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CLIMATE CHANGE THEOLOGY:

James S. Pender

 Barely a day goes by without us reading an article in a newspaper about climate change; be it about international negotiations, carbon trading, controversy over its future effects or how it impacts on peoples’ lives. Firstly it is important to note that ‘climate’ simply refers to dominant weather patterns and secondly ‘climate change’ has been happening for millennia.

In fact it has even been proposed that climate change had a significant impact at the beginning of the Judeo-Christian story as inhabitants of the ‘fertile crescent’ between the Nile and Euphrates river basins were forced out of more lush areas now under the Persian Gulf as sea level rose, and forced to rely more on agriculture as a hotter, dryer climate reduced fruit and wild mammal species making a hunting and gathering lifestyle more difficult. It was in these agricultural civilisations that the Old Testament narrative is situated.1 However, what is new is that human beings are now influencing the climate by emitting ‘greenhouse gases’ into the atmosphere and changing land use patterns such as through extensive deforestation.

Christians tend to react in one of two ways either saying “well Jesus will come soon so no need to do anything about global warming” or in denial that human accelerated climate change is happening at all.

The focus on the ‘End Times’ is a particularly common response in Evangelical circles. Now it could be that verses like Luke 21:25 where Jesus states “There will be strange things happening to the sun, the moon, and the stars. On earth whole countries will be in despair, afraid of the roar of the sea and the raging tides” does refer to anxiety over climate changed induced sea level rise.2 Likewise Revelation 6:8 where St. John prophesies: “I looked, and there was a pale-coloured horse. Its rider was named Death, and Hades followed close behind. They were given authority over one fourth of the earth, to kill by means of war, famine, disease, and wild animals” may talk about the effects on society of climate change inflicted maladies.

However, in both Matthew 25:13 and in Mark 13:32 Jesus tells us that no one knows the day or the hour of His return, so speculation is futile, and more importantly Jesus goes on to warn that people must be ready for His return. This means that we should be living righteously in terms of our relations to the poor and creation so that we may be judged favourably when He does come back. As Global Warming is a breach of our responsibility to care for God’s other creatures (Genesis. 2:15) by threatening them with extinction and its projected impacts run contrary to Christian justice and

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Jesus’ call to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40, 45) by making the poorest suffer, action on climate change is required by all Christians regardless how close Christ’s return may or may not be!

Denial is not a valid option either as the vast majority of the world’s scientists is now convinced climate change is happening. This has led to a joint statement from the most prestigious associations of scientists across the globe, including the Royal Society, UK, the National Academy of Sciences, USA and similar bodies in Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan and Russia to say that: ‘There is now strong evidence that significant global warming is occurring. The evidence comes from direct measurements of rising surface air temperatures and subsurface ocean temperatures and from phenomena such as increases in average global sea levels, retreating glaciers, and changes to many physical and biological systems. It is likely that most of the warming in recent decades can be attributed to human activities. This warming has already led to changes in the Earth's climate.’

The 4th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which has been endorsed by all major world governments, has provided further and stronger evidence for human caused climate change so as Sir John Houghton former Chair of the IPCC, states: “Although there is a lot of uncertainty concerning the detail, the basic science underlying global warming and climate change is well understood and is not in question.”

Many in Britain have already begun to notice changes in ‘the weather’ with milder winters, hotter summers, serious flooding and powerful storms affecting lives and property in recent years. Birds are more sensitive to these changes than humans and are good indicators of a changing climate and of threat to ourselves just like the ‘miners’ canary’ and the British Trust for Ornithology has detected declines of over 50% over the last 35 years in familiar woodland bird species, while nesting dates are becoming progressively earlier.

Although all nations will be affected; in terms of the impact of climate change few places in the world will experience the range of effects and the severity of changes that will occur in Bangladesh, where I have been working as a Mission Partner with the Church of Bangladesh Social Development Programme; these will include:

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Average weather temperatures rising; more extreme hot and cold spells; rainfall being less when it is most needed for agriculture, yet more in the monsoon when it already causes floods; melting of glaciers in the source areas of Bangladesh’s rivers altering the hydrological cycle; more powerful tornados and cyclones; and sea level rise displacing communities, turning freshwater saline and facilitating more powerful storm surges. This will have huge effects on the environment and the communities that depend on the land particularly the approximately 75% who still live in rural areas. Although city dwellers are also subject to food price increases when crops are lost due to the changing climatic patterns and unemployment when flooding causes industries to close.

