

SOFiA

Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality

On Climate Change

This issue of the newsletter continues the theme of this year's Conference, "Spirituality for a Sustainable Future". Robin Boom sent us a contribution, "Climate Change is Natural – RELAX" in June 2020. We initially planned to publish it, but concerns were expressed that readers might conclude that we rejected the current consensus on the reality of human-induced climate change. There was also concern about the polemical style of the article. Up until then, no article submitted to the newsletter had been rejected, so your editor felt that a decision whether to publish was way above his pay grade and referred the matter to the national committee, who decided against publication. Two years later, Robin has strengthened his claim to be a SOFiA supporter. For example, he attended the latest Conference where he repeated his plea for publication. He also wrote another article on a different theme for our newsletter.

We have now managed to obtain from Greg Hughson an article challenging Robin's views, so can now overturn the original decision against publication. Edward Finn and Bruce Spittle, who wrote letters to the editor protesting the decision, will be glad. Generally speaking, SOFiA is opposed to censorship and welcomes the open airing of diverse ideas. These days there are many contrarian voices: anti-vaxxers and Trumpian claims of electoral fraud. In particular, the Danish statistician Bjorn Lomborg has argued that there are better ways of spending money than combating climate change. Robin Boom has written a response to Greg Hughson and your editor wants to have his say as well, so look forward to February's newsletter.

In this issue, your editor responds below to the disappointing news that the Auckland group has closed. Beverly Smith reviews Karen Armstrong's latest book *Sacred Nature* and we have excerpts from two addresses given at this year's Conference.

Oh No! Homeless...Again

At this year's AGM, the Auckland SOFiA group voted to close. There were people willing to attend meetings, but no-one willing to step into the role of chairperson or treasurer to replace those who had stepped down.

SOFiA has been my spiritual home for many years, so losing it brings a feeling of existential homelessness, despite the continuing existence of a small North Shore group in Auckland. I feel cast adrift, more alone in the universe. I look around wondering what other groups I might find

that I could belong to, and have a sense that my identity, previously fairly clearly defined, has now become more fluid and uncertain. What makes it worse is that this is not my first experience of losing a SOFiA group. I was in Christchurch where the group struggled on for a while without a committee or invited speakers, deciding at one meeting what would happen at the next, before finally ending. Fortunately, shortly thereafter I shifted to Auckland and found a thriving group with committee, newsletter and annual subscription.

Now of course the founders of the Sea of Faith (now SOFiA) did not think they were creating an organisation that would exist for all eternity. SoF emerged in the midst of a theological upheaval and was an ad hoc response to that particular situation, caused for example by Bishop John Robinson's book *Honest to God* and Don Cupitt's BBC series *Sea of Faith* that detailed how our picture of the world and our role in it had fundamentally changed.

I joined the Sea of Faith somewhat later and found it liberating. Here at last I could speak frankly and explore my reservations and questions. There was also the excitement of investigating new ideas.

In church circles I had always been cautious about expressing doubts or contrary views, not wanting to disturb the faith of others. I also discovered that the desire to question ideas and to thoroughly test them was not shared by others. There is always the contrary desire to support people and build them up in the faith.

Once my church (Presbyterian) started drawing lines where none were needed (for example, on office-bearers openly practising homosexuality), I no longer felt it was my spiritual home, leaving Sea of Faith to fulfil that role by default.

A Gestalt course strengthened my view that this questioning process was important. There I learnt to think of incorporating ideas as parallel to the digestive process. First we have to attack something with our teeth and thoroughly decompose it into small bits before it can be broken down even further by our digestive system, enter our bloodstream and so become part of us. In the same way, ideas need to be challenged, sometimes aggressively, and broken down into their constituent parts before we can make them part of us.

For some of us, SOFiA was a temporary waystation on the way out of church. The questioning process left the dogmas of the church wanting and so we belonged to SOFiA for a while and then moved beyond it.

For me, the goal was always to go deeper. Dismissing religion on the basis of a superficial rationalism along the lines of the new atheists seems much too easy to me.

But why is SOFiA failing? Our membership is aging and attempts to attract a younger membership have not been successful. Is it just that the younger generation generally has little or no socialisation into a church culture and so has little need for a forum where they can think through the ideas that church presented them with? Or is it that SOFiA hasn't evolved to keep up with a rapidly changing world? We changed our name, but has our focus changed? I'm struck by the fact that the NZ Skeptics society began life as "The New Zealand Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (NZCSICOP)" but fortunately broadened its scope and adopted a new name.

But now, many years later, we are in a very different world. The mainline churches are declining and aging. The Internet and social media are transforming the very nature of society. Attempts to get youth on board with SOFiA have not been successful.

You might ask, "Why continue to bother with a declining organisation?" The signs are not looking very good. Nowadays there are so many possibilities elsewhere in society. We can belong to numerous Facebook groups and have all sorts of interests catered for. Zoom is undermining the tradition of meeting in groups.

I like the thought of SOFiA as providing a "spiritual friendship." The increasing diversity of our membership is no problem; our focus is on the things that really matter and we attempt to resist the attractions of a society with its surfeit of entertainment and consumption but a deficit in attention to the things that really matter. Politics and religion are famously controversial subjects best avoided. In SOFiA we can bypass such inhibitions and openly share our interest in "Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality".

There's plenty to get our teeth into. Free will and consciousness are intriguing subjects that perplex the philosophers. Psychotherapy has a host of insights that can enrich us. Frans de Waal interestingly undermines the assumption that humans are the only ones with a sense of right and wrong.

