity and LOAF principles; missionary support abroad can be linked to climate awareness for that region; historical information about the church can be linked to plans for the future.

Drip Drip Drip

Don't imagine that you are being repetitive. Use every opportunity to talk about every small and larger thing the church or any church member is involved in. This is the most important issue the world has ever or will ever face and the church needs to be equipped for an uncertain future. ■



Margaret Roberts is a Pioneer Licensed Lay Minister for the 5th Mark of Mission in Derby Diocese. She is involved in the Green Christian Churches Project and Christian Climate Action.

¹ 5th Mark of Mission: To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

For the spiritual thirst of our times...

How can we be leaven in our communities, asks **Alan Heeks**



A community resilience group in Nottingham

Photo credit: Georgina Wilson

One of my favourite spiritual teachers is Thomas Berry, an American priest. Although he died in 2009, Berry had a very clear view of the climate crisis ahead, yet he wrote, *“The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the earth.”* He offers a blessed challenge to our concerns!

Perhaps, like me, your faith that all is for the best and that divine Providence is awake at the wheel may feel really tested in these times. If so, Berry’s book *The Dream of the Earth* could help you. One hopeful way to view the current situation is that only a crisis of this severity will awaken people to the spiritual thirst that could recover their connection with the divine.

I believe there are plenty of signs of a widespread spiritual thirst in our society, but it’s not apparent, because few people would use this language, and the mainstream media is hardly looking for it. Some of the wisest observers on the climate crisis, such as Rupert Read, Joanna Macy and Jem Bendell have described it as fundamentally a *spiritual* crisis, calling us to question the meaning and purpose of life.

Spirituality as leaven for communities?

I’ve been exploring how community and spirituality connect for many years, learning from places like Hilfield Friary, the Northumbria Community, Chithurst Buddhist Monastery, and

Findhorn Foundation. These are what I’d call “peak” spiritual centres, which offer powerful teachings, but in a form that mainstream society would struggle to relate to.

So there seems to be a pressing need to offer spiritual nourishment in forms that more people can engage with. Language is a key factor: even words like spiritual can be a deterrent. We live in a society which is relentlessly materialist, preoccupied with what’s measurable: so how can we offer an accessible experience of divine grace and the joy of feeling faith?

Could we reinvent the monastery?

Role models for what we need aren’t obvious, but I’d like to describe some of the spiritual communities which have inspired me. Walking the Camino San Benedetto in Italy for two weeks, I learnt what a crucial role monasteries played in the chaos of medieval Italy; amid times of civil strife, sickness and uncertainty, the monasteries were places of support, trust, stability. They would mediate in disputes, provide food and health care, and just as importantly, nourished the soul.



A Ricostruttori monastery in Italy

Photo credit: I ricostruttori nella preghiera

Another role model, also from Italy, is a modern reinvention of the monastery as a welcoming spiritual community with a



A Ricostruttori meditation room

Photo credit: I ricostruttori nella preghiera

Christian core and an interfaith flavour. The Ricostruttori di Pace (Reconstructors of Peace) were founded in 1978 by a Jesuit priest, Father Cappelletto, who wanted to offer a spiritual path for young people, very different from mainstream Catholicism. I have visited one of their monasteries several times, and find it very inspiring. The Ricostruttori take on derelict rural buildings with land, restore them beautifully, grow much of their food, and practise crafts like stained glass and fine woodwork.

My impression is that they are living as Jesus lived: in poverty, simplicity, and close to the land. The vision I'd love to explore with fellow Green Christian members is for a catalytic centre that draws on some of the best of the monastic tradition, but like the *Ricostruttori* is much more accessible, adaptable, and attuned to the needs of our time.

It's pretty clear that we all face rising turbulence in the years ahead, from climate change and the many other crises of our times. It's also pretty certain that government policies can't fully meet these pressures, and nor can individual households. I believe that local communities are the best focus in raising resilience to face the climate crisis, and the best kind of capacity to strengthen is social infrastructure. By this I mean the connections between individuals and groups within a community, and the skills to handle stress and conflict. The specific emergencies ahead of us are unclear, but social infrastructure will help with all of them.

Even if Green Christian members and others could engage only a small minority of their local community, it could significantly add to the community's resilience, bringing benefits to the whole locality, particularly in the event of a major challenge. Adam Greenfield's book, *Lifefhouse*, which describes how superhuman qualities of inspiration and selflessness emerge in disaster situations, illustrates this well.

Exploring Faith and Soul Resilience

Recently, I've been exploring with networks and individuals what language, and what processes, could provide the spiritual haven for communities. Our hope is to inspire and train individuals who could then catalyse a neighbourhood. They would be the transformers who draw on divine presence, but turn it into accessible language: for example, inviting their community to name and strengthen shared values such as mutual care, respect, inclusiveness, and to explore what their collective vision and purpose could be.

This process of exploration and experimentation is likely to continue for many months, and one aim of this article is to invite Green Christian members to share relevant experience and to join our journey if they'd like to. We are calling the project the Soul Resilience Network. The first events we're offering are online groups, with a different guest presenter each month, and topics including: Faith, Meaning, Prayer, Emptiness, and Ecospirituality. We want to signpost a wide range of networks and resources which could help people, including those from specific faith traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism and Sufism, as well as integrative approaches like spiritual ecology.



