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# MISSIONAL FOCUS

**Missional Justice**

**EQUIPPING GOD'S PEOPLE FOR MISSION**

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# MISSIONAL FOCUS

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# Contributors

## ANDY KINGSTON-SMITH (GUEST EDITOR)



Andy grew up in Chile and started working life as a solicitor. He then spent three years as a missionary in Bolivia with his family until they returned to the UK where he embarked on a master's degree in Global Issues in Contemporary Mission. In 2008, Andy joined the faculty of Redcliffe College lecturing and co-ordinating the programme on justice issues in contemporary mission. In 2015, he joined the staff of ForMission as Postgraduate Programme Director. Andy contributed to and co-edited the book *Carnival Kingdom: Biblical Justice for Global Communities*, has co-written a newly-published training programme on biblical justice with International Justice Mission, and contributed to *God's Justice Bible*, which was published in 2016. He is co-founder, together with wife Carol, of the jusTice initiative and they both write a blog viewable at [Justice, Advocacy and Mission](#).

## MARIJKE HOEK



Marijke is a writer, pastoral worker and guest lecturer. She co-edited the books *Micah's Challenge: The Church's Responsibility to the Global Poor* (2008) and *Carnival Kingdom* (2013). She contributed to Micah Challenge, the global church's campaign to hold governments to account on delivering the Millennium Development Goals and is a regular contributor on BBC Radio Manchester. Marijke is currently networking in Manchester with community, entrepreneurs, philanthropists and artists to develop new shoots.

## BOB KIKUYU



Bob Kikuyu is the Global Theology Advisor at Christian Aid, guiding the organisation in ensuring that its policies, processes and practices are developed and reviewed through a reflective process using theological input. He is also responsible for global church relations, helping Christian Aid to build and participate in movements for change. A graduate of the University of Nairobi and the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, he has previously worked as the Executive Director of EduKenya, an NGO that provides transformational education in the slums of Nairobi. He also served for 11 years as the Senior Pastor of Lifespring Chapel in Kenya. He continues to live in Nairobi, Kenya with his wife and has three adult children.

## ROBERT BECKFORD



Robert is an interdisciplinary activist-scholar researching/transforming across and within diverse media (television and radio documentaries, radio drama, written texts and music production). He is engaged in knowledge exchange/restorative justice projects with public and private sector partners, international aid agencies, local government, arts organisations, and broadcast media in the UK and USA. He has won numerous international awards for his work, including a BAFTA, Jamaica Diaspora Award and a Black Pentecostal Scholar's Award.

## MERETHE TURNER



Merethe's main field of interest is preventing abuse and misuse of power in missional leaders, advocating for a trauma-informed approach. In November 2022 she graduated from the MA programme at ForMission College after spending her final year researching the topic. She worked for many years as a Youth Minister as well as Community Pastor, where she helped transform a neighbourhood in Gloucestershire into a thriving community. After living in England for ten years, Merethe is now back in her home country, Norway, with her husband and their two-year-old son. She recently joined the postgraduate tutor team at ForMission College.

## CAROLINE POMEROY



Caroline has been the Director of Climate Stewards since 2013. Climate Stewards provides advice and online tools to help individuals, churches and other organisations to measure, reduce and offset their carbon emissions. They also help people understand more about climate change and creation care. Climate Stewards is part of the A Rocha worldwide family. Caroline has an MSc in Climate Change Impacts and Sustainability, having previously worked as a Chartered Surveyor. With her husband Henry she spent five years in Ghana and Rwanda working on community and environmental projects with Tearfund and other NGOs. More recently she was an environmental advisor to the Diocese of Bath and Wells. She is a churchwarden of her village church and loves cycling, walking and gardening.



# Editor's Note

Welcome to the latest issue of *Missional Focus*, the fourth publication of ForMission College's innovative journal. This edition explores some of the key issues of (in)justice experienced today, and considers how as a Christian community we are to understand these and respond missionally.

In the previous edition covering 'missional youth', it was noted how many young missional believers showed a strong awareness and passion for global issues, inequalities and creation care. These concerns, together with racial injustice, are considered here, provoking us to ask deep and challenging questions of today's missional leaders.

Marijke Hoek reflects on a biblical vision of shalom within the context of the many economic and social injustices found in the contemporary UK. The cost-of-living crisis, and growing economic inequality with its resultant political turmoil, should prompt the church to provide an ethical and just voice, advocating for those marginalised and victimised.

Our attention is broadened in Bob Kikuyu's article, to consider aspects of contemporary global injustice. Our dependence on a healthy environment affects us all, but the realities of climate degradation do not affect us all equally: the poor and the young are disproportionately affected, both now and in the future.

One of ForMission's MA graduates, Merethe Turner, has produced an excellent dissertation exploring how leaders need to mitigate against the risks of perpetrating abuse, or inadvertently upholding abusive structures, by doing the 'inner work' of healing and character development. Her article, a short summary of her research, is a timely reminder of the importance of just and ethical leadership.

Our two interview-style articles on racial and environmental justice raise serious and challenging questions for us as we participate in the *missio Dei*.

Finally, I review Tracey Skillington's book on intergenerational justice within the current climate crisis, and briefly consider what theological connections may be drawn. May books such as this serve as a 'wakeup call' for the church, at a time of spiritual yearning as the young, especially, seek answers to some of life's deepest questions.

I hope you will be informed, and challenged, by the content of these articles. Our prayer is that you might capture not only the sorrow of manifest injustice but also see the hope of Christ expressed through His people, witnessing today to the vision of the coming new heavens and new earth.

**Andy Kingston-Smith, Guest Editor and Postgraduate Programme Director, ForMission College**



# Seeking Shalom

**BY MARIJKE HOEK**

When Jeremiah instructs God's people in exile to seek the peace and prosperity of the place to which He has brought them and pray for it, he reminds them that their destiny is interwoven with that of the wider community: if the city prospers, they too will prosper (Jeremiah 29: 4-14).

Instead of lamenting their plight (Psalm 137), He focuses them on His purposes in exile. This small community was to hold out a vision of wellbeing for the wider society and bring *shalom* in the place of brokenness and hopelessness.

'*Shalom* is human flourishing with God the Creator and Redeemer at the centre of our embodied existence, living heartily as complete persons of soul and body in right relationship to God's good creation and its blessing', writes Naugle.[1] While they feel dislocated in Babylon, the command to



seek the wellbeing is followed by the instructions to invest for the long haul. Besides prayer, they are to build, settle, grow and produce families. It echoes the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28 and 2:15.

### Faithful stewardship

We are called to seek peace, soundness, wholeness, security, and fullness of life, in which our relationships with God, with each other and the nonhuman creation are to thrive. Our witness and work will always take shape in a specific context scarred by injustices and the absence of *shalom* in multiple facets: social, spiritual, emotional, physical, cognitive and material.

How do we live well in the light of such grand commissions? Delving into the riches of biblical themes enables us to understand our responsibilities. The Lord requires us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him (Micah 6:8). As He is just and merciful, we should, likewise, emulate Him in our relationships. 'Mishpat' (justice) needs to be pursued (Deuteronomy 16:20), and lived out in relational values such as treating people equitably (e.g. Leviticus 24:22; Zechariah 7:10f). Israelite society was founded on the expectation of righteousness ('*tzadeqah*', e.g. Proverbs 12:28). This concept involved 'acting rightly' and being in 'right relationship' with God and with each other. Hence '*tzadeqah*' and '*mishpat*' are frequently placed alongside one another (e.g. Job 29:12-17). It concerns our daily life, how we relate, who we relate to, the character of our vocation and the kind of society we build. 'Learn to do right; seek justice; defend the oppressed; take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow'. It's worship (Isaiah 1:17).

Our stewardship is meant to reflect God's gracious and just reign. In *To Change the World*, Hunter (2010) speaks of a faithful presence, 'For Christian believers, the call to faithfulness is a call to live in fellowship and integrity with the person and witness of Jesus Christ. There is a timeless character to this call that evokes qualities of life and spirit that are recognisable throughout history and across cultural boundaries.'<sup>[2]</sup> The Spirit is a powerful and inspirational companion enabling us to live well, 'to each manifestations of the Spirit are given for the common good' (1 Cor. 12:7).



Seeking shalom, learning to live righteously, doing justice; these are action verbs.[3] Our worship takes place on the altar of daily life in which we discern God's will (Romans 12:1-2). It shapes the character of our households, professions and communities. It may mean hosting a refugee in your home; creating apprenticeships for those who need a second chance; offering your judicial expertise *pro-bono* to those lacking access to legal aid; helping the homeless access housing; paying your cleaner a living wage; inspiring your class to advocate on behalf of their asylum-seeking fellow pupil; teaching NEETs to code; dedicating a significant portion of your company's profit to the vulnerable; starting a local campaign that awakens consciousness of racial prejudice, and more.

