

CHRISTIANITY AND
THE RENEWAL
OF NATURE

Creation, climate change and
human responsibility

Edited by
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The Ebor Lectures were conceived as a response to the growing need for theology to interact with public issues of contemporary society; they aim to promote public conversation and to contribute to the formation of personal decisions and collective policy-making in the economic, political and social spheres. This ongoing series of lectures is organized by York Minster (represented by the Revd Canon Dr Jonathan Draper), York St John University (Professor Sebastian Kim), York Institute for Community Theology (the Revd Richard Andrew), the Order of Carmelites (Fr Tony Lester) and the Churches Regional Commission (the Revd Liz Carnelley). Suzanne Parkes, coordinator of the Ebor Lectures, completes the committee. A relevant theme is chosen each year, and the lectures are delivered alternately at York Minster and York St John University between September and June. The combined annual lectures are published in book form to make them available to a wider audience. Our desire is to use these lectures as an instrument to promote serious thinking and reflection on contemporary issues from the perspective of faith. The lectures relate faith to public concerns including politics, economics, contemporary culture, religion and spirituality, society and globalization. They are also an ecumenical project which seeks to exchange insights between academic and religious traditions, and to build bridges between churches and other faith groups.

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Martin Redfern is a senior producer in the BBC Radio Science Unit where he has worked for most of the last 25 years. Before that he graduated in geology from University College London, joining the BBC as a studio manager. He has spent time as a science producer for BBC TV and as science news editor for the BBC World Service. Most of his work now is on science feature programmes for Radio 4 and the World Service, for which he has won many awards, including three from the Association of British Science Writers. In 2005 he was

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Clare Short was Secretary of State for International Development from 1997 to May 2003. She entered the House of Commons in 1983 as the Member of Parliament for Birmingham Ladywood, the area where she was born and grew up, and held the constituency until her retirement in 2010. Since 2003 she has been a member of the International Advisory Board for the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (GDAF) and in 2004 she became an Associate of the Oxford Research Group. Since 2006, Short has been a member of the Policy Advisory Board of Cities Alliance, an alliance of the World Bank, UN-HABITAT, local government and development partners committed to meeting the UN target to develop cities without slums. She is the author of *An Honourable Deception? New Labour, Iraq, and the Misuse of Power* (London: Free Press, 2004), which was awarded the title of Political Book of the Year by Channel 4.

Rowan Williams has been the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury since December 2002. In 1983 he was appointed as a lecturer in Divinity in the University of Cambridge, and the following year became Dean and Chaplain of Clare College. In 1986 he returned to Oxford, where he had completed his D.Phil., as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity and Canon of Christ Church; he was awarded the degree of Doctor

Contributors

of Divinity in 1989, and became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1990. In 1991 Williams accepted election and consecration as Bishop of Monmouth, a diocese on the Welsh borders, and in 1999 he was elected Archbishop of Wales. Williams is acknowledged internationally as an outstanding theological writer, scholar and teacher. He has written extensively across a very wide range of related fields of professional study – philosophy, theology, spirituality and religious aesthetics.

Introduction

SEBASTIAN C. H. KIM

‘When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.’

(Psalm 104.30, NIV)

The reality of climate change, and the challenges it presents to sustainable living, are perhaps the key issues facing humanity at present. The developing ecological crisis raises profound questions for theology, religious traditions, politics and economics. Governments, various NGOs and religious communities have been engaging with these issues and are actively involved in shaping both theoretical and practical responses. In particular, in recent years the Christian churches have made conscious attempts to deal with the problem in three ways: Christian leaders are attempting to make the Church aware of its responsibility in the issue; Christian groups and organizations are providing practical tools for action; and theologians are reshaping our understanding of theology in relation to ecological crisis.

First, as a collective effort of Christian churches, the World Council of Churches (WCC) initiated the ‘Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation’ programme (now ‘Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation’). In particular, the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, meeting at San Antonio in 1989, reaffirmed the stewardship of human beings over God’s creation and the importance of seeking justice in the sharing of land. Human beings have a ministry to be ‘guardians of nature’, as the San Antonio report affirms: ‘Because the earth is the Lord’s, the responsibility of the church towards the earth is a crucial part of the church’s ministry.’ The conference emphasized God’s mandate to human beings to ‘till it [the earth] and keep it’ (Gen. 2.15) rather than ‘to subdue it; and have dominion over’ it (Gen. 1.28). ‘Justice, peace and the integrity of creation’ has been a dominant theme for the ecumenical tradition for a number of years and has made a significant impact on the life of the churches. To bring about justice, human beings need to recover the role in creation given to them by God, which means reaffirming God’s creative activity

in and through ourselves as human beings. This is characterized as 'stewardship' and needs to be reinforced in the theology and ministry of the Church.¹ In the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen, which took place on 7–18 December 2009, the WCC mobilized the 'Countdown to Copenhagen'. It collected more than half a million signatures and conducted a bell-ringing and prayer campaign on 13 December. In a letter to the president of the conference, it stated that 'it will be a subject of justice and wisdom towards our planet and the entire good creation of God, to see the same promptness from the global community in responding to the climate change crisis, as the way in which it dealt with the financial and economic crisis', and concluded, 'Do not be afraid! Act now!'²