SOUL RESILIENCE NETWORK
Spiritual purpose to grow through crisis times

The hope is that people will join the group each month, and that this will evolve into an online community with its own life, with opportunities for in-person residential events later in 2025.

The spiritual teacher, Neil Douglas-Klotz in *Revelations of the Aramaic Jesus*, urges us to see creation not as a one-off event way back in time, but as a continual process of divine unfolding¹, in which "our job description as humans is to figure out the creative part we're asked to play". If you are interested in exploring whether this project might be for you, you can see more at soulresilience.net or contact me at alanheeks@gmail.com. I will also be taking part in a Green Christian workshop discussing ways of being communities of support and encouragement in early summer this year. ■



Alan Heeks is a writer, group facilitator and project pioneer, who set up the Hazel Hill Wood retreat centre. He is deeply involved in climate crisis responses, including ways that Christian teachings can have wider application.

¹ see *Revelations of the Aramaic Jesus*, Neil Douglas-Klotz (Hampton Roads, 2022)

Witnessing to Christ's love of all creation

Dave Penney wants us to speak out and act!



Creation in God's Hands and Ours to Care Photo Credit: Cimmerian, iStock

As I listened to "Carols from King's" on TV last December, I wondered how many people taking part and watching really took to heart the true message of Christmas. Love came down at Christmas in the form of a servant. God's human representative on Earth, *"the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve"* (Mark 10:45). As followers of Christ, we must do the same. Jesus said: *"Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant"* (Matt. 20:28).

We should remember that Christ, a humble and lowly servant *"became flesh and made his dwelling among us"* even though *"he was with God in the beginning and through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"* (John 1:14,2-3). Like John the Baptist, as Christians, we have a duty to bear witness to God's love in Christ for all life, all of his creation. Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Magnificat, her Song of Praise, foretold what God will achieve through Christ and Christians when she declared: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty"* (Luke 1:52,53). We need to seek justice and not just dole out charity to bring radical change.

Christ showed righteous anger against child abuse when he said *"If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the sea"* (Matt.18:6). God loves and cares for the whole of creation, for all life: flora, fauna and human life. Jesus said *"not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ... even the hairs of your head have all been counted"* (Matt. 10:29,30).

Christ also reminds us that he *".. came not to destroy the message of the prophets but to fulfil them"* (Matt.5:17). This includes their message that the whole of creation is sacred and must be protected and cared for. We belong to creation; humanity has a sacred duty to look after it and share it. *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"* (Gen. 2:15).

This is a call for leaders to adopt a servant-hearted nature and to put the needs of others before their own. It's a challenge to the self-serving and domineering styles of leadership that are common today with totalitarian and populist dictatorships, nationalists, fascists, racists and warmongers. The rich and powerful and their supporters dominate the world by means of rampant, ruthless, free market capitalism. Naomi Klein in her book *This Changes Everything* makes it clear that capitalism is the driving force behind destructive climate change. Capitalism creates a widening gap between rich and poor; division and conflict between competing power groups with resource wars, environmental desecration and growing numbers of climate refugees. We must oppose this lust for power, domination, greed and the exclusion of others and defend the poor, marginalised and rejected with a circular and sharing economy.

Jesus warned us that challenging the status quo is bound to bring us into conflict with those with political power. He said *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness"* (Matt.5:10) – doing what is morally and justly right to do, campaigning for justice, for there can be no peace without justice.

There is no excuse for Christians not to be involved in politics. Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: *"When people say that religion and politics don't mix, I wonder which Bible it is they are*



Jesus the Servant Washes the Disciples' Feet

Photo credit:iStock

reading". I remember that when I shared Trevor Huddleston's criticism of the apartheid regime in South Africa as anti-Christian, from his book *Naught for your Comfort*, during an act of worship and reflection, I was told that I should not use the pulpit for political purposes. But this is an excuse for not standing up for justice. Jesus stood up for justice and peace as witnessed in the Gospel records with his prophetic utterances and accusations of hypocrisy for the powerful, who were only interested in protecting their own interests and showed no compassion for the weak, the poor and the vulnerable. Early Christians *"had all things in common, shared everything they had"* (Acts 2:44) and welcomed foreigners. Do we welcome refugees forced to flee from persecution and deprivation? As it says in the book of Hebrews: *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it"* (Heb. 13:2).

Jesus' stand for justice and peace led to his trial and execution on the cross, on trumped-up charges, by the colluding Jewish and Roman authorities. Christ did not resist arrest by sanctioning violence saying: *"Those who live by the sword will die by the sword"* (Matt. 26:54). He was not prepared to compromise his principles and values, and the truth that God

accepts and loves all human beings, whatever their situation, and only wants them to find healing, wholeness and fulfilment in life. He was prepared to suffer and die for his beliefs, just as St. Peter and others down the ages bore witness to the truth of Christ and were martyred for following him.

My actions have led me to being criticised by both Church and State. I stood up against the apartheid regime in South Africa and Israel, the obscenity of nuclear weapons and the persecution of Mordechai Vanunu, an Israeli nuclear technician and peace activist, whom the Church refused to recognise as a prisoner of conscience. I have helped expose the cover up of child abuse and paedophilia in the Church, spoken out against the injustice of the Poll Tax and the cruelty of fox hunting, given sanctuary to foreigners in a local church and objected to violence against traveller communities and the abuse of their rights.

