

Text from speakers at LOVE GOD, LOVE GOD'S WORLD
23rd September 2015

WHY CHRISTIANS CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

1. Most Revd David Chillingworth **Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church**

Sometimes - entirely unexpectedly - a global issue becomes a personal issue. This is one of those days for me, I am the proud owner of a reasonably new Volkswagen Golf 1.6TDI Bluemotion. I bought that car because I trust Volkswagens. In our immediate family - my wife, myself and our three adult children - we own six Volkswagen Diesel cars. I bought that car because it is very economical and therefore puts out less CO₂ into the atmosphere. I bought it because of the reputation of Volkswagen for concern for the environment. I travel a great deal in my work and I feel uncomfortable about my carbon footprint and the environmental impact of my life. I now find that I have been cheated by a company that has been using technology to get around the emissions testing regimes.

I think this is an event which will have profound significance. Some are saying that it is for the car industry their 'Libor' moment - the equivalent of the moment when it became clear that banks had been manipulating lending rates to their own advantage. I think it certainly spells the end of the existing regimes of emissions testing. It may mark the beginning of the end diesel engines in our everyday car transport

I am delighted to have the opportunity of being with you today. I think that the questions around our care of the environment and the fragile ecology of our world are among the most important of our times. They challenge us to review the spiritual question of our relationship with the created order. They challenge us to recognise our shared humanity with all other people in our world. Many of the people most seriously affected by climate change are the poorest and most vulnerable people of the world. We are therefore challenged as global citizens.

Issues of climate change and climate justice challenge us deeply in our lifestyle, forcing us to consider whether patterns of life which our society regards as normal and acceptable may actually be profoundly damaging to the world

With that backdrop I want to tell you about my participation in the Eco-Bishops Conference organised by the Archbishop of Southern Africa for Bishops of the Anglican Communion in Cape Town last March. We gathered from all over the world - 23 of us. Most came from the developing world. We listened to one another's stories of the impact of climate change on the lives of our people. For those of us from the developed world this was an important opportunity to listen to the experience of people whose lives are significantly affected by climate change and who seek our support in issues of climate justice. The central image of the conference was this image 'The World Is Our Host'. It expresses our recognition that the world receives us, houses us, feeds us and shelters us. We are called to be careful guardians rather than careless exploiters. This picture is of Bishop Mark MacDonald, Bishop of the Anglican Church in Canada for Indigenous Peoples. He spoke movingly of the way in which the indigenous peoples of northern Canada are dealing with climate change as it affects their lives. He also talked about their holistic understanding of their relationship with creation. That struck a chord with me - I realised that I was listening to something akin to our understanding of Celtic Spirituality.

We are all affected by climate change. We do not experience the distress of farmers in the developing world for whom the regularity of the seasons can no longer be trusted. They no longer

know on which day to sow and which day to harvest. They are at risk of flooding and violent storms which threaten to make traditional patterns of life and agriculture unviable. For us the effect of climate change is I believe seen in the violence and capricious nature of the climate. The River Tay in Perth where I live looks gentle – but the picture is of the massive flood gates which protect the City of Perth from inundation by the river.

This picture is of a large tree which fell through the roof of our church cottage at Croftcarnoch near Killiecrankie. Once again this violence of the climate turns events which might have been freak and very occasional occurrences into a commonplace.

I now showed a video from Bishop Desmond Tutu formerly Archbishop of Southern Africa. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlh_ptOlijkg.

Finally I want to mention a book which I read which in the words of the title 'This Changes Everything' by Naomi Klein did change things for me. It was a very important book because it explains why our efforts to make progress in reducing emissions seem to be so inadequate. The prevailing orthodoxy of our economic management is that of neo-Liberal conservatism. The free market dominates. Politicians are reluctant to interfere with that or to manage the economy to any significant degree. But the reality is that if we are to make the kind of changes needed to enable us to see serious reductions in emissions we have to change the way in which we do our politics. I learned for example that in Germany much of the generated capacity of the country has been taken back into public ownership and is now carbon neutral. In a situation where public utilities have been privatised – as in Britain – this kind of political action is unachievable.

This has been a very brief survey of a complex issue which affects every part of our lives. I believe that it is for our generation of leadership to recognise the challenge and to seek to respond to it. I believe that, in that recognition and response, a secular age will have to begin to rediscover its spirituality in a new relationship between ourselves and God's creation

2. The Very Rev John Chalmers

Principal Clerk and formerly Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Nearly 40 years ago I first discovered that CFCs were damaging the ozone layer and that somehow or another human beings might be hastening the end of time. Of course, then, as a young blade - new to the world of conservative theology I believed that that, in itself, was an unacceptable proposition. If we were doing that to the planet – it must have been in the will and purpose of God. And if it meant the end of days – then bring it on!

For the last 30 years I have been deeply repentant of that kind of thinking and I have spent the last 30 years distancing myself from that kind of unsupportable and infantile theology.

Now I believe that, for us in the developed world, Global Warming is a lifestyle issue and lifestyle is governed by the imperatives of what we believe.