The Editor

About SOFiA

SOFiA (The Sea of Faith in Aotearoa) is a network of people interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of values, meaning and spirituality. We want to explore for ourselves what we can believe and how we can find meaning in our lives.

SOFiA is not a church: it is a forum for discussing ideas, experiences and perspectives. SOFiA itself has no creed; its members come from many faiths and from those with no attachment to any religious institution.

If you are in sympathy with our aims, you are most welcome to join us; receive our Newsletter, attend a local group and/or come to our Conferences.

We follow similar organisations in the UK and Australia in taking our name from "Sea of Faith", the 1984 BBC TV series and book by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt.

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Our national Committee oversees the work of SOFiA.

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Publication deadline for the next Newsletter is 7 February 2023.

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SOFiA News

Auckland Group Closes

At its AGM on 20 November, the Auckland group voted to close down, as there were no volunteers to replace the Chairperson and Treasurer, who were standing down.

Book Reviews

Sacred Nature

How we can recover our bond with the natural world.

By Karen Armstrong

For most of human history, and in almost all the world's cultures, nature was believed to be sacred, and our God or gods to be present everywhere in the natural world.

When people in the West began to separate God and nature in modern times, it was not just a profound breach with thousands of years of accumulated wisdom: it also set in train the destruction of the natural world.

"Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother
And even such a small creature as I finds
An intimate place in their midst.
Therefore that which fills the universe
I regard as my body
And that which directs the universe
I consider as my nature.

All people are my brothers and sisters, and
All the things (in nature) are my companions."
(Ximing by Zhang Zai)

Armstrong writes: 'We walk in a place of extreme beauty while talking on our mobiles or scrolling through social media: we are present, yet fundamentally absent. Instead of sitting contemplatively beside a river or gazing in awe at a mountain range, we obsessively take one photograph of the view after another. Rather than let the landscape find an intimate place in our minds and hearts, we are distancing ourselves from nature, which is becoming a simulated reality. Our urban living and all-absorbing

technology have alienated us from nature, so that even the magnificent films of David Attenborough may fail to reach our innermost core.

Chinese religious traditions may be unique in having no creation story and here, Armstrong filled a gap in my knowledge. 'Yin and Yang the two opposing elements within Chi (the vital essence of all things) interact creatively in a process of continuous transformation to produce and sustain the material elements of the universe.'

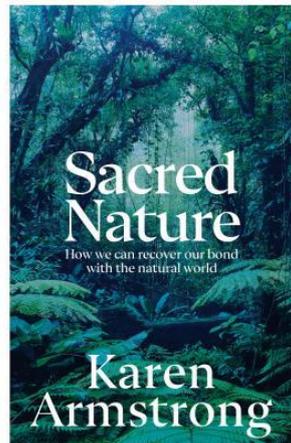
When finally we realise that our very existence depends upon nature, it will be time to surrender our anthropocentrism and include the entire cosmos in our ultimate concern. 'You seek to establish yourself,' said Confucius'.

The great Chinese Scholar and statesman Wang Yang-ming (1473-1529) in his commentary on the 'Great Learning'; argued that human beings are not naturally anthropocentric. He pointed out that when a child hears the pitiful cries of animals about to be slaughtered, he finds their suffering difficult to bear, proving that his humanity 'forms one body' with other beings and things.

But we do not merely share the same nature as animals, plants and other 'things'; as the Zhongyong tells us, humanity also forms a trinity with heaven and earth.

Tu Weiming argues that we must go beyond the secular humanism that formed the anthropocentric ethos of the Enlightenment. We should develop an anthropocosmic mentality that unites the individual with the community and preserves the harmony between the human species and the non-human world. This underlying sense of nature's inherent sacrality relies on the dynamic vitalism of the qi, the substance of life, which others have called the Dao, the Brahman, God or the sacred. It lies at the heart of the ongoing creativity and renewal of nature, which was explored at the beginning of this book.

The book concludes with a thoughtful recitation of the Buddha's prayer, 'Let all beings be happy'.
Beverley Smith



Maori Spirituality- Whakapapa and Whanaungatanga

Excerpts from Rob McKay's talk at the 2022 Conference.

Maori Spirituality for me as I understand it is based on two things: Whakapapa & Whanaungatanga - our history, our genealogy, our family relationships, our bloodlines and our connections to other species.

The Maori worldview considers everything living and non-living to be interconnected. Whakapapa describes these connections and tells the story of how people, the landscape, plants and animals came into being. People, plants and animals are all descendants of Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatuanuku (the earth mother) and their children, which means humans are therefore, intrinsically linked with biodiversity.

What does Matariki mean for me? Matariki is about our papakainga/whanau coming together, reflecting on the past year, remembering our loved ones who have passed on over the previous 12 months. So, I connect MATARIKI to whakapapa and whanau.

Io

Io refers to a supreme being. The concept of a single celestial parent is contested by Ani Mikaere (2011) who argues that the notion of Io is a post-Christian development (see Ani Mikaere, 2011, pp. 233-237, 241-246, 249; see also Cox (2014) and his chapter entitled: "The debate over Io as the pre-Christian Maori Supreme Being"). However, Marsden (in Royal, 2003), Michael Shirres (1997), and Schrempp (1992) maintain that Io was an atua for some hapu and iwi, before Pakeha contact.

