

Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality



From the Editor

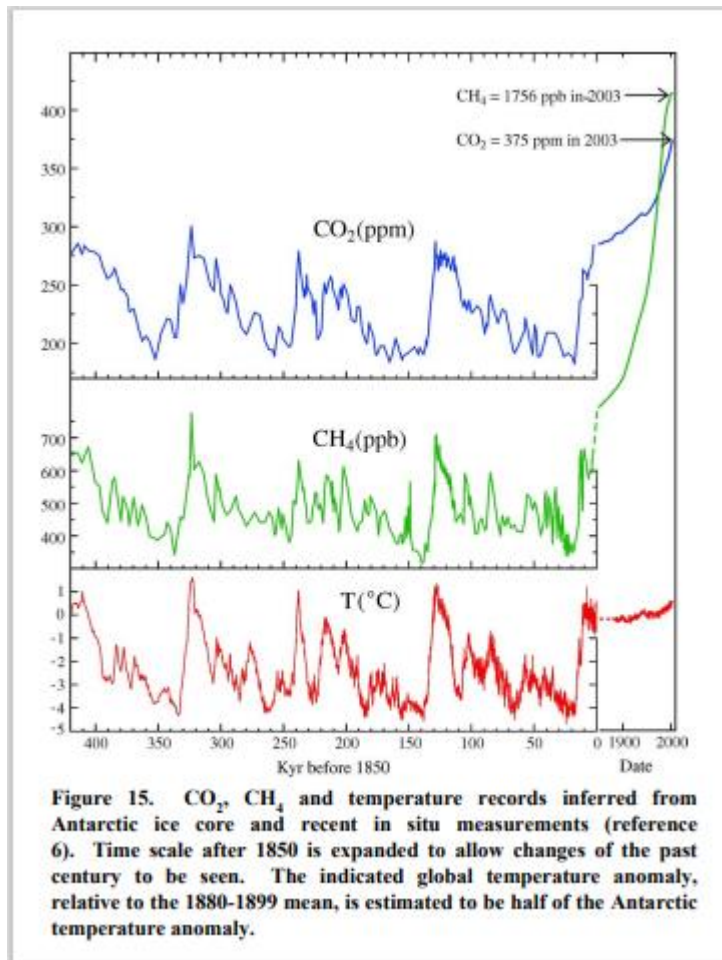
We live in an age of ever-increasing change, so it should come as no surprise that our newsletter is changing too. In an increasingly online world, our subscribers opt to receive an electronic version rather than the physical, printed version. So the main purpose of the changes is to provide an email-based newsletter that is free of most of the limitations that a print newsletter imposes, such as must be: a multiple of four pages and headings are best at the beginning of a page. A print version will continue to be available, but it won't be so nicely formatted.

The general public has by and large accepted the conclusion that climate change is anthropogenic (human-induced). The heated controversy is largely a thing of the past and the focus has shifted to the question, "what do we do to minimize its negative effects?" But along comes Robin Boom who does not accept this conclusion, puts a lot of energy into arguing against it, and tells us to relax. Climate changes over time anyway and that there is no need to regard humans as the main cause. Many of the authorities he quotes are not climate scientists; their field of expertise is elsewhere. But one of the authorities he quotes (Richard Lindzen) is a respected, though unconventional, climate scientist who has authored over 200 scientific papers, so not so easily dismissed. Contrarians have an important role to play challenging conventional wisdom. However, the effects can also be negative, for example in the long drawn out battle over tobacco (see the book *Merchants of Doubt*, which details how scientists were coopted into attempts to cast doubt on the science so as to allow the tobacco industry to continue unchecked). Other authorities, such as James Hansen, became so alarmed at their findings that they turned to political activism to alert the authorities to the issue. I happened across the following good review of

Richard Lindzen and his professional career in the Internet archive:

https://web.archive.org/web/20140111103404/http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/w hat-catastrophe_773268.html?page=1

Robin questions some of the data on temperature change. If you are interested, have a look at [GLOBAL SURFACE TEMPERATURE CHANGE - Hansen - 2010 - Reviews of Geophysics - Wiley Online Library](#). This shows just how scrupulously James Hansen examined the data. I also find the following graphic from him helpful when talking about these issues.



I would turn to this graph to check any of Robin's statements about temperature rise, the temperature in past times etc. This one graph could give rise to a long discussion. As another contrast to Robin's views, I include a review of James Hansen's book from one of our own.