I was even criticised for being a "new age hippy" for organising a Creation Festival to highlight the need to protect human rights and care for creation in the face of human-induced climate change. I was so unpopular. The local MP stood up in the House of Commons and echoed the words of King Henry II referring to Thomas Becket, *"Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?"* What a compliment!

Christ's message is universal. He was critical of divisive sectarianism and narrow judgemental religions. I am ashamed that the Church has split into factions and developed traditions that water down the radical truth of Christ. The universal Church is a community not a building, representing God's kingdom of justice and peace on Earth. Christ reminds us that *"A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand"* (Mark 3:24). The primary aim of Christians is to follow Christ, as a servant, in seeking justice and peace for the whole of creation to which we all belong. This involves both prophetic protest and pastoral care.

The early Celtic Christians based their faith and spirituality on Christ's love and care for all creation, which is sacred and to be protected and preserved. *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory as the Son of his Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn 1:14). As followers of Christ, can we show the same grace and truth in caring for all of creation in 2025? ■



Dave Penney is a Green Christian member and a retired priest, though still actively campaigning. He gives talks in schools and is often found protesting with Greenpeace and CND.

From lines to circles

Long before dawn's first kiss,
the daily battles start anew:
We huddle, shivering, in a serpentine line,
a thousand souls, each yearning for a loaf of bread.
Six aching hours.
Some will leave with the same empty hands they arrived with.

Grandparents: old, sick, unable to stand.
Parents: clinging to their children's hands.
Lone siblings, hoping to feed their families
instead of their own hearts with more grief.

Another battle.
The harder one:
Another queue for water.
Any container will do.
If our tears could fill them,
we would have enough.

Long after the moon's sad lullaby,
we all gather in silence
seeking sweet rest...
finding it temporary and bitter...
—before the dawn returns
and with it, the next battle.

by Donya Abu Sitta

from We Are Not Numbers,
a platform for sharing authentic
and compelling stories from the
next generation of Palestinian
writers and leaders
(wearenotnumbers.org),
with permission.

To support Donya, see her GoFundMe page:
<https://www.gofundme.com/f/even-sharing-makes-a-difference>

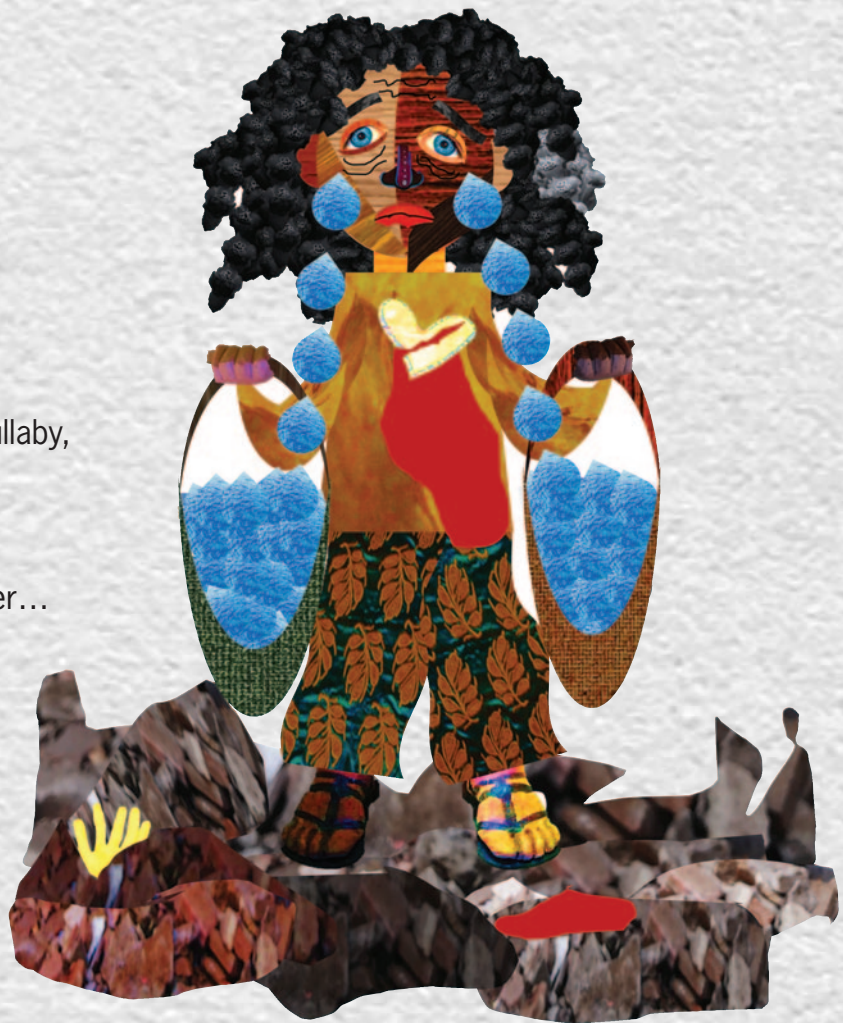


Illustration credit: Chana Basha Helfand

A Community Of Hope

Isobel Murdoch reports on Green Christian Local Groups



St Albans Green Christian Groups members with their prayer tree

Photo credit: Kathryn Clough

Barnet and **Bedford** recently became the ninth and tenth official Green Christian Local Groups, while we also have links to five other independent groups. Would you like to start a group wherever you are? We now offer our Local Groups two options. These are either:

- to be an officially recognised Green Christian Local Group, which needs you to follow certain requirements on running events (so that public liability insurance can be provided)

OR

- to become a group of individual Christians (members or not) who are not recognised as an official Green Christian Local Group. Even in this option, you can still reach out to other Green Christian members in your area, so helping to publicize your group.