From the Catholic Church, the Vatican's Council for Justice and Peace hosted the Pontifical Council on Climate Change and Development in April 2007, inviting prominent scientists, environment ministers and leaders of various religions from 20 different countries. The main issue discussed at the conference was the balance between environmental concern for nature and the developmental needs of people. The participants called for the Vatican to focus on the ethical and moral challenges posed by climate change.³ In the recent Pontifical Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* ('Charity in Truth', 29 June 2009), the Catholic leadership has expressed its view on the issue of the environment. The encyclical emphasizes that the environment is God's gift to everyone, but that the Church has a particular responsibility to use it for the care of the poor. It also states that nature reflects the Creator and his love for humanity, but cautions against either seeing nature as something more important than human beings or treating it as the object of exploitation. It calls for 'renewed solidarity' to share natural resources between the rich and the poor and for 'responsible stewardship over nature', and insists that the Church in particular has this responsibility in the public sphere. The encyclical also emphasizes the importance of human ecology, in which our attitudes to other human beings and to nature are interconnected, and that the 'decisive issue is the overall moral tenor of society'.⁴

Meanwhile, among evangelicals, a significant step towards dealing with climate change was the statement made by 280 American evangelical leaders in January 2006 and entitled 'Climate Change: An

Evangelical Call to Action'. The signatories recognized the impact of climate change both on the poor and vulnerable and on future generations, and affirmed four principles: the reality of human-induced climate change; the devastating consequences of climate change for the poor; the responsibility of Christians on the basis of moral convictions; and the urgency of immediate action. On this basis, they called for Christians to 'make personal changes and rally action', and for policy-makers 'to make wise and moral choices' to protect God's world and its people.⁵

Second, it is very encouraging to see various Christian NGOs specifically addressing the issue of climate change. A Rocha (the name is derived from a Portuguese word meaning a rock) is among the most active international Christian groups working for the environment. Its activities are founded on commitments which include: faith in God who entrusts the world to the care of human society; research and education for conservation and restoration of the natural world; and working with local communities and in partnership with wider communities and individuals. A Rocha provides resources such as ideas for sermons, service outlines, material for children and young people, and group studies. Similarly, Operation Noah, Christian Ecology Link, Christian Aid, CAFOD, Tearfund, the European Christian Environment Network, and the Environment and Climate Change theme within Churches Together in Britain and Ireland provide web resources, printed materials, news updates and networking among those who are concerned. They also conduct regular conferences and workshops designed to encourage local congregations to get involved in promoting the cause. An increasing number of special projects are taking place within different church denominations and other faith organizations, such as the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, Ecological Buddhism and The Big Green Jewish Website.⁶ The strength of these movements is their practical suggestions for local religious communities and individuals to do whatever they can in their own situation, and these local initiatives are increasingly gaining support from the general public.

Third, alongside the growing practical concern with ecological issues, there have been theological discussions – led by Michael Northcott, Celia Deane-Drummond and David Hallman, among others – on such issues, providing resources and insights that contribute to the development of what is commonly called 'eco-theology'. Eco-theology

is concerned with 'the environment and humanity's relationship with the natural world' and seeks to 'uncover the theological basis for a proper relationship between God, humanity and the cosmos'.⁷ Michael Northcott insists that the environmental crisis requires a 'radical change to the predominant direction of human behaviour' rather than new technology and regulations. Although the latter are important, he is convinced that the issue is an ethical one, which demands 'recovery of a spiritual, moral and cosmological awareness of our place in the natural order', and that ethical teaching from religious traditions could contribute in a significant way to dealing with the problem. He sees a purely material and scientific reading of environmental issues as missing the point that redemption requires moral and spiritual conversion as well.⁸ Northcott emphasizes that the Hebrew Bible and the Christian doctrine of natural law offer significant insights into God's created order, an account of the interaction between human beings and the ecological order, and relations between these and God. A renewed examination of the Sabbath of the land and the *shalom* of the earth will show us our duty to preserve God's created order, since we are part and parcel of the whole system rather than above it.⁹ In her comprehensive study on eco-theology, Deane-Drummond discusses various theological attempts to relate ecology and theology, arguing that ecology is the 'universal vocation' for Christians and should be at the heart of Christian faith and practice. She insists on the importance of the biblical wisdom traditions of the Sabbath, which she regards as the ethos for eco-theology – 'living from the Sabbath is a reminder to the human community to live according to covenant responsibility' – and also helps us to approach nature with respect and humility.¹⁰

