

HOPE IN GOD'S FUTURE

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP
IN THE CONTEXT OF
CLIMATE CHANGE

Report and study guide – second edition

Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change

A report of a joint working group on climate change and theology convened by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church

Study guide reflections, sample group sessions, prayers and a list of follow-up resources have been added to the report to aid engagement with it.

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Summary

1. Approaching God in the context of climate change

The theological task is to reflect on modern scientific accounts of current and threatened future harms from climate change in the context of affirming the triune God as creator and redeemer of the universe. The scientific analyses of climate change and the role of human greenhouse gas emissions are well-grounded. It is now morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.

2. Encountering the Word of God

Reading the Bible in the context of climate change gives a vision of hope in God's faithfulness to creation, a call to practise love and justice to our human and non-human neighbours, and a warning of God's judgement of those who fail to do so. In this context, closing our ears to the voices of those most vulnerable to climate change would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be disciples of Christ.

3. Responding to God's Word

What is required of God's people in the industrialized world is repentance. The first step towards this change of heart and practice is confessing our complicity in the sinful structures that have caused the problem.

4. The body of Christ in the World

A core component to Christian discipleship is now a commitment to lifestyles consistent with levels of greenhouse gas emissions the earth can sustain. The church must commit itself to this standard of sustainability. At the time of writing, this means signing up to the UK government target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 80% from 1990 levels by 2050 and to urgent action to meet appropriate interim goals, as well as assisting members of its congregations to make similar changes and engaging with government to enable national and international change.

5. Sending out

We call on our churches to confess their guilt in relation to the causes of climate change, to show signs of repentance and redeemed sacramental living and to be a prophetic voice in the life of our communities in the following ways:

1. Through prayer, preaching, bible study, teaching, and discussion to raise awareness of the need for confession and repentance among the churches and thereby enable acts of corporate confession in liturgical settings.
2. To act urgently to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the whole of church life in line with the national goal of a minimum 80% reduction on 1990 levels by 2050 and appropriate interim targets. This will require first a systematic audit of church greenhouse gas emissions at national and local levels and second a strategy to reduce these emissions to achieve this target.
3. To help members of congregations to make similar adjustments in the greenhouse gas emissions associated with their lifestyles by supporting them in a personal audit and strategies to reduce their emissions.
4. To campaign at a local and national level for policies that strengthen and take steps towards realizing the commitment to a minimum 80% reduction by 2050.



Approaching God in the context of climate change

*To you, our God, we bow the knee
in praise and worship; honour be
to you for all around we see,
your glorious work in land and sea.¹*

¹ Hymn 'To you, our God, we bow the knee' written for this report by Rosalind Selby, to be sung to the Celtic version of the tune to 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross', *Complete Mission Praise* no. 1126, © Rosalind Selby 2008.

Reflection I

Before you work through the report, jot down any initial questions or thoughts you have about climate change.

- What have you heard in the news?
- What have you discussed with your friends?
- Do you believe all the information you are confronted with?

Keep the questions safe, and we will return to them at the end of the study session.

Summary

The theological task is to reflect on modern scientific accounts of current and threatened future harms from by climate change in the context of affirming the triune God as creator and redeemer of the universe. The scientific analyses of climate change and the role of human greenhouse gas emissions are well-grounded. It is now morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.

1.1 The Christian doctrine of creation

The foundation of the Christian doctrine of creation, and therefore the starting point for theological reflection on the issue of climate change, is the great affirmation of Genesis 1.31: 'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.'. In this statement we see both that the universe, our solar system and all life on earth are entirely dependent on God for their origin and continuing existence, and that all these things were declared good by their creator. The opening of John's gospel identifies this creative work with the Word of God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, showing that the reconciliation of all things to God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from God's act of creation (Col. 1.15–20; Eph. 1.9–10). Creative and redemptive work also belongs to the work of the Spirit,

recognized by Christian theologians as sweeping over the face of the waters in the beginning (Gen. 1.2) and inspiring a groaning creation as it awaits redemption (Rom. 8). God, Creator and Redeemer, Father, Son and Spirit,² is the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all creation.³

The church has always celebrated the beauty of creation in praise and thanksgiving as a sign of God's gracious goodness, just as Jesus appreciated the splendour of the lilies of the field in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6.28–9). The Psalms also delight in God's created order and call on all parts of creation to rejoice in God's goodness to them (Pss. 97, 98, 100, 148). Christian theologians have seen creation as a book alongside the Bible in which God's good purposes could be read. The whole of creation shouts out in gladness at God's presence: the sea roars, the floods clap their hands and the hills sing together for joy (Ps. 98.7–9).

Reflection 2

Spend ten minutes looking carefully at something from the natural world: a leaf, a flower, a bud, a stone, a bowl of water: Look deeply, noticing tiny details. Look, smell, touch, listen, taste? Think about its place in the inter-connected web of Creation, and how God sees its goodness.

- What thoughts or feelings does this stir in you?

Make a collage showing something of your thoughts and feeling about Creation, using your object as an integral part.

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- 2 In this report we avoid using masculine pronouns for God, but for scriptural and ecumenical reasons retain, alongside other names, the traditional Trinitarian formula which includes masculine referents.
 - 3 While the working group compiling this report has reflected on the teachings of other faiths as part of its work, it has not been possible to rehearse these within the scope of this report without the risk of failing to attend to the particularity of different faith traditions. Some references to relevant reading may be found in the attached list of study resources.

1.2 The scientific understanding of climate change

In this theological context, we approach the current scientific understandings of recent and future changes in the earth's climate. In the second half of the twentieth century it was recognised that 'global atmospheric concentrations of CO₂, methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) have increased markedly as a result of human activities since 1750 and now far exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years'⁴. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is tasked with drawing together observations and climate modelling studies, together with assessing potential impacts of future climate change resulting from human activity. After over 15 years of concerted research, the fourth report of the IPCC published in 2007 concluded that 'Warming of the climate system is unequivocal'⁵ and that 'Most of the observed increase in global-averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic [human induced] GHG [greenhouse gas] concentrations.'⁶ In predicting future climatic changes, the IPCC set out several scenarios, projecting increases in mean global temperature by the end of the 21st century ranging from just under 2°C (compared to the end of the 20th century) for a gradual reduction in GHG emissions after 2040, to 4°C for continuing increasing GHG emissions.⁷

Associated with these global temperature increases, the IPCC also judges climate change will cause:

- increased frequency of heat waves over most land areas (very likely);
- increased occurrence of heavy precipitation events over wet areas (very likely);
- increased tropical cyclone activity (likely);
- decreases in water availability and droughts in semi-arid areas (high confidence);
- the North Pole to be ice free in summer months by 2050, although recent trends in decreasing ice coverage have been faster than model

4 IPCC, 'Summary for Policymakers of the Synthesis Report of the IPCC Fourth Assessment', (2007), 5.

5 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 2.

6 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 5.

7 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 7–8, Figure SPM-5 and Table SPM-1.

predictions, suggesting that the rate of climate change, at least in some areas is faster than projected;⁸

- gradual sea level rise of seven metres over a timescale of 1000 years, although 'more rapid sea-level rise on century timescales cannot be excluded', affecting 'major changes in coast lines and inundation of ... river deltas and low lying islands'.⁹

All of these changes will have significant impacts upon all human populations and the wider ecosystem of the earth. The Stern Review notes that 'the poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem'.¹⁰ In Africa, for example, agricultural production is projected to be severely compromised as early as 2020, and food production in other areas will be compromised. Progress toward achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals is likely to be impeded and by the mid 21st century there are likely to be 200 million refugees as a result of climate change.¹¹ For global warming as low as 1.5°C, it is estimated that 30% of species face an increased risk of extinction, while for warming of 3.5°C, 40–70% of species may become extinct.¹²

While there was some legitimate debate during the early stages of the development of scientific models of climate change regarding their accuracy, there is now an overwhelming scientific consensus that the analysis provided in the IPCC report is robust and reliable.¹³ A small minority of scientists and some parts of the media remain sceptical, but the vast majority of experts

8 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 13, Table SPM-3.

9 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 13.

10 *Stern Review Report on The Economics of Climate Change* (London: Cabinet Office – H. M. Treasury, 2005), URL: < http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm>, xxvi.

11 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 11, Table SPM-2, 18; N. Myers, 'Environmental Refugees: An Emergent Security Issue', Paper presented at the 13th Economic Forum, Prague, 23–27 May 2005, URL: <http://www.osce.org/documents/eea/2005/05/14488_en.pdf>.