### Reweaving communities

In *Generous Justice*, Keller (2012) describes 'doing justice' as living in a way that generates a strong community where people can flourish and, in particular, to go to places where shalom has broken down, where weaker members are falling through the fabric, to repair it. We reweave by weaving ourselves into it. Reweaving shalom means to sacrificially thread, lace and press your time, goods, power, and resources into the lives and needs of others.[4]

Numerous injustices are found in contemporary Britain. Like the biblical concept, being 'poor and needy' denotes economic, judicial and/or social vulnerability. It is experienced through a range of conditions due to forced migration,



unjustly low wages, extortionate loan schemes, erosion of legal protection for the weak, discrimination, violence by people with evil intent and courts favouring the powerful, just to name a few. Consider the institutional racism in the Windrush scandal emanating from the hostile environment policy, unlawful benefit sanctions, withholding protection from victims of human trafficking or modern slavery, employers paying below the minimum wage, extortionate payday loans, the rise of the working poor, and more.

Societal injustices are many and varied and may have typical regional or local expressions. These fractures and flaws in society call for a compassionate reweaving of community life that restore the capacity for people to thrive. All expressions of apparent need provide an opportunity to forge links with those who often feel deeply alienated, even deserted. We can all be good neighbours who accompany the vulnerable in their quest to access justice or who provide new

opportunities where horizons have closed. Such friendships transform a community by initiating something new amidst the social processes that lead to hopelessness and poverty. This is the idea of justice rooted in relationship, expanding the spaces where people can flourish, as Wariboko (2014) asserts in *The Charismatic City*. [5]

### Initiating newness

The strength of our communal life is key. The variety of experiences and gifts causes us to listen more deeply and to create an emancipatory setting in which all have agency and a voice. New relational forums have emerged that address the systemic dynamics that prevent people from thriving. The Poverty Truth Commissions in various cities are made up of people who experience poverty, decision makers, and organisational, civic and faith leaders, enabling a deeper and empathic listening.[6] These relational networks of converging civic relationships and friendships across social, spiritual, and political groups



enhance the insight and wisdom to effect structural change.

Furthermore, campaigns are an effective way to address injustice. In response to the rise of in-work poverty,[7] Christians started local Living Wage campaigns, leading to a significant rise in Living Wage employers. In Manchester it led to policy change when the City council became a Living Wage employer and partnered with businesses and organisations aspiring to become an accredited Living Wage City, a move that has lifted tens of thousands of households out of poverty. The emergence of the Churches Mutual Credit Union that adopts fair borrowing practices exemplifies an effective joint voice with those with lived experience, which raises public awareness, educates the public conscience, critiques unjust policies and practices, and models a new moral economy.[8] The current cost of living crisis following the Covid pandemic caused a rapid emergence of new moral local economies. The paradoxical phenomena of food waste and food poverty are being countered in new community groceries where redistributed surplus food is made available, while people can also become part of a learning community offering a curriculum of life skills, such as debt advice, counselling, on the job training as well as opportunity to explore faith.[9] Such creative grace furthers *shalom*.

### Honing our lens

The above requires us to observe our worlds closely, intentionally forming new relationships and starting new conversations. We need to listen better to those who suffer injustice, and so adjust our optics. Honing his lens, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well, 'We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.'[10]

This line of sight forges a new critical consciousness as it brings lament to

the core of our mission. Life ought not to be like this. How we are to live as a community is shaped by cries that offer a profound critique of the status quo. Lament is undoubtedly connected to the new heart and Spirit we have received (Ezekiel 36:26). The capacity to grieve is the beginning of real criticism, according to Brueggemann (2001), 'Bringing hurt to the public expression is an important first step in the dismantling criticism that permits a new reality, theological and social, to emerge.'[11]

### Conclusion

Jeremiah focuses God's people on God's purposes in exile. This is a time for seeking the *shalom* of the city. A time of profound spiritual renewal. God's purposes concern a comprehensive restoration. Within a fractured society His Spirit creates a new household, a hospitable community that listens intently, moves emphatically, and works with people who are disjoined from a constructive base and sustainable way of life. Salvation is comprehensive; all of human life and wider creation are the focus of God's redemptive plans. Our prayers, lament, and supplications express yearnings for His divine intervention in interrupting the present and reconfiguring new possibilities. As we read the texts through the lens of new creation, and shape our vocations, we are sustained by hope as we dedicate ourselves to this divine command to seek *shalom* and to do justice.

### End Notes

[1] Naugle, D.K. (2008) *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p.18.

[2] Hunter, J.D. (2010) *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: OUP, p.197.

[3] Wright, C.J.H. (2006) *The Mission of God*. Nottingham: IVP, p.367. The Old Testament combination 'righteousness/justice' is at the heart of ethical teaching and Wright suggests the nearest English

expression would be 'social justice', with the warning that this cannot be seen as a static phrase as the Hebrew twin theme is dynamic, i.e., things you do.

[4] Keller, T. (2012) *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*. London: John Murray Press, p.177.

[5] Wariboko, N. (2014) *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.28-40, 108.

[6] <https://mhp.org.uk>; Grinnel, A. (2021) *Wisdom Cries Out: Public Theology from the Margins*. Temple Tracks 2. William Temple Foundation; <https://povertytruthnetwork.org>.

[7] See the report on the current steep rise of in-work poverty by Williams, M. (2022) *A Biblical Response to Working Poverty*, The Jubilee Centre.

[8] <https://churchesmutual.co.uk>.

[9] <https://communitygrocery.org.uk>; <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do/pantry>.

[10] Kelly, G.B. (1991) 'The Life and Death of a Modern Martyr' in *Christian History Magazine* edition 32. <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/life-and-death-of-a-modern-martyr>, accessed 8/5/2023.

[11] Brueggemann, W. (2001) *The Prophetic Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress, p.12.



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# A Theological Reflection on Loss and Damage

**BY BOB KIKUYU**  
Global Theology Advisor,  
Christian Aid

## Introduction

Christian Aid recognises climate change is already changing our planet and affecting our relationships with each another. Even with effective mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change there will be increasing 'Loss and Damage' which will disproportionately affect poorer people in poorer countries. As part of Christian Aid's deepening work on 'Loss and Damage,' we invite church leaders, congregations and others motivated by Christian faith to explore what 'Loss and Damage' means from a theological perspective.

## Creation as a gift for human flourishing

The biblical account of creation describes a clear relationship between human and non-human creation. Regrettably, this relationship has been dominated by the abuse of creation by humans. When one sees us as made in the image of God and sees creation as the handiwork and expression of God, it may very well be seen that in abusing our relationship with creation we are also abusing our relationship with God.

Genesis 1 reminds us that there is something extremely important that God cares deeply about when people are engaged with all of God's creation and are serving as God's image bearers... allowing creation to flourish, and within that

humankind to flourish as well as they carry out this call to care for God's world.[1]

## Creation in crisis

More than half of the population of the Philippines lives in disaster-prone areas, and the country is now considered the third most vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change in the world. Twenty of its largest cities are situated on the coast and are at risk of rising sea levels and extreme climate conditions. Between 1990 and 2006, damages caused by disasters in the Philippines amounted on average to roughly 0.5 per cent of annual gross domestic product per year. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has noted: 'In a future warmer world, there is a high likelihood of more frequent heavy precipitation events and more intense tropical cyclones.'<sup>[2]</sup> Because of these extreme weather events, countries have increasingly focused on the question of how to address the effects of climate disasters and consequences. 'The phrase "loss and damage" refers to permanent loss or repairable damage caused by the manifestations of climate change, including both severe weather events and slow-onset events, such as sea level rise and desertification. It also refers to economic or non-economic harm, such as loss of life, livelihoods, ecosystems, or cultural heritage.'<sup>[3]</sup> Loss and Damage is caused by a failure of humans.

## A failure of our biblical mandate – Stewardship

Judeo-Christian values have been

hailed as being critical in the spurring of successful economic models and work ethic, especially in what is considered the Western world. Value for work and a sure reward for one's labour are important components to this. Most critical may be that the soul of Mankind is in a crisis. We have been lured by what Walter Brueggemann would describe as Pharaoh's narrative, where production is key and where we need to produce more bricks at all costs. This drive for production has occasioned the need for cheap labour, which has seen many Western companies outsource factories in poorer countries. Brueggemann says, 'It is entirely possible that slavery was instituted because of Pharaoh's desire for cheap labour. Indeed, we may set it down as a truism that where there is great wealth, like that of Pharaoh, we will find this type of exploitation of labour makes surplus wealth possible.'<sup>[4]</sup> It has also occasioned the need for more natural resources to be used up and for humans to reach deeper within the earth's surface. In the process, humans have also been sending up increasing amounts of harmful substances into the atmosphere. The environment has been scarred beneath and suffocated above. We need to review our orientation, yet 'Judeo-Christian values do not require a new logic for economics but instead, an enriched view of the human person that widens the scope of self-interested behaviour to include the well-being of others.'<sup>[5]</sup>



### **A failure of our relationships**

'Loss and Damage' is firstly a matter of justice. When fully considered, those living in poverty are more likely to experience 'Loss and Damage' because they are less likely to be able to adapt to a given climate impact. They have neither adequate tools nor resources to plan for climate crises, also considering that the challenges they face are often multi-dimensional. Yet, at the same time, they are also far less responsible for contributing to climate change.

