

Storm of hope

Making A a good place to B with Christian Ecology Link

ChristianEcologyLink

Travel broadens the mind, they say.

We have opportunities which our ancestors could only dream of, thanks to trains, planes and automobiles.

But there is a point at which we can become more mobile than is good for us, and for our planet. Do we risk losing something precious – the gift of belonging? The question which God asked Adam and Eve in Eden, 'Where are you?', is one for us too.

Join us in this *Storm of Hope* in questioning how we travel, and our sense of home. Unlikely as it sounds, we will discover that our choice of transport – and its alternatives – can be signs of God's kingdom.



Photo credit: Dr Steve Meila

Car-free living is possible in Vauban, Germany, thanks to enlightened planning and transport policies

Did you know?

- ▶ It's cheaper to run a car now than it was 30 years ago. Over the same period rail fares have increased more than 80 per cent, and bus fares more than 70 per cent.
- ▶ Traffic flows have increased by over 23% in the past ten years.
- ▶ Nearly half of local authorities are cutting their support for buses, with a number of them removing all support in 2014.
- ▶ In maintenance and new projects, the average amount spent on each kilometre of road per year is nearly ten times that spent on the railways.
- ▶ In the past five years air traffic at the UK's airports has increased by over 27%.

Proclaiming the in-car nation?

The prophets said we go astray, like sheep without a shepherd. The figures below suggest that we've made 'straying' something of a way of life.

It's sometimes called hypermobility. It can mean we lose touch with being 'us, here, now': we can forget the roots of who we are, where we are, and the patience needed to grow and change from within. Then there is the toll of our growing demand for high-speed transport on landscape and human life.

But perhaps the biggest impact of all is on the climate, as a result of the carbon dioxide emitted from burning fuel. Each year the average person in the UK is responsible for emissions equivalent to about 15 tons of CO₂. About a fifth of this is from travel, including flying, and the transport of goods. For a stable climate our maximum annual output should be two or three tonnes, and possibly much less. So the average British citizen uses their entire sustainable carbon quota on motorised transport alone.

Getting out of this fix won't be easy. We've become dependent on the car. The way our towns are planned and our food is grown and distributed, and the long-term neglect of public transport systems have locked us into a vicious circle which drives our decisions about where to live, work, shop and send our children to school. Once the car is outside the front door it becomes the 'mode of choice' for almost every journey, no matter how short or congested the drive.

What is true for driving is also becoming true for air travel. We are flying more, developing family, work and leisure links in other countries, and becoming similarly dependent on the aeroplane.



Diane says...

God planted a passion for the environment within me at a young age. Cycling or walking were the only means of independent travel in my childhood, and I continue to cycle or use public transport whenever possible. Essential car journeys are planned to combine a number of purposes. Being a Green Christian means constantly challenging myself to curb my own consumption (charity shops are great!), and trying to influence others as a gardener, volunteer master composter and Love Food Hate Waste cascader. It gives me confidence in sharing concerns in a world that often seems reluctant to listen.

Recovering the incarnation

In his book on the ethics of global warming *A Moral Climate*, Michael Northcott suggests that the speed of modern transport has 'lent a peculiar quality to human experience in modern society, in effect turning human life into a quest for immediacy'. We 'lose bodily and sensual connection with the organic rhythms of life on earth'.

Only God can be everywhere all at once. The rest of us have to live with our limitations as creatures. It's part of our calling as human beings. And it's a calling God chose to share by becoming human, not only when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine or (maybe just once) rode a donkey, but here, today in the life he gives us. To be a Christian is not to lose those limitations, but to flourish within them as Jesus did.

Jesus fulfilled one of God's great promises – to be Emmanuel, God with us. Like a shepherd God gathers us together, even those who have gone astray. God has made a home among us, and invites us in.

Our churches can become places of gathering, where we can 'be still and know', and rediscover how God gives Himself and becomes flesh, here and now. When so much of our lives has become de-materialised and alienated from the earth, the Church's mission is to reveal the incarnation once more.