12 IPCC, 'Synthesis Report Summary', 13–14.

13 See the DEFRA position on climate change (<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ENVIRONMENT/climatechange/index.htm>); The United Nations Framework Commission on Climate Change (<http://unfccc.int/2860.php>); the United Nations Environment Programme Global Environment Outlook Report (<http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/media/>); The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (<http://www.occ.gov.uk/activities/stern.htm>); and the Royal Society guide to climate change controversies (<http://royalsociety.org/page.asp?id=6229>).

are persuaded that climate change is taking place and that greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are playing a significant part in causing the changes. Even in the most optimistic scenario identified in the report, where there is international action to bring rapid and significant cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, the associated rise in global temperatures of 2°C by the end of the 21st century will make many areas of human population uninhabitable and cause the extinction of many plant and animal species. It is important to note that while much progress has been made in understanding climate change, the scientific view continues to develop. Some new research released since publication of the IPCC report suggests climate change will occur even faster than the IPCC estimates.¹⁴ Regardless of whether this is eventually accepted into the consensus scientific view, the conclusions of the current IPCC report are sufficiently robust to suggest that it is now morally irresponsible to fail to act on this analysis of our current situation.

Reflection 3

- What are the threats humankind will face?

You could roughly draw out a map of the world and mark on it the threats you have identified.

- What are your initial reactions?
- What most alarms or surprises you?
- How urgent do you see these threats?

If you made the collage, try to find some way of showing on it the threat of climate change.

14 J. Hansen, et al., 'Target Atmospheric CO₂: Where Should Humanity Aim?', *The Open Atmospheric Science Journal*, 2 (2008), 217-231, doi: 10.2174/1874282300802010217, URL: < <http://www.bentham.org/open/toascj/openaccess2.htm>>.



Encountering the Word of God

*We to your word, this live-long day
open our ears and hearts, and minds;
may we be led along your way,
your will and our true selves to find.*

Summary

Reading the Bible in the context of climate change gives a vision of hope in God's faithfulness to creation, a call to practise love and justice to our human and non-human neighbours, and a warning of God's judgement of those who fail to do so. In this context, closing our ears to the voices of those most vulnerable to climate change would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be disciples of Christ.

2.1 Theological approach

The remainder of our report tackles the question of how these theological and scientific accounts bear upon each other as we work out a theological response to climate change. The approach we have adopted is to:

- recognize the situation we find ourselves in, and the questions our faith provokes in this context;
- bring these questions into dialogue with the Bible and Christian theological traditions; and
- seek to discern the implications of this encounter for changed practice.

Our report also seeks to reflect our *practice* as Christians, and is structured to reflect many Christian liturgies. We seek to bring the situation of the church, as part of a world facing threats of climate change, into encounter with God's word in the Bible in order to inform and motivate a response by the church and the world.

2.2 Christian hope in the context of climate change

We consider it crucial to begin our theological response to climate change by reflecting upon our situation in relation to the overarching biblical narrative: God creating the universe, God in Christ bringing reconciliation to a world gone astray (e.g. Gen. 3, 4, 6), and God's promised redemption of all things in Christ and through the Spirit.¹⁵ This understanding of the place in which the church finds itself crucially shapes theological thinking about climate change. First, and most importantly, followers of Christ

¹⁵ See paragraph 1.1 above.

must hope in these days and not despair. If we affirm the goodness of God's creation, God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, and God's promise of redemption, we cannot despair of what will be, because we are called to have faith in God and hope in God's promises. God's creatures do not have the power ultimately to frustrate the purposes of the almighty God we worship; God's sacrifice in Christ was a once-for-all effective action to defeat the sin of God's creatures and to refuse to allow it the final word. In these days between the resurrection of Christ and Christ's return, we are part of a creation groaning in labour pains for the new creation on its way (Rom. 8). These are testing times, but faithfulness means not weakening our grip on the hope that has been set before us (Heb. 6.18). We cannot, therefore, countenance a future in which God has abandoned the project of creation and redemption, in which climate change destroys all that God has established or in which human irresponsibility overwhelms God's ability to bring redemption to creation. The basis for Christian responses to climate change is hope in the realization of the reign of God over a renewed creation.

This affirmation of Christian hope in the face of climate change is subject to two kinds of misunderstanding. First, ever since disputes with Marcion and other Gnostics in the early church, some Christians have been tempted to view redemption as an escape from the created order rather than its renewal. This view of the end-times leads to a lack of concern for what happens on earth, for it considers material creation as unimportant in comparison with the higher spiritual reality to which some human beings are destined. This has obvious relevance to debates about climate change. Such a theological view would suggest that actions to mitigate global warming are unimportant. This Gnostic view of creation and redemption has been consistently rejected by Christian theologians from Justin Martyr in the second century onwards. It is inconsistent with the Christian understanding of the incarnation of God in Christ in which God affirms all God has made, the promise of the resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15) and faith that God will make all things new (Rev. 21.1–8).¹⁶ Christian hope means hope for what God is doing in this world, not that spiritual beings will escape the destruction of the material.

¹⁶ Tom Wright makes this point in a recent book (N. T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007)).

The second possible misunderstanding is that we need not act in relation to the threat of climate change because God will sort out the problem for us. In creation God has given creatures freedom, and human beings bear weighty responsibility. Their good and bad actions have real and serious consequences for others. Hope in God's future does not mean a naïve confidence that bad things will not happen. This is made clear by the biblical narrative of human disobedience of God, originating with Adam and Eve in Eden and Cain's murder of his brother (Gen. 3–4), and rehearsed in a catalogue of human atrocities throughout history and continuing to this day. Hope in God's future is, therefore, not an alternative to wise and moral actions in response to the situations that confront us (Rom. 6.1–2). Christian hope guarantees that such faithful actions will not finally prove to be meaningless and ineffective but will find a place in God's purpose for the redeeming of the world. Hope is thus a reason for bold action in the world in accordance with God's will for creation, not an excuse for inaction.

Reflection 4

The two ways of misunderstanding Christian hope have tended to make Christians slow to respond to the threat of climate change.

- What is your reaction to them?
- Do you or your church see or do things any differently?

Look up the Bible references given above.

- What do they say to you about Christian hope?
- What do they say to you about the hope that God is calling you to?

If you made the collage, add a sign of hope to it.

2.3 The human vocation to love and do justice

The Bible provides no shortage of counsel for how humankind should live in accordance with God's will, bearing significantly on the question of climate change. Jesus summarizes the Jewish law in the commandments to love God and love the neighbour (Mk. 12.29–31). Our love of God is

demonstrated in our response to the seventh day of creation, in a Sabbath commitment to worship and interruption of our daily work. This love, in response to the covenant God made with all living creatures after the flood (Gen. 9), cannot wholly be distinguished from the second call to love of neighbour: Luke's gospel follows this two-fold commandment with the parable of the Good Samaritan as an example of neighbourly love (Lk. 10.25–37). This love is linked in Matthew's shocking identification of Christ with those in need in his image of God's judgement of those who fed the hungry, gave water to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited those in prison – and of those who did not (Mt. 25.31–46). In this account those in need are particularly identified with Christ. Priority claims of those in need are echoed in Jesus' 'Nazareth manifesto' where he declares he has been anointed by the Spirit to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (Lk. 4.18–19). The beatitudes similarly announce God's blessing on the poor, the mourning, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, peacemakers and the persecuted. Luke follows this with a catalogue of the woes to fall on those who are rich, full, laughing, and well-regarded by others (Mt. 5.3–12; Lk. 6.20–26). There is no doubt that Christ's disciples should show particular concern for the poor and vulnerable.

The New Testament demand to 'love your neighbour', with particular attention to the poor, can be seen in continuity with the emphasis in Jewish law and Jewish prophetic writings. Jewish law made particular provision for those in need, as well as establishing economic structures such as the Jubilee to prevent differences between rich and poor becoming too great (Lev. 25.8–17). The prophets protested against oppression of the poor by the rich: the book of Isaiah opens with a vision of cities desolated because of evil-doing. God calls Israel to cease doing evil, learn to do good, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan and plead for the widow (Isa. 1.16–17). Amos declares that because Israel has trampled on the poor and taken their grain they will lose their houses and vineyards (Amos 5.11) and Deuteronomy associates departing from God's law with agricultural catastrophe (Deut. 28.38–40). The judgement Jeremiah prophesies has an ecological dimension in which the mountains quake, the birds flee and the fruitful land becomes a desert

(Jer. 4.24–6). God speaks these warnings through the prophets to call God's people back to the acts of love and justice required by their relationship with God: this is a call for changed living to transform Israel's future, rather than the fatalistic living out of a future fixed by God. The words of the prophets remind us that concern for the poor and vulnerable is not only a matter of love and charity, but of what is due to them under God's law: it is a matter of justice.