If you would like to receive a fuller briefing on how each option works, or have any questions to ask, do call or email me (01790 763603 or isobelmurdoch@greenchristian.org.uk).

Here is our recent group news:

Green Christian St Albans held a stand at the St Albans Community Showcase in the autumn. One feature which helped to engage people was inviting them to write a prayer, a hope or an action on a leaf to attach to a tree on display. Group members have also been campaigning: nationally (taking part in the March for Clean Water in November) and locally (opposing the construction of a quarry in Hatfield). They ran the *Landscapes of Hope* Advent course as well.

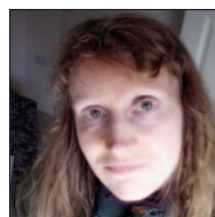
Cheltenham Green Christian's fortnightly climate prayer vigils have now entered their fifth year. Group members have also been supporting the peace movement through events including a vigil for Palestine and setting up a performance of *The Priest's Tale*, a play about a survivor of Hiroshima, in St Gregory's Church in January. The group misses their friend and fellow member Mark Boulton who

died in December 2024.

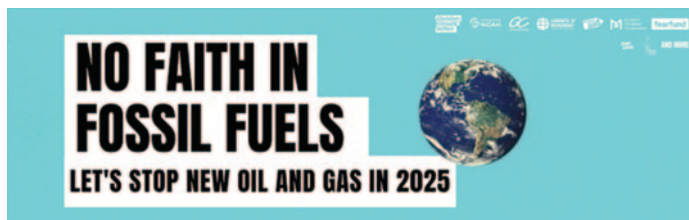
Sheffield Green Christian members gathered for Green Christian's hybrid retreat last autumn, Being The Still Centre On The Radical Edge, connecting to the talks on Zoom and then reflecting together. **Clun Green Christian** showed films from *A Perfect Planet*, (narrated by Sir David Attenborough, over the winter.

Douglas Green Christian is starting to create and plant a new contemplative garden in the backyard of their chapel. One of Green Christian's linked groups, **Lincoln**, held a day conference in March, Facing The Storm – Preparing For A Different Future. Keynote speaker Roy Searle (a founder of the Northumbria Community) and others reflected on the signs of the times and our possible responses.

The **Colchester Green Christian Local Group** attended the last Green Christian retreat at Othona at Bradwell-on-Sea and is planning to visit Othona again in May, this time for the Essex Green Weekend. In October the group will be at St Teresa's RC Church for a social event followed by a Taizé Service (working with the Cantus Firmus Choir). They also plan to hold a day conference for local churches focusing on creation preservation and reducing carbon emissions. ■



isobel.murdoch@greenchristian.org.uk
01790 763603



Green Christian is supporting campaigns for no new oil and gas exploration in the UK. A webinar in February, co-hosted with Uplift, attracted over one hundred people and was also supported by Tearfund, Christian Aid, Student Christian Movement, the Laudato Si' Movement, Operation Noah and Christian Climate Action. Lorna Gold, the Director of the Laudato Si' Movement, chaired.

In her introduction, Bishop Rosemarie Mallett said: *"The Bible teaches us to seek justice and to care for our brothers and sisters...across the world. We don't believe that we can do that without calling for an end to fossil fuel projects which destroy their land, their livelihoods and contribute to extreme weather events which disproportionately affect the global majority world."*



Bishop Rosemarie Mallett

Photo credit: CofE

Green Christian's Churches Project Officer, Melanie Nazareth, also spoke at the event, highlighting what we can do as Christians to support this important campaign. A particular aim was to encourage attendees to continue to raise concerns with their MPs about Rosebank, the UK's biggest undeveloped oil and gas field. A recent court ruling concluded that developing this huge oilfield would be unlawful, as the initial Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had not accounted for the emissions caused by burning the field's oil.

However, it is still possible that Rosebank's owners, Equinor and Ithaca Energy, resubmit an EIA so it is vital that every MP and MSP hears from their constituents that for a safe climate, we must stop Rosebank, indeed stop all new oil and gas now. With enough public pressure, we could see the UK take the decisive leap of moving away from fossil fuels, inspiring global momentum towards a safer future.

Ash Wednesday Service and Vigil



Photo credit: ON

Service at St John's with scratch choir

The same coalition of organisations also held an Ash Wednesday service at St John's Waterloo on March 5th. The service was followed for some by a 24-hour vigil outside the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) calling on the UK Government not to license any new oil or gas fields.

Our service and vigil took place during Stop Rosebank's No New Oil & Gas MP & MSP Action Week. There is still time to contact your MP as this magazine goes to print. See the Stop Rosebank website (stopcambo.org.uk) for more information including an email template.

CAN Bill

Along with many other religious and secular environmental organisations, we encouraged our members to contact their MPs to ask them to support the Climate and Nature (CAN) Bill. After the CAN Bill was kicked into the long grass, we wait to see if the Government will change their planned legislation to take account of the CAN Bill's proposals.