There have been an increasing number of publications on the Church's response to the ecological crisis, and ecology has now become an important item on the agenda of theology. Eco-theology has challenged traditional theologies and has not only given the Church and its ministry new and fresh insights but has also led to a re-examination of Scripture and the understanding of human beings and nature. Eco-theology has emerged as theologians have wrestled with several challenges. These include, first, the criticism of traditional theologies, which are accused of being anthropocentric (human centred) and androcentric (man – not woman – centred). As such they are accused of complicity in colonialism, environmental destruction

and the oppression of women. This is seen as largely due to the understanding of the creation narrative (especially Gen. 1.28) as affirming human – particularly male – domination over other beings. Second is the failure of traditional theologies to respond to the problems of the ecosystem, and their silence in the face of development and technology models which have been the main contributing factors to the present crisis. Third is the encounter with the people and philosophies of other religious traditions. Christian theologians have found deep insight among people of other faiths concerning the relationship between humankind and nature. This has brought to the fore the question of how and to what extent Christian theology can learn from the more integrated systems of other religions and indigenous spiritualities.

As I have briefly mentioned above, churches, along with other religious communities, have made considerable progress in approaching the current ecological crisis and are actively participating in addressing the issues in various ways. As a part of these endeavours, this volume has brought church leaders, theologians, scientists, media personnel, activists and politicians together to examine the roots and causes of this global emergency from a variety of perspectives and to look at the implications of the crisis for future sustainable living on the planet. The strength of this volume is that the contributors not only offer various perspectives from their own expertise, each making distinctive contributions to the issue, but also interact with each other's insights, demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of the problem. They call for religious communities to take the issue seriously and get involved in dealing with the problem through critical enquiry, open debate and practical action.

Rowan Williams starts by exploring God's glory and sovereignty over the relationship of human beings with nature. Showing that the language of redemption in Scripture often applies both to people and nature, and that both are in the hand of God, he further asserts that our task is to seek ways to preserve and nourish an integral approach to both human beings and their environment. For this, a proper use of intelligence is vital for dealing with the problem: God has given us the ability to change our situation, but more significantly, vision can renew intelligence, and faith can play a significant role in this process. Williams strongly contests the idea that God might somehow protect us from failure in our duty to care for the environment, and

insists that such a belief is unchristian and unbiblical. For him, according to Psalm 104, through the breathing of God (the sending of his Spirit) on creation, the face of the earth is renewed, which is the 'movement that carries our love and intelligence in the same direction, so that we can properly make answer for, be responsible for, our world'.

Tim Gorringer discusses the book of Revelation (especially chapter 8) in order to bring to bear relevant insights on climate change from a theological perspective. He identifies the problem of a development agenda that fails properly to consider the consequences, an agenda which has brought about the current crisis and which costs the whole inhabited earth. This, he believes, is largely an outcome of the distorted modern world view of technology and the market economy. After extensive study, Gorringer suggests that the text is not meant to predict the end of the world, but rather is imagining the 'destruction of destructive powers'. This destruction is what he sees as God's liberative judgement, which opens hope for the earth and humankind. He further insists that the texts provide hope based on faith and not merely on optimism, and that they also call for repentance and action in more concrete and practical ways.

Similarly, Mary Grey expounds Scripture to deal with the topic; in this case Luke's Gospel. She believes the Scriptures offer resources for change and reminds us of the sacred duty God has entrusted in human beings towards the environment. She identifies Luke's Gospel as providing insights for the discussion of climate change, and expands the passages from a liberation-theological perspective. Discussing examples of the effects of climate change on the lives of people in Rajasthan, north-west India, and in Palestine, particularly with regard to the problem of the shortage of water and land for cultivation, she suggests some lessons drawn from the study: the urgency of the matter, the call for perseverance and prayer, and the need for a sacrificial lifestyle, an attitude of hospitality and welcome, wisdom to meet the challenge, and the Spirit for wisdom and creativity. She concludes that Luke demonstrates the 'wisdom of creation' to 'inspire and guide us through this crisis into God's redeemed future for *all* created life'.