2.4 Hearing our neighbour as a test of discipleship

In the context of this biblical demand for love and justice, encountering those whose communities are imperilled by climate change is especially striking. In September 2007 the Pacific Conference of Churches issued a statement from their General Assembly concerning climate change. They understand themselves to be guardians of the Pacific Ocean or Moana, and 'deplore the actions of industrialized countries that pollute and desecrate our Moana'. They declare 'the urgency of the threat of human induced effects of climate change to the lives, livelihoods, societies, cultures and eco-systems of the Pacific Islands' and call on 'our sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world to act in solidarity with us to reduce the causes of human-induced climate change. We issue this call especially to churches in the highly industrialized nations whose societies are historically responsible for the majority of polluting emissions. We further urge these countries to take responsibility for the ecological damage that they have caused by paying for the costs of adaptation to the anticipated impacts.'¹⁷ In this statement from the Pacific Conference of Churches, we can hear echoes of the anger of the prophets. The Pacific Islanders face grave threats to their way of life as a result of the burning of fossil fuels by industrialized nations: we cannot fail to recognize this as the trampling of the poor by the rich criticized by Amos. The demands of justice and love for these neighbours are even stronger than the claim of the man cared for by the Good Samaritan: here are nations left wounded by our negligence in the past, whose injuries we continue to worsen through our irresponsibility in the present. Closing our ears to this call would be nothing less than giving up our claim to be Christ's disciples.

17 Pacific Conference of Churches, 'Statement From the PCC 9th General Assembly on Climate Change', (2007)

Being able to hear the voice of these communities already threatened by climate change is a blessing to us in shaping a theological response, especially as many who are not able to make themselves heard are also threatened. Among these are communities in sub-Saharan Africa for whom changes in climate may have already brought increasingly frequent famines and droughts, as well as those in India, the Americas and Europe who have suffered heat waves and storms that are likely to have been intensified by global warming.¹⁸

There is also a much larger group of human beings threatened by climate change who have no chance of making themselves heard: those not yet born. As well as alerting ourselves to the demand of love and justice to our present neighbours, we need to understand what it means to treat as neighbours those in following generations. The covenant God made after the flood was with all the creatures in every generation descended from those saved in the ark (Gen. 9): we must not make the mistake of thinking that those alive today have any superiority under the covenant over those to follow us. For some, thinking of children and grandchildren helps to give faces to those who will inherit the earth we leave (cf. Mal. 4.6), but this must be only a first step in appreciating the enormity of the moral demand of future generations. The requirement to develop our moral imaginations in this direction is particularly crucial given that the worst effects of failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions now will be felt by those alive one hundred years and more from now. Christians should resist market-based economic analyses that discount the well-being of future generations in relation to those alive today, and thereby portray as unattractive actions that will benefit future generations but which incur immediate costs.¹⁹

18 In 2005, Lord Robert May, President of the Royal Society, drew attention to the findings that 'climate change, largely caused by a rise in greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, may already be responsible for an increase in drought conditions, and hence for a rise in the risk of famine, in eastern Africa where millions are already at risk of hunger' ('Open letter to Margaret Beckett and other G8 energy and environment ministers', October 2005, URL: < <http://royalsociety.org/page.asp?id=3834>>). See also Andrew Simms and John Magrath, *Africa-Up in Smoke? 2: The Second Report on Africa and Global Warming from the Working Group on Climate Change and Development*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxfam Publishing, 2006).

19 For a theological discussion of this issue, see Rachel Muers, *Living for the Future: Theological Ethics for Coming Generations* (London: T & T Clark, 2008); for a detailed philosophical and economic analysis, see John Broome, *Counting the Cost of Global Warming* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 1992). See also Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

Reflection 5

Low-lying countries like Bangladesh are threatened by rising sea levels.

- What would it feel like if your whole community had to leave your homeland?
- What would your concerns be?

Write a letter to a future great grandchild explaining how what is going on in their world came about.

2.5 Attending to non-human neighbours

Attending to biblical depictions of human obedience to God's will also directs our attention to non-human creation. The creatures of each day of the first Genesis creation narrative are declared good (Gen. 1) and the whole of creation in all its diversity is declared 'very good' at the end of the sixth day (Gen. 1.31). After the great flood, God makes a covenant not only with Noah and his family but with every living creature that came out of the ark (Gen. 9.9–10). The law of Israel protects not only human beings, but the animals they keep, who must not be made to work on the Sabbath (Exod. 20.10) or muzzled while they are treading grain (Deut. 25.4). The Sabbath year is to rest the land and benefit both livestock and wild animals alongside the Israelites and their hired workers (Lev. 25.5–7). When Job questions God's treatment of him he is reminded of the majesty of God's careful provision for every creature, and of God's creation even of creatures like Behemoth and Leviathan who are threatening to humanity (Job 38–41). This attention to creation beyond the human is echoed in the New Testament: where Jesus reminds his disciples of God's concern for birds and lilies of the field (Mt. 6.25–34); the letters to the Colossians and Ephesians emphasize the union of all things in Christ (Col. 1.15–20; Eph. 1.9–10) and the letter to the Romans pictures the whole of creation awaiting its share in the freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8.18–23). This biblical vision of solidarity among God's creatures accords with modern scientific discoveries relating to both the genetic affinity between human and other animals and the radical interdependence of all life on earth.

This biblical regard for creation beyond the human has often been overlooked in interpretations of God's injunction to 'subdue the earth' and 'have dominion' over other animals (Gen. 1.28). This instruction has been seen as giving human beings licence to use other animals as they will, although there is no allowance in these verses for killing animals for food.²⁰ Many biblical commentators on Genesis are now agreed that identifying human beings as the image of God does not name a particular capacity as God-like, but gives them a particular role in relation to other creatures.²¹ Our dominion should therefore be exercised in a way that it images and reflects God's care for creation. This kind of care, made more explicit in the instruction to Adam to till and keep the soil of Eden (Gen. 2.15), has often been described as 'stewardship' of creation, rooted in the image of a person placed in a position of responsibility to manage somebody else's property, finances, or household.²² This picture of a human role on behalf of the rest of creation can help us recognize our responsibility to care for other life, although it is important to recognize its limitations. God is present and active in sustaining creation from moment to moment. We are not, therefore, stewards acting in place of an absent landlord, but servants called to play our part in response to God's care for creation. This responsibility has obvious relevance to climate change, suggesting that the potential mass extinctions of other species on the planet caused by human activities represent our abdication from a divinely-entrusted duty. Biblical texts testifying to God's concern for creatures beyond the human, together with Israelite law defending them, demand that we should be motivated by love and justice to protect non-human neighbours threatened by climate change alongside the human ones.

20 Permission is only given for meat-eating after the great flood (Gen. 9.3). Gerhard von Rad is one of many commentators to reject the interpretation of dominion as unlimited license: see Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (London: SCM, 1972), 60.

21 See, for example, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis, Word Bible Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1994), 30; Victor P Hamilton, *Genesis, Nicot* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 135; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 32; von Rad, *Genesis*, 58 and the detailed discussion in J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 93–145.

22 Calvin's commentary on Gen. 2.15 concludes 'let every one regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which God requires to be preserved.' (John Calvin, *Genesis*, ed. & trans. John King (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), vol. 1, 125.

Reflection 6

Look up the Bible texts from this section.

- In what ways do animals and nature contribute to your life?
- In what ways can you exercise responsibility towards them?

2.6 Bringing God's judgement upon us

Alongside hope in the future that God is bringing, therefore, comes an urgency to cooperate with God's purposes. Where human beings have wilfully neglected their responsibilities before God, both Old and New Testament texts proclaim God's judgement: Jeremiah prophesies that the rich will not get to enjoy their wealth and Jesus warns those who fail to care for him, embodied in those in need, are not fit for eternal life (Mt. 25.31-46). The Bible repeatedly tells of a world turned upside-down when God's reign is inaugurated, with those now well-off going hungry and those now first finding themselves last (Mt. 10.30; Mk. 10.31). In encountering biblical warnings about the consequences of failing to love and deal justly with those in need, it is hard to escape the conclusion that in continuing to emit carbon at rates that threaten our neighbours, present and future, human and other than human, we are bringing God's judgement upon us. Even here we should not despair: that God judges rather than abandons us is a sign of God's grace and continuing love for us. But in our encounter with God's word in the context of climate change we should be clear that, while we have grounds for hope in the future God will bring if we act in accordance with God's love for all creation, we also have grounds for fear of God's judgement if we continue to fail to respond to the urgent needs of our neighbours. A belief that God is our judge does not mean that we can assume that bad things that happen, such as climatic change, should be understood as punishments from God. Nonetheless, climatic change reminds us that the effects of our actions often rebound on ourselves, as well as others. When the rich man, who had ignored Lazarus begging at his gate, asked to be allowed out of hell to warn his brothers, Abraham replied they already had Moses and the prophets (Lk. 16.27-8). Neither can we say we have not heard.



Responding to God's Word

*Thus knowing holiness and grace,
in humble honesty confess
we all our sins before your face,
and turn our lives to righteousness.*

Summary

What is required of God's people in the industrialized world is repentance. The first step towards this change of heart and practice is confessing our complicity in the sinful structures that have caused the problem.

3.1 Confession and hope

In encountering God's word in the context of climate change we have received a vision of hope in God's faithfulness to creation, a call to practise love and justice to our neighbours, and a warning of God's judgement of those who fail to do so. In response our first action must be confession: acknowledging what we have done wrong is the first and necessary step towards the change of direction repentance requires. We must confess that we:

- are heirs to the riches of an industrialized economy that has been instrumental in causing the climatic change already placing our neighbours in peril;
- are so addicted to the fruits of this economy that we find it hard even to want to live lives that do not threaten the future of life on planet earth; and
- know much of the good we should do to live within sustainable boundaries, but struggle to summon the moral will to change.