'Loss and Damage' is essentially a recognition of human failing. It is what happens when climate change cannot be mitigated or adapted to. There have been several attempts at this, yet one high-level climate conference after another seems unable to actually meet the level of expectations, especially for the most affected nations who have contributed least to the problem. 'Loss and Damage' is an expression of humans further breaking creation, and of dislocating our relationships with each other. It could point to the possibility that we too have suffered a form of moral 'loss and damage'.

### **Hope and recovery**

'Loss and Damage' by definition means that we are past the critical point of mitigation and adaptation. But it should not suggest a paralysis of intent and action. If indeed it is because of misunderstanding of our role, hope should lie in reclaiming that role and actively seeking to live it out. We must continue with our efforts in mitigation and adaptation. This is what we could call repentance by seeking to right what is wrong. It can be viewed considering the Ephesians Chapter 4 Principle – putting off the old self and putting on the new; we stop what wrong we have been doing and start doing what is right. If, as someone said, the next best time to plant a tree is now, equally the next best time to change course and do the right thing is now. We need to raise the STOP sign with conviction. The statistics and the data are often pessimistic especially about our trajectory towards the 1.5C pre-industrial level global warming mark. We must believe that our generation can be a change agent for the climate. It is probably in times of greatest threat that we may have the greatest opportunity. We need to be creative and prayerful in how we go about engaging these opportunities to speak and act prophetically.

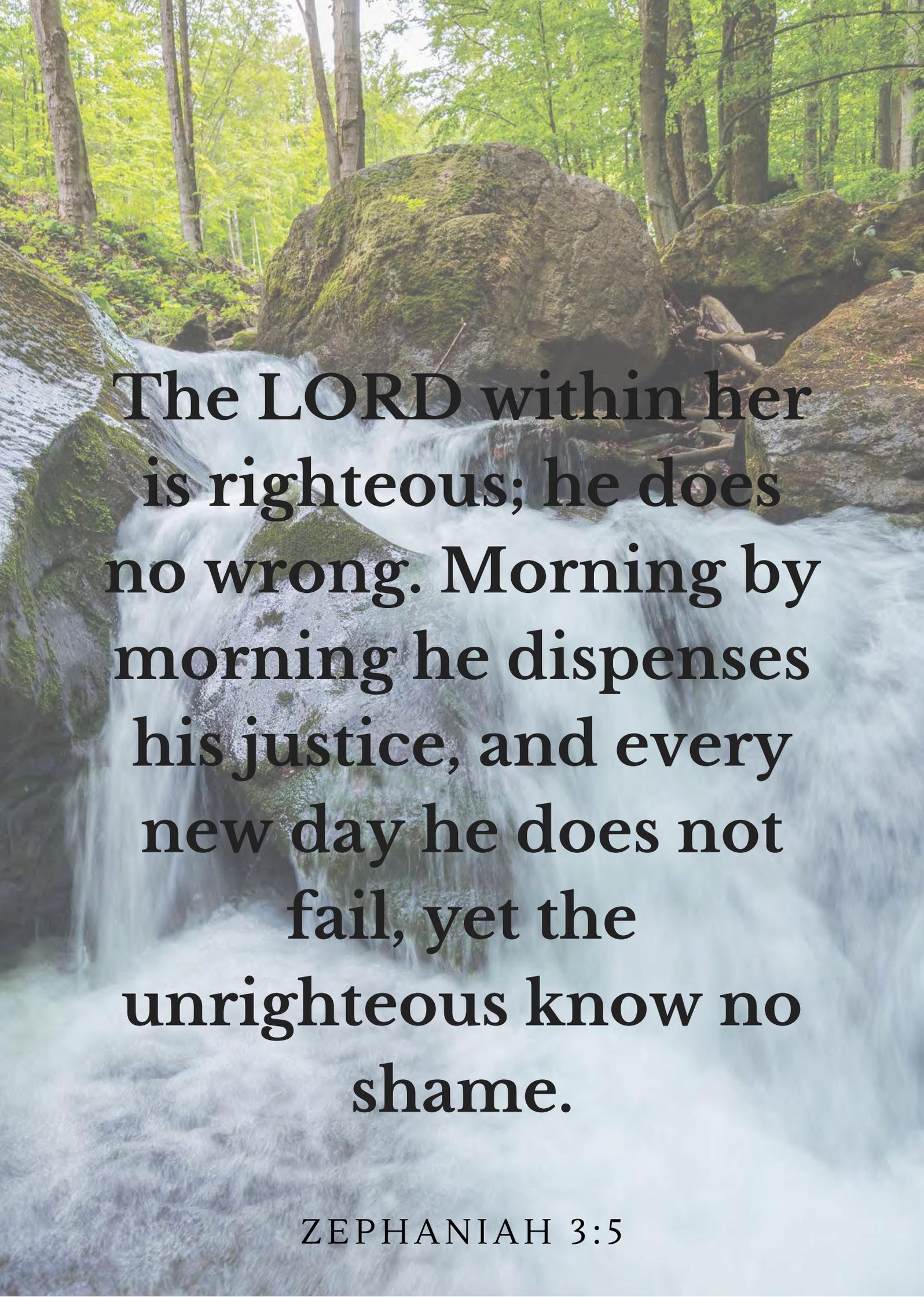
We have limits. The planet has limits. And sometimes we must go beyond the limits of daily speech and communication to demonstrate the severity of the climate crisis. For as long as we are able, we must hold on to hope and demonstrate our hope with action.

### **Considering justice**

'Loss and Damage' means an almost irreversible turn for the worse for many who are already in poverty. One annual crop or a herd of cattle wiped out by drought may take several years for a subsistence farmer and his or her family to recover. What would reparative justice look like for someone who through this has lost their land, home, or livelihood? What can we do beyond this to heal our relationships with creation and with each other?

### **Restitution towards the environment**

We have taken so much from the land that it feels natural for us to continue hacking away at virgin forest land to make room for more arable land. It all sounds justified when populations are increasing and the demand for food is multiplying.

A photograph of a waterfall in a forest. The water is white and frothy as it falls over several large, moss-covered rocks. The surrounding trees are green, and the scene is bright and natural.

**The LORD within her  
is righteous; he does  
no wrong. Morning by  
morning he dispenses  
his justice, and every  
new day he does not  
fail, yet the  
unrighteous know no  
shame.**

ZEPHANIAH 3:5

But it is important to be aware of the need for balance in the ecosystem. We should therefore consider restitution to the environment, giving back to it as it has given to us. It is possible given the right understanding as seen in the following example: 'Kenya has surpassed the 2022 minimum target of 10 per cent tree cover to achieve 12.13 per cent.' The Kenya Vision 2030 blueprint set a goal for the country to increase the area under forest to 10 percent by 2030 and sustainably manage natural forests for environmental protection and enhanced economic growth.[6]

### Reconciliation is critical in 'Loss and Damage'

Most people would consider the logical outcome of 'Loss and Damage' to be the due recompense for those in negative balance. Indeed, those who have been the most affected and have been the least complicit in the climate crisis are justified to expect so. Yet the conversation on compensation often gets stuck because there seems to be no agreement for who takes responsibility and for how much. Justice is delayed in the back and forth as lives continue to be affected in the ongoing climate crisis. But there can be more than that. A theological reflection around this would suggest that 'Loss and Damage' needs to go beyond recompense and reparations. It needs to consider reconciliation for the enablement of just communities. It is then that we can speak of the redemptive actions of restitution and reparations.

When reconciliation is pursued, we can repair our relationships with fellow humans: We have said that 'Loss and Damage' is a matter of justice, where some have not been considerate of others in their actions which have led to the climate crisis. Reconciliation gives us a pathway to the restoration of relationships. Reconciliation allows us to talk with each other and find ways and means in which the harm is acknowledged without cause for further division. But more than anything else, reconciliation opens the door for those aspiring just communities to walk in solidarity with the common goal of being reconciled and healed with creation.