Furthermore, Moorfield (2011) insists that some hapu and iwi have an Io tradition that may be a response to Christianity. However, Moorfield (2011) also argues that references to an Io belief occur in a number of traditions from the Polynesian islands, including Hawai'i, the Society Islands, and the Cook Islands, suggesting a more ancient tradition. Judith Binney (1995) contends that Io may have travelled with Maori from the wider Pacific.

Legal Persons

In the LAW in NZ July 2014 the awesome majestic Ureweras - our national park transformed into a LEGAL PERSON with its own rights, responsibilities, duties and liabilities.

Our LAW did it again three years later in March 2017 our country's 3rd longest river. The WHANGANUI RIVER became a legal person

So for Maori, the FIRST PEOPLES to discover and make these lands their home, PERSONALITY has always been seen in these lands between RANGINUI our SKY FATHER and PAPATUANUKU our EARTH MOTHER. I think it's COOL AZ that our legal system now recognizes the whakapapa & whanaungatanga of LANDS & WATERS.

Colonial countries including AOTEAROA NZ must address and must find new ways to respectfully CONNECT with indigenous peoples and as a part of that we need to examine, reconstruct the foundations of our society. And in our LEGAL SYTEM - LEGAL PERSONALITY shows one of the WAYS to do this.

Spirituality for a sustainable future

Excerpts from a talk by Elizabeth (Loo) Connor at the 2022 Conference.

Sustainability is such a compact, easy word. And when you look into what it means, it contains possibly the most profound challenge humans have faced in our entire history on this planet.

In my lifetime the seriousness of the global environmental crisis has been dawning. What began with scientists noticing subtle trends in the data - sea level rise, ocean acidification, global warming - is now being felt as massive storms, floods, famine threatening much of the world's population.

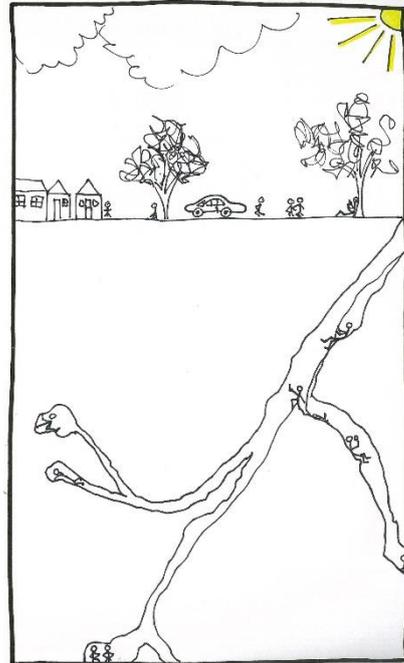
Every human living on Earth has this situation to grapple with. As a diagnosis, it's extremely serious. "Not looking good", a doctor might say.

As a teenager I was also attracted to science. This is me lying on the roof of our house at night looking at the moon and the vast distance between the stars. I was enchanted by the way all the disparate phenomena in the world could be connected by the same underlying laws and patterns of physics. The fact that gravity could explain the way the moon hung in the sky, the arc of the powerlines, leaves falling from trees and me sticking to the roof. It was magic!



Below is a picture of scientists digging away at their specialist fields, making new discoveries. The further they dig, the more specialised they become. They develop their own languages, full of specialised jargon that

makes it hard for them to talk to people outside their tunnel.



As a person who likes to connect everything to the big picture, I felt panicked at the thought of going down a specialist tunnel.

When I returned to New Zealand in 2009, I reconnected with Paul

Callaghan and put a lot of pressure on myself to do something to help in this crisis. He supported me to win the Prime Minister's Science Communication prize which gave me time and money to focus.

But six months after receiving the prize I got totally overwhelmed. The scale and magnitude of the issues. The uncertainty of where I fitted and what ground I stood on. I burnt out. My brother rescued me and helped me refocus on something more manageable - my own healing and development.

I think in that experience of burning out I recognised that we need deep healing as a society and culture to face the challenges we're up against.

The world view that has led to this global crisis is in me too. It's in us. As a disconnect from each other, a pressure to produce and perform, a lack of confidence in our place and connection with the land and natural systems.

Elizabeth (Loo) Connor

Robin Says 'Climate Change is Natural – RELAX'

There have been occasional references to Climate Change in the SOF Newsletter and at conferences which line up with the Main Stream Media metanarrative that Climate Change and Global Warming is the greatest threat to life on this planet, and that we humans are largely responsible for this. It is unfortunate MSM only promote a one-sided unbalanced and biased view, and fail dismally in their job of challenging and testing 'scientific' assumptions, and pushing back on policy which if implemented will be a financial travesty for future generations of Kiwis, i.e. that many tens of thousands of hectares of good farmland will be planted in trees forever to be 'carbon farmed', never to be cut, but used as a short term carbon sink. The carbon market through the human fabricated ETS scheme is being gamed by multinational companies and the extreme rich, raking in taxed money we all pay for. The loss of farmland will be devastating to rural communities and their social and economic welfare, let alone a huge loss to NZ Inc.

Hitler's propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, is credited as stating 'It is not truth that matters but victory. Make the lie big, make it simple, keep repeating it, and eventually they will believe it'. Is climate change real? You bet it is. The climate has been changing radically for the past 3 million years in particular, with a series of ice ages and interglacials occurring every 40,000 to 100,000 years which is called the Quaternary Ice Age Period. These are believed to come and go from what is known as the 'Milankovitch Cycle', caused by the

axial tilt of the Earth in relation to its elliptical orbit around the sun. Why these started 3 million years ago is unknown, but for the previous 250,000,000 years, there were no polar ice caps and the world was much warmer than today.