Christians recognize that we sin through a combination of ignorance, weakness and deliberate fault. In a time before we knew about the consequences of our consuming of fossil fuels we were sinning in ignorance, but to continue to do so now is either weakness or deliberate immorality. Our wrongdoing in relation to climate change is best understood as complicity in structural sin, a socially-embedded and continuing pattern where the rich and powerful exploit those who are poor and powerless, just as they did in the days of the prophets.

South African theologian, Ernst Conradie, has argued that the need for white South Africans to confess their involvement in the structures of apartheid is a good analogy for the confession necessary in relation to climate

change.²³ Just as most white South Africans had no direct responsibility for the establishment or maintenance of apartheid but were guilty in benefiting from it and failing to challenge its injustice, so we did not originate the industrialized economies that resulted in climate change but are now guilty of enjoying the fruits of systems that threaten the future of God's creatures. Drawing on Barth's work, Conradie notes that our confession is only possible because of our knowledge of God's grace: it is our encounter with God's mercy that enables us to recognize our guilt. Conradie recognizes, however, that for most of us confession is still some way off, because we are not sure that we can envisage or want to live the renewed and reordered lives that would result from being forgiven. Like the rich man who could not bear Jesus' command to be separated from his possessions and sadly turned away (Mk. 10.17–22), we look at the prospect of lives within levels of greenhouse gas emissions that the earth can sustain, and decide we prefer our lives of sin. Here, then, is the first challenge to the church: receive God's grace, come to desire a forgiven life, and thus be enabled to confess current wrongdoing.

Reflection 7

"Our wrongdoing is best understood as complicity in structural sin" and is compared above with involvement in the structures of apartheid or historical complicity in the slave trade.

Either: Make a list or 'mind map' of ways in which our lifestyles (personal, corporate, ecclesial) are contributing to the high level of carbon emissions which are causing climate change.

- Which of these are easy to forget, or take for granted?

Or: Cut up pictures from catalogues, magazines and newspapers to create a montage depicting the lifestyle we aspire to, or are lured to, or unthinkingly fall into.

23 Ernst Conradie, *The Church and Climate Change* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008).

3.2 Repentance and forgiveness

Authentic confession leads to repentance: a turning from past sin to the way God would have us live. As individuals, churches and nations, we need to work towards this about turn, which is the only hope for the kind of societal changes that will avoid our greenhouse gas emissions resulting in catastrophic climate change. If we think of this task of repentance only as an individual matter we are likely to fail in our attempts to bring about the change necessary even in our own lives: repentance of structural sin must have a corporate dimension in which, as churches, we take action collectively and turn our practice around at institutional and individual levels. Beyond this, we need to consider what role we can play as churches and citizens in contributing to a similar turning about of our nation, by entering the political arena to make the case for strong action based on our moral duties to our neighbours.²⁴

Even to sinners like us, God promises forgiveness (Rom. 5.6), and in God's name the church offers absolution from sin. Before us, therefore, is the great and joyous prospect of being welcomed home with open arms by our God (Lk. 15.20), released from our burden of guilt and despair into lives as God's forgiven children. It may be that desire for this newness of life, for lives washed clean of the stain of our sin (Ps. 51), is the strongest motivation for the change of life to which God calls us.

Reflection 8

Either: Tear up the list you made earlier and offer each piece to God, asking for a vision of a better way.

Or: Tear up your montage of a high-carbon lifestyle and stick the pieces onto a fresh sheet of paper to see if you can create a new image of a renewed order of life.

Can you suggest why repentance, in relation to climate change, must be individual **and** corporate?

²⁴ We outline what signs of repentance might look like in section 4 below.

3.3 Intercession

One response of those forgiven by God must be intercession for those threatened by climate change. In confidence in God's good purposes for creation we ask God to:

- protect human populations made vulnerable by changes in climate;
- protect those in generations to come who will inherit the problems we have created; and
- protect those plant and animal species whose habitats will be eradicated by global warming.

As our prayers in this area become more detailed, however, they also become more uncomfortable: we pray for:

- nations to recognize the urgency of action in response to climate change;
- politicians to be bold in setting out strategy to achieve the goals that need to be reached; and
- the citizens of nations – and especially nations like ours – to be motivated to support costly action to cut greenhouse gas emissions and seek to ameliorate its effects for those it threatens.

Our prayers of intercession, therefore, lead us to pray for continuing change in our hearts and minds, allowing us to play a part in changing the hearts and minds of others, and becoming part of the answer to our intercessions.

Reflection 9

Look through a selection of newspapers, cutting out stories which address the effects of climate change, particularly in other parts of the world.

Make a note of related stories you hear on the news.

Do you have links with church partners in other countries. How might they be affected by climate change?

Use these stories as a focus for prayers of intercession.



The body of Christ in the world

*Sustained by word and bread and wine,
Christ's body we are fed to be.
May servant life we know was thine
be ours in all humility.*

Summary

A core component to Christian discipleship is now a commitment to lifestyles consistent with levels of greenhouse gas emissions the earth can sustain. The church must commit itself to this standard of sustainability. At the time of writing, this means signing up to the UK government target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 80% from 1990 levels by 2050 and to urgent action to meet appropriate interim goals, as well as assisting members of its congregations to make similar changes and engaging with government to enable national and international change.

4.1 United as Christ's body

As participants in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, enacted in the sacrament of holy communion, the church is united in its saviour Jesus Christ and nourished to live in holiness as Christ's body on earth. In responding to Jesus' command to eat bread and drink wine as his body and blood in remembrance of him, the material stuff of creation, in the form of grain and grapes, becomes a sign and sacrament of God's presence with us. Through participation in Christ, we are made capable of lives we could not otherwise live. We are transformed from individual disciples into members of his one body, no longer dependent on ourselves but bound together in the life of our Lord. Together we are equipped and enabled to act as God's people in the world, witnessing to what God is doing and serving God and neighbour. Just as the humble bread and wine become sacraments of God's presence with us, so our small acts in response to God's call become signs of God's presence in the world.

Reflection 10

Try to bring to mind the most moving Holy Communion service you have attended.

What does Christ teach us, through Holy Communion, about a more spiritual, sustainable way of life?

4.2 Judging what repentance requires

Before we can identify what actions are necessary at ecclesial, individual and national levels, we must determine what reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions are necessary in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change. The IPCC 4th Assessment Report estimates that keeping the globally-averaged equilibrium temperature increase between 2 and 2.4°C above pre-industrial values will require greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced by between 50 and 85% by 2050 compared to emission levels in 2000. This would lead to an eventual stabilisation of carbon dioxide between 350 and 400 ppm (compared to 379 ppm in 2005) and of greenhouse gases between 445 and 490 ppm CO₂-equivalent (compared to 375 ppm CO₂-equivalent in 2005).²⁵ In common with many other interpreters of the IPCC report, the recent first report of the UK Government Committee on Climate Change judges that ‘the global danger zone starts above about 2°C and that global policy should aim to keep ... temperature increases below this’²⁶. However, in making this assessment they note that ‘it is no longer possible with certainty, or even with high probability, to avoid this danger zone’ and therefore ‘strategies for adaptation to temperature increases of at least 2°C’ should be planned, with the additional aim ‘to reduce to very low levels (e.g. less than 1%) the dangers of exceeding 4°C’²⁷. In light of this judgement, the Committee on Climate Change concludes that global emissions of greenhouse gases would have to be reduced by 50% below current (2008) emissions by 2050. Since ‘it is difficult to imagine a global deal which allows the developed countries to have emissions per capita in 2050 which are significantly above a sustainable global average’ of ‘between 2.1 and 2.6 tonnes per capita’ for the UK this implies an ‘80% cut in UK Kyoto (greenhouse gas) emissions

25 IPCC, ‘Synthesis Report Summary’, 20, Table SPM.6. CO₂-equivalent is a means of combining the proportionate effect of known greenhouse gases into a single parts per million figure.

26 UK Government Committee on Climate Change, ‘Building a Low-Carbon Economy – The UK’s Contribution to Tackling Climate Change’, December 2008 (London: The Stationery Office, 2008), URL: <<http://www.theccc.org.uk/reports/>>, 20.