Some of the richest and most biodiverse areas in the world’s largest mangrove forest home to River Dolphins, the Bengal Tiger and 50% of Bangladesh’s birdlife may be reduced by half or in a worst case scenario totally submerged in the next century. While 51 to 97 million people living in Bangladesh’s coastal areas may be forced off their land by rising salinity in their farmland, inundation with sea water and high storm surges caused by higher sea level and stronger cyclones due to the effects of global warming by 2100. Direct effects on human health are already significant with World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that climate change since the 1970s is already responsible for over 150,000 deaths each year through increasing incidence of diarrhoea, malaria and malnutrition, in developing regions. While only another 0.5°C increase in global temperature above present levels could double annual deaths from climate change to at least 300,000.

It was inconceivable to previous generations that human beings might be able to alter the earth’s climate and natural processes in such a devastating degree as is now beginning to occur through global warming. It is hard sometimes for us to believe too, but as earlier stated the evidence is there and now the issue cannot be ducked. It has come about through our modern industrial economies and the burning of fossil fuels, especially coal and oil to heat/cool our homes, produce the various items in our shops, to travel from A to B, to produce and to transport our food. Land use choices such as industrial farming, clearing of forests and cattle rearing have further exacerbated the situation by releasing carbon stored in biomass, methane from farming as well as preventing the absorption and storage of greenhouse gasses by trees.

To use the earth’s resources to improve and sustain our lifestyles in not wrong in fact in Genesis 2 verse 15 ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it’ and in Psalm 65 verses 8-13 God is thanked for providing a rich and fertile land to farm and for good harvests, as well as for pastures full of livestock. In Deuteronomy 8 verse 9 God even promises the Hebrews a land where ‘you will never go hungry or ever be in need. Its rocks have iron in them, and from its hills you can mine copper.’ So even mining and by implication the processes

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needed to turn natural resources into useful products are permitted and even shown to be God’s blessing to mankind.

However, the rule of man and woman over creation as mandated in Genesis 1 verse 28 was not intended to be irresponsible or without limits. For an Old Testament understanding of kingship is very different from the absolute monarchies which evolved in western society: In this context a ruler was supposed to exist for his subjects and as Lord of his realm he is the one who protects as well as causes the land and those less powerful to be blessed through his rule.\textsuperscript{11} Throughout the law God gave to the nation of Israel there were many restrictions to how people must live for example in Deuteronomy 22:6-7 an element of sustainability in using wildlife as sources of food is shown for the eggs or young found in a birds nest may be taken but the mother left alone. Likewise people are told in Deuteronomy 20:19 ‘When you are trying to capture a city, do not cut down its fruit trees, even though the siege lasts a long time. Eat the fruit, but do not destroy the trees; the trees are not your enemies.’ Most importantly in terms of limits was the Sabbath legislation in which vulnerable workers, immigrants, and farm animals got a day to rest each week and the seven yearly Sabbath year the ‘jubilee’ in which debts were cancelled and land was to lie fallow to recover its fertility. In looking at the issues of climate change clearly limits in any form have not been observed and the earth has been ruthlessly exploited being ‘worked’ but not ‘cared for’ as God requires us. Likewise the vulnerable are being exploited and their needs overlooked.

While it is true that the poor and vulnerable are routinely exploited and abused within their own nations and all human beings are producing greenhouse gases, we must be reminded that in terms of suffering as a result of global warming we in the west are primarily culpable. The west has got rich through its industrialisation, often at the expense of the poor in previously colonised ‘developing’ countries and 90% of greenhouse gases produced by humans have come from that process. Even now while only 10% of the world’s population resides in Europe and America we produce 30% of current carbon dioxide emissions the main greenhouse gas. With the UK’s carbon dioxide emissions being 2% internally or 15% of the global total if all the external emissions of the banks and businesses quoted on the London Stock Exchange are included.\textsuperscript{12} The contribution to global warming by developing countries such as China may be increasing but their per capita emissions of greenhouse gases due to their smaller energy use per capita is still far lower than us, and while the average American consumes twice as much energy as the average Briton, that is still more than ten times more than that used by the average Chinese person and nearly one hundred times that of the average Bangladeshi.\textsuperscript{13}

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 in which different servants are given amounts of money to invest teaches us to use what God has given us in a productive way, but in damaging the very resources God has given to our care we have surely been poor stewards even if money has been made. Furthermore the parable of the

\textsuperscript{13} Nick Spencer & Robert White, \textit{Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living}, (London: SPCK, 2007), 51-52.
sheep and the goats follows next in the narrative in this chapter of Matthew and very clearly warns that if we do not care for the needs of the vulnerable we will be judged very severely, so that money earned by being productive stewards of our finances and other resources is closely linked by Jesus to living in a socially responsible and equitable way. The inequitable consumption of energy worldwide mostly from the fossil fuels coal and oil has left the developing world poor; and now it threatens them most through global warming. As the tropics will be most affected by global warming, while the countries located in these mostly developing regions have the least capacity to enable them to deal with the effects of climate change.