Robin's view is that population increase is a major issue that gets almost no attention. I would rather say that there are several inter-related problems that combine to pose a severe threat to our future: species depletion, environmental degradation, pollution, exhaustion of oil resources. So even if there is a lot of truth in Robin's view of climate change, there is still an urgent need for action on many fronts. Robin's view that we can relax as there is no need for action cannot be left unchallenged.

Glyn Cardy spoke recently to the Auckland SOFiA group and we publish the text of his talk [here](#). John Thornley is busy providing programmes for Manawatu Public Radio and we publish a text from one of them. You may be interested in some of the Zoom events that the Australian SOFiA is holding, so we include basic information about them and a talk at Palmerston North [here](#).

Finally, we provide a short text from *The Little Prince*, a famous modern fairy tale from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. This newsletter may seem shorter, but if you follow the [See more](#) links below you will find there is plenty of material.

The Editor



[Robin Boom Responds](#)

In the last issue, Greg Hughson countered Robin's argument that climate change is not human induced, so we can relax. Robin replies, arguing that, as we are in an inter-glacial period, we need to warm the planet to prevent the cooling of the next ice age. **See more...**

[Alright, Then, I'll Go to Hell](#)

Glynn Cardy reflects on justice with help from Mark Twain

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, with I suspect more faith than certainty, that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." I wonder if he was alive today, and seeing the incarceration of so many black men, and the police shooting of so many black people, and the backward laws of so many states making it harder for black Americans to vote, whether he'd still have that sense of optimism. I suspect so.

Justice is like the word love. It can be defined in all sorts of ways. Catching the 'bad guy' and locking him up can be seen as justice. Legislation to build bigger prisons can be seen as justice. Laws to right past wrongs can be seen as justice. There is retributive justice, procedural justice, and restorative justice. There are institutions of justice, and the dreams of justice. **See more...**

Magnificat from a New Jersey Jail

John Thornley shares thoughts from Assata Shakur (b. 1947 and member of the Black Liberation Army) on discovering that she is pregnant. **See more...**

Book Review: Storms of My Grandchildren by James Hansen

Reviewed by Ian Crumpton, a recently deceased longstanding SOFiA member and former chairman of the Christchurch group.

The main thesis of this book is as crystal clear as it is frightening: that human activity over the last century has rapidly increased the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere to the point where we are on the verge of transforming the planet into a hothouse world, with massive species depletion, sea level rise and a host of related changes. All threatening the whole biosystem with unstoppable global warming. The difference between Jim Hansen and other "end of the world" prophets, is that he is a leading planetary scientist who has spent a lifetime studying these trends. His predictions are based, not on a misreading of some ancient religious text, but on hard science. And it all points in the same direction. **See more...**

Interesting Texts

"It's madness to hate
all roses because you got
scratched with one thorn,

to give up all dreams
because one of them
didn't come true,

to give up all attempts
because one of them failed.

It's folly to condemn
all your friends
because one has betrayed
you,

to no longer believe in love
just because someone
was unfaithful
or didn't love you back,

to throw away
all your chances to be happy
because something went wrong."

"There will always
be another opportunity,
another friend,
another love,
a new strength.

For every end,
there is always
a new beginning."



"And now here is my secret,
a very simple secret:
It is only with the heart
that one can see rightly;
what is essential,
is invisible to the eye."

 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
The Little Prince Excerpts, 1943

Events

Melbourne SOFiA Group

The **Melbourne SOFiA Group** has monthly lecture/discussions, mostly at 2pm on Saturdays.

25 Feb. – "The Soul of the Machines? The Current State of Advanced Artificial Intelligence." – Lev Lafayette.

25 March – "From Physics to Metaphysics: A New Way." – Dr. Stephen Ames.

Please contact David Miller – sofmelb@yahoo.com.au for each month's Zoom link.

Under Shirley's Spell: Researching the Life and Work of Shirley Erena Murray

Covering discoveries made as the writer makes contact with those who have known and loved the hymns of Shirley, and those who have composed tunes for her words, both within Aotearoa and overseas.