27 Committee on Climate Change, ‘Building a Low-Carbon Economy’, 20. There is a growing body of opinion that is concerned that observed changes in climate, such as ice melt within the arctic circle, are progressing faster than the IPCC models predict. This has led to proposals for stabilisation of greenhouse gases at lower concentrations to reduce the risk of passing dangerous tipping points in our global eco-system. Two significant networks are the 350 network, URL: <http://www.350.org>, and the 100 months campaign, URL: <<http://www.onehundredmonths.org>>.

from 1990 levels'.²⁸ Towards this end, they set three five-year carbon budget targets which would see a reduction in UK emissions of 42% by 2020,²⁹ achieved through energy efficiency measures and technological developments to de-carbonise power generation and transport.³⁰

Meeting the ambitious target of an 80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels will not prevent serious damage caused by climate change: a 2°C rise in global temperatures will make areas uninhabitable by humans, lead to droughts, food shortages and large numbers of environmental refugees, as well as the probable extinction of a third of species on earth.³¹ While it would be good to do more than this³² we cannot aim to do less, even if other nations are not yet ready to take similar action. In recognition of the damage we have already done, and in response to our encounter with God's word and with the voiced and unvoiced claims of our neighbours, we must reduce our greenhouse gas emissions to levels that the earth can sustain. It is incumbent on those who have generated the most greenhouse gas emissions and derived the greatest benefit from relatively cheap and accessible fossil fuels to pioneer the path towards alternative energy futures.

28 Committee on Climate Change, 'Building a Low-Carbon Economy', xiv–xv.

29 Following the EU framework, the figure of 42% is the intended budget reduction relative to 1990 that will apply 'following a global deal on emissions reductions'. Before a global deal is reached an 'Interim budget' requires a 34% reduction by 2020 (Committee on Climate Change, 'Building a Low-Carbon Economy', xix).

30 Recent documents published by the EU and Australian governments also commend the global target of a 50% reduction in emissions by 2050. However, in aiming towards this, they recently adopted less ambitious emission reductions by 2020: the EU up to 30% and Australia 15%. See European Commission, *Combating Climate Change: The EU Leads The Way* (Brussels; European Commission Publication, 2008), URL: <http://ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/move/75/index_en.htm> and Australian Government Department of Climate Change, *Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme: Australia's Low Carbon Future* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2008), URL: <<http://www.climatechange.gov.au>>. Again both these figures refer to 'intended' targets following a global deal on emissions reductions. Prior to this, 'interim' targets of 20% for the EU and 5% for Australia are proposed. For discussion of the viability of a 50% reduction by 2050 see also Ross Garnaut, *The Garnaut Climate Change Review Final Report* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008), URL: <<http://www.garnautreview.org.au>>, and K. Anderson, and A. Bows, 'Reframing the Climate Change Challenge in Light of the Post-2000 Emission Trends', *Phil Trans Royal Soc A*, vol. 336, no. 1882 (2008), 3863-3882, DOI: 10.1098/rsta.2008.0138.

31 See section 1 above.

32 The Operation Noah campaign (<http://www.operationnoah.org/>) judges that the UK must achieve a reduction in emissions of at least 90% by 2030 and supports the proposal of the Centre for Alternative Technology for zero carbon emissions in *Zero Carbon Britain* (Llwyngwern: CAT Publications, 2007), URL: <<http://www.zerocarbonbritain.com/>>.

4.3 Enabling repentance and redeemed living in the church

In the remainder of this section we set out some practical initiatives at the ecclesial, individual and national level that would be both signs of repentance and first steps toward the forgiven and redeemed lives to which we are called. We have argued that confession is the first step towards repentance and changed life and that that is only possible alongside the hope of a good and God-given future in which we can live forgiven lives before God. As churches we must first seek to enable and equip this change of heart, mind and will through prayer, preaching, bible study, discussion and reflection, leading to corporate liturgical acts of confession. On this change of heart all else depends. These actions are the church's preparation for joining in the redemptive mission of God in this area of life. They lead the church to where its members may hear God's universal call to changed lives in response to the threat of climate change.³³ They are a precondition to the church recognizing that a commitment to living within sustainable levels of greenhouse gas emissions is central to Christian discipleship in our days. Through our common worship and common life we are transformed, and become a people capable of transforming the life of our local communities and our nation. In this way we participate with joy in nothing less than God's redeeming of the world.

Reflection 11

"A commitment to living within sustainable levels of carbon emissions is central to Christian discipleship in our days."

- How far do you agree with this?
- What, in your understanding, are "sustainable levels of carbon emissions"?

How could this be realistically achieved in your daily life?

³³ Where 'church member' is used in this document it is intended to refer to regular participants in the worship and other activities of churches, rather than narrower denominational definitions of the term.

4.4 Reducing the carbon footprint of the church

As churches, we must address the carbon footprint of our own activities. We must first move quickly to discover the current level of our greenhouse gas emissions and identify a strategy to enable an audit of greenhouse gas emissions at all levels of the church, so that local churches, regional structures, and national church institutions become aware of the starting point for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Alongside this we must establish a way of supporting church structures at all levels in making reductions in greenhouse gas emissions proportionate to the overall reductions necessary by 2050 of at least 80% from 1990 levels, with the urgent and immediate interim steps this requires. National churches will need to provide support and incentives for local and regional structures to meet this challenge. We do not underestimate the magnitude of this task but consider it the minimum adequate response to the situation we face, as well as the only morally authentic basis for calling on church members and the nation at large to make similar changes. We recognize the structural factors, internal and external to the churches, that impede progress towards these goals, and the need for churches to work in partnership with local and national government to overcome the barriers to change. Church policy in many areas, including the investment of church funds, will need to be reviewed in the light of this commitment.

4.5 Helping members of congregations to reduce emissions

Alongside actions to address the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the corporate life of our churches, we need to identify ways of enabling members of congregations to make changes in their carbon footprint matching the minimum of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels together with appropriate interim goals. Again, the first task is to encourage and facilitate an audit of current greenhouse gas emissions, followed by supporting individuals in church or small group contexts to commit to reducing their carbon footprint and identifying strategies to do so. We believe that many will respond to the offer of exchanging a general consciousness of guilt for addressing the topic responsibly and realistically in a group context. The early church began as a movement of small groups

of Christians who agreed to be accountable to one another. It may be that, if we can recover this sense of accountability which small groups can foster, many may be enabled to make changes that seemed impossible in isolation. If congregations were able to see the net impact of both corporate and individual commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, this might be a significant encouragement and motivation for further action.

4.6 Engaging politically to work for national and international change

Finally, alongside movement towards these changes in the corporate life of the church, we need, as churches, to be prepared to contribute to public political debate about appropriate responses to climate change. Our churches should support the UK government in developing a coherent strategy to reach sustainable levels of greenhouse gas emissions, which at the time of writing means cutting greenhouse gas emissions by a minimum of 80% from 1990 levels by 2050 and impress on the government the urgency of this task. Our churches have called for action by the UK even in a global context in which others are not yet ready to make matching commitments.³⁴ The churches must speak prophetically to challenge politics bound by party interest and the horizon of the election cycle; they must also act to build grassroots coalitions so that politicians offering wise and responsible long-term action in response to climate change will find electoral support. Cuts must come from real reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the UK: while support to assist poorer nations in sustainable energy development is crucial, it would be irresponsible for the UK to buy out its responsibility to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions. High on the list of political priorities must be advocacy in support of those poor nations most exposed to the threats of climate change through no fault of their own, where help is owed not only on grounds of charity but also as restitution and reparation for damage done by the activities of industrialized nations. Churches at regional and local levels need to work towards action with local governments. At every level, the corporate commitments of our churches to act in relation to their own

³⁴ Baptist Union of Great Britain, The Methodist Church, the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the United Reformed Church, 'A response to the draft climate change bill consultation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)'. (July, 2007), URL: <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/jpit_climatebilldefraresponse_0707.pdf>.

greenhouse gas emissions will significantly enhance their contribution to this public debate. Effective political initiatives will often come from joint projects with other churches, other faith groups or non-religious groups sharing similar goals, and action to improve understanding between such potential allies and networks is important.³⁵

4.7 Alertness to disproportionate impact on the vulnerable and poor

In making these proposals for the kinds of action churches should engage in as signs of repentance and sacramental living, we recognize that, for many members of church communities, action in response to these issues will seem confusing, threatening and unwelcome. Alongside making the case for substantial change, our churches must keep alert to the pastoral implications of the proposed changes for church members. In particular, we must avoid strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that have a disproportionate impact on the poor and vulnerable.

4.8 The need for action in relation to other environmental issues

In addressing the issue of climate change, we must also recognize that it is only one of many environmental issues requiring attention by our churches: related issues include concern for:

- threats to biodiversity;
- deforestation;
- water shortages;
- depletion of non-renewable resources; and
- the impact of rapid rises in human population.

Climate change is but one manifestation of the impact of a global industrialized economy. Action in response to climate change will ameliorate the impact of some of these environmental challenges, but it is also required

³⁵ We welcome the Church of England 'Shrinking the Footprint' campaign (URL: <<http://www.shrinkingthefootprint.cofe.anglican.org/>>) and the London Roman Catholic Church 'For Creed and Creation' (URL: <<http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/publications/environment/ForCreedandCreation.pdf>>) as examples of cross-denominational work on this issue.

in these other areas.³⁶ Appreciation of the complex interrelationships of environmental issues and other justice concerns is also necessary, such as balancing the economic advantages to poor communities of fairly traded goods from overseas against the carbon costs of such imports. Attention to the challenge of climate change should not be at the expense of concern for other justice issues affecting the poor.