It will not be an easy ride. Consumerism schools us constantly to be seeking out new objects and experiences. But if we un-learn that impulse we will be able to learn that we can possess with open hands. We will rediscover our creatureliness. We will relate 'at scale' with the creation in which we belong. Such peaceful relationships will take time to develop and to bear fruit.

The hidden cost of the motor car

Our transport choices are still largely unexplored as a topic of theological reflection – surprising, perhaps, for the 'pilgrim people of God'. One of the few writers to break the silence is Michael Northcott, professor of ethics at the University of Edinburgh. In his book *A Moral Climate* (DLT, 2007) he considers the irony of the notion of 'private' transport and its growing contribution to climate change:

The ascription 'private' is increasingly problematic when applied to automobiles. Their use requires the public maintenance of an extensive of concrete, steel and tarmac infrastructure, representing one half of the built space of European and American cities. And the polluting emissions of these vehicles, together with the accidents they cause, place a considerable health burden on society as a whole, the costs of which are estimated at around \$100 billion in the United States alone.

The diminishment of space given over to the rapid movement of vehicles, far from enhancing freedom, in reality reduces it for the majority of humans and other animals... The residential street dominated by fast-moving vehicles is neither a peaceable nor a secure space for children to play, nor for residents and walkers to take the air or engage in conversation.

Walking and cycling, moving from individual to collective modes of rapid transit, and from planes to trains or airships, for international travel, will enhance community, foster a greater sense of being in place and a more respectful mode of dwelling on the earth. Most significantly of all, these practices will be a collective turning away from the politics of speed. And it is precisely the politics of speed which is driving industrial humans towards a future of catastrophic climate change, which will be the largest 'accident' in human history.

Martin says...

Living in town, I travel mostly by foot, bus or train, first asking, 'Is my journey really necessary?' Every place on God's earth can be one of pilgrimage. There's no need to travel to celebrity destinations to find Him. He's there, where we are (Exodus 3:5). Ends which justify my car use include exercise (country walks), shopping (mindful of in-built air miles), visiting friends and family — and occasional scene-changing. Aged 70, I'm retired from both working and flying, though not holidaying: this year, trains took me to Spain and Romania. You can source life's essentials walking amongst Europe's poorest.



Think global, live local

In becoming accountable to the soil beneath our feet, we will cherish local produce that roots us in the place and time we find ourselves in. As things stand, however, the supply chains of our economic system are often global in scale. Manufacturing moved to emerging economies, mainly in the Far East, to take advantage of cheap labour, with a consequent upsurge in cargo shipping to markets in the West. Even within Europe, products are traded over national boundaries when they could be produced at home.

With this dis-incarnation, markets have lost their humanity. Standards in labour and environmental protection have been deregulated, leaving democracy powerless to protect communities, workers and the ecosystems on which they depend, and vulnerable to the system's inherent bias towards inequality.



But there are signs that the halcyon days of globalisation are fading. Rising wages and labour standards in emerging economies, and an inexorable long-term rise in the cost of oil, are levelling the playing field. Globalisation was always unsustainable, not only ecologically but economically.

So what will take its place? The alternative is **localisation**, an economic programme summarised in the box opposite. CEL has long encouraged individuals and Churches to localise their food supply – one of the LOAF principles we advocate is that food should be locally grown. We can do more. Localisation is one of the models being considered in CEL's ground-breaking Joy in Enough project. With the Christian conservation charity A Rocha and student network SPEAK, we are equipping Christians and Churches to break the silence on unsustainable economics.

Localisation

- ▶ Re-regulate global trade and finance, and liberate local trade and finance.
- ▶ Diversify and decentralise economic activity, to make them more resilient and stable.
- ▶ Strengthen human-scale business in order to neutralise the power of corporate monopolies and reinvigorate democracy.
- ▶ Rely more on human labour and skill, thereby creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions and increasing wellbeing.
- ▶ Reduce the need for transportation, and packaging, and less processing.