If we go back 50 million years when mammalian species were beginning to appear Earth, the temperature was 16 degrees warmer than now, so claims that life on this planet will disappear are wrong. In fact of all the species alive today, they make up less than one percent of creatures which have lived on this planet over the past 600 million years.

Ice ages have a much bigger impact on life than warming. In fact the last ice age which was also the coldest and most severe of all the ice ages, called the Late Glacial Maximum, peaked just 20,000 years ago, and humans couldn't live in a lot of places we do today. Where the city of Chicago is, was covered by a kilometre of ice, Boston was covered by two kilometres of ice, and Montreal was covered by ice three kilometres high. Even as recently as 12,000 years ago Britain was covered in glaciers and our own Southern Alps was one massive ice sheet, and the electricity-producing South Island hydro lakes would have been all frozen over.

Fortunately for us and a lot of other species the planet started naturally warming when CO2 levels were a lot lower than today, and this rate and speed of warming was much faster, with no human influence at all. For 12,000 years sea levels rose on average one metre every century, five times greater than they rose for the whole of the twentieth

'What historians will definitely wonder about in future centuries is how deeply flawed logic, obscured by shrewd and unrelenting propaganda, actually enabled a coalition of powerful special interests to convince nearly everyone in the world that CO2 from human industry was a dangerous planet-destroying toxin. It will be remembered as the greatest mass delusion in the history of the world – that CO2, the life of plants, was considered for a time to be a deadly poison'. Prof Richard Lindzen

century – just 0.2 metres. The planet is warming, but human influence I believe is widely exaggerated, and the real elephant in the room is over-population which MSM remains silent about. Yes we should be looking at renewable energy sources, yes we are polluting this planet with plastics and all sorts of chemicals and have changed its landscape like no other species in its history. Yes we should slow down and make more efficient use of our limited fossil fuel and other mineral resources. But let's get a balanced view on all of this climate change alarmism.

I work as an agronomist and I love CO₂ as it is plant food. Plants love it and grow bigger from it. In fact some glass houses increase CO₂ levels up to five times higher to make plants grow bigger and faster for more juicy tomatoes and capsicums. Carbon is essential for life and if levels got too low, life on this planet as we know it would disappear. Back in the Jurassic period, 150 million years ago, carbon dioxide levels were 2000 ppm, five times higher than they are today, and that's why the huge herbivorous dinosaurs were able to thrive on all of the plant matter growing in this CO₂ rich environment. CO₂ greens the planet and increases crop production. Extra CO₂ will protect us from going into another Ice Age, and Siberia and Greenland may one day become the food-bowls of the world and allow humans to thrive there like our distant cousins, the Neanderthals, did 50,000 years ago. The sky isn't falling as the Chicken Little alarmists would try and tell you, inflicting fear and hopelessness into the minds and hearts of gullible young people like Greta Thunberg. We all need to relax and smell the roses, because they are only going to get bigger and more beautiful with all of the extra CO₂ as the planet returns to its natural equilibrium of a warmer climate.

There is so much more I could discuss such as the doctored 'hockey-stick' graphs, out-gassing from the oceans, warming periods of the Holocene age, radiation forcing band-widths of different green-house gases, soil carbon storage, effects of volcanism etc, but space prevents me.

Further Reading

- * 'Climate Change Delusion and the Great Electricity Rip-off' - Professor Ian Plimer
- * 'How To Get Expelled From School, A Guide to Climate Change for Pupils, Parents and Punters' - Professor Ian Plimer.
- * 'INCONVENIENT FACTS: The science that Al Gore doesn't want you to know' - Professor Gregory Wrightstone
- * 'Human Caused Global Warming : The Biggest Deception in History' - Professor Tim Ball
- * 'Red Hot Lies: How Global Warming Alarmists Use Threats, Fraud, and Deception to Keep You Misinformed' - by Christopher C. Horner
- * 'Polar Bear Myths and Facts' - Professor Susan Crockford
- * 'Global Warming : A Guide to the Science' - Professor Willie Soon
- * 'Global Warming Skepticism for Busy People : The end is not near' - Professor Roy Spencer
- * 'Confessions of a Climate Scientist : The global warming hypothesis is unproven' - Professor Mototaka Nakamura
- * 'The Rise and Fall of Carbon Dioxide Theory of Climate Change' - Professor Rex Fleming
- * 'The Great Global Warming Blunder : How Mother Nature Fooled the world's top climate scientists' - Professor Roy Spencer
- * 'The Climate Change Hoax : Pathway to Socialism'' - Lawrence Newman
- * 'The Mythology of Global Warming : Climate Change Fiction v Scientific Fact - Professor Bruce Bunker
- * 'Inconvenient Data : Proving the Consensus Wrong' - George Root
- * 'Climate Bogeyman : The Criminal Insanity of the Global Warming Hoax - MS King
- * 'Climate of Corruption : Politics and Power Behind the Global Warming Hoax - Larry Bell
- * Climate Change Reality Check: Basic Facts that Quickly Prove the Climate Change Crusade is Wrong and Dangerous' - Calvin Frey
- * 'The Climate Surprise: Why CO₂ is Good for the Earth - Professors; Roger Kimball; William Happer; Craig Idso , Richard S. Lindzen, et al.