Today people are increasingly recognising that the environmental crisis as well as global poverty and inequality have at root a spiritual crisis. Rev Dave Bookless UK Director of Christian conservation charity A Rocha highlights that we damage the earth and hurt the poor not only through inadequate information or poor decisions, but through selfishness. ‘So when we are too lazy to walk to the local shops and take the car, we make a spiritual choice to be selfish. When we know about the facts about energy wastage, and the damage that excessive carbon dioxide does to the atmosphere, and yet carelessly leave a television on standby or lights on around the house, we are not only harming the planet but also sinning against God and our fellow humanity.’

Recently Richard Chartres Bishop of London spoke in a similar vein when he said that making selfish choices such as flying on holiday or buying a large car could be symptoms of sin, explaining that “sin is not just a restricted list of moral mistakes. It is a life turned in on itself where people ignore the consequences of their actions.” For in the words of Spencer and White (a theologian and a scientist respectively), writing in respect to climate change: ‘To refuse to consider the physical and social welfare of others when the consequences of our actions are already clear is not only reckless but at root selfish. And selfishness is nothing less than sinfulness, of putting oneself first. If our daily actions are at root an expression of sinfulness than we need not only to repent of that but also to change our behaviour’.

It is right that we should feel some measure of guilt when we are confronted with our sins both at an individual and a national level in terms of how we are despoiling God’s creation, causing the poor to get poorer and making the vulnerable even more at risk through our contributions to global warming. Indeed ethicist Northcott writes that ‘the first move in the quest for redemption from the structures of sin is for individuals to acknowledge that they are responsible in some part for sustaining these structures’ Sadly though this is where most of the environmental or global justice campaigners stop - with guilt; my observation is that this either leads many people to become pessimists with regard to the future or hedonists who try to ignore the unpleasant consequences of their actions. Pessimists often end up in that state when the wider public ceases to join them in strict ethical living, become cynical and give up hope. Others ignore the situation as they feel overwhelmed or unable to change their lives or their society. Perhaps environmentalist Jonathon Porritt writing nearly

15 Nick Spencer & Robert White, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, (London: SPCK, 2007), pp8, 47, 221.
ten years ago was unknowingly prophetic when he wrote: ‘the Green Movement is never likely to move very far at all if it remains bogged down in its current state of secular, anthropocentric sterility’. For messages have lacked hope, largely failing to cause the lifestyle changes and generate the moral attitudes needed to stop the environmentalist crisis including climate change worsening. Development organisations as they increasingly address climate change are a little more positive, but are again majoring in guilt. Guilt may increase the market share of fair trade goods or ethical products but stops short in terms of the global transformation needed. Environmental groups are now beginning to realise the importance of faith based approaches and bodies like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and The Sustainable Development Commission have been trying to stimulate developments of this nature.

Evangelist Jim Smith writes that ‘when faced with poverty, we are easily overcome by guilt or resignation. These reactions are quite understandable when faced with the enormity of the problem, but they must not be allowed to dominate us. On the contrary, they must be faced and overcome, if there is going to be any genuine advance in the battle against poverty.’ When confronted by the impact of climate change on the poor, we cannot even live, let alone act effectively with such a weight of guilt on our shoulders.

Dr John Stott writing in relation to world poverty explains that ‘it is not God’s fault, nor is it the fault of the poor, nor is it necessarily our fault. We become personally culpable only if we acquiesce in its continuance.’ This approach is also applicable to climate change, as individuals we have not contributed all the greenhouse gases, much was caused by our forefathers and by decisions we have not been party too, but in our globalised world we have all contributed to some degree to the problem through our lifestyles and as part of a consumerist economy.

So while it is not all our fault we must repent of our sins albeit many committed in ignorance, and then commit to changing our lifestyles, even if for many of us that will be a gradual rather than an immediate process. We can additionally through intercessory prayer confess and ask for forgiveness of sins on behalf of our communities and nations.