Through reconciliation we can renew our relationships with creation. It does not take away the need for restitution towards creation, but it builds on those efforts. If indeed creation is groaning and longing for liberation through being subjected to abuse by humans, then reconciliation should strive to bring a song to creation through the renewal of our relationship with it. A new relationship with creation should help us to see creation not *apart from* humans but *together with* humans. It is not about exploitation of the environment but how we work with and within the environment in a mutually beneficial way.

In conclusion, this theological reflection emphasises the gravity of the current situation but also

suggests and inspires pathways that we can follow to mobilise people and resources in building just communities that will both mitigate against the climate crisis as well as seek justice for those most affected by it.

### End Notes

[1] Dr Andrew Abernathy, <https://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/44467>.

[2] [www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/time-for-climate-justice-11-loss-damage-protecting-most-vulnerable-october-2013.pdf](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/time-for-climate-justice-11-loss-damage-protecting-most-vulnerable-october-2013.pdf).

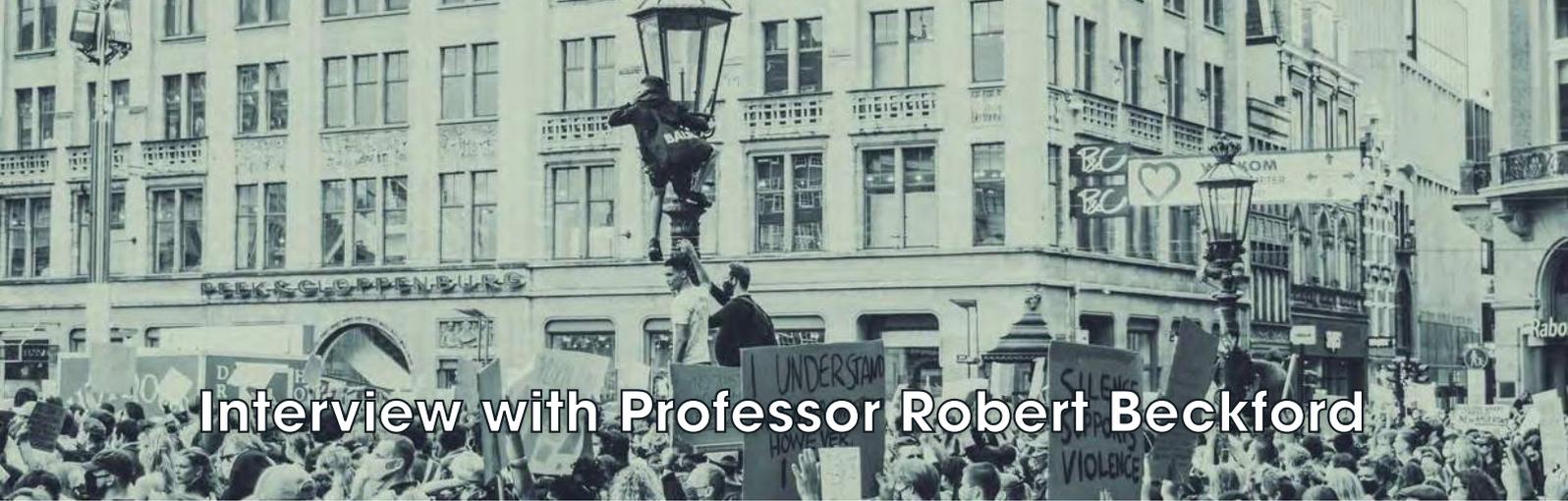
[3] [www.americanprogress.org/article/the-meaning-of-loss-and-damage-in-the-international-climate-negotiations](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-meaning-of-loss-and-damage-in-the-international-climate-negotiations).

[4] [//churchanew.org/brueggemann/thoughts-on-labor-day](http://churchanew.org/brueggemann/thoughts-on-labor-day).

[5] De Vries, B.A. (1998) *Champions of the Poor: The Economic Consequences of Judeo-Christian Values*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

[6] [www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001447088/kenya-makes-strides-in-tree-and-forest-cover](http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/national/article/2001447088/kenya-makes-strides-in-tree-and-forest-cover).





# Interview with Professor Robert Beckford

**PROFESSOR ROBERT BECKFORD WAS INTERVIEWED BY MISSIONAL FOCUS CO-EDITOR REV. CAROL CLARKE IN JULY 2023.**

**Carol Clarke (CC):** Professor Beckford, thank you for agreeing to take part in this *Missional Focus* issue, focusing on the theme of 'Missional Justice'. Can you start by telling me a little bit about yourself?

**Prof. Robert Beckford (RB):** I am an activist scholar, working interdisciplinarily to address, confront and overturn injustice in African mainland and diaspora communities. My scholarship takes place across a range of media. I have to date written eight monographs exploring the interface of religion, ethnicity, and social justice. My most recent work is an action-research project on decoloniality, music and theology (*Decolonising Gospel Music: A Revolutionary Theopraxis*, Bloomsbury 2022).

I am also a BAFTA Award-winning documentary filmmaker. My films have contributed to increasing public awareness of issues of corporate malfeasance in Africa, the reparations movement and anti-racism in Britain. My most recent media projects are an independent film project funded by the Movement for Justice and Reconciliation (50k), exploring the meaning of reconciliation in response to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade ('After the Flood: The Church, Slavery and Reconciliation,' 2022).[1] Also, a BBC World Service documentary on the environmental impact of colonialism on Barbados (2022).

In 2021, I completed a three-year collaborative £600,000 ESRC research project on 'Austerity Britain' with the University of Coventry and in Autumn 2022, I hosted the first national symposium for global majority peoples in Britain advocating climate and social justice.

**CC:** What are the key challenges surrounding racial injustice in today's world, particularly in 'multicultural' (as well as more homogenous) settings in the UK?

**RB:** There are two fundamental issues to be resolved. One is the arrogance by white theology. What I mean by that is the unwillingness to address its complicity with racial terror, and then, racial capitalism or slavery. Consequently, there is a cultural ignorance, and a lack of moral courage to do the right thing. I am speaking specifically about the church.

Secondly, another barrier of concern is black people in mixed churches who are frightened of raising issues of racial injustice because they would prefer to be liked rather than being God's instruments of prophetic justice. An example of this is the unwillingness to transform theological education so that antiracism is built into the syllabus and pedagogy.

In summary, I am saying on the white side there is an arrogance and on the black side there is a view of not wanting to upset the status quo. Another way of describing this is the continuity of colonial thinking of Christian theology, church and life. It is about the continuation of colonial thinking of the theological establishment and church life. A good book on this is Willie James Jennings' *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (2020).

**CC:** What is the legacy of Black Lives Matter (BLM), and are there lessons we can learn?

**RB:** We often forget that the primary role of the prophet is to speak truth to power. Most churches have corrupted the practice of the prophet by reducing it to clairvoyancy or just looking into the future. For me, BLM was a prophetic utterance; a call to dismantle structural racism. I would say, it took BLM to hold to account London City Airport for polluting black communities. Equally, underlining the institutional racism in the police force.

**CC:** What can we learn from this?

**RB:** I would say that my sense is, neither theology nor the church have learned a great deal from the movement and are currently irrelevant in the struggle for racial justice. What this means is that our public witness is weakened because we have neither positive example nor meaningful policies to offer as an alternative.

I think there are three things that are required:

- Repentance from the sin of racism.
- There should be a consideration for restorative justice to heal the wounds caused by racism in Christianity.
- Then thirdly, I would say the need to institutionalise new practices of inclusivity and neutrality.

**CC:** How do we conceptualise equality and identity, and how can we formulate a robust theological and missional response to instances of real and imagined discrimination that are all around us?

**RB:** I would say that is a big question, but the way ahead is to decolonise mission and that is a much more complex discussion. We have to acknowledge that what we know as Western Christianity is fundamentally a racist tradition. Black inferiority is inscribed in the discipline from when Immanuel Kant folded whiteness in the being of Christ. Black inferiority was integral to the Christian mission in the West Indies, and only enslaved Africans who became Christian figured out that it was not possible to love God and be racist. Racist Christianity has not been undone in modern British theological thought or church life.

There are very few theological institutions that make a centrepiece of Christianity's collusion with racism – there are almost no courses or modules. Yet somehow, white Christians are supposed to think they are receiving a theological education when the most pressing question about equality in Christ is suppressed. Racism is not about individual prejudice; it is about the structures of theological thought and how they scaffold discrimination in mission and church life. Until we get to the root of this in teaching, preaching and mission, we will continue to ask the same questions repeatedly about racism in Christian missions without addressing the actual root cause.

**CC:** How would you summarise the key points of your argument?

**RB:** I would say that we need to rethink what the Bible says about mission in relation to the history of colonialism. We must develop new concepts of missions that respect and empower diverse communities. And finally, we need to practise decolonial or inclusive and reciprocal missional strategies. Sadly, there are very few examples of this in Britain.