Responding to Human-induced Climate Change

I am grateful for this opportunity to share my current understanding of climate change in response to Robin Boom's article "Climate Change is Natural-RELAX".ⁱ I agree with Robin Boom that climate change is indeed real. The climate here on planet earth has indeed been changing constantly over millions of years. Robin is correct when he states that "Back in the Jurassic period, 150 million years ago, carbon dioxide levels were 2000 ppm, five times higher than they are today, and that's why the huge herbivorous dinosaurs were able to thrive on all of the plant matter growing in this CO₂-rich environment." Clearly, those ancient high CO₂ levels were not due to human activity.

The reality we are facing today however is that the increases in CO₂ since AD1800 ARE largely due to human activity and that these increases ARE indeed cause for great concern. This is the truth, verified by the vast majority of mainstream scientists worldwide. Robin Boom's unhelpful and emotive references to Hitler's propagandist Joseph Goebbels and the "lies" being perpetrated by the mainstream media about the causes of recent climate change, do not enhance the credibility of his misguided call for us all to "relax". Rather, these caricatures seek to denigrate and demonise those who accept the truth and are moved to take action to prevent future catastrophe, distress and death here on planet earth.

The truth is that greenhouse gas concentrations in our planet's atmosphere are at their highest levels in two million years. The fact that CO₂ levels were even higher 150 million years ago is irrelevant. And emissions are continuing to rise. As a result, the Earth is now about 1.1°C warmer

than it was in the late 1800's. The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record.

Temperature rise is only part of the story. Because all of the processes which sustain life on earth are ecologically interconnected, changes in one area create changes in many other areas. The consequences of recent human-induced climate change over the last 200 or so years now include intense



An artistic impression of global warming, created using artificial intelligence software

droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity. We are continuing to observe, experience and record significant detrimental changes to our precious earth's climate in every region of the world, across the whole climate system.

Scientific consensus affirms that strong and sustained reductions in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases would limit climate change. It would take 20-30 years to see global temperatures stabilise, according to the IPCC Working Group I AR6 report, *Climate Change 2021: the Physical Science Basis*,ⁱⁱ a report which was approved last year by the 195 member governments of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) including Aotearoa-NZ. Professor Bronwyn Haywardⁱⁱⁱ of Canterbury University was a coordinating lead author for this hugely significant report.

This same scientific report advises that unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C, will not be possible. An average temperature rise of more than 2°C will severely destabilise current weather patterns

and lead to runaway temperature increases which will have a catastrophically deleterious effect on all of earth's ecosystems. This is not therefore, a time for us to relax.

The IPCC 2021 report provides evidence supporting the current global scientific consensus that emissions of greenhouse gases from human activities are responsible for approximately 1.1°C of warming since 1850, and finds that averaged over the next 20 years, global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5°C of warming. This assessment is based on improved observational datasets to assess historical warming, as well as progress in the scientific understanding of the response of the climate system to human-caused greenhouse gas emissions.

“This report is a reality check,” said IPCC Working Group I Co-Chair Valérie Masson-Delmotte. “We now have a much clearer picture of the past, present and future climate, which is essential for understanding where we are headed, what can be done, and how we can prepare. It has been clear for decades that the Earth's climate is changing, and the role of human influence on the climate system is undisputed.”

The IPCC Working Group members who prepared this crucial scientific report comprise 234 authors from 66 countries; 31 coordinating authors, 167 lead authors, 36 review editors plus 517 contributing authors. The report includes over 14,000 cited references and a total of 78,007 expert and government review comments. Their report describes the most updated physical understanding of the earth's climate system and climate change, bringing together the latest advances in climate science and combining multiple lines of evidence from paleoclimatic studies, ecological process research, as well as global and regional climate simulations. The report clearly illustrates how and why our climate has changed to date and provides an improved understanding and proof of human influence on a wider range of climate characteristics, including extreme weather events.

The overwhelming scientific evidence for human industrial and agricultural activities

being major current (since AD 1800) causative agents in driving climate change cannot be dismissed as “lies”. We cannot, as Robin Boom suggests, relax. We must take comprehensive action now to prevent the worst effects of future climate change, which otherwise will be predictably far worse than what we are already experiencing internationally. Future generations will not look back on this decade as a time when humanity was “deceived” by so many thousands of scientists into thinking that CO₂ was, in Robin Boom and Richard Lindzen's (accusatory) words a “poison”. We all know that CO₂ is not a poison. When it accumulates in the atmosphere however, CO₂ does, like other “greenhouse gases” prevent heat from escaping from our planet. If we do not take urgent action now, our grandchildren will look back and ask why we did not do more to respond to the overwhelming number of legitimate warnings to change our environmentally destructive lifestyles and industrial/agricultural practices. Young people are already asking us this question.

The current mainstream reputable scientific consensus is that the global warming we have seen since 1800 is largely attributable to human activity. Since AD1800 human-generated economic and agricultural systems have pumped ever-increasing amounts of CO₂, methane and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. This is the truth which we as a species must face up to and respond to if we are to preserve our precious earth for our grandchildren and future generations to enjoy.