Reflection 12

Look at the four numbered points in the 'Sending Out' section on page 5.

- What are the possibilities for beginning to work on these in your church?
- What could be your starting point?
- What is preventing you from taking the action you would like to take as a church?

How can this be overcome?

³⁶ The Eco-Congregation initiative (URL: <<http://www.ecocongregation.org/>>) is one example of an approach to church action on environmental issues taking a range of environmental concerns into account.



Sending out

*From worship we are bidden,
'Rise, for into all my world you go,
to teach and serve and to baptise
that all my Son and will may know.'*

Summary

We call on our churches to confess their guilt in relation to the causes of climate change, to show signs of repentance and redeemed sacramental living and to be a prophetic voice in the life of our communities.

5.1 A call to action

We call on our churches to respond to the challenge of climate change:

- as those affirming the hope of God's continued faithfulness to creation;
- as those who have received the call to show love and justice to neighbours present and future, human and other than human; and
- as those who have heard the warning of God's judgement of those who hear and do not act.

We call on our churches to confess their guilt in relation to the causes of climate change, to show signs of repentance and redeemed living and to be a prophetic voice in the life of our communities, through promoting a change of heart among congregations;³⁷ urgently reducing church carbon footprints at every level in line with national targets;³⁸ enabling members of our congregations to make similar changes towards sustainable lifestyles;³⁹ and engaging politically with local and national governments.⁴⁰

5.2 The way ahead

We are aware that the responses to the challenge of climate change we call for in this report require our churches to make a considerable journey from where we find ourselves at the moment. This is a journey unlike any other that most of us have taken, and which has a destination only future generations will reach and benefit from. The destination is a promise rather than a recognisable place and the route has not been mapped out. The costs

³⁷ See section 4.3 above.

³⁸ 4.4.

³⁹ 4.5.

⁴⁰ 4.6.

of the journey are to be borne now but the benefits will not be felt in our time. While we live in an age of individuality and immediacy, this is a journey not of individuals but of a community: the people of God and the people of the earth, which requires us to build for the future rather than for immediate returns. Such a journey changed the children of Israel from a disorganised group of refugees into a nation. The beginning of their journey involved giving up the comfort and apparent security of one lifestyle and moving to a more dangerous and uncomfortable way of living. But they gained freedom. The most difficult part of such a journey is the exodus, the leaving without looking back. The Israelites' guide was a God who loved justice and hated oppression, who cared for the humble and opposed exploitation: we believe in the same God who loves those who are exploited and oppressed today. We too set out on a journey of freedom in response to the challenge of climate change, blessed by God's peace, sent by our saviour and going our way in the company of the Holy Spirit (John 20.21–22).

Reflection 13

Return to the questions and thoughts you noted down at the beginning of the study session.

- What answers or responses do you think God has given you?
- As you reflect over what you have learnt from reading the report and doing the exercises, what image, idea or insight most stands out?
- Who can you talk to in the next week about what you have learnt?

Write down three small, practical steps you will make in the next two weeks addressing your responsibility as a Christian in a time of ever-worsening climate change. You may want to encapsulate your commitments in a brief covenant prayer, using words or images that you have reflected on, to commit you.

Reflection 14

Consider signing up for a free email newsletter at www.creationchallenge.org.uk and keep in touch with actions being taken by Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches.

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Report Status

The report *Hope in God's Future: Christian discipleship in the context of climate change* has been produced by three Churches. It has been adopted by the Faith and Unity Executive of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and by the Mission Council of the United Reformed Church. The report has also been adopted as a Statement of Conference by the Conference of the Methodist Church in Britain.

For further information about how each Church is encouraging action in response to this report see the individual Church websites below and www.creationchallenge.org.uk.

Baptist Union of Great Britain: www.baptist.org.uk (or contact the Faith and Unity Department at Baptist House)

Methodist Church in Britain: www.methodist.org.uk

United Reformed Church: www.urc.org.uk

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How to use this resource

This report is intended to take you on a transformative journey, using the changing mood of a service of worship as a framework. It presents our three Churches' position on climate change and invites members to see how faith deeply connects with the challenge.

A service of worship begins in a place of contemplation: praising and waiting for God. It moves to an encounter with God's word, which elicits a response of transformed hearts and the resolution to begin to live out changed lives.

You are invited to read and reflect on the report and the challenges it presents 'with the mind in the heart'. This means letting God speak to your whole personality: heart, mind and lifestyle.

Individual Use:

This guide can be used as a tool for personal study and devotion. As you read through the report you will see questions and activities which will aid your reflection. It might be helpful to have a Bible and a notebook with you as you work through them. Study at your own pace, taking time to pray on what you have read and the insights you develop.

Group Use:

The report can be studied in a group setting, over one or two evenings, or even a day dedicated to working through the issues raised. Feel free to explore further by raising your own questions and discussing them in the group. All members should have a copy of the report which they can refer to and take away for individual reflection.

One evening outline (sample) – 2.5 hours

Consider starting the evening with a simple bring and share meal. Begin with prayer, thanking God for the nourishment from food and friendship. Have a prayer focus in the middle of the space.

7pm **Introduction.** Set out aims and agree as a group the protocol guidelines.

Use the prayer focus as a devotional link to the first exercise.

Split into groups of two or three for the following activities. If the groups wish to share their findings with the whole meeting, you may want to allow time for this.

7.15 **Section 1.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise.

7.35 **Section 2.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise.

8.05 **Section 3.1.** Read through the section and create the montage or mind map (15 mins).

Read through **Section 3.2** and complete the montage-related activity or alternative exercise.
(10 mins).

8.30 Each group selects and works through one of the ‘sending out’ points from page 5.

8.50 Feedback and conversation

9.15 **Section 5.2.** For individual contemplation, think through the closing questions.

9.30 Closing prayer

Two evening outline (sample)

Evening one – Reflection

Consider starting the evening with a simple bring and share meal. Begin with prayer, thanking God for the nourishment from food and friendship. Have a prayer focus in the middle of the space.

7pm **Introduction.** Set out aims and agree as a group the protocol guidelines.

Use the prayer focus as a devotional link to the first exercise.

7.15 For the opening devotion, individuals should work through exercise 1.1.

Split into groups of two or three for the following activities. If the groups wish to share their findings with the whole meeting, you may want to allow time for this.

7.35 **Section 1.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise (15 mins).

8.00 **Section 2.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise.

Consider discussing a question from exercise 2.4 with the whole group (10 mins).

8.30 **Section 3.1.** Read through the section and create the montage or mind map (15 mins).

Read through 3.2 and complete the montage-related activity or alternative exercise.
(10 mins).

9.00 **Closing reflection.** Discuss the images or ideas that stand out from the above exercise.

Closing prayer.

Evening two – Action

Consider beginning or ending with Holy Communion, perhaps linking it with section 4 of the report (in some church traditions this requires the presence of an ordained minister.) A good text to use would be the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

7pm **Welcome.** Recap and share any reflections on the last meeting. Remind everyone of the agreed protocol.

7.10 Opening devotions

Split into groups of two or three.

7.15 Each group selects and works through one of the ‘sending out’ points from page 5.

Discuss the possibilities for beginning to work on these in your church.

8.00 Whole group discussion. How can you turn your contemplation into action? Could you develop an action plan? Could the study group become an action group?

8.45 **Section 5.2.** For individual contemplation, think through the closing questions.

9.00 Closing devotions.
Closing prayer

Study day outline (sample)

9.30 Arrivals and coffee

10.00 **Introduction.** Set out aims and agree as a group the protocol guidelines.

Use the prayer focus as a devotional link to the first exercise.

10.10 As the opening devotion, individuals should work through exercise 1.1.

Split into groups of two or three to carry out the following activities.

10.40 **Section 1.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise.

11.00 **Section 2.2.** Read through the section and work through the exercise (15 mins).

Consider discussing one of the questions from **section 2.4** in the whole group (15 mins)

11.30 Coffee break

11.45 **Section 3.1.** Read through the section and create the montage or the mind map (15 mins).

Read through 3.2 and complete the montage-related activity or alternative exercise (15 mins).

12.15 Whole group discussion. What are the group's thoughts or insights about the montages or the process of carrying out the activity?

12.25 Closing reflection. Discuss the images or ideas that stand out from the above exercise.
Closing prayer.

12.30 Lunch

Consider a simple bring and share meal. Begin with prayer, thanking God for the nourishment from food and friendship.

1.30 Each group selects and works through one of the 'sending out' points from page 5.

2.15 Whole group discussion. How can you turn your contemplation into action? Could you develop an action plan? Could the study group become an action group?

3.00 **Section 5.2.** For individual contemplation, think through the closing questions.

3.15 Closing Holy Communion

Advice for leaders

Your role will help the group achieve its purpose. This advice may be useful:

- Find someone to help co-lead the group. This shares the responsibility.
- Read through the above format options and decide which would work best for your envisaged group. Don't be afraid to adjust activities to suit your needs.
- Create a simple prayer focus and use it to think through opening and closing devotions.
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to contribute.
- Keep the process moving and to time.