Presenter: Anne Manchester, former journalist

Date: Saturday 4 March

Time: 7 pm followed by light supper

Venue: St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Church St, Palmerston North

(close to the City Square)

90 minutes in length, including 26 Powerpoint visuals

Donations towards costs are appreciated

(Enquiries: John Thornley email johngill@inspire.net.nz)

Response to Greg Hughson

One of the problems Rev Hughson refers to in response to my initial article challenging the general consensus on climate change, re the lift in global temperatures of 1.1 degrees since 1800; is that the planet needed to warm. For the previous 450 years the world had experienced a period known as the 'Little Ice Age', which was the coldest time on our planet for the previous 10,000 years, so to use 1850 as a benchmark for 'normal', which climate alarmists do is in itself a flawed concept, as it is not the planet's normal. During this time glaciers grew, crops failed and hunger and sickness in Northern Europe was rampant, so it was not a time of abundance, and our planet needed to start warming. 1850 is not the 'normal' for our planet. If we used 1000 years ago as the 'normal' during the Medieval warming period, or 2000 years ago in the Roman warming period, or 3500 years ago during the Minoan warming period or 8000-10000 years ago in the early Holocene period, there is no climate emergency, as the temperature back then was similar to today. Using the pre-Industrial date of 1850 as the benchmark, being the end of the Little Ice Age period is to cook the books so to speak. For some weird reason all the politically driven IPCC, MSM and alarmist narrative shut their eyes to paleoclimatology. There is no way we can stop our planet warming 1.5 degrees above 1850 as that was a very cold period, and on average our planet for the past 250 million years has been 6 degrees warmer than today, and only in the late Quaternary period, the past 3 million years has the planet cooled down to today's temperature, resulting in mass extinctions through Ice Age events. We need global warming to stop us going into the next deep freeze of the Milankovitch Cycle.

We are currently in the middle of an interglacial period, with the last and most severe Ice Age peaking a mere 20,000 years ago. The previous Ice Age peaked 61,000 years ago, with peak interglacial around 40,000 years ago. We should be at peak interglacial but we are not there yet. 40,000 years ago the planet was about 2 degrees warmer than today. Over the past couple of decades there have been some woolly mammoth bodies which have been found in the melting permafrost in Siberia along with other mammals. Their bodies have been preserved for 35,000-40,000 years in the frozen ice tundra, and only now is it warming enough for them to be discovered. On their bodies and in their stomachs are seeds and stems of temperate grasses, proof of an abundant food source for grazing herds 40,000 years ago in this thawing landscape. Our planet still needs to warm up quite a lot more to equal the last interglacial peak, and remember the last Ice Age was the most severe ever, being the coldest time for the previous 250,000,000 years. What is interesting with these mammoths is that when the cold hit them, it hit them hard and fast, as they did not have time to migrate to warmer regions further south, and there was no predation and devouring of their bodies from carnivores, nor time for mass bacterial decay. The temperate climate of Siberia 35,000-40,000 years ago, was suddenly hit by a huge freezing event and their bodies were literally snap-frozen, hence their intact or semi-intact bodies. We need to warm the planet more to reduce the impact of the next Ice Age which will have a much more severe impact on human life and almost all other biological life, than a further 1 or 2 degree warming.

As for the media and our politicians' fixation with mitigating global warming by taxing all of us at the petrol pump and other places through the ETS (Emission Trading Scheme) and transferring that wealth to a global elite who are buying up large tracts of good farmland and planting it permanently into trees to carbon farm, this is a national travesty. This impact on local rural communities will be disastrous and the hopes of young farmers wanting to buy land to earn an income off it is being crushed by the deep pockets of large corporates and carbon traders who will make huge profits from our politically and artificially inflated carbon prices in the ETS.

Yes we were a signatory to the Paris Climate Change Accord which states in Article 2...*'aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty, including by:*

(a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees of above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit temperature increases to 1.5 degrees C.

*(b) Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner which **does not threaten food production.***

Somehow the last five words of Article 2 (b) seems to be completely ignored. Whether we like it or not, living in our temperate maritime climate and relatively young soils, NZ farmers and growers are first class food producers, and do it very efficiently. Our dairy farmers have been the whipping boys of our MSM, which continually demonises them as environmental villains with their methane burping cows, yet the milk produced by NZ cows has the lowest carbon footprint of 0.77 kg CO₂e per kg FPCM, compared to 1.06 kg CO₂e for Australian milk, 1.23 kg CO₂e for USA milk, 1.32 CO₂e per kg Dutch milk, 1.68 CO₂e per kg Chinese milk, 2.05 CO₂e per kg Indian milk and 3.34 CO₂e per kg Peruvian milk. We have 10 million cows, around 1% of cow numbers worldwide. India has 300 million cows and along with China and Brazil, they collectively have 63% of cows worldwide, yet none of these countries are likely to issue a tax on their burping cows, and for good reason. They are an essential source of food as article 2b of the Paris Accord states. Milk and meat not produced in NZ because of our ETS will now be produced somewhere else in the world, with higher net greenhouse gas emissions at the global level. Therefore converting our farms into trees and taxing farmers for methane emissions is a nonsense, and it is also both socially and economically destructive for our communities and nation as a whole.