#### **End Note**

[1] <https://www.mjr-uk.com/aftertheflood.html>.



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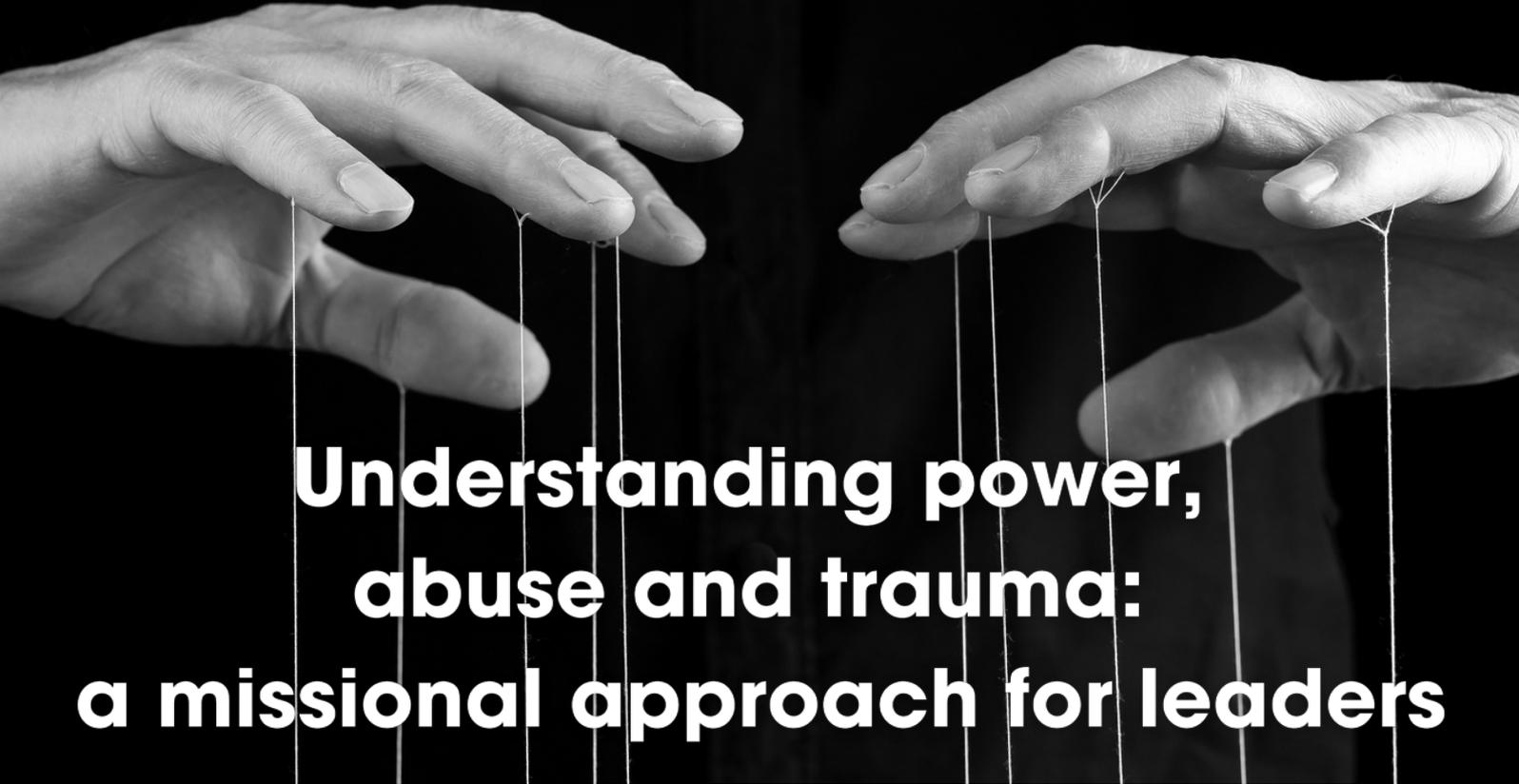
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# Understanding power, abuse and trauma: a missional approach for leaders

BY MERETHE TURNER

There was a time I would have been shocked and in disbelief about the stories that have been coming to the surface the last few years about abuses from different evangelical leaders and churches. I would have avoided talking about it to ‘non-Christians’, terrified of placing the church in a bad light, in case it would push people further away from God. We have all heard about Catholic priests who have sexually abused boys, protecting the system rather than the children concerned. What these recent investigations are demonstrating is that abuse does not just happen to children, neither does it just happen in the Catholic church. It happens in *our* churches to people of *all* age groups, and we too are part of a system that protects the organisation and offenders rather than the victims. Up until now, some of these stories might still have felt too distant. However, for some, the reality of it might have hit closer to home when investigations around Mike Pilavachi and Soul Survivor were revealed; worship leader Matt Redman recently attesting to the reality of it (Shepherd, 2023).

Or maybe you are like me; someone who has first-hand experience of being abused by a church leader. However, even I, as a victim did not

realise the extent of the abuse I experienced until a few years later when I learnt about *power dynamics*, *abuse* and *trauma*. I am no longer shocked, and it no longer brings me despair to read these stories. Actually, rather ironically, it gives me hope. Hope that something better and healthier might emerge. We cannot do anything about a problem if we do not know it exists, nor dare to acknowledge it. What if this is God at work, bringing justice and standing up for the hurt and broken? What if this is God’s way of ‘saying’: ‘I see you. You are not alone. This is not okay!’ This is an opportunity for the church to be born again into something healthier. That should be what just and ethical missional leadership is about: demonstrating that this is not acceptable, nor should be tolerated, but instead striving to create something better. The issue of abuse goes deeper than individual leaders. There is an underlying systemic and cultural issue that allows it to continue. So, how do we prevent abuse and misuse of power in missional leaders? How can we be leaders who are ethical and just? This was the topic of my dissertation in my recent MA Missional Leadership studies at ForMission College. This topic is vast and clearly cannot be discussed in detail here. However, one important starting place is to help educate missional leaders around the issues

of *power*, *abuse* and *trauma*, and encourage them to become increasingly self-aware of how it relates to them personally.

One important aspect to understand about power is how it can be found at both micro and macro levels. As individuals, we have power through the words we use or don’t use; our physical appearance (tall and muscly vs small and skinny); emotional (do we show empathy, or do we get angry?); absence (do you turn a blind eye?); spiritual (no one can argue against God!) or specialised knowledge acquired through position or title such as a prophet, just to mention a few. Although the concept of missional



leadership has an extensive focus on servant leadership, I have found that people often overlook the fact that they still carry power because of their title. We might also forget that there is also power in the spiritual gifts and labels we give people, even though we might not be leading in an official capacity. For example, will the word of a prophet often carry more weight than the administrator when it comes to sharing what God is doing in someone's life?

In addition, power dynamics are also found at the macro level, in our church culture, theology, language, the norms of our society and in a shared world view. These are often hidden powers. One way of understanding this power is, adopting Hiebert's suggestion, asking ourselves who is benefitting, and who is being oppressed by this biblical teaching or theological perspective (Hiebert, 2008, p.226)? An example of this type of power is how some communities/churches may disown you if you do not follow their interpretation of what the Bible says. In such circumstances there is little 'real' choice if you are relying on the people in that community for your survival (e.g., your family and social network is part of it).

Where there is power, there is also the potential for abuse. It may start when a person crosses an individual's boundaries, for their own gain (Collins, 2019, LOC2205; Diederich, 2017, p.53). However, this may be difficult to discern in a context where the focus is on building God's Kingdom. Dr Diane Langberg, an expert in the field of church abuse and trauma, argues that abuse happens when, firstly, we silence people's words, choices, feelings and thoughts; secondly, when relationships bring fear, shame, isolation, humiliation, betrayal and disconnection; and, thirdly, when we leave people feeling hopeless, powerless, useless and ineffective (Langberg, 2020, pp.7-8). This can be summed up as losing one's agency, autonomy, connection and/or control. What may not be appreciated is that long-term exposure to the above, can

cause trauma in the same way as one-off events, such as suffering a car accident. This form of abuse is known as *complex* post traumatic stress disorder.