We have the intelligence and scientific tools to measure increases in the temperature of our air and oceans. Yes, there have been “natural” changes in climate over millions of years. But our focus now as humans needs to be on the next fifty or so years. We have been warned for decades now about the consequences of not restricting the current increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The truth is that if we do not heed these warnings, and average global temperatures increase by 2°C (above AD1800 pre-industrial temperatures), many

of the earth-systems upon which we rely for sustenance and protection will be severely disrupted. Already we are experiencing increasingly violent weather events. In recent times there have been huge floods in Northland and on the West Coast of the South Island of Aotearoa-NZ. A dam in Victoria, Australia overflowed during November 2022 as a result of unprecedented rainfall. An Australian hydrologist when asked about this, stated that it is not possible any more to use historical weather data to predict future climate events. What was normal over the past 200 years, cannot be used to accurately predict what will occur over the next 50 years. The predictions are that storms, cyclones, floods (as in Pakistan), out of control fires (as in the USA and Australia), ocean acidification and warming of the sea will all intensify unless the rate of release of human-controlled greenhouse gases is reduced.

The main contributions to greenhouse gas emissions are the burning of fossil fuels and agricultural (methane and other) emissions. Both of these activities are under the control of humans. There is no denying that these activities are contributing significantly to global warming. There may indeed, as Robin Boom points out, be other factors contributing to global warming which are outside of human control, but we need to take responsibility for controlling those processes over which we, as a species, DO have control.

Along with all other world religions, the Christian faith advocates for wise stewardship of creation. In recent decades there has been a healthy growth in ecological awareness. Eco-theology has become a vital and inspiring new discipline. Quality worship and devotional resources are now available to nurture our awareness of our human place in creation alongside millions of other species. For example, the Pacific Council of Churches' "Season of Creation" resources.^{iv} A Jewish and Christian understanding of our humanity is that we have been "created in the image of God" with the capacity to co-create with God, and with the capacity to care for and tend God's creation.^v Clearly, as a species we have

largely failed to care for and preserve the beautiful and complex world of which we are a small part. Our current climate crisis (yes, it is a crisis!) is a wakeup call to us all. We need to study the scientific reports, but also I suggest we need to pray and/or meditate on the significance of what is happening to our planet. The truth is, global warming is happening as a result of human greed and over-consumption. This is not a lie. We are not being deceived by Hitler-like manipulators, or by an ill-informed main stream media. The current climate crisis is, as the Secretary General of the UN has clearly stated, "the defining issue of our time". This is not a time to relax and enjoy the benefits of increased crop yields due to ever increasing carbon emissions. Certainly, in some areas of the world, crop yields may increase. But globally, unless we take action to reduce emissions, the outlook for humanity as a whole is disastrous. Other species such as cockroaches will thrive, but (in a worse-case scenario) human numbers will reduce dramatically to only those wealthy few who can afford to live in air-conditioned protective "pods". This could of course be seen by an objective outsider as a "natural corrective", a feedback loop which effectively reduces the human source of the global warming problems created for planet earth by our species. There is currently no planet B^{vi} to which we can escape.

The irrefutable scientific evidence of global warming has been available for decades, yet relatively little action has been taken. The economic growth of individual first-world nations has taken priority over the need for global ecological health. Patriotism and nationalism have been major obstacles to the commitment of countries to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This has been, and still is the case in China, which continues to increase the burning of coal, and here in NZ with our apparent inability to legislate (until recently) for a significant reduction in grazing ruminant agricultural emissions. My own scientific training included the study of ruminant digestion and physiology. I understand how the methane is generated. The easiest and most direct way to deal with this problem is to

reduce stock numbers. Certainly, our farmers are upset. Change is not easy. The NZ Meat Industry Association is unhappy with the current emissions pricing proposal which they believe will decimate rural communities^{vii} The NZ Labour-led Government believes that if NZ farmers accept the proposal, they will lead the world in reducing emissions and help give NZ a competitive advantage in a green-conscious global marketplace. Ultimately here in Aotearoa-NZ, I believe that we must significantly reduce stock numbers and transition to regenerative and sustainable farming practices.

The 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC (more commonly referred to as COP27) was the 27th United Nations Climate Change conference held recently from 6 November until 18 November 2022 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. It is a credit to organisers that at this recent international gathering they realised that scientific evidence alone will not sway public opinion and motivate human action to prevent climate catastrophe. In addition to scientific data, interviews with victims of climate change were shared. For example, a new educational-inspirational platform, “Frontline Truths” was launched during COP27.^{viii} Young Pacific people who are already directly affected by climate change shared their stories. These are not lies. These young people convey their plight with urgency. I urge you to view and listen carefully to these interviews. If you are someone who does not appreciate the style of Greta Thunberg, then listen to these passionate young Pacific voices closer to home. Our Pacific neighbours are victims of the affluence of all industrial first-world economies, including our own. The UN predicts that by 2030 up to 700 million climate refugees will have needed to move away from their homes which will have become uninhabitable due to rampant flooding, huge storms, and/or drought. COP27 has agreed in principle that countries that are victims of climate change, caused by affluent countries, should be compensated financially by those countries.

This is an attempt to address the injustice that has been caused. Money cannot however restore ecosystems that have been severely disrupted. Prevention, as in medicine, is far better than cure. We must act together now to prevent even greater devastation than what we are already seeing. To ignore the consensus of world scientific opinion is to adopt the same attitude of the tobacco companies, who took decades to accept that their product caused cancer, or the stance of those who died as a result of refusing to receive a Covid vaccine (when they had no medical reason not to receive the vaccine).