As Greg Hughson claims to have studied ruminant digestion, he should be aware that for methane, it breaks down into carbon, oxygen and water, and also assists in the rebuilding of atmospheric ozone, after 30 years, so does not build in the atmosphere like CO₂ and nitrous oxide do over the centuries. As methane produced from livestock in 1990 has all broken down and is no longer having an effect on global warming, methane produced by today's livestock is only replacing that which has broken down, so methane from our national flocks and herds is no longer contributing to an increase in global methane quantities in the atmosphere since livestock numbers are no higher today than they were in 1990. Reducing our national herd numbers could in theory contribute to a global cooling, but I repeat my statement above that any reduction in meat/milk

produced here in NZ will likely be produced overseas to feed 8 billion people with a higher net CO2 equivalent cost, resulting in further net warming rather than cooling at the global level.

Ruminant agriculture has been the backbone for the NZ economy for well over one hundred years due to our efficient farming methods, soils and environment. Greg Hughson suggests Regenerative Agriculture as a way forward and this is also promoted by uniformed politicians and groups such as Greenpeace who do not understand that the majority of NZ pastoral farms are already 'regenerative' by world standards. A study last year by AgFirst/AgResearch compared 16 regenerative farms to conventional sheep and beef farms nationwide, and found that the conventional farms produced 30% more gross revenue per ha, had slightly less costs/ha, produced more than 50% more kg meat per ha, more than doubled their net income per ha, and produced 20% less greenhouse gases per kg of meat, so claims that regenerative farming in NZ is a better option than our conventional farming methods are bogus. The study can be found here: <https://ourlandandwater.nz/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Regenerative-Agriculture-Value-Proposition-FINAL.pdf>

One solution climate alarmists have been an advocate of is converting livestock farms to forestry. In the King Country region where I live, over the past two years, 40 farms have been sold to be planted into trees and this trend is happening nationwide. This afforestation of our hill country is happening because of the current Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) with its totally artificially created high carbon price making carbon farming considerably more economic than livestock farming. Large corporates, carbon traders and the wealthy elite are purchasing these farms and planting them in fast growing pinus radiata which absorbs carbon faster than most other trees within a 30 year period, being paid handsomely through the ETS money we all pay through the likes of fuel levies. The ETS takes our hard earned money and distributes it to the wealthy elite who can afford to buy these farms and plant them into trees. Meanwhile budding young Kiwi farmers who would like to purchase farms which come onto the market are being outbid by these individuals and companies, many of whom are overseas based. Last year the Overseas Investment Office (OIO) approved the sale of the iconic Huiarua Station north of Gisborne and Matanui Station with a combined area of over 6000 ha to Swedish company Ingka Investments to plant into trees for carbon farming. Swiss company Corisol, Austrian company Johannes Trautmansdorff-Weinsberg and Italian company Greendom are other examples of companies which have been buying up large tracts of land to carbon farm as the profits to be made are substantial and with their deep pockets they can see the potential returns far outweigh other investment opportunities. These companies are not interested in saving our planet, but have their own self-interest at heart. Profits do not come back into the community to be redistributed as what happens with local family owned farms. The forestry slash littering the rivers and beaches on the East Coast from cyclone Hale will become more and more common as more farmland is planted in trees.

As for rising sea levels which is making some Pacific Islands uninhabitable and people living on river deltas more vulnerable to flooding events like what we witnessed last year in Pakistan, it may be that there needs to be mass migration to more temperate regions. Maybe in the not too distant future Greenland could become one of the food bowls of the world, and places like northern Russia will

again be home to grazing herds like it was 40,000-300,000 years ago, where our human cousins the Neanderthals made their stand and thrived. Let me stress again that the climate of 1800 is not the planet's 'normal'. Far from it. Look at paleoclimatology and discover what temperatures have been most conducive to life on this planet for the myriads of God's creatures, both great and small, that have called our planet home over the eons of time.

Due to industrialisation, more and more people in the third world are aspiring to lifestyles similar to what we have taken for granted. They want to be able to switch on electricity, warm and cool their homes and entertain themselves with electrical gadgets. They also want to be mobile, drive their own cars, and travel to other places within their country and abroad and explore the planet. Who are we to deny them the option of becoming tourists? We are very fortunate in New Zealand that most of our electricity is produced with renewable energy sources, particularly HEP, due to our hilly terrain and reasonably reliable rainfall. Other countries do not have this option, so for them it has either been coal fuelled power stations or nuclear, and after the Chernobyl disaster, coal seems a safer bet and is less expensive to set up.