From the perspective of a journalist, Martin Redfern presents, using his wealth of experience and insight, some of the past and current debates relating to climate change. He asserts that climate change is

'the defining challenge' of the twenty-first century, and that it determines the quality of life and the very survival of future generations. He discusses some of the difficulties of the scientific community in establishing the reality of climate change and in convincing politicians to take action, and gives his own account of the effects of climate change in Antarctica to make clear his point that global warming is a reality which is supported by overwhelming scientific evidence. Redfern sharply criticizes tendencies towards reductionism among scientists and towards dualism among religious people, and calls for an integral approach to the problem by different members of society. He concludes with a quotation from a meditation by Shantanand Saraswati.

John Sauven, a Greenpeace activist, challenges readers about the urgency of climate change and calls for immediate action from all. Employing various statistics and scientific discoveries, he argues that climate change is a far greater problem for us than the economic crisis, particularly in view of its urgency and its effect on future generations. Sauven particularly criticizes governments that spend huge sums building up weapons systems, people's habitual consumption of natural resources, and the obsession with development, growth and progress at the cost of natural resources. In order to achieve environmental sustainability, he suggests, there should be more innovation to maximize production at the same time as minimizing the use of natural resources. He urges us to develop a culture of habits which lead to less consumption and stronger global institutions to deal with ecological issues. He insists that the issue of climate change is neither a scientific nor an economic one but a 'human challenge', and he presents some practical guidelines, including the need to define the levels of consumption and emissions which are sustainable; to avoid using short-lived disposable goods; to develop a new model of ownership to be responsible for sustainable development; and to consider the poor as a priority concern.

Both Michael Northcott and Clive Pearson discuss the public role of the Church in tackling the issue and provide some practical suggestions. Northcott argues that the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have failed, due to the employment of neoliberal market techniques for the management of emissions reduction. He suggests that the Church's task is to offer a theological critique of this approach and to promote a

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spiritual theology of cooperative action for the common good. Pearson, on the other hand, propounds his thesis that active engagement with ecological issues lies at the heart of doing theology in the public sphere. To do this, he discusses the ideas put forward by various contemporary theologians, especially John de Gruchy, Michael Northcott and Robert Schreiter, and also examines the cases of Tuvalu in the Pacific in its problem of rising sea level and Australia in its government's responses to the Kyoto Protocol.

In the final chapter, Clare Short presents insights drawn from her rich experience in politics. She sees the present context as decadent, and calls for the building of a 'new, more moral, sustainable and generous civilization'. For that we need to recapture 'hope and energy in order to create the world of justice and peace'. She gives examples from many parts of the globe and suggests some practical ways of improving the current 'unequal and divided' world. Short particularly emphasizes the importance of local community initiatives, and the urgency and scale of the human action needed to respond to the enormous problem we face in contemporary society. The format of this chapter follows a different pattern from the others, including questions and answers.

Responding to the ecological challenge is part and parcel of the role of the Church, which has a responsibility to face this overwhelming crisis. And as it carries out its responsibility towards the creation as part of its ministry, the Church should establish sound theological perspectives on the issue, formulate practical steps for church members, and actually engage in changing the situation. This volume aims to support the above endeavour of the Church, together with the wider community, for the 'renewal of nature', or as the psalmist expressed it, 'renewing the face of the earth'.

1

Renewing the face of the earth: Human responsibility and the environment

ROWAN WILLIAMS

Some modern philosophers have spoken about the human face as the most potent sign of what it is that we can't master or exhaust in the life of a human other – a sign of the claim upon us of the other, of the depths we can't sound but must respect. And while it is of course so ancient a metaphor to talk about the 'face' of the earth that we barely notice any longer that it *is* a metaphor, it does no harm to let some of these associations find their way into our thinking; because such associations resonate so strongly with a fundamental biblical insight into the nature of our relationship with the world we inhabit.

'The earth is the LORD's', says the twenty-fourth psalm. In its context, this is primarily an assertion of God's glory and overall sovereignty. And it affirms a relation between God and the world that is independent of what we as human beings think about the world or do to the world. The world is in the hands of another. The earth we inhabit is more than we can get hold of in any one moment or even in the sum total of all the moments we spend with it. Its destiny is not bound only to human destiny, its story is not exhausted by the history of our particular culture or technology, or even by the history of the entire human race. We can't as humans oblige the environment to follow our agenda in all things, however much we can bend certain natural forces to our will; we can't control the weather system or the succession of the seasons. The world turns, and the tides move at the drawing of the moon. Human force is incapable of changing any of this. What is before me is a network of relations and interconnections in which the relation to *me*, or even to us collectively as human beings, is very far from the whole story. I may ignore this, but only at the cost of disaster. And it would be