Local Electricity Bill

Green Christian has long supported the Power for the People campaign, which aims to empower local communities to generate and share renewable energy. Due to their campaigning, the UK Government has taken the significant step of amending the Energy Bill. This amendment empowers Great British Energy, a state-owned company, to actively support, promote, and participate in local community energy projects.

Lent Course

Green Christian's 5-week Lent Course, *"Calling a Wounded Earth Home"* is proving popular this year. Inspired by Green Christian's Deep Waters Course and part of the *Borrowed Time* project, the course focuses on the kind of people we might need to become to face the challenges of the climate crisis.



Photo credit: Annika Gordon on Unsplash

Participants explore interconnected themes of love, truth, wisdom, justice, and hope in this engaging course. Through music, prayer, and biblical reflection, participants delve into the critical issues of creation care and the climate crisis. The format is interactive and discussion-based within a collaborative environment. See our website for more details.

Green Christian Way of Life Day

Green Christian Way of Life companions and explorers met in person in London in February for reflection, prayer and conversation. The theme of the day was "Oceans of Opportunity", looking at the importance of the seas in creation care.

The Green Christian Way of Life is offered to Green Christian members for whom care for God's creation in all its forms is a fundamental outworking of their faith. It offers deeper engagement and shared encouragement. If you would like to know more about the Way of Life please contact Green Christian Chair George Dow, georgedow@greenchristian.org.uk or visit greenchristian.org.uk.

Green Christian Zoom Workshops & Events



Photo credit: Chris Montgomery on Unsplash

Green Christian hosts a lively and engaging programme of virtual events throughout the year on Wednesday evenings at 7pm. Green Christian workshops start with a 20 minute presentation followed by a lots of stimulating discussion, often in breakout rooms, and our Joy in Enough events are longer talks by experts with a Q&A session at the end.

The sessions explore a diverse range of topics, such as Barbara Keal sharing stories of the "Coat of Hopes" journey to COP27, and its UK tour, to raise climate change awareness. Roman Krznaric also gave a talk, History for Tomorrow, looking at alternative economic models. The Food Group recently piloted a Community Conversation exploring how to inspire Christians to adopt a more biblical approach to food.

We also celebrated the online launch of our former co-Chair Deborah Tomkins' award-winning novella, *Aerth* (Weatherglass Books 2024). Highly recommended reading!

The sessions are recorded and available to watch later and can be accessed from the YouTube channel icon on the Green Christian homepage or links found by clicking on Activities tab.

Summer Festivals

Greenbelt Festival

We will be at Greenbelt, the arts, faith and justice festival as usual this year, which takes place on 21st -25th August, at Boughton House, Kettering. Please come and say hello to us on the Green Christian stall; even better, sign up to volunteer on the stall!



Green Christian Stall, Greenbelt 2024
Photo credit: Ruth Jarman

New Wine Festival

Green Christian will also be sharing a stall at New Wine with others including Climate Stewards and Operation Noah. New Wine will be taking place on 30th July – 4th August at Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet.

Deep Waters

Deep Waters is Green Christian's 8-week course which aims to support people to navigate the complex emotional responses to the climate crisis. Readings, articles, poems, music and art provide a context for each week's sessions, which offer a safe space for conversation and reflection. *Deep Waters* invites you on a journey through climate grief and eco-anxiety, to discover renewed courage, clarity and purpose.



Photo credit: JunCTionS CC licence

The next course begins in September 2025. To register, please visit the Green Christian website and find Deep Waters under the Activities tab. For more information, please contact our information officer, Ruth Jarman at info@greenchristian.org.uk

Bluesky and X

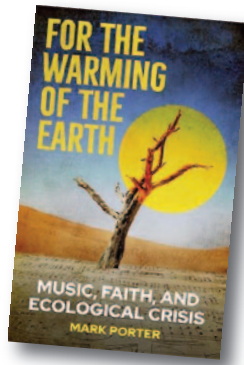
If you currently follow Green Christian on X, please note that our X account is under review by the Green Christian board. We also have an account with BlueSky (bsky.app) so please consider following us there.

Annual Members Meeting – Save the date!

Green Christian's Annual Members Meeting will be on Saturday November 15th, 2025, from 11am – 4pm. Bring and share lunch and afternoon discussions. Venue to be confirmed.

For The Warming Of The Earth: Music, Faith and Ecological Crisis

Mark Porter
June 2024
SCM Press
ISBN 978-0-334-06568-5
214 pages
RRP £40 (paperback)



In *For the Warming of the Earth*, Mark Porter invites us to visit and explore varying musical projects and approaches that foster connections between feelings and attitudes towards the reality of climate breakdown, and the motivations to convey related messages and to worship a loving Creator.

It becomes clear that, for all the contributing artists and interviewees described and quoted in the book, those dynamics are very much entwined. Porter takes a robust approach in disentangling these and repositioning them within useful paradigms concerned with music and relationships. His main themes in doing so are Creativity, Coalition, Community and Pragmatism.