The real challenge for us humans is over-population, which is not a popular subject MSM, politicians or the United Nations want to broach. The demand on ever diminishing resources by a growing world population will at some stage in the future reach a climax and there is likely to be mass famines and starvations, wars and conflicts as these resources will only be available to those who are lucky enough to live in the right place with the right resources. Choosing not to have children, like some indoctrinated young people are doing, is extreme. Introducing a one child policy like dictatorial China once had could solve the problem of over-population, but it also creates other problems as the Chinese discovered, so it was rightfully abandoned. Denying parenthood is extremely onerous, yet in the future I fear young people being pressured from breeding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Their natural instincts will be sacrificed on the altar of alarmist indoctrination. So stop generating fear and hopelessness in the minds of gullible young people. I for one do not see a lift in the planet's temperature of another 1 or 2 degrees as being the greatest challenge to humanity in spite of what the Secretary General of the UN recently declared. Life flourished on Earth for millions of years at much higher temperatures when CO2 levels were three or four times higher than they are today. Life will continue to flourish should our species destroy itself in the future, but higher CO2 levels in the atmosphere I don't believe will be the cause of our downfall. Narcissism, power and greed are much bigger omens to deal with and it is these that the gospel of Christ confronts. Scaring gullible young people with a Chicken Little 'the sky is falling' type narrative is not helpful.

Robin Boom

Alright, Then, I'll Go to Hell

Glynn Cardy 23rd October 2022

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, with I suspect more faith than certainty, that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." I wonder if he was alive today, and seeing the incarceration of so many black men, and the police shooting of so many black people, and the backward laws of so many states making it harder for black Americans to vote, whether he'd still have that sense of optimism. I suspect so.

Justice is like the word love. It can be defined in all sorts of ways. Catching the 'bad guy' and locking him up can be seen as justice. Legislation to build bigger prisons can be seen as justice. Laws to right past wrongs can be seen as justice. There is retributive justice, procedural justice, and restorative justice. There are institutions of justice, and the dreams of justice.

King's dream of justice, being shaped by both the reading of the Bible and the racism of America, I suspect was similar to the redistributive idea of justice we find in the Scriptures. Isaiah 58: 'Is this not what I choose (says God) to loosen the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them?'

Which is all to say that justice is more than looking on your neighbour kindly, or ridding your country of 'whites only' restaurants and restrooms (whether they have a sign up or not), or having schools and hospitals that serve everyone in the community. It is about breaking the 'yokes' that shackle people of colour, women, and minorities into dependency or low paying jobs, poor food and health, poor housing, poor options, generation after generation. Justice is about politics, the economy, the way power is shared (or not), and the way privilege is shared (or not). It's no wonder that King's critics labelled him with that favourite of American insults: 'communist'.

The difference between John the Baptist and Jesus was about how they understood justice. John looked around him and saw what the Romans were doing. He looked at the violence, and the taxation, and systems of oppression – including poverty – that were imposed on non-Romans. And so, he began a movement where people came to the Jordan River, went through a baptismal rite of commitment, and then waited for an apocalyptic Messiah to come 'down' from God to destroy the Romans and liberate Israel/Palestine. Justice involved retribution (killing Romans and their lackeys), then restoration (Jewish communities again determining and controlling their own lives), to be led by this off-the-planet fiery, purging and burning, Messiah. John's followers would look on and applaud.

But this John the Baptist justice never came. Sure, some would-be Messiah's in the 1st century took up the sword, including Judas of Galilee, Theudas, Simon of Peraea, and Athronges. All of whom were short-lived.

For Jesus the justice of God had already arrived. His optimism was much greater than Martin Luther King's! Justice was here in our midst but hard to see. To illustrate this, he told the Parable of the Mustard Seed where the sower chooses to plant this tiny little, and potentially dangerous, seed. The sower is planting justice. Justice that is hard to control for those who like things the way they are.

The metaphor works when you know something about mustard shrubs. They were considered noxious in the ancient world. A nuisance. Usually windblown, they would arrive in your field or garden and you would have a devil of a job trying to get rid of them. If you wanted to plant mustard (as in the parable) you would plant in a carefully controlled environment like a pot. Even then your neighbours would blame you if the wind picked up the seeds and mustard was transplanted into their gardens.