But crucially climate change is also a lifestyle issue in the developing world; for there, many of the poorest people in the world have nothing but trial and despair to put up with in their lives because climate change is pushing the boundaries of the deserts and visiting upon the poorest people of earth more frequent extreme weather events which are driving them out of home and land.

So, Climate Change becomes a justice issue, because the poor do not cause climate change - they use but a tiny proportion of the world's resources. It's the developed world that causes climate change, *and we do so almost without feeling the difference* while those with no voice and no resources to do anything about it; suffer on a disproportionate scale.

If Climate Change is a lifestyle issue and a justice issue - it is surely, also a spiritual issue.

Our lust for more and more of life's material things is making other human beings into slaves and refugees. Our acquisitiveness at a material level is using up the planet's resources at rate that cannot be sustained, BUT the greed and selfishness, the avarice and ego which drives this can(in my view) only be counter-balanced by us finding satisfaction in deeper things. In wanting less stuff and seeking more contentment, in desiring the good of all instead of the comfort of the few.

Rowan Williams summed it up perfectly when he said:

In a society where we think of so many things as disposable; where we expect to be constantly discarding last year's gadget and replacing it with this year's model - do we end up tempted to think of people and relationships as disposable?

Are we so fixated on keeping up with change that we lose any sense of our need for stability?

And he goes on to say,

"A culture of such vast material waste and emotional short-termism is a culture that is a lot more fragile than it knows".

That is why changing the way we live and the attitudes that drive us, are matters of deep spiritual significance. We cannot claim to love our neighbour as we love ourselves unless we are also working to make the earth a place which offers security and sustainability for our neighbour and in today's context that means all people without exception.

As Christians we set our coordinates according to the belief that the ownership of the earth is not ours, but that it is a gift lent to us from generation to generation.

The Biblical injunction to "rule over it" is not permission to act without license – and that is why the Church of Scotland has made the issue of Climate Change such an important priority.

The Eco-Congregations project has been adopted now by about a quarter of our congregations; is one of the most powerful ecumenical programmes ever devised and it has travelled across Europe to be adopted as far away as Hungary.

Eco Congregations allows the issues to become real at local level - the circle of care for the earth grows, the circle of the well-informed grows and the power of the people grows.

As Moderator I had the immense privilege of meeting with Pope Francis and one of the subjects over which we shared a deep concern was the way in which we use and abuse the resources of the good earth.

We noted that "Climate Change is perhaps the most pressing issue in human history, its effects are most keenly experienced by the poorest of the world's poor; so, it is also a matter of social justice and it needs to be tackled with great urgency. It [was our] prayer that women and men of the Christian Church across the world would become ever more active in pursuing the [Climate Change] agenda".

My hope expressed to Pope Francis was that his Encyclical Letter on Ecology, and ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, would galvanise religious leaders across the world to make this matter one that unites us in common purpose.

The Encyclical Letter must have done something right, because it immediately made the Climate Change deniers even more vociferous. Of course their lame response was that the Church should stay out of this discussion which should be left to the experts.

I'm sorry, but as far as I'm concerned we are the experts

- the experts in stewardship of the good earth
- the experts in addressing ego and greed
- the experts in the search for social justice
- the experts in prophetic speech which calls the rich to account and raises up the voice of the poor

The Pope's encyclical delivers on all of these things and it has made others sit up and take notice.

This Baton which has travelled so many miles – joined me at the top of Ben Lomond and I look forward to seeing it in Paris where it will be a symbol of the many thousands of people in Scotland who support the aims that it stands for. Thank you.

3. Philippa Bonella

Head of Communications and Education at the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund

I have always been an active Catholic and I have always cared for the environment, although I haven't always seen the link between the two. I think in some ways, my learning through life has mirrored the different strands of theology around the environment.

Child – instrumentalist approach

As a child I enjoyed "picking up litter parties" with my family and local community groups. I wanted to make my local area a nice place to play.

This reflected the old view that we were given the earth to subdue (the focus on "dominion"), that creation was something for us to make use of.

Teens and 20s – human dignity focus

As I grew up a little, I began caring for the environment around the world, not just the bits of it nearby me which I could use. I became aware that a poor environment could have a big impact on people (I cared about people not polar bears). That's probably the same impulse that led me to SCIAF.

We campaign on the issues of climate justice, land rights and business ethics, because of the effect that climate change, pollution and land use all have on the people we exist to serve.

Much Catholic social teaching on the environment has focussed on the impact of environmental degradation on our flourishing as one human family. For example Paul IV in *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971): "Man is suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he risks destroying it and becoming in his turn a victim of this degradation."

Or more recently, Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* (2004): "The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole."

Seeing care for the environment as a political issue

In my teens and early twenties, I probably got a bit self-righteous. I saw environmental issues as primarily political problems, to be solved by government and big business.

Of course I wouldn't call Catholic teaching self-righteous! But it has long seen the need for a political and economic as well as a moral response. St John Paul II talked about the unfairness of developing countries having to deal with the impact of pollution and climate change in the 80s and early 90s.