Beginning with projects that invite new songs written round the themes of creation and ecology, to compile into a Climate and Environment focused album, Porter raises issues such as the relevance of the worship song format in encouraging environmental engagement, without that engagement becoming the sole focus of worship. He speaks of navigating tensions in the relationship between the pragmatic and the ideal, and demonstrates a narrative of God's kingdom and humanity's caretaker role within a gospel message encompassing not just personal sin and salvation, but every aspect of our lives, and that of the Earth. Protest songs, written and

used by Christian Climate Action, which can be an act of prophesy, embodying prayer, allowing inter-religious solidarity, creating dilemmas, and asking for God's work in changing hearts and minds, are usefully discussed as mediation between faith and activism.

Further paradigms are found in festivals, where music is used as part of a toolbox for educating and motivating, as well as stimulating debate and participation. Porter asks questions about the efficacy of environmental communication through music, and the extent to which this connects to behavioural changes and action on a wider scale. These are partly answered in the suggestion that pointers to lifestyle change and activism could be more prominently placed in each festival programme.

Ecological requiem is presented as a creative form that enables integration within a larger liturgical journey, pioneering multiple emotional musical narratives, and leading participants along different pathways of experience. Forest churches are explored, as offering a space for reworking human-nature relationships, with music and sound as a medium for encounter between people and nature spaces. Perhaps his brief consideration of nature's sounds, or sadly, increasing lack of sounds, as inspiration for worship or lament, could be beneficially expanded here.

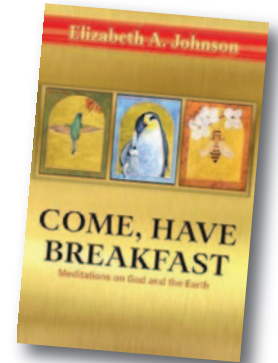
Mark Porter's carefully and clearly written debate provides us with much inspiration for conversations and experimentation by musicians, environmentalists and worship leaders. By asking crucial, but as yet not fully answered questions, such as "*who needs to hear what message, in what musical form, from whom?*" and "*which creative possibilities remain just a dream, and which can become reality?*" he brings us to ask more, similarly powerful, questions. These grapple with demands of traditions, expectations, and degrees of

willingness to encounter new possibilities, and to adapt what has been tried to new situations.

Catherine Fish

Come Have Breakfast: Meditations on God and the Earth

Elizabeth Johnson
February 2024
Orbis Books
ISBN 978-1626985643
256 pages
RRP £23 [approx] (hardback)



"Come, have breakfast" – the title says it all. This book of meditations on God and the Earth is immensely refreshing. It brings the Bible to bear on the wonders of creation and broadens traditional understanding of God to encompass the whole natural world and indeed the Universe itself. Elizabeth Johnson builds upon a long distinguished career as a theologian and writer with a particular concern for the God-Earth relationship in a time of ecological crisis. 30 meditations or essays are grouped loosely to fall within a Christian understanding of God: Creation, Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection, the Spirit. Each meditation however, stands on its own, and needs to be read on its own, as Johnson herself recommends, preferably with Bible in hand.

A key meditation is entitled *Animal praise to the God of all flesh*. She carefully unwraps biblical quotations, from the story of Noah to the psalms and the prophets, to demonstrate how animals can worship their maker. "*They bear witness with their very existence to the creative power who is the source of all*". She suggests that animals are equally open to salvation as humans and quotes Psalm 36; "*Your steadfast love reaches to the*

heavens, You save humans and animals alike, O gracious Lord". In this she is deliberately turning to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of understanding the natural world. A powerful meditation starts with the quotation from Job; "Ask the beasts and they will teach you." Johnson pleads with us "to ask the galaxies".

The enormity of the Universe compels us to have a second book in our hand, what Augustine calls "a great big book", the book of created nature... why look for a louder voice? Heaven and Earth cry out to you "God made me". But it is not just the enormity, but also the intricacy of ecosystems in the creative order that demand to be observed in a religious spirit. Similar thoughts are explored in a delightful meditation, *Here we are*. She quotes from the book of Baruch; "the stars shone in their watches and they were glad". God called them and they said "Here we are". She sees that as parallel to many biblical passages, from the child Samuel to Isaiah, where the response to God is "Here I am". The whole created order can respond to God in that way.

In one meditation, *The gaze of Jesus*, Johnson points out how close to nature Jesus is in his teaching. "Consider the lilies of the field" is but one example of how open Jesus is to the natural world, brought up to be a Wisdom teacher, knowing the Psalms and other Wisdom literature intimately. Perhaps the most challenging of all her meditations is the one on Resurrection. "You are the hope of all the Ends of the Earth and the far distant seas" (Psalm 65), and from Romans, "Creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God". In her words "a grand community of creation destined for joy". Johnson brilliantly summons us afresh to the praise of God for his whole creation.

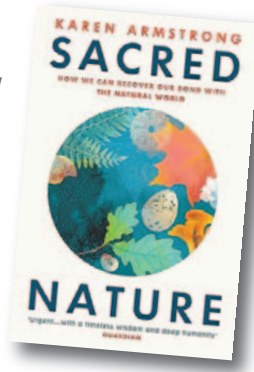
Peter Dodd

Sacred Nature: How we can recover our bond with the natural world

Karen Armstrong
June 2023
Vintage
ISBN 978-1529114799
256 pages
RRP £10.99 (paperback)

Karen Armstrong is a remarkable woman. At the age of 17 she became a nun. She later wrote about the harshness of the life she had entered with its old fashioned and brutal ascetic practices. Still, her community supported her in going to Oxford where she read English and it was while she was a student that she decided to leave the Order. She was awarded a congratulatory First and began a long exploratory odyssey. It has led her to examine in her many books the place of women in religion, the Bible, how the different world religions relate together and a wondering about the very nature of God. In 2008 she received the TED prize for a talk in which she launched a Charter for Compassion. Surely her words are of critical importance in our world today: "We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community".