The other thing about the mustard shrub is that it doesn't grow into a mighty looking tree with large branches. This part of the parable is deliberately mixing the mustard metaphor with the great cedars of Lebanon metaphor – the cedars being long used in Hebrew literature to symbolize strength, resilience, and success. By mixing mustard and cedar Jesus is trying to upend what we think of as strength, resilience, and success. Maybe it's what we see as a tiny nuisance that should have these accolades.

So, justice is here, says Jesus. It's tiny. It's not what you expect. It's a nuisance. And we participate in its planting. We collaborate with God to make it come about. As Dom Crossan says, John the Baptist understood God's justice as an intrusion for which humans could hope, but not participate in except by acceptance. But for Jesus God's justice involved human and divine collaboration.

And justice, in the Jesus way was, like planting, a normal, familiar, everyday process that didn't involve a parting of the clouds, a blinding light, or a heavenly voice. Like with planting, watering, and tending a shrub, we cooperated with a force beyond our own strengths and abilities, to bring about justice's growth.

I met a woman the other day at the shops who I've known for many years. She's headed up significant charitable organisations and given her time generously to many, including her local parish church. I asked about her minister. "He's Māori, full-blooded," she said. "But he's a very nice man."

Leaving aside the assumptions about culture and DNA, and the antiquated painful way some Pākehā use terms like "full-blooded", it was the 'But' that hit me. 'He's Māori... but he's nice.' As if being Māori and being nice don't belong together.

Now some friends, using the current idiom, might say 'Call her out Glynn'. Which means stop right there and confront her with her words. Of course, she might say, 'Oh, that's not what I meant'. But that is how the injustice of racism works. It lingers below the surface, and then seeps or peeps out, often without us meaning it to. For a person to address and try to change what's under the surface takes deliberate conscious effort. And help.

The confronting approach has its uses but I suspect it does more for the one confronting than the one being confronted. In the confronted it can produce wariness, or resentment, or a resistance to change. And change – change that’s embraced and then celebrated and then collaborated with – is what justice wants.

So, I approach this like a gardener with a mustard seed. How do I create the conditions, prepare the soil, and choose the time, to drop a little seed into her consciousness, that has a chance of being accepted, and chance that others might join in watering and nurturing? That day, at that time, at those shops, was not planting time. I think seeing the stunned look on my face might have been enough.

Every day I am - and I suspect most of you are - preparing, planting, and nurturing these seeds of wild justice. In the little things we say. In the encouragements we give. In commending the actions and understandings of others. To confront racism effectively takes effort from us all collectively.

And the Church, generally and historically speaking, hasn’t done well when it comes to growing justice. Too often we have sided with the power, whether political or fiscal, that wants things to remain the same. That is with insiders in and outsiders out. Too often we have overlooked that the person at the gate asking to be included is of a race or culture other than our own. He or she is not like us and must have got the wrong address or wants something from us. Too often we conduct our business, make our rules, draft our theology, and proclaim our ethics in the language and ways of our dominant culture, and in the gendered ways of our culture.

Our first reading today is an extract from Mark Twain’s 1876 novel *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain, a Presbyterian, was born and raised in Missouri, the setting of this novel, which was a Southern Confederate state.

In this extract where Huck is weighing in his conscience whether to hand over to the authorities the runaway slave Jim, there are two voices he hears. One is the voice of what his world calls justice. And the Church at that time called justice. To obey the law. To obey his Sunday School teacher. To not sin. To want people, respected adults, to think well of him. To not be consigned to the everlasting fire of Hell which he believed in. And that voice says, ‘Dob him in’.

Then there is the other voice. The voice of good memories, the voice of kindnesses, the voice of gratitude. All of which he’d experienced from and with Jim. With Jim the black runaway slave.

When you think of the strength of the first voice (upbringing, authorities, God, pleasing adults, the threat of hell) it’s a miracle he listened to the deep rhythm within him and chose the latter. “He ripped up the letter” and in a brilliant theological statement of faith said, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell!”

Twain is sowing in this book seeds of a subversive hope, in particular that the de-humanizing and heretical institution of slavery might come to an

end. Because it is what feels right in the heart. Twain is collaborating with justice.

We try to be just. To find a medium of experience and have the courage of Twain. We sometimes succeed, and oftentimes fail. We listen for that song calling us to justice's vision, and that knock on the door offering justice's practicalities.

So, we try. We join together and try. We pick each other up when we fail, and then we try again. And we block out old theologies and knock out new ones. We discard the God of privilege and 'chosen' peoples and pictures of a white Jesus and 'always obey the law' mantras. We 'go to hell' in some people's eyes, as we try to earth a little of heaven's justice.