It may not be widely understood that trauma is not about what happened in the event itself, but what happens *inside the body* (both at the time and afterwards). When our body senses a threat, such as fearing a disconnection in a relationship, it can go into *survival mode*, also known as being outside our *Window of Tolerance* (Siegel in Kolber, 2020, p.72). When our body is in survival mode the nervous system becomes dysregulated and goes into fight, flight, freeze or fawn responses where the logical part of our brain shuts off. In practice, this can be manifested in anger, becoming controlling, overly people-pleasing, becoming emotionally overwhelmed and paralysed from taking appropriate action, to mention just a few. How our bodies react in survival mode is outside of our control and it is akin to passive responses such as being unable to say 'no' (Scaer quoted in Collins, 2019, p.173). That is why it can be so hard to recognise when abuse is happening, both for the victim and also for any leader who might abuse, even unintentionally. Putting it another way, when our body is in survival mode it might be *impossible* to scream, run, fight, walk away or *even say no*, and instead we do what we are told. The body is reacting on autopilot, doing what it believes is the safest option at the time, based on what has worked best in the past. For many who have lived long-term in *survival mode*, especially in childhood, a person of authority or power can easily trigger a *survival mode* response, because the body *remembers* how it has been treated previously by authority figure. The problem of trauma is that the body is unable to recognise that the threat from the past is over and therefore re-lives it as if it is happening in the present.

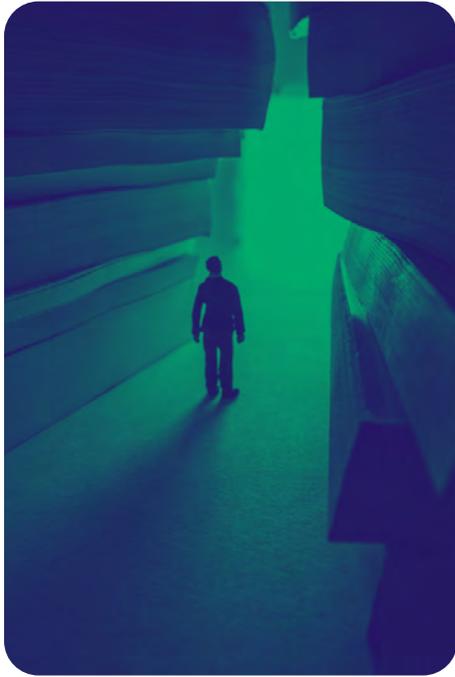
There are two aspects for a leader to be aware of when it comes to understanding survival mode. The first is, as previously discussed, how we can unintentionally abuse people

simply by virtue of the power we carry, if we do not make it *feel safe* to say no. Secondly, if as leaders we operate outside our *Window of Tolerance*, we might unintentionally become abusive because the body might resort to unhealthy leadership styles, such as demanding perfectionism, bullying, or trying to control people and outcomes. This is why it is so important to gain awareness of how we react *when our body feels threatened*. Unfortunately, receiving a no to a request or experiencing disagreement can be perceived as a threat to our nervous system, as it can feel like a threat to the connection of the relationship.

To create healthy, just and ethical leaders we need to address this issue from a variety of angles. We need leaders who understand power and recognise the ways they carry it, both through their character, status, and appearance as an individual, but also through the culture and theology they have adopted, and then promote through their words and actions. Leaders need to understand what abuse is, the tactics that abusers use and the harm they might be causing, even when done with good intentions. We also need to let go of some of the naivety of how we might think we know what an abuser looks like, or that they do not exist among us, because they do. As Scripture warns us, there are wolves in sheepskin.

It is crucial that missional leaders become trauma-informed, both to develop understanding of how we, even with the best of intentions, might actually harm others, rather than bring healing. Being trauma-informed will help us to create communities where it feels safe to set boundaries and raise concerns. It is also important to be trauma-informed from a personal perspective. Leaders need to learn to recognise when they are acting outside of their *Window of Tolerance* and may be resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms. An important question to ask oneself is, how do I react when I receive a no to a request? Do I keep on pleading until someone says yes? Do I take it as personal rejection and become angry? Or maybe I become manipulative by saying things such as, 'If you don't help out, we cannot run this group, which means people will not experience Jesus.'

Unfortunately, these responses are all too common. At that point, there is danger of creating a slippery slope resulting in serious harm. Or we allow the creation of a culture that allows abusers free play. Leaders need to learn the tools to help them get back into their *Window of Tolerance*. Unfortunately, for many, myself included, our faith can become a way to justify, bypass or ignore the signals our body is making about our needs, through our emotions and sensations. Learning about power, abuse and trauma needs to become an important part of missional leadership training as we practise loving our neighbour as ourselves and as we share the good news of Jesus.



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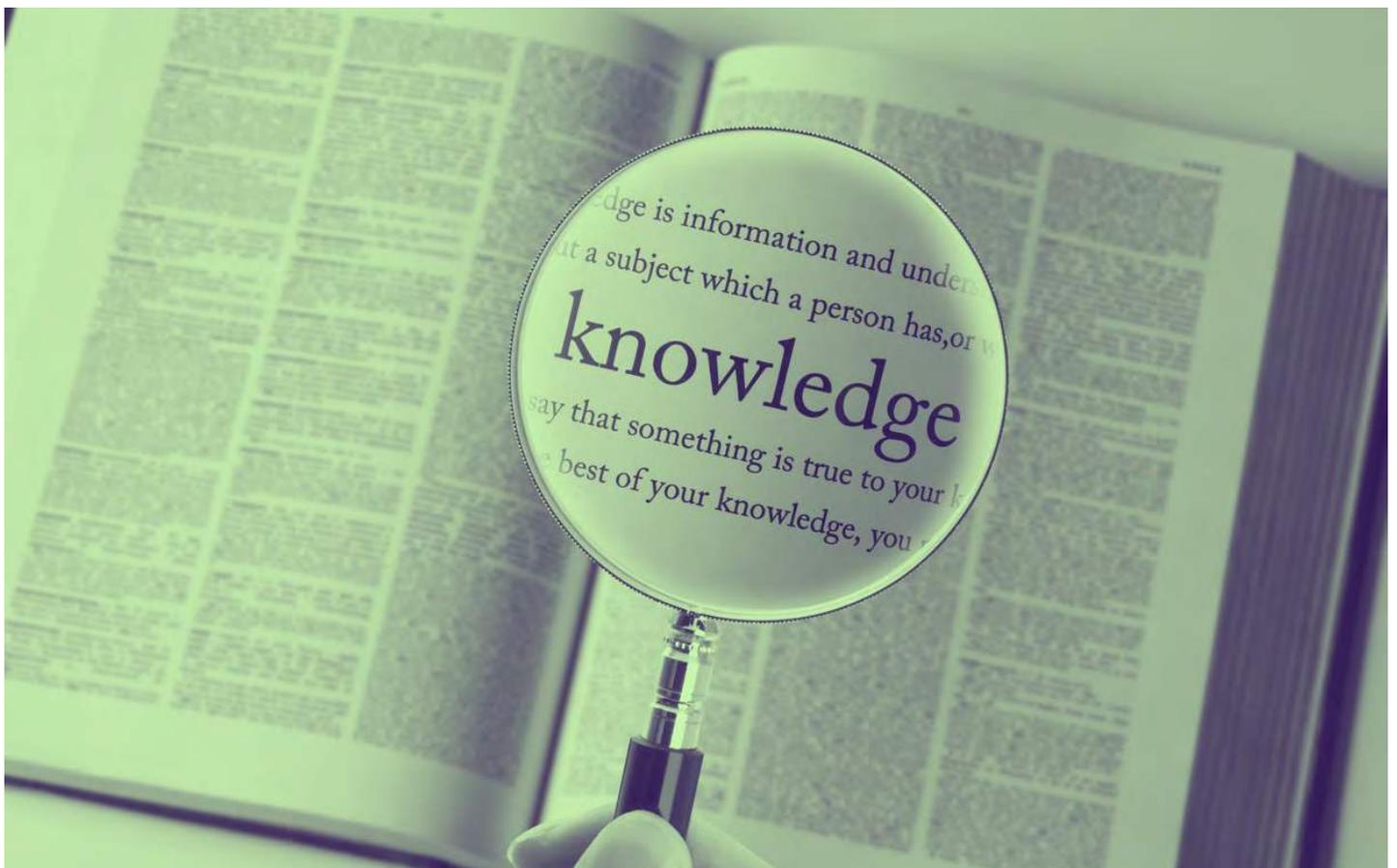
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**To act justly  
and to love  
mercy and to  
walk humbly  
with your God.**

MICAH 6:8



# Justice and creation care: An Interview with Caroline Pomeroy

**CAROLINE WAS INTERVIEWED BY MISSIONAL FOCUS GUEST EDITOR ANDY KINGSTON-SMITH IN JUNE 2023.**

**Andy Kingston-Smith (AKS):** Thanks so much Caroline for talking to us. I wanted to tease out from you two aspects. One was the justice implications around creation care, and more specifically the work you are doing with carbon off-setting and the projects you have been involved in.

Secondly, thinking through missional or mission-related application as well; some of the theological perspectives that would be helpful to think through.

Please can you tell us about yourself and Climate Stewards.

**Caroline Pomeroy (CP):** I am Director of Climate Stewards. My background is that at university I studied Land Economy which qualified me to become a Chartered Surveyor. I love Geography and the outdoors, sailing, walking and cycling.