The theology of forgiveness of sins or selfishness; through which Christ in His death on the cross took all our sins onto Himself is I believe key to addressing the issue of climate change. As Northcott writes; it is this love of God that ‘makes it possible to reflect on past moral wrongs, which have occasioned the present atmospheric emissions of climate-changing gases, without passing judgement. For only such knowledge is able to redeem present industrial humans from the sense of being trapped by the actions of their ancestors, and from guilt at the extent of their own

17 Jonathon Porritt in forward to Ian Bradley, God is Green, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990), vii.
18 WWF-UK and the Sustainable Development Commission, Sustainable development and UK faith groups: Two sides of the same coin? (Godalming, Surrey: WWF-UK and SDC, 2005).
present contribution to the problem.’ Then it frees us to judge past wrongs as wrongs, but allow their perpetrators and their victims to be liberated by the cross and resurrection to become agents in the redemption of the earth and its inhabitants.  

It is well established from history that a genuine spiritual revival within the Church and among Christians have been truly transforming both internally and in wider society, this flows from the freedom from the guilt of sin or selfishness, gratitude as a result and a deep desire to serve the purposes of God through love for Him in expanding the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ through Christ. In Britain the eighteenth century ‘Evangelical Revival’ or ‘Great Awakening’ led to a huge effect not only in changing the life of the church but in having a great and long lasting effect in transforming the morals, institutions and laws of society. This included the abolition of slavery, schooling for poor children, the establishment of maximum working hours in factories and the establishing of mission societies like CMS which led to transformation in the various societies around the world to which they went. For example in the Indian Empire missionaries worked against widow-burning, infanticide, temple prostitution and the caste system.

William Wilberforce the British parliamentarian who dedicated his life to the fight against slavery and other social evils was at one point told that his campaign was hopeless for according to his acquaintance the whole British and world economy depended on the slave trade, without slavery the world economy would simply collapse along with the livelihoods of those throughout Britain bringing much misery. Change of this nature would be impossible! Thankfully we know Wilberforce despite the odds did not give up and the slave trade was abolished in the British Empire and eventually slavery itself. However, I find it interesting that similar arguments are used against action to combat climate change! We are told that pollution and fossil fuel dependence are essential to our world civilisation; it will hurt the economy or people’s lifestyles too much to change to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, it is simply impossible to do. Just as in Wilberforce’s day there were those that denied slavery was harmful to those it involved and fed misinformation, today there are similar efforts to deny climate change and its harmful effects on the most vulnerable, despite similar overwhelming evidence to the contrary. I believe it will therefore take those similar in attitude to Wilberforce and his colleagues: God inspired, Holy Spirit empowered, courageous and stubborn Christians to address the crisis of climate change.

It is not the first time humankind has caused environmental damage and social injustice through their disregard of God given limits and laws in society, coupled with greedy economics. For in chapter 24 verse 5 Isaiah tells out that ‘the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant’. A similar message is found in the period leading up to the Hebrew exile to Babylon in other prophetic books of the Old Testament as ‘the Hebrew Prophets suggest that the burdens which greedy kings and merchants placed on Israelite households and lands in the latter years of Israel’s tenancy of Canaan

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caused the droughts and spreading deserts which afflicted not just Canaan but the whole region of Mesopotamia from the eighth century BC.  

It is notable that prophets such as Isaiah also gave out a message of hope that if the people turned back to God and His ways there would be a healing and restoration of both the people and the land’s fortunes as he promised them in 2 Chronicles 7: 12-14. However, in the book of Nehemiah we read that this restoration also required an effort on behalf of the people, for while God’s blessing and protection may have been upon them, the people themselves had to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the temple, their homes and to replant the land despite considerable opposition, danger and difficulty. In the environmental crisis of our times ‘Jesus is Sustainer. He is committed to His creation and will not abandon it’; just as He was then, if we return to God and His ways we can tackle climate change and its impacts but as throughout history it will require the efforts of God’s people to play an active part in God’s greater purposes.

The call for Christians to get involved in climate change mitigation; through personal lifestyle changes as well as through campaigning for societal change is to some degree quite straightforward once one has a basic understanding of the issues involved for Western churches. However, living in Bangladesh I have been giving a lot of thought to what kind of message the Bible can offer to a Bengali believer who might be living on the coast watching his fields first become salty to farm and then disappear as sea levels continue to rise. He may also be facing greater storm surges as cyclones increase in power and sea levels rise, or greater and longer flooding during the monsoon and all these hazards arising through no action of his own! If God is Creator and the gospel is ‘good news’ for all humanity surely there is a message of for him or her also?