But, you know, let's not be too hard on ourselves. Let's have the confidence of King and Jesus that the arc of the universe bends towards justice. That there's a wind that picks up those seeds from shrubs we have helped plant, and blows them where it will. Hundreds, thousands, millions of little subversive seeds singing a song of justice, and making it real. And we join with that song in that mighty chorus, and we join in making justice real.

Magnificat from a New Jersey Jail

Thoughts from Assata Shakur (b. 1947 and member of the Black Liberation Army) on discovering that she is pregnant.

"I spent the next few days in a virtual daze. A joyous daze. A person was inside of me. Someone who was going to grow up to walk and talk, to love and laugh. To me it was a miracle of all miracles. And deeply spiritual. The odds against this baby being conceived were so great it boggled my mind. And yet it was happening. It seemed so right, so beautiful, in surrounding that were so ugly. I was filled with emotion. Already I was in deeply in love with this child.

Already I talked to it and worried about it and wondered how it was feeling and what it was thinking. I would lie in my cell wondering about his or her life, wondering what kind of life it would have. What kind of people it would love, what kind of values it would have, and what it would think of all the madness that would surround it. Sometimes I felt so helplessly protective, wondering when my baby would be called nigger for the first time, wondering when the full horror and degradation of being Black in amerika would descend on my baby. How many wolves hid behind the bushes to eat my child?

But there were so many happy things that I thought about, too. I wondered when would be the first time my child would sit down and seriously appreciate the glory of a sunset and marvel at the wonders of nature. Or when he or she would smack lips and lick fingers over a sweet potato pie, or kiss strawberries and drink lemonade. It had always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time. I wanted, with all my being, for my baby to experience the many types and sides of love and friendship and to know and understand selflessness and generosity, struggle and sacrifice, honesty, courage, and so many of the sentiments that have given me strength and have made my

life worth living. In those days I was in such a state of sensitivity and thought that I barely noticed what was going on about me”.

Note: There are full notes on Assata’s life in Wikipedia, and other Googled material. Assata Shakur lived in California in the sixties and was a member and teacher with the Black Panthers. She is Step-Aunt and Stepmother to Tupac Shakur, a leading hip hop artist, assassinated in gang warfare in Los Angeles in 1996. His rap poem ‘Words of Wisdom’, found on his first CD, is dedicated to Assata. She believed that long-term political education, and not violence, was the only way for African Americans to move forward. She was critical of the Panthers’ hierarchical structures dominated by men, and felt the movement neglected the needs of women and children. Along with other members of the Black Panthers, she was harassed by the FBI over many years, and brought before several court trials. In 1979 she escaped from prison and made her way to Cuba where she was granted political asylum and continues to live today.

Quoted by John Thornley in a Manawatu radio programme entitled “Every baby is a child of God”. This can be downloaded as a podcast from (www.mpr.nz/show/wesley). John interloaned Assata’s *Autobiography* from the Porirua City Library.

Storms of my Grandchildren

The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and our last chance to save Humanity

by **James Hansen**. Published by Bloomsbury, 2009

The main thesis of this book is as crystal clear as it is frightening: that human activity over the last century has rapidly increased the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere to the point where we are on the verge of transforming the planet into a hothouse world, with massive species depletion, sea level rise and a host of related changes. All threatening the whole biosystem with unstoppable global warming. The difference between Jim Hansen and other “end of the world” prophets, is that he is a leading planetary scientist who has spent a lifetime studying these trends. His predictions are based, not on a misreading of some ancient religious text, but on hard science. And it all points in the same direction.

Dr Hansen has worked for many years as Director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies. He has been raising his voice on the issue of global warming since the 1980s. He comes across as one who prefers the lab to the public arena, but because of the seriousness of the situation, has been moved to voice his concern publically, even join protest movements, and finally, to set forth the situation in this book. The book contains a double horror: not only the horror of what we are doing to the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels inefficiently, but also the alarming situation where power company and “business as usual” lobbyists, with millions of dollars at their disposal, exercise such inordinate power over the lawmakers who, as a result, prevaricate and fail to address the problem. Sometimes even taking steps to muzzle the scientists who are

reporting warming trends. The mainstream media is of little help, with its love of contention, whereby it casts around for some “denialists” and gives them equal weight. The public is left with the false impression that it is a fifty/fifty issue whether global warming is a reality or not – whereas in fact, the overwhelming weight of evidence shows it is an escalating and dangerous reality.