My husband and I had previously worked in Ghana with Tearfund, with environmental projects and setting up a little environmental NGO and doing some study on the theology of creation care. I then did a master's degree in climate change, practice and sustainability.

I also worked with the diocese of Bath and Wells as an environmental officer, based in Somerset at my local diocese part-time alongside climate change groups.

**AKS:** To get the ball rolling, could you give us some thoughts to what you see as some of the big issues of climate injustice today?

**CP:** I think probably the top one is those who have done least to cause it, bear the brunt of the consequences. The extracting and burning of fossil fuels. We, in the West, are benefiting from that legacy. By and large, people who are being hurt the most by climate changes are those in the Global South. Most of whom have had absolutely no benefits from the process of industrialisation.

So, there is huge inequality, and we are living on the back of that. Most people in poor countries are less able to adapt and they are seeing a bigger impact from climate change because of geography and extreme weather. They have few resources and less resilience to adapt to these climate impacts.

The impacts are unequal and many of us in the West are rich enough to make choices as to how we do things. The general trend is that the more money you have, the bigger your carbon footprint, which is a strong correlation. So, people who can afford to fly around the world on holiday generally do so. In the UK people who have the lowest footprint tend to be the poorest people, because they cannot afford to do a lot of things that I might take for granted.

**AKS:** I would like to get your thoughts around the biblical missional imperative for creation care; why should Christians really care? One of the big arguments is that there are many other priorities that we should be involved in. How would you respond to the attitude that this is not a top priority and what would be a biblical imperative for focusing on it?

**CP:** Right through the Bible there are many passages that tell us that we

should care for creation... from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis 1 and 2, Adam and Eve are called to tend the garden, to serve and preserve, to be good stewards. At the end of Genesis 1, verse 28 says that humans have been given dominion over creation. This has often been misquoted or misinterpreted as 'ruling over' creation. But dominion is not domination, and I think we have wrongly dominated the Earth. Dominion is about a loving, kingly type of 'rule' and Jesus the Servant King is the best example of how to exercise this dominion.

I have a Green Bible in which there are over 2,000 passages written in green relating to the environment - water, land, air, animals, plants etc. I think this tells you that the Bible is a very earthy book. But we've tended to ignore that aspect of it. We generally focus on the vertical relationship between us and God, and the horizontal relationships between us and other people, largely ignoring our relationship with the earth. The Bible describes the relationship between God, humankind and creation, as a triangular one - we are all interdependent.

So, we are all inter-connected and inter-linked. We can see that around us; we can also read that in the Bible, but we tend to filter out earthy things and focus on 'spiritual things'. That is a failing we have inherited from a certain theological viewpoint which separates spiritual from earthy, material things; actually, they are all important to God. At the end of the Gospel of Mark, we are told to preach the good news to 'all creation' (Mark 16:15)!

**AKS:** Tell us more about Climate Stewards and specifically the concept of carbon offsetting and how it works from a Christian perspective.

**CP:** Climate Stewards helps individuals and organisations to measure, reduce

and then to offset their carbon footprints. You could describe offsetting as compensation - we, who can afford to have a carbon-hungry lifestyle, consume more than our fair share and emit more carbon dioxide than the world can afford. By offsetting we can compensate for this by repairing the damage and helping those who are suffering as a result of climate change.

The average Brit has a carbon footprint of 8-10 tons of carbon dioxide per year, equivalent to about 45 London buses' CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This CO<sub>2</sub> is adding to the blanket of global warming gases around the atmosphere, causing the Earth's temperature to rise. If I lived in Rwanda, my emissions would be about 0.1 tonnes per year. If I lived in Qatar, it would be nearer 30 tonnes. So, it is a huge range, but you can see that the richest countries are burning more fossil fuels. To keep ourselves on a safe trajectory as a planet, each person would have a carbon budget of about 2 tonnes.

So Climate Stewards encourages people first of all to measure their carbon footprint by using one of our online carbon calculators. Then we encourage people to think about how to reduce their footprint, perhaps by travelling less, or eating less meat or buying second-hand. The general principle is to constantly be asking ourselves if we can live more lightly on the Earth - Do I need to buy this? Can I buy a greener version? Can I simplify that? Can I use less of that? If I am making a journey, can I walk or go by public transport rather than car or plane? Can I combine trips and travel less?

We then encourage people to pay an amount of money which compensates for those emissions. This is used to fund our partner projects in the Global South which help communities to not only lock up carbon (as trees grow) and reduce emissions (by using cleaner technologies) but also to adapt to the impacts of climate change. These include tree growing projects with churches, schools and communities; water filters so families have access to clean water without boiling; and clean cookstoves which save fuel and improve health. We work closely with our partners to help them count and measure the carbon savings and make sure the projects are sustainable.

**AKS:** How do you answer critics who might

say it is more important to focus on reduction or simplification rather than offsetting, as I suspect many might be tempted to look at offsetting as a way of justifying the continuation of their high-emitting lifestyle.

**CP:** You are right - this is a risk! George Monbiot described offsetting as 'papal indulgences' - you pay others to do your dirty work for you but make no effort to reduce your own emissions; this is greenwashing.

However, in our experience the people and organisations who come to us really are concerned about their carbon footprint. They are doing whatever they can reduce it, but they recognise that they won't get to zero in the current fossil-fuel-based economy and want to be responsible about their unavoidable carbon emissions. So they choose to compensate for their emissions by supporting Climate Stewards' offsetting projects.





**AKS:** As a separate issue, there is much climate disinformation and/or fake news. Where do we turn? It can be so confusing.

**CP:** There is some very deliberate disinformation. If you read certain media and social media outlets you will get very skewed views. The BBC generally now provides clear, accurate information, and there are lots of other good websites and podcasts – take a look at our [Resources page](#) for some suggestions.

**AKS:** What advice would you give a college like ForMission to help us to move in the right direction?

**CP:** I agree with Katharine Hayhoe, a Christian climate scientist, who says that the most important thing we can do about climate change is talk about it. Start having these conversations in our church, our small groups, children’s work and everywhere you can think of! It should become a normal part of conversation for Christians to be talking about climate change.

Quite apart from the biblical calling to care for creation out of love and obedience to God, I also think it is huge missional opportunity. People notice when Christians take action on climate change. Recently, I was running a local biodiversity day for families in my village churchyard.

A woman came to visit the church, noticed what was going on and asked about it. She said, ‘This is amazing... I have never seen a church doing anything like that.’ She gave me £10 for the project!

It’s also important to remember that individual behaviour change alone will not solve climate change. We need governments to take bold action and create incentives for businesses, colleges, churches and individuals to make good choices for a cleaner, more sustainable world. And to make that happen we will need to raise our voices by voting and lobbying those in power, so they know that we care.

**AKS:** At ForMission, what should be our top three priorities in this area?

**CP:** The big elements of an organisation’s carbon footprint tend to be travel and energy usage. I know that at ForMission you’ve already done a lot to cut down on your travel, but there will always be more you can do to encourage staff and students to switch to public transport, liftshare, walk or cycle.

In terms of buildings, you could ask your landlords about considering switching to a renewable energy provider, making your building more efficient by managing heating and cooling carefully, adding insulation, cutting out draughts, and getting ready to move away from oil and gas

when boilers, cookers etc. need replacing. You could also look at the food you serve (less meat, more veggie), using recycled paper and finding ways to cut out single use plastic.

And finally, it’s great that you are talking to me about this topic, and integrating creation care into the curriculum so that students will be actively engaging with this and adopting it as a normal part of their ministry.

### **Recommended Resources**

Resources that may be useful in your own response to this article.

- [Operation Noah](#) and the [John Ray Initiative](#) both offer lots of good resources on climate change, divestment, and the Christian call to care for creation.
- The [Eco Church website](#) contains church surveys, more resources, and all you need to know about registering for Eco Church.
- Many denominations (including the [Church of England](#) and the [Methodists](#)) have useful resources about how to respond to climate change.



# ‘Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice’ by Tracey Skillington

Book Review by Andy Kingston-Smith

*Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice* by Tracey Skillington (2019)[1] sets out the challenges confronting us in the future, as experienced in the present and resulting from past human actions/inactions. In particular, she addresses the issue of intergenerational justice as it connects with the impacts of climate change and related environmental crises and offers reasoned approaches for working towards the safeguarding of the planet for future generations.

Dr Skillington is a research-based academic at University College, Cork[2] with an extensive portfolio of published papers, articles and books on topics including human rights, climate change, intergenerational justice and cosmopolitanism. *Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice* is not written specifically with a faith audience in view. Skillington does not address what Christianity, or any major faith/religion, may contribute to the issues she raises. However, this does not disqualify her writing from being taken seriously by people of faith, and I will attempt to offer key reasons why I think it is worth reading.