Your role is not to be the 'expert', but to be passionate about the subject, encouraging learning and open discussion.

However, you may decide you would like more of an expert on climate change to come along to the sessions. If the study group then decides to become an action group, this person could act as a mentor as you plan how to respond and act. The expert should not dominate the group, but become a friend and valuable resource.

Practicalities

- Good organisation is essential. In good time, think about invitations, venue, timings, refreshments, materials for activities (collage material, paper, pens, crayons, rough maps etc).
- Think about location. If you are meeting in someone's home, try not to have more than ten in the group, including leaders. You may need to think about somewhere larger for the study day.
- Encourage everyone to read a copy of the report before the study sessions.

Group protocol

Ask the group to agree to ground rules such as:

- Always listen carefully to whoever is speaking.
- Respect each person's right to explore and express their views, even if they are not your own.

- Allow everyone the opportunity to contribute.
- Try to be mindful of how long you have been speaking.
- Take responsibility for sharing your perspective.

Prayer Focus

A simple, visual prayer focus at the centre of your meeting can create a sense of sacred space. The basis of this could be two pieces of green/blue or rainbow-coloured cloth to represent the earth, rivers, or land. You could add signs of the natural world – water (in an open bowl), pebbles, twigs, leaves or flowers. Add animals and people by representing them with toys, cut-outs or pictures. Perhaps think of a way to represent day and night. Place a candle and a Cross somewhere in the focus.

Think about using music or natural sounds to accompany an opening, contemplative act of worship (garden centres might be useful for locating CDs).

Anthology of prayers

Feel free to use and adapt these prayers in your study sessions.

A prayer of approach and adoration

Wonderful God,

Sometimes, as we immerse ourselves outdoors, an intoxicating sense of your presence steals upon our spirits.

Myriad colours dance in a sunlit garden or park, and our hearts sing.

The joyful chorus of birdsong sweetly fills and strangely deafens our ears.

Awesome snow-capped mountains and tumultuous waterfalls speak to us of your eternal timelessness.

Scurrying, flitting insects and the amazing variety of grasses absorb us on a lazy summer day.

In six days you created the world, and then on the seventh, you stopped and paused to delight in your Creation, seeing its goodness and seeing our goodness, so that you trusted us to be caretakers with you.

You call us in this *kairos* moment to pause with you, to take time, to drink in deeply the wonderful gift of Creation.

Help us not to continue to carelessly spoil it in thoughtless, rushing lifestyles.

May we deeply see, hear, smell, touch, taste and cherish the fragile interconnected garden of the earth – your gift to us.

Amen.

A prayer of confession

Gracious God,

We confess that we have been slow to recognise how carelessly we have treated your precious gift of Creation.

Our addictive lifestyles have encouraged us to take, use and cast aside.

We have plundered finite resources,

With little thought for poorer communities and future generations.

We acknowledge our guilt and ask you to change our hearts.

May we glimpse the possibilities of a new, shared, wholesome and more just way of living.

May we know your forgiveness, and act upon it,

So that we may receive your fullness of life,

And know lasting contentment.

Silence.

In the name of Christ, who did not abandon us in our limited, myopic lives, we ask to hear your words of forgiveness; to receive the gift of your Spirit to blow through us, spring cleaning our hearts and lives.

Amen.

A prayer of commitment

God, who provides what we need for life in all its fullness,

We thank you for the gift of energy;

Providing warmth, light, access to multimedia communications.

May we be mindful of how we use this life-enhancing gift.

Help us stop our careless squandering of it,

Aware of the big impact on climate change for poorer communities and future generations.

God create in us a new heart and renewed lives.

We thank you for the gift of transport;

Swift travel to diverse places.

May we be mindful of how we use this life-enriching gift,

Which can also complicate and busy our lives.

May we be disciplined about its frivolous and unnecessary use,

Aware of the big impact on climate change for poorer communities and future generations.

God create in us a new heart and renewed lives.

We thank you for the gift of diverse possessions, which bring enjoyment and status.

Make us mindful to distinguish between passing wants, and true needs.

To humbly recycle, re-use and reduce land-polluting waste.

To see that true wealth does not rest in 'things'.

God create in us a new heart and renewed lives.

We thank you for creating us as inter-connected creatures.

Make us mindful of the deep privilege of this.

To honour our bodies by living a healthy lifestyle;

To honour our relationships to know the fullness of loving, laughing, suffering alongside others;

To honour the precious, finite resources of earth, that we might have life without depriving others of what is needful for their fullness of life.

God create in us a new heart and renewed lives.

Amen.

A blessing

God's blessing be upon us as we leave and return changed to our homes.

May we strengthen and encourage one another in our shared vision.

And may the blessing of our adventurous Creator God go with us.

And may the blessing of the Son, who showed us how to live, re-shape us.

And may the blessing of the dancing Spirit joyfully enable us in our renewed living.

Amen.

Holy Communion

A simple liturgy focusing on the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

The gracious sharing of the little that is offered, going a long way.

Resources for enabling your church and study/action group to respond to the challenge of climate change

- **Creation Challenge newsletter and website**

(www.creationchallenge.org.uk)

The Creation Challenge e-newsletter showcases initiatives taken across the Baptist Union and the Methodist and United Reformed Churches. It is compiled every two months and enables members of our Churches to share resources and ideas, as well as providing information on events and national initiatives. Sign up at the web address above.

- **Operation Noah, *Between the Flood and the Rainbow: Climate Change and the Church's Social Teaching – A Study Guide*** (www.operationnoah.org) £5 plus p&p

This is a production of Operation Noah, with support from CAFOD, Columban Faith and Justice, and the National Justice and Peace Network. An excellent small group resource, packed with accessible information to help a church engage with the issues surrounding climate change. Includes helpful prayers and liturgies for worship.

- **The Ash Wednesday Declaration**

The Ash Wednesday Declaration is a call to our churches produced by Operation Noah. This challenging declaration has gained the support of four archbishops and many other church leaders including the presidents/general secretaries of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. The declaration draws a strong association between justice and economic behaviour. It challenges some current assumptions around the foundations of our prosperity and argues that the demands of justice require us to hold our governments and corporations to account. Engaging with theological principles of repentance and hope, the declaration offers a deeply spiritual perspective on human flourishing and sustainable living. In many respects this biblical and theological study reflects themes explored in *Hope in God's Future*. It is available for study and church members and others are invited to endorse the statement on the Operation Noah website.

- **Eco-congregation** (www.ecocongregation.org)
Free, downloadable modules to help a church engage at different levels with environmental issues, beginning with module 1 – Church Checkup. This module is designed to identify and affirm existing environmental ministry and help a church prioritise what to do next, identifying supportive resources. Modules include: Greening worship; Theology and the environment; Children and creation care; Young people and environmental issues; Resources for small groups; Greening the church building; Greening church spending; Churchyard conservation; Lifestyle issues; Community matters; Global neighbours. There are plans to produce a further module offering advice on reducing carbon emissions.
- **Claire Foster & David Shreeve, *Don't stop at the Lights: Leading Your Church Through a Changing Climate***, London, Church House Publishing, 2008 £14.99
This is an inspiring resource structured around the liturgical year. For each season, key biblical texts and theological themes are explored in depth. Worship is linked to a plethora of practical ideas for celebrating the season, which prophetically sign a reduced carbon footprint.
- **Claire Foster & David Shreeve, *How many Lightbulbs Does it Take to Change a Christian? A Pocket Guide to Shrinking Your Ecological Footprint***, London, Church House Publishing, 2007 £4.99
A succinct, practical guide to living more simply, stressing that our response to climate change has to go beyond token gestures. Each section helps you to work on your own life and suggests actions to take in and with your church and local community. Sections covered include: water, energy, transport, waste, biodiversity, well-being, lifestyle and Sabbath.
- **Nick Spencer & Robert White, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living***, London, SPCK, 2007 £9.99
Current habits of consumption in the West cannot be maintained. The way we live, generate and use energy, is no longer environmentally sustainable. High-income countries are facing threats to health and well-being, and for low-income countries, the numbers of economic refugees

are continually increasing. The book is divided into three parts. The first analyses the scientific problem and the second reflects on an in-depth biblical perspective as a foundation for reflecting on whether those of faith should care about the environment. The final section analyses a Christian response.