The book gives a clear and fascinating insight into how climate scientists go about their work: some studying climate changes of past eras (“Paleo-climate”), and others modelling the climate using super-computers, observing how small changes can play out in unexpected ways and often with sudden unexpected speed. Yes, there have been hot periods in the past – a well understood one was the “Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum” of fifty million years ago. But they have never been as sudden as the one now occurring. And the climate “forcings”, which caused changes, have always been hundreds of times weaker than the forcings we are applying today. Hansen is honest about those areas which are not so well understood – where scientific disagreement allows an opening for the “denialists” to minimise the problem. Nevertheless, the main thrust of climate change is overwhelmingly obvious: the world is heating up, and doing so with increasing speed.

The basic climate mechanism is simple. The Earth receives energy from the sun, and radiates energy back to space. Calculations show that the greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere are causing a build-up of heat. The estimated difference amounts to half a watt per square metre of the Earth's surface. As the ice caps melt, even less is reflected. Other greenhouse gasses are released from the tundra and ocean floor. So “feedback loops” speed the process and threaten to trigger runaway heating.

Dr Hansen's calculations lead him to recommend an equally simple solution. That is to stop burning coal inefficiently. Weaning our culture off oil will take longer, he believes. But the big one is coal. It must be left in the ground unless the waste gasses can be sequestered. He points out that nuclear power, especially the proposed “fast-breeder” reactors, offer far fewer problems. But he notes the public fear of the technology, following Three Mile Island and Chernobyl accidents. Coal, he points out, is responsible for many more deaths and health problems – is far more dangerous than nuclear risk.

Dr Hansen is critical of cap and trade schemes and Kyoto-type greenhouse gas reduction targets. Governments fail to meet such targets, often making little effort to do so (“green-washing” their rhetoric). And the cap and trade schemes are so open to watering down as to be useless. Only one thing will work to get the CO₂ concentration stabilised at or below the 350 parts per million he considers necessary (it is now 450, and rising): that is, a steadily increasing tax on coal, the revenue from which is distributed to the citizenry. He calls it a “fee and dividend” system:

“Under fee and dividend, 100 per cent of the money collected from the fossil fuel companies at the mine or well is distributed uniformly to the public. Thus those who do better than average in reducing their carbon footprint will receive more in the dividend than they will pay in the added costs of the products they buy.” (p. 109)

Given the abysmal record of legislators in dealing with this issue, we are given a graphic scenario of how things will go if we continue with “business as usual.” Our current culture will lead, inevitably to the “Venus Syndrome:” an uninhabitable hothouse world like Venus. The route will take us through a time of massive storms, sea level rise of up to 75 metres, desertification, ocean acidification, and changes we can hardly imagine.

Where then is the hope? Not with those in current leadership, influenced by vested interests and money. It lies with the citizenry becoming informed, then picking up the issue, and so harassing our leaders that they are forced into action. Jim Hansen, a mild and peace-loving scientist and family man, has given us a lead. The question is, what are we going to do? - *Ian Crumpton*

Remembering Ian Crumpton

Ian Crumpton was a long-standing member of SOFiA. He emailed us in July 2021 and almost casually told us that he had been diagnosed with Myeloma, a terminal blood cancer. 18 months later, he died comfortably at home, aged 82 years, surrounded by wife Tricia and family. Although we knew about the diagnosis, his death was a shock and we only found out about it when the Editor sought permission to publish his review of *Storms of Our Grandchildren*. His obituary described him as “Liberal Theologian, Philosopher, Bard, Astronomer, Musician, Artist, Environmentalist, West Coaster, Lover of the outdoors, Our Renaissance Man.”

Ian was a key member of the Christchurch Sea of Faith group. In later years he was increasingly concerned with environmental issues. He contributed articles and book reviews on a broad range of topics: Jeremy Lent on *The Patterning Instinct*, Elisabeth Sahtouris on *Earthdance* and Henryk Skolimowski on eco-philosophy.

He lived on a lifestyle block outside Christchurch and the Christchurch group was invited for social meetings to his place, where he provided generous hospitality. Space permitted him to run a tractor over the large vegetable garden each year before sowing the crops that were maintained by Tricia. A grove of large pine trees provided firewood. Ian and Tricia almost single-handedly organised the 2019 Conference in Christchurch – a remarkable achievement. He was president of the Royal Astronomical Society of New Zealand, with his own telescope at home.

Ian was a gentle and gracious thinker with a mind that continued exploring and deepening his convictions about the capitalist economy, the environment and the future of religion. We are sad to lose him. *The Editor*