Firstly prayer to God must be part of the natural response of a Bangladeshi Christian, however in response to climate change this would not be primarily a prayer of repentance but a cry of deliverance from the actions of those in the Western world, in the style of Psalm 43 verse 1 in which the writer cries: ‘Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men’. Or in words of Former US Vice-President Al Gore: “If you believe in prayer, pray that people will find the strength to change (in response to climate change)”.

Those who are a little less vulnerable in developing countries and with contact to the West, often through donor organisations or inter-church relationships automatically follow this by advocating for justice on behalf of their members and countrymen. This is very much a prophetic role, as a prophet means being: Someone who sees clearly - a ‘seer’; a watchman who looks out for danger, a person who forth-tells the future; someone who calls people to account on behalf of their selfish behaviour; an individual who can read the signs of the times; and a person whom the Holy Spirit can

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26 Dave Bookless, Planetwise: Dare to care for God’s World, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 66.
use to give instructions in the way of God.\textsuperscript{28} It is of no coincidence that environmentalists have sometimes been dubbed ‘secular prophets’ on account of their role in highlighting damage to creation and its consequences.\textsuperscript{29} The Bishops of the Church of Bangladesh have been very active in this respect, speaking at every opportunity when visiting the USA, Britain and other developed countries, in the hope that their partners may heed their prophetic words and advocate for climate change mitigation on their behalf or corporately in partnership with them.\textsuperscript{30} For the churches around the world must put their structures to good use to enable the Christian prophetic voice to be heard around the world and if Christian hope is to be translated into action in respect to climate change they must move and move quickly.\textsuperscript{31}

Those suffering from the effects of climate change in Bangladesh and elsewhere may also pray for God’s provision for in for in the Lord’s Prayer Jesus instructs that we should pray for our ‘daily bread’ to Father God and St. Paul in tells the Philippians in chapter 4 verse 19 of his letter to them that: ‘My God will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.’ While in Matthew 6 verses 26-34 Jesus tells his followers not to worry about food or clothes for even as He feeds the birds and clothes the flowers generously, He will look after them. Dr. Paul Yongi Cho in the beginning of his ministry as a church pastor in the cold Korean winter, wrapped up in blankets because he had no heat he found himself in a predicament thinking: ‘If God was so good, if He had such great and abundant resources, why was I so poor? This is a question which many, especially in the developing world are still asking.’ Yet in answer to prayer his most pressing needs of the time for a chair, a desk and a bicycle were answered.\textsuperscript{32} Likewise new Christian and Church of Bangladesh member Derin Murmo said: “Before when I did ‘puja’ worship it was useless, there was no effect whatsoever, but now when I get sick I come to church, I am prayed for and I get healed.” Of course as St. Paul in tells Titus in chapter 3 verse 14 of his letter to him that: ‘Our people must learn to spend their time doing good, in order to provide for real needs,’ so sometimes the answer to the prayers of developing world believers should come through the faithfulness of Christians in the West.

The Bible gives much confidence to those who pray to God in the face of climate related hardship for in the book of Nahum it states that: ‘The Lord is good; he protects his people in times of trouble; he takes care of those who turn to him’. Isaiah 25 verses 4-5 where the prophet claims: ‘The poor and the helpless have fled to you and have been safe in times of trouble. You give them shelter from storms and shade from the burning heat,’ is a further comfort to those at risk from extreme weather, disasters and social turmoil due to global warming. In the wake of a massive locust plague and severe drought devastating Judah\textsuperscript{33} God in Joel 2 verse 25 said: ‘I will give you back what you lost in the years when swarms of locusts ate your crops’ and while the effects of climate change are not connected to judgement of the local population as in Joel, I feel that there is a general pattern of God restoring the situation of His people. Furthermore throughout difficult situations as Psalm 46 verse 1-3 states so eloquently:

\textsuperscript{28} Barry Kissell, \textit{The Prophet’s Notebook}, (Eastbourne, East Sussex: Kingsway Publications, 2002).
\textsuperscript{29} Tim Cooper, \textit{Green Christianity: Caring for the whole creation}, (London: Spire, 1990), 103-144.
\textsuperscript{31} Paula Clifford, ‘All creation groaning’: A theological approach to climate change and development, (London: Christian Aid), 18.
\textsuperscript{33} New International Version, \textit{The NIV Study Bible}, (London: Hodder & Staughton, 1987), 1317.
‘God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths; even if the seas roar and rage, and the hills are shaken by the violence’. It is this God that through Christ came to walk on earth alongside us through all our difficulties and is still alongside us as John 14-27 teaches, through the presence of His Holy Spirit the Comforter, that helps all of us rich and poor to keep going despite difficult circumstances and leaves us with a deep peace and prevents our hearts from becoming troubled or fearful.