The way forward is to realise and affirm that we are all interconnected both ecologically and spiritually here on planet earth. How we live our lives here in Aotearoa-NZ directly affects the people of the Pacific and further afield. We can no longer view the issue of climate change through the eyes of just one discipline (e.g. agronomy, theology, meteorology, anthropology or ruminant physiology) alone. The current climate crisis calls for a radical new openness to the varied insights of ALL disciplines. A multi-disciplined response is what is required. We must listen to our IPCC scientists, including Professor Bronwyn Hayward of Canterbury University. We must also listen to and respond intelligently and with grace to (human-induced) climate-change deniers, so as to avoid polarisation and demonisation of each other. We must listen to our young people, a significant number of whom, because of climate change, are deciding not to reproduce, knowing what sort of a world lies ahead of us. And we must listen to the earth itself. We must attend spiritually to the what the earth is trying to say to us.

The season of creation is now an international ecumenical Christian season. This year, 2022, the season began on September 1st with a Day of Prayer for Creation and ended on October 4th with the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology venerated by many Christians around the world. Throughout the month-long celebration, the world's 2.4 billion Christians gathered in worship and

elsewhere to express our care for planet earth. In this season of growing ecological awareness, we are encouraged by our Pacific sisters and brothers to “Listen to the Voices of Creation.” In the Pacific region, humans have been listening to the voices of creation and living harmoniously with creation for thousands of years. In Australia, for hundreds of thousands of years. This season we celebrate those voices, the voices of our trees, the animals and birds, the small living organisms in our forests, our rivers and lakes, the skies that give us rain and replenish our water, our vast and beautiful blue oceans and the whole of creation here on Earth.

If we listen to the voices of creation we will be motivated to research, discover and implement more sustainable living practices. If we listen attentively with open hearts and minds, we will also hear the voice of our creator who brought us, and all that exists, into being.^{ix}

The Pacific Conference of Churches encourages everyone; Christians, people of other faiths and people of no religious faith, to pause and to listen to the voices of creation. We can either respond to these voices, change our destructive ways, and live in harmony with creation, or suffer the consequences. We can become more responsible stewards of creation, stewards of this precious earth which we share with millions of other species, or we can continue with our anthropocentric selfish and polluting ways.

As individuals and as communities we need at this crucial time in human history to dare to be wise (*Sapere Aude*^x) and to actively respond to scientifically informed, spiritually sound calls to live more simply, so that others can simply live. Let's focus on what we can do, and urge businesses big and small to transition to greener technologies. Many wise and informed businesses already are making this transition. It is important not to ignore the warnings, or to ignore the ecological challenges we face whether these challenges are articulated by scientists or religious leaders.

In July of this year a Senior Vatican Cardinal Michael Czerny called for an international treaty that tackles the climate crisis at its source: fossil fuels.^{xi} The call builds on the Vatican's admirable and sincere calls for fossil fuel divestment and new policies for investments in “a more just and sustainable world”.

Global momentum is building in support of a proposed Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.^{xii} Two countries directly affected by Climate Change, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, are the first two countries to sign the treaty. The proposed fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty has three pillars:

NON-PROLIFERATION

Prevent the proliferation of coal, oil and gas by ending all new exploration and production

A FAIR PHASE-OUT

Phase-out existing production of fossil fuels in line with the 1.5C global climate goal

JUST TRANSITION

Fast-track real solutions and a just transition for every worker, community and country

Individuals can express support for this treaty via <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/> Thus far this very sensible treaty proposal is supported by 101 Nobel laureates, 3,000 academics, a growing group of religious leaders, 320 parliamentarians, thousands of youth activists, more than 1,500 civil society organizations and over 60 cities including London, Paris, Amsterdam, Sydney, Los Angeles, Barcelona, Toronto and Geneva. All of these people and groups are not supporting lies. They are people and groups who are committed to actioning what needs to be done to prevent global warming reaching unmanageable and destructive levels. I encourage you to sign up, in support of this treaty, as I have and to forward the link to all your friends and colleagues.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, Prefect of a Roman Catholic Organisation for Promoting Integral Human Development, has recently written:

“Regarding COP27, Pope Francis again joins scientists in holding to the Paris Agreement's temperature

increase goal of 1.5°C. The planet already is 1.2°C hotter, yet new fossil fuel projects every day accelerate our race towards the precipice. Enough is enough. All new exploration and production of coal, oil, and gas must immediately end, and existing production of fossil fuels must be urgently phased out. There must be a just transition for impacted workers into environmentally sound alternatives. The proposed Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty holds great promise to complement and enhance the Paris Agreement.”

The World Council of Churches, comprised of 350 Churches representing millions of people, has also expressed grave concern for many years about human-induced climate change. In its most recent statement “On COP27 a critical occasion to re-envision a roadmap for a sustainable tomorrow” xiii the WCC declares that:

“COP 27 is a critical occasion for governments to together re-envision, develop, commit to and implement a roadmap towards a fossil fuel-free, post-growth, equitable and sustainable tomorrow, and to tackle the greatest existential challenge to life on the planet.”

“In support of the efforts being undertaken at COP27, the WCC executive committee therefore calls on governments to deliver more ambitious commitments and effective action—especially by countries with both the greatest historical responsibilities for climate change and the largest financial and technological capacities—to rapidly reverse the rate of greenhouse gas emissions...”