Benedict XVI repeatedly talked about the need for morality in politics and economics, and the Church's role here: "*The Church has a responsibility towards creation and she must assert this responsibility in the public sphere. In so doing, she must defend not only earth, water and air as gifts of creation that belong to everyone. She must above all protect mankind from self-destruction.*" (*Caritas in Veritate*)

New understanding – Seeing behaviour change as something for me too

Now in my forties, I don't see things as black and white any more. While there is a big role for business and governments to play, I know that as a comparatively well-off European, I too am part of the problem and also part of the solution. This is no doubt part of getting older. I feel more connected to nature, and these days my free time is spend going for walks, pottering in the garden, growing tomatoes and watching the birds peck at my fruit.

For forty years, successive popes have called on us to be less selfish, to change ourselves and to protect creation. St John Paul II talked of the "narrowness of the human outlook, motivated by a desire to possess things" (*Centesimus Annus*, 1991). Benedict XVI insisted: "What is needed is an effective shift in mentality which can lead to the adoption of *new life-styles* in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2004)

Seeing creation as something in which God rejoices, something we are part of

But as Christians we can't just take a political or personal response to these issues. We also need to see in creation the beauty and mystery of God's work. In his new encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis forcefully challenges old misunderstandings of humanity's dominion over the earth. We must remember our limits. "We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us". He reminds us that "other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes" – the Lord rejoices in them too. This is not new – it is already clear in the Catholic Catechism, which he quotes to remind us: "Each of the creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness."

Everything is interconnected, as Pope Francis reminds us again and again.

"The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things."

So where does that leave us? With hope. With joy. With a renewed understanding that people can change, that our environment is precious and that God loves us.

Or as the Bishops of Japan say it, quoted in *Laudato Si'*: "To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope."

4. John Humphreys

Synod Moderator of the United Reformed Church in Scotland

A hymn which is not to Lenin by Fearghas MacFhianlaigh

Why care? Yes, the care of creation and the care for creation belongs to the heart of the biblical narrative. From the ancient mythical stories of Genesis to the ways Jesus taught of God with through creation to Paul's groaning creation to the great river of Revelation. Creation itself is revelation and that much more than the proverbial sunset.

Why care? Justice is much ignored in the Bible, our generation looks for sex or the lack of it! Climate change is not just. It is in the hands of the haves. The have not's are victims. It is in the hands of the well-fed, not of the hungry. Staple foods like rice are threatened.

Why care? Beauty and integrity of creation.

Why care? Migration is in the news currently, but migration is to be a 21st century story as climate changes, particularly as rainfall varies and low-lying land disappears.

Why care? Here are some snippets from the United Reformed Church's engagement. With reference to the Rio Earth Summit the General Assembly in 1992 commended the prime minister for signing the conventions on climate change and biodiversity "which commit us to obligations to manage our national affairs to our common international interest" (res 33 – earth summit)

The previous environmental Policy adopted by the general assembly in 2004 was founded on the Five Mark of Mission, the 5th being "to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth." This was followed in 2010 by the Vision 2020 strategic framework for mission in which the URC "will be a church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth ...Our churches reflecting faith in God the Creator and sustainer of life in all its fullness, must discover the radical care for the earth that is supported by the way we live." In the vision 2020 we affirm that "the changing climate and its consequences for all life on planet earth cannot be overemphasised as the most significant underlying issue of our time" and that it is vital that the church "recognises the reality and fear present in environmental debates and lives hopefully in the present climate".

We affirmed the 2009 report Hope in God's Future that "it is now intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse emissions in order to prevent damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species". In line with the reports recommendations, we commit to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the national minimum 80% reduction by 2050 to 1990 levels. We also commit to reach an interim goal of reducing our carbon emission by 42% in 2020 relative to 1990, the target set by the Scottish government. This must involve personal commitment and a 'transformation' of our internal structures. – And as usual we would wish to work ecumenically in this.

Objectives have been agreed for the different councils of the church. For example for local each congregation these include: congregations are encouraged to:

- Carry out an a systematic environmental audit of their buildings
- Raise awareness through teaching etc. celebrate 'Time for Creation'
- Be energy efficient and carbon friendly
- Help members make adjustments to their lives

- Involve children and young people
- Engage with local political representatives
- Support campaigns
- Use church land to enjoy nature
- Produce community art

There are also lists for Synods and for General Assembly.

In Scotland, some 25% of our congregations have received the eco-congregations Scotland 'award', church gardens are emerging, providing beauty, food and awareness. Realism is creeping into local decisions about buildings being fit for purpose. We are seeking to cut the need for travel to meetings across Scotland in part by using other technologies for communication.

The synod has partnered with eco congregations Scotland to not only to create a post to work with eco congregations Scotland but also by providing covering the stipend, but also in by providing a person of ability and commitment in Trevor Jamison.

Why care?

Repeat the final 4 stanzas of 'A hymn which is not to Lenin'