A Biblical example of God’s provision during a climate related disaster is told in 1 Kings chapter 17; of His provision of Ravens that initially flew to the prophet Elijah each morning and evening to bring him scraps of meat and the nearby Cherith Stream that brought him drinking water. This story develops to tell us that later Elijah was told by God to go to a widow and her son, poorest-of-the-poor and some of the most vulnerable within society and through a miracle Elijah causes her oil and flour supplies to sustain her family as well as himself until the drought ended.

In terms of climate change adaptation most pertinent are the case studies of Joseph in Genesis chapters 37-47 and Noah in Genesis chapters 5-9: Both had the future revealed to them by God, Joseph through interpreting the vision of pharaoh ruler of Egypt and Noah through God speaking to him directly, with Joseph being warned of a seven famine which may relate to a great drought in the ancient Near East beginning around 2200 BC and Noah being warned of a great flood. Both acted to make wise preparations and adaptations so that they and those whom they were responsible for survived these two natural disasters. While neither story is a perfect case study in relation to how to respond to 21st Century climate change and its impacts there are some important principles that can be extracted: Firstly when God reveals truth to His people regardless of whether it is through a direct revelation, second hand through somebody else’s dreams or through scientists He requires us to act faithfully in response to it; secondly we are taught to be agents of redemption for both those within the community of faith as well as for the wider community and even wildlife; and thirdly when we boldly act in the ways He leads us God will bless us and give us success despite the odds.

Following the examples of Joseph and Noah the Church must assist places and communities, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable to effectively prepare for future climate change events like sea level rise or floods, as well as adapt to effects of global warming such as increasing salinity in farm fields and a drying climate in Bangladesh. The Church of Bangladesh Social Development Programme is seeking to do this through disaster preparedness, in adopting new agricultural techniques such as floating gardens in the flood prone areas, by encouraging crops that can tolerate low rainfall in drought prone areas and planting shelter belts of trees along roadsides.

A final message of hope is as Christians we look forward to the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven as Ephesians 1 verse 10 puts it: ‘This plan, which God will complete when the time is right, is to bring all creation together,

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everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.’ Isaiah in chapter 65 verses 17-20 prophesies the promise from God that: “I am making a new earth and new heavens. The events of the past will be completely forgotten. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. The New Jerusalem I make will be full of joy, and her people will be happy. I myself will be filled with joy because of Jerusalem and her people. There will be no weeping there, no calling for help. Babies will no longer die in infancy, and all people will live out their life span.” Revelation Rev 21:2-4 confirms this future when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven promising that God will live with his people and that ‘He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain’.

Bishop of Durham Tom Wright explains that ‘if it is true that God intends to renew the whole *cosmos* through Christ and by the Spirit; acts of justice, mercy and peace, like the holiness of Christian living are proper, albeit partial, fitful and puzzling, anticipations of the future life of the resurrection. They are not lost or wasted but are signs of hope for world that groans in pain, waiting for its promised liberation’.35 However, although the church is like a ‘pilot plant’ it is not only a mere sign of things to come but ‘it offers the hope here and now of substantial healing in nature of some of the results of the Fall, arising from the truth of redemption in Christ’.36

So while like for the 1st century Christians and slaves in America this glorious future does offer a future hope that gives strength to endure current suffering due to global warming, it is not an escapist vision as it has firm implications for the present. For actions in climate change adaptation and of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions while a signpost of hope, also have eternal value and begin that redemptive process. I believe that this vision offers us a chance to get involved in climate change action optimistically and with a great sense of direction for it invites us to get involved in actions which have a guaranteed hope of success in the future, as well as giving us the ability to overcome situations currently threatening people and environment through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps uniquely in this time of great environmental crisis the Church has a hope in this vision, a counter to the hopelessness in society and answer to the despair of our times, as well as being good news that is applicable to all humanity both rich and poor.

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