Her most recent book, *Sacred Nature*, follows through that vision of compassion into our response to the climate and nature crisis. Drawing on a

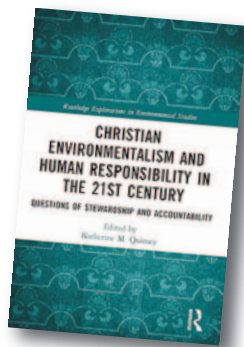


deep and comprehensive understanding of world religions and their writings, Armstrong suggests ways we might value their spiritual practices for recovering our bond with the natural world. Delving into Confucianism, Daoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, kabbalistic Judaism, mystical Christianity and Islam she finds much with the power to restore our "primordial link with nature". So many doors are opened for the reader that it is hard to summarise the scope of this book. But her aim is clear. It is not that we should change our own beliefs. A very helpful opening chapter distinguishes between *logos* as objective facts and *mythos* as what "helps us to glimpse new possibilities". Armstrong encourages us to experience how ancient religious myths can open us to a deeper love of nature. "We need to recover the veneration of nature that human beings carefully cultivated for millennia; if we fail to do this our concern for the natural environment will remain superficial".

The insights gathered are in each chapter grounded in a section headed *The Way Forward*. In one I found what spoke to me, and so it may be for each reader. For me it was in how the 17th century Jesuit missionaries brought their theology of a transcendent God into a culture where the ultimate reality was felt not to be a matter of verbal concepts. Yet after describing Dao as the "ineffable, unknowable source of being", and in Hinduism Rta as "a sacred animating force", we are reminded that in the early Christian tradition too we have Dionysius writing of God as "abiding within all things". "If we develop a mind that 'watches and receives' (Wordsworth) and discover the fluidity of our natural environment, we may be able to recover some of our ancestors' vision of a sacred nature". That was the gem that sparkled for me; and there are many more in this book.

Andrew Norman
Green Christian Chaplain

Christian Environmentalism and Human Responsibility in the 21st Century: Questions of Stewardship and Accountability



Katherine M. Quinsey (Editor)
March 2025 (paperback)
Routledge
ISBN 978-1032433134
238 pages
RRP £38.99 (paperback)

This book is about everything contained in the title, but not necessarily in the ways you might expect. It is inspired by the life and work of Deborah Bowen, the retired chair of English at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ontario. Her work focuses on poetry and the environment, and the pieces in the book include reflective and creative writing as well as ecocritical readings of literature which explore themes of creation, earth and non-human nature.

Most of the contributors have connections with Redeemer University or with Hamilton, and many of the pieces are grounded in a strong sense of place, often place under threat, such as the floods in small town Iowa described in Samuel Martin's *"Can You Make This All Run Again?" The Art and Environmentalism of Margo and Rein Vanderhill*.

The literature explored in the book covers a wide range, from *Paradise Lost* and 17th century sermons to *Jesus of the Deep Forest* by the Indigenous African poet Afua Kuma, from Thi Bui's graphic memoir of her family's experiences as Vietnamese refugees to Margaret Atwood's *MaddAdam* trilogy. The subjects are not limited by narrow literary definitions, including the lyrics of Bruce Cockburn and a treaty, again from the 17th

century, between Indigenous people and settlers.

The styles vary from ostensibly simple observation and humour (especially in the short story *Bandits*, about an accountant, his chickens and their raccoon adversaries) to challenging theological perspectives, with reference to the *via negativa*, sacramental theology and the work of Teilhard de Chardin, but there is a unity of tone throughout, and a sense, when browsing from one piece to another, that they are part of the same whole. This may partly be owing to the fact that the writers have close connections with one another, with institution and locality, but I think it stems from something more as well. There is no effort to underplay the scale of natural and climate catastrophes, but against their backdrop there is an intense and loving recognition of creatures, human and otherwise, landscapes and all that is being lost. This loss is true, the book seems to say, but so too is the wonder, the joy of beholding. John Terpstra's *Invasive Species* concludes:

*I stand here, a non-native son,
though born on this soil,
and walk my walk,
banging through the woods
cowbell around my neck
head in a cloud of bugs,
birds nesting in my beard,
searching for a place that will call me home.*

The gentle ambiguity of those final words encapsulates the generosity, care and yearning that characterises this volume. It is not a book that needs to be read in linear fashion, but dipping into it at random produces delights of many kinds. Not least among them, in these dark days, is the reminder that faith in North America still has much to teach us about nature, community and human experience, and that neither responsibility nor compassion have been forgotten.

Tanya Jones

On Your Bike: Reflections of a Pedal Pilgrim



John B. Thomson
April 2024
Darton, Longman and Todd
ISBN: 978-1-913657-90-1
174 pages
RRP £12.99

Bishop John Thomson is such a keen cyclist that his coat of arms is inscribed with the phrase *"The Biking Bishop of Selby"*. He tells us that in this book he has *"used cycling as a lens through which to understand what it means to follow and serve Christ today"*.