The WCC executive committee recently reiterated the call from the WCC 11th Assembly

“for all member churches and ecumenical partners around the world ‘to give the climate emergency the priority attention that a crisis of such unprecedented and all-encompassing dimensions deserves...’”

Sadly, the outcome of the recent COP27 has not been encouraging. However, in every crisis there is an opportunity. The opportunity is for us all to realise how interconnected we are and to support LOCAL initiatives to protect, preserve and then eventually restore our local ecosystems.

Just and equitable climate solutions were widely canvassed throughout COP27. It seems however that world leaders do not have the political will to enact such solutions. Whilst heads of state are making public speeches full of lofty rhetoric, their teams have too often been busy undermining

progress in private negotiating rooms on the key issues of mitigation (reducing carbon emissions) and providing life-saving climate financing for impacted communities. COP27 has at least agreed to the establishment of an international fund into which the big polluter countries (including China and the USA) will pay, a fund from which money will be paid to the victims. How this will work in practice remains to be seen. COP 27 has failed to come to any agreement on how the goal to keep global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius will be met. Given that there appears to be no effective and binding international plan, we need to do what we can here in Aotearoa-NZ, and hope and pray that other countries will do the same.

In every crisis the human tendency is to seek to apportion blame to some group, thereby distracting attention and energy away from working to creatively address the crisis. The Judeo-Christian tradition, with its biblically based advocacy for human dominion over creation, has been blamed for creating our current ecological crisis. xiv

In his recent book “Is anyone in charge here ?” xv Rev Dr Selwyn Yeoman, a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa-NZ, presents an evaluation of how this doctrine/idea of human dominion has been understood and implemented over the centuries. In response to those who would blame the Judeo-Christian tradition for our current crisis, Jonathan Boston, Professor of Public Policy at Victoria University writes these words in his review of Selwyn’s book :

Selwyn Yeoman helps Christians to see that we “are called to care responsibly for God’s good creation and safeguard all the earth’s amazing creatures. He furnishes an engaging, rigorous, and persuasive response to those who blame the Judeo-Christian tradition for our tragic and escalating ecological crisis.”

It is easy to focus on blaming and shaming groups of people for our current crisis. We need to get over blaming and shaming, and instead, continue to educate and convince big business (and big religious) leaders that it is in their interest, and in the interest of all species on planet earth, to

transition to greener more sustainable technologies. A Rocha International^{xvi} is one Christian organisation which has emerged to champion caring for creation at all levels.

A Rocha groups are active in Aotearoa-NZ^{xvii} We also have a growing network of EcoChurches.^{xviii} These are Church communities which are actively committed to caring for God's earth as an integral part of their holistic mission.

As a small country which contributes only a very small amount to global warming, we in Aotearoa-NZ must nevertheless, for moral and ethical reasons, share the same level of commitment to reducing our emissions as larger nations are being challenged to achieve. This will indeed (as Robin Boom notes) require some sacrifices from those whose agricultural livelihoods currently contribute to the problem. We need to transition towards more sustainable farming practices, urgently, over the next 20 years. Just as the economies of England and the USA were dependent (without much protest) for many years on slavery, eventually the consensus was that things must change. Likewise our economy here in Aotearoa-NZ cannot continue to be based on agricultural and commercial manufacturing activities which contribute (even slightly) towards the unrestricted warming of planet earth, whatever the economic justification for the continuation of such practices.

Native American indigenous wisdom prophetically proclaims that "When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten, you will realise that you cannot eat money." It is the greedy over-indulgent (some would say sinful) desire for monetary wealth which is driving climate change, not taking any account of the cost to our global environment or future planetary well-being. The time has come for us all to wake up to the truth of what is happening and take action worldwide to significantly reduce our emissions.

Global action to ban refrigerant Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) has in recent times had a significant influence on reducing the size of the ozone hole.^{xix} Unfortunately, the hydrofluorocarbons that have been

substituted for CFC's have global warming potentials hundreds to thousand times higher than that of CO2.^{xx}

Slowing global warming is the greatest challenge we have ever, or will ever, face as a species. It is not a challenge that we can ignore. The words quoted by Robin Boom at the end of his article from retired MIT USA atmospheric physicist Professor Richard Lindzen, need to be read alongside the other erroneous claims this individual academic has made over the years. These many claims, and the equally many scientific facts which clearly refute his claims, are listed in an article entitled "Climate Misinformation by Source: Richard Lindzen".^{xxi} I will finish with another quote from Professor Lindzen: "If I'm wrong, we will know in 50 years and can do something"^{xxii}

It is clear NOW that he IS wrong, and that to wait 50 years to confirm that he is wrong would be extremely unwise. By then, he (and most of us reading this) will be long gone. Our grandchildren however, will still be here. The state of the world they will inherit is in our hands.

*Rev Greg Hughson M.Sc. (Biology) B.D. (Practical Theology)
Dunedin, NZ. November 2022
(lightly shortened)*



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Learning from Islam

Just as we can learn from Buddhists what poverty is, so we can learn from Muslims what obedience to God is. This attitude of a humble obedience, that is dependent only on God and that opens up what is narrow and uplifts what is bent low, is expressed in the Islamic prayer gesture... The worshippers throw themselves three times each day on the floor, for we are nothing but dust and ashes; but then they put their hands to their ears, as if they were hearing in the rustling of the desert winds the inexpressible word of that all-encompassing mystery that we call God.

Eugen Drewermann *Clergy (Kleriker)* p 707.