- *George Marshall, Carbon Detox: Your step-by-step guide to getting real about climate change*, London, Gaia Thinking, 2007 £7.99
This is a humorous, practical guide to getting real about climate change. It does not overwhelm with facts, but summarises enough to give the overall picture. Designed to get the ‘grumpy green’ on board, it helps us recognise our natural inertia to take climate change seriously. Included is a helpful guide to doing our own carbon footprint audit, and help in recognising which of our responses might be token gestures... and which might make a real difference.
- *Andrea Skevington, The Creation Spirit*, Oxford, Lion, 2009 £6.99
A beautifully-illustrated devotional resource to aid meditation on the spirituality of climate change and a sustainable lifestyle. Sections include: the lesson of the seed; the lesson of the web; the snapped thread; the lesson of our daily bread; the creation spirit. A resource recognising that changed hearts underpin the motivation for a changed lifestyle.
- *Ruth Valerio, L is for Lifestyle: Christian Living That Doesn't Cost the Earth*, Leicester, IVP, 2004 £7.99
An accessible book written by an evangelical Christian. It explores the implications of the 1980 Lausanne Committee World Evangelisation statement entitled ‘An evangelical commitment to a simple lifestyle’. The committee stated: “The call to responsible lifestyle must not be divorced from the call to responsible witness. For the credibility of our message is seriously diminished whenever we contradict it by our lives. It is impossible with integrity to proclaim Christ’s salvation if he has evidently not saved us from greed, or his lordship if we are not good stewards of our possessions, or his love if we close our hearts against the needy.”

- **Dave Bookless, *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World*, IVP, 2008 £7.99**
Dave Bookless is national director of A Rocha UK and is passionate about faith and the environment. His first four chapters (with foreword by Rob Frost) show how we have neglected God's teaching about caring for the environment and moved away from a wholesome sustainable lifestyle. The following four chapters explore discipleship, worship, lifestyle and 'mission as if Creation mattered'.
- **Alastair McIntosh, *Hell and High Water: Climate Change, Hope and the Human Condition*, Edinburgh, Birlinn, 2008 £8.99**
McIntosh suggests that politics alone is not enough to tackle the likely scale of global warming. The root lies in our addictive consumer mentality: wants have replaced needs in defining our very identity. We have to find the courage to radically change, and open ourselves up to a better way of loving. In this way we can move beyond despair, to find hope.
- **Paula Clifford, *Angels with Trumpets: The Church in a Time of Global Warming*, London, St Paul's, 2009 £7.95**
A provocative exploration of the Church's response to climate change. Christians must find and use their prophetic voice and face up to the reality we are already encountering. Drawing on the work of Barth and Moltmann, Clifford looks at different aspects of climate change with reference to the seven Churches in the book of Revelation. Each chapter ends with questions that could be the basis for group discussion.
- **Michael Northcott, *The Ethics of Global Warming*, DLT, 2007 £12.95**
A thought-provoking book calling for radical changes to our values and lifestyle. Western consumer attitudes, argues Northcott, have made us unhappy. It is time for Christians to partner with other concerned parties in leading the way in slowing down and connecting holistically with the earth – our home. A call to cut greenhouse emissions before it is too late.

Appendix – For Methodists

Hope in God's Future: A Statement of Conference

The report Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change was first presented to the Methodist Conference in 2009. As a sign of how seriously the Church takes the issue of climate change, Methodist Conference proposed that parts 1-4 of the report be adopted as a Statement of Conference.

A Statement of Conference is used to set out the judgement of the Methodist Conference on a major issue of faith and practice when it is considered likely that this will stand for some time. It is an important position statement that must be adhered to when anyone is speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church. It is also referred to by groups such as Faith and Order when deciding on related areas of doctrine.

Because the exact wording and arguments (and not just the conclusions) are adopted, the Methodist people must be consulted thoroughly before a report can become a Statement of Conference. In July 2009 a consultation and redrafting process was launched.

The consultation process

The process for consulting on the Statement of Conference began in 2009 and involved three stages:

- Stage 1. Focus groups were arranged in order to lay the ground and develop appropriate areas of questioning for a Connexion-wide consultation. Three general district groups were run, as well as a specific group of Church Stewards and some facilitated group work at the Youth Assembly.
- Stage 2. The next stage was an open consultation across circuits and districts to gather a wide range of views from different perspectives as to whether the report (as it stands or revised) should be a

Statement of Conference. Using the learning from the focus group discussion a consultation questionnaire was designed and made available online. The consultation was given publicity inviting all Methodists to give their views on the wording of the draft Statement.

Stage 3. Finally a redrafting group was established led by Vice-President Dr Richard Vautrety. They first had to consider whether in the light of the responses they could recommend that the report in some form could be adopted. Having affirmed that this was the case their aim was to end up with a Statement of Conference that the greatest number of Methodists will be happy to own as an official statement of their Church.

The redrafting group used the material from both the focus groups and respondents to determine the extent and nature of a revised text. In the light of the responses to the consultation and focus group observations the redrafting group determined that a light-touch approach to the redrafting exercise was appropriate. Changes were made to address concerns raised by the consultation exercise and to improve readability (for example the inclusion of summaries at the start of each chapter).

Baptist Union of Great Britain and the United Reformed Church partners were consulted on proposed changes and suggestions were made by some members of the original working group. The Methodist Church in Britain Faith and Order Committee also provided comments, after which the revised text was presented to Methodist Council. The revisions are indicated in the 2011 Methodist Conference Agenda, item no. 36.

It is only sections 1 to 4 (with an additional section 4.9) and associated footnotes that comprise the Statement of Conference.

Responding to the report

The Conference 2009 resolutions detailing the above are listed below.

Resolutions passed by the Methodist Conference 2009:**10/1.** The Methodist Conference:

- a) receives the report Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change.
- b) commends the report as a helpful guide for reflection and action, and encourages Local Churches, Circuits and Districts to enable these through prayer, preaching, Bible study, teaching, discussion and acts of corporate confession, repentance and commitment.
- c) acknowledges the action taken by many individuals across our churches with respect to their personal life styles and affirms members of congregations as they continue to make adjustments in their carbon emissions.
- d) directs the Methodist Council to investigate innovative approaches to the application of Methodist grant funds and reserves including the possibility of making available statutory grant-funding.
- e) directs the Methodist Council to establish a project to consult widely with Circuits and Districts to:
 - i) identify appropriate and realistic approaches to assessing the carbon output of the Methodist Church in order to determine how to bring about a reduction in carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the national goal of a minimum 80% reduction by 2050 and appropriate interim targets.
 - ii) assess the Methodist Church travel and other policies.
 - iii) make recommendations in relation to energy audits of all manses and other church buildings
 - iv) bring to the Methodist Conference of 2010 a further report on items (i) to (iii) above, and on other measures that may be required adequately to resource circuits and districts in their responses to Hope in God's Future.
- f) welcomes measures planned or underway to assess and reduce the carbon footprint of the Connexional Team and requests that the Methodist Council remain apprised of progress
- g) welcomes the introduction of the UK Climate Change Act but is deeply concerned that the UK Government has not articulated a strategy

for achieving the rapid decarbonisation of the economy implied by this legislation and commensurate with the challenge we face. The Conference calls for UK support for a strong international agreement at the crucial Copenhagen UNFCCC Cop15 meeting in November/December 2009 and for adequate domestic action.

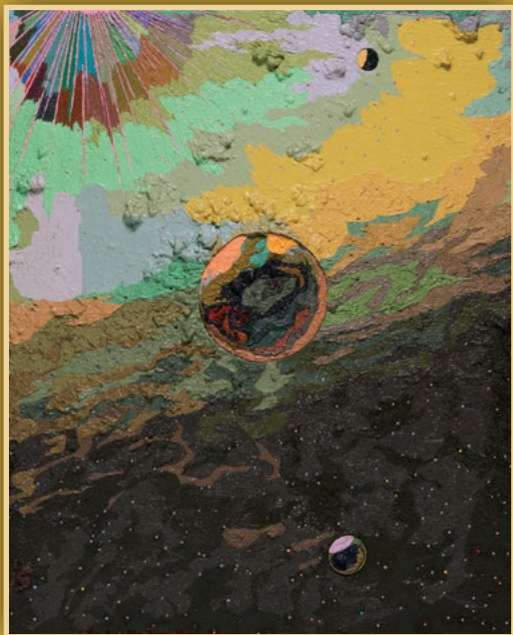
Responding to the report

Since the 2009 Methodist Conference work has been done to establish the carbon footprint of the Methodist Church and determine the most cost effective means of reducing this. In 2010 Methodist Conference received a report (Agenda Item 12) providing an initial indication of some aspects of the carbon footprint of the Methodist Church. Districts and Circuits are encouraged to develop carbon reduction strategies and the Connexional Team will work with ecumenical partners on carbon reduction strategies and resources to assist District and Circuits.

Changes have been made to Methodist Standing Orders to require a current Energy Performance Certificate for manses. Standing Orders (Book VI Part 2 Guidance Section 1C 3) now state that “Circuits should seek to provide manses to meet a minimum of a ‘C’ energy efficiency rating”.

Further Methodist and ecumenical responses to Hope in God’s Future can be obtained from the website of the Methodist Church and the Creation Challenge e-newsletter (www.creationchallenge.org.uk).

CLIMATE CHANGE: THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH IN OUR GENERATION



Ex. 6, No Traveller's Borne (Translation No. 13)

Artist: Jess (Jess Collins)

Credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art; Purchased with
the Edith H. Bell Fund, 1979

The **Methodist Church** 



The
**United
Reformed
Church**



**Baptist Union
of Great Britain**
Encouraging Missionary Disciples

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