Thomson is able to draw on the experience of a long career in the Anglican ministry, including 35 years in Yorkshire, 10 of them as Suffragan Bishop of Selby, preceded by some years in Uganda and South Africa. The subjects covered span discipleship and ministry, including suffering, community, spirituality, the common good and politics.

At one level the *"cycling lens"* is a means to open up conversations at the start of each of these subjects. The small size of the book set against the wide range of subjects covered at first sight might suggest a series of sketches and at one level that is what the book provides. However, 27 pages of a quite academic bibliography and notes point to much deep thinking distilled into the main text. It is worth noting that Thomson has a PhD in ecclesiology which informs a deep reflection on his ministerial practice.

Thomson's *"cycling lens"* gives an unusual angle from which to reflect on discipleship and ministry and derive some different answers from more orthodox approaches. For example, in the chapter on Ministry, Thomson hones in on the way motorway driving

sacrifices beauty and contemplation for ease and speed. By contrast, cycling enables both engagement with the countryside and also with other people, unlike car driving where a screen often blocks out such interaction. The chapter on Spirituality develops this further, building on Bishop John's own experience of contemplation and cycling.

In the context of public discourse and common good in Chapter 9, Thomson explores the idea of balancing the needs of stakeholders in local communities. As he tells us, the needs of cyclists, pedestrians and car drivers are very different, and getting the balance right is not easy especially when some groups are much more powerful than others. On the same theme, *Green Christian* readers will find his localised discussion of fracking in North Yorkshire of interest.

Not everyone wants to embrace cycling as their preferred mode of transport, but the "cycling lens" is not that dissimilar to the perspective of walkers or public transport users. I think that Bishop John's book is a very helpful contribution to open up the relevance of "Slow Travel" for Christian spirituality and theology.

Stephen Retout

The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics

Ched Myers
June 2023
Lab/ora Press
ISBN 978-1739716240
130 pages
RRP £5.99 (paperback)



This book first came out in 2001, with a second edition in 2023. There is not much in the way of new material but given what has happened over the last

25 years, both nationally and internationally, the book remains strikingly relevant. The crises we face have only amplified his message, whether climate collapse, environmental degradation, the cost-of-living crisis, catastrophes caused by wars (in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan to name but three), Covid, or the huge transfer of wealth to the super-rich. Things don't look good right now, whichever way you look.

One of the reasons I was drawn to reviewing this book was that, with Pope Francis declaring 2025 to be a Jubilee year, it seems a good year to be looking (again) at the economy and the possibilities for continuing to generate alternatives to the present economic consensus. *Sabbath Economics* can help rekindle our imaginations and refocus our cry that another world is both possible and necessary. Ched Myers stakes his claim in the first few passages: that the world as created by God is abundant with enough for all; that disparities in wealth and power are not natural but are the result of human sin, and that the prophetic message calls people to the practice of redistribution. Even in 2001 he wrote about the increasing concentration of wealth in the richest 1% and with the consolidation of both power and wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer (not least the tech bros who did so well through the Covid pandemic), the need for that prophetic voice to articulate an alternative language and practice that can loosen the grip of market thinking is increasingly urgent.

Ched Myers roots the vision of Sabbath economics firmly in the biblical tradition – a vision that he says continues to haunt our history. He brings alive the traditions of Sabbath practice from the texts of the Torah, the books of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, with their call for limits to consumption and for practices of redistribution, illuminating the two principles of Sabbath Economics: enough for everyone and a prohibition on accumulation. Moving to the New

Testament, Myers says that Jesus was a Jubilee practitioner, starting out his public ministry with what is called the Nazareth Manifesto from Luke's Gospel (4:16-21). The book draws on encounters recorded in the Gospels and illuminates their significance for us today. As readers of his work will know, Ched Myers is both scholarly and skilful in the art of biblical exegesis. Whether it is his reading of the parable of the talents, the wilderness feeding or Paul's writing to the people of Corinth, he gives us fuel for the journey, with built in examples of practical responses.

I think the book lends itself to group study and I hope to use it for just that, along with CAFOD's Jubilee 2025 study guide, something from Local Futures (localfutures.org/) and perhaps the different voice of Gary Stevenson (find him on YouTube) and his work on the necessity of tackling the huge disparities of wealth if we are all to flourish.

Jonathan Morris

Join Now

Membership on line starts at just £3 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:

- ☐ Standing Order £30
- ☐ Annual Cheque £40
- ☐ Joint/Family £50 Corporate £70
- ☐ Church Membership (recommended) £60

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____
(GC99)



***"I want their future
to have trees"***

*"This is what we are about...
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
Knowing that they hold future promise."*

Archbishop Oscar Romero

When you think of providing for your loved ones, could you consider giving to continue our work of protecting God's Creation?

To leave us a gift in your Will, please give your solicitor or the person drafting your Will the following information:

Registered Charity Name: Christian Ecology Link, Registered Charity Number: 328744. Green Christian is the registered trading name of Christian Ecology Link. Thank you for considering us.



Green Christian Annual Members Meeting

"Building on the rock – true resilience for stormy times"

Join us to share in our plans and vision

Saturday 15th November 2025, 11 – 5 pm

Bring and share lunch from 1 pm

Venue and speakers to be confirmed



GreenChristian