Skillington’s main idea is essentially that we need to

work towards ensuring that future generations inherit a world less environmentally ravaged than what the current trajectory is leading us to. This necessarily touches on interrelated issues of economic, political and social justice. It predicated on the goodwill principle of each generation leaving a better present for future generations to inherit, thereby ensuring fairness, equality and justice is experienced by as much of the community of humanity as possible.

The book is 144 pages long and arranged in seven chapters addressing themes such as present legal and political frameworks, rights and responsibilities of various actors (e.g., youth, corporations, national/state/public bodies) and suggestions for extending cosmopolitan approaches transcending the self-interest and protectionism of national borders, whilst advocating global approaches for tackling global problems. It is available on Perlego [3] in electronic format (page numbers are not cited below).

### **Book Structure and Key Content**

Following the Introduction, the first chapter offers ‘a critical diagnostic of the societal present as marked by inequalities that have been progressively expanding over



time' (Skillington, 2019). It highlights how relations between generations may be understood in the context of domination. Youth, and even more acutely, the generations to come, are (and will increasingly become) the ones on whom the burden of environmental degradation falls. Older generations of today are, arguably, enjoying the peak benefits derived from lifestyles formed by a neo-liberal economic order that has intensively capitalised on the exploitation of fossil-fuels.

Chapter 2 moves on to evaluate the discourse on climate change and reflect on how this perspective of domination and wanton disregard of the needs of future generations has been side-stepped, noting how youth movements have challenged 'settled convictions of prevailing short-term policy thinking' and challenged governments 'to extend principles of justice to newer subjects (e.g. future generations) and to problem areas exacerbated by declining climate conditions' (Skillington, 2019).

In chapter 3, the author asks whether future generations can have rights, as current legal frameworks define and interpret them. In the next two chapters she illustrates the practical ways by which young adults have used legal remedies in seeking redress through the courts. This development has influenced the evolutionary understanding of rights frameworks

to overcome existing technical barriers which currently limit the rights of future generations. Skillington highlights how creative and innovative legislation, attitudinal changes by the judiciary and influential public bodies, and more rigorous enforcement of existing laws against perpetrators of environmental injustices are bringing about important changes.

In her final chapter, Skillington offers a hopeful account of how a deeper framework of intergenerational justice may help develop 'pluricentric approach[es] to climate justice... in keeping with the basic principles of intergenerational solidarity celebrated in the founding moments of the United Nations (e.g. UN Charter, 1945)[4] and the European Union (e.g. the Treaty on European Union, 1992)[5].'

#### **Book Summary**

The book is well-focused and offers a clear overview of the significance of the current dilemmas we face. It relates the 'good news' stories of movements seeking to transform 'old order' structures which tend to resist long-term change in favour of self-interested short-term gains. As already noted, the book does not interact with faith perspectives nor the resources of faith communities. It is a weakness, in my view, that virtually no recognition is given towards the many faith-based initiatives that are working to safeguard the integrity of creation.

Skillington clearly puts much faith in the global legal frameworks as well as the passion of young people to take initiative in this environmental struggle.

It is an optimistic approach, which does not take account of faith-based worldviews but instead sees ultimate 'salvation' in legal mechanisms aided by 'communication platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, [which] allow for a more regular engagement with themes of justice, inequality, and rights' (Karpf, 2010).[6] In addition, Skillington does not venture beyond her predominantly sociological analysis to consider philosophical questions around inherent rights which may be afforded to the nonhuman world, such as animals, plants, or the environment as a whole ('rights of the earth').[7] Rights are predominantly conceptualised as human-engineered mechanisms to protect vulnerable humans.

#### **Relevance and applications for Christians**

Much of Skillington's content correlates with biblical themes around God's restorative justice and the desires, responsibilities and hopes that we bear as tenant-representatives on earth. An obvious starting point is the stewardship mandate in the accounts of creation. [8] Caring and tending for God's creation presupposes the manifestation of flourishing for present and all future generations.

God's many blessings (e.g. the Abrahamic blessing[9]) are to be enjoyed in perpetuity, by and for, all future generations. To ensure that all future generations can live fruitful lives, there is need for an environment (on which we depend) that is conducive to allowing and encouraging the flourishing of all of life. The Noahic covenant[10] was one made by God with all of creation (not just humanity) as an everlasting covenant, and the mandate at the end of Mark[11] is a 'call' to witness to all of creation.

The Jubilee principles [12], and many other Old Testament ethical examples, are predicated on an appreciation of the long chain of history; God's 'cosmic narrative.' The principles of the Jubilee serve as a corrective when social relationships and the environment (e.g. land) have been corrupted, resulting in covenantal decimation where gross inequality and injustice becomes actual experience. Under these provisions, victims of such injustices are assured that their present misfortunes are temporary, and that restoration would come. Restorative justice maintains hope as well as engendering work for the common good, antidotes to selfishness and greed at both individual and corporate levels.

The common good of society rests on fair and equitable distribution of its resources to safeguard the shalomic vision of God's community where we may each become 'like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail', a people who will 'rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; ...Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings [13].' Isaiah also depicts us enjoying the fruits of our labours within the wider vision of the new heavens and new earth.[14] The redistributive ethics behind protection for the marginalised, the alien and the 'weak' have at root 'right relations,' embedded socially within a wider environmental context. Humanity, and with all of creation, thrives when the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land we nurture and grow our food in, is properly looked after. Historically, there have been theological perspectives which have

diminished key dimensions of the created order. A Platonic worldview has persisted in the Church for centuries, where the 'material' world is regarded as less important than the 'spiritual' dimension. The desire to escape the temporal for the 'eternal' has hardly encouraged the development of a vision for long-term earthly existence, with the focus on 'saving souls' narrowly interpreted such that creation care has inevitably slipped down the order of Christian priorities. Common misinterpretations of biblical passages [15] have given licence for centuries of believers to adopt an exploitative mentality, the consequences of which we reap today in increasingly alarming ways.

At end of the book of Revelation the 'river of life' and the 'tree of life' whose leaves provide healing for the nations, are described in the wonderful vision of the new heavens and new earth where our dependence on God's creation guarantees the continuation of life in a more fruitful and glorious way than we have yet experienced.[16]

### Conclusion

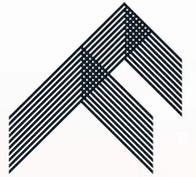
Such theological and biblical elements are not acknowledged in Skillington's work. However, her passion for working towards intergenerational justice is to be commended. Although a specialist book, it is clear, readable, and challenging. For the Christian community, there is urgent need to make connections with theological implications and take seriously the significance of what are some of the biggest challenges facing us today, not least for young people. In conclusion, I offer my final thoughts:

- It is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in global justice issues, who wants to understand the debate around intergenerational justice. Whilst focused on environmental justice, there are obvious connections with issues of economic, social, and political justice. Informative and wide-ranging, it is a source of conscience-raising for Christians engaged in the public square.
- The younger generation, or those engaged in ministering to young people, would do well to read books such as this. Whilst it has a future orientation, it is nevertheless grounded in present realities.

- It does provoke pastoral implications for young people especially, and provides a wakeup call for those of us who care about the wellbeing of our children and grandchildren, many of whom are already struggling with climate anxiety and despair about their own futures.[17]
- For those who want to go deeper, it barely ventures beyond its social focus to consider philosophical questions around inherent rights afforded to the nonhuman world, be it animals, plants, or the environment as a whole ('rights of the earth.') These are complex, and controversial, theological questions in themselves.

### End Notes

- [1] Skillington, T. (2019) *Climate Change and Intergenerational Justice*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- [2] <http://publish.ucc.ie/researchprofiles/A024/tskillington> (accessed 17/08/2023).
- [3] <https://perlego.com>.
- [4] <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text> (accessed 17/08/2023).
- [5] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/treaty-on-european-union> (accessed 17/08/2023).
- [6] Karpf, D. (2010) 'Online political mobilization from the advocacy group's perspective: Looking beyond clicktivism', *Policy & Internet* 2(4) (December): pp.7-41.
- [7] For example see the radical steps taken by Bolivia to recognise rights of Mother Earth at [www.garn.org/universal-declaration-for-the-rights-of-mother-earth/](http://www.garn.org/universal-declaration-for-the-rights-of-mother-earth/) (accessed 17/08/2023).
- [8] Genesis 1-2.
- [9] Genesis 12.
- [10] Genesis 9:8-17.
- [11] Mark 16.
- [12] Leviticus 25.
- [13] Isaiah 58:11-12.
- [14] Isaiah 65:11-13.
- [15] See, for example, Genesis 1:27-28 and 2 Peter 3.
- [16] Revelation 22.
- [17] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51451737> (accessed 17/08/2023).



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