For more information visit www.localfutures.org



David says...

We shouldn't feel guilty about having to travel around more than previous generations did – God has called us to live in 21st century Britain! However, if we are serious about caring for the planet, we need self-discipline about how far we travel and a good knowledge of the impacts of the various modes of transport we use. We should also argue for better urban planning and design, instead of just campaigning for better public transport.

For reflection

Jesus said 'The reign of God is in your midst' or 'very close to you'. What do these words mean for a civilisation as reliant as ours on high-speed, global transport?

How does your faith challenge current proposals for expanding London's airport capacity? Or high-speed rail projects such as HS2? Or measures to relieve local congestion?

*Dear God, we pray for another way of being,
another way of knowing.*

*Across the difficult terrain of our existence
we have attempted to build a highway
and in so doing have lost our footpath.
God, lead us to our footpath.*

*Lead us there where, in simplicity,
we may move at the speed of natural creatures
and feel the earth's love beneath our feet.*

*Lead us there where, step-by-step,
we may feel the movement of creation in our hearts.
And lead us there where, side-by-side,
we may feel the embrace of the common soul.*

*Nothing can be loved at speed.
God, lead us to the slow path;
to the joyous insights of the pilgrim;
another way of knowing;
another way of being. Amen.*

(Michael Leunig)



The gospel of slow

It is time for our society to learn to be stiller and slower. But in other ways we are pilgrims with urgent purpose and a long way to go. Time is short. The journey on which God invites us is against the tide of the trends and policies. Let us step out, carrying the Cross, and nurture new social norms and a new meaning to progress.

CEL invites you to join this journey seeking peace with the earth, not only in travel but the whole of life. It is our elected representatives whose decisions must make that peace on our behalf. We invite them on our journey too, through prayer and the ballot box.

This peace is a way of being human which has not been tried before in our technological society. Like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, we are called to 'put out into the deep', into waters which have not been charted in our previous economic and social history. As we join with others who are trying to learn this way of life, we will find it is not as difficult or as strange as we thought.

Barbara says...



As a Green Christian, I respect environmental campaigners of all faiths and none. I am inspired by the courage and determination of the people who, during the winter of 2013, occupied the trees and hedges when the bulldozers moved in to the tranquil Combe Haven valley to prepare the ground for the Bexhill to Hastings Link Road. Through intense cold, and drenching rain and snow, they put themselves in the way of destructive forces of 'progress'. They lost ... but their actions spur us on to cycle, bus, train and walk – and oppose such insane road schemes everywhere.

If your Church regularly goes on pilgrimage, is it time to visit a place and use a mode of transport which ensures that your footprints on God's earth are gentle?



Join us

Since 1982 CEL has been working with Christians, churches and the green movement to witness to hope in the ecological crisis.

You can become a member for £30 a year, or £12 if you are on a low income (less with a standing order). Send your details to our Information Officer using the form below.

To find out more before committing yourself, visit our extensive website: www.greenchristian.org.uk. sign up for our free monthly news e-mail or contact us for a free introductory pack

Christian Ecology Link is a Registered Charity no. 328744, and a Company, reg. no. 2445198, registered at 76 Old Eign Hill, Tupsley, Hereford HR1 1UA



ChristianEcologyLink

Post
10 Beech Hall Road,
Highams Park, London
E4 9NX

Telephone
0845 459 8460

E-mail
info@christian-ecology.org.uk

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Key CEL events in 2014 – see our website or call us for more details.

Whatever the papers say, the age of growth economics is over. If we try and carry on, our legacy to the next generation will be a ruined planet, inescapable debt and brutal inequality. There is an alternative.

'Joy in Enough' is CEL's campaign to promote a new way of thinking about the economy. Join with CEL, A Rocha, SPEAK and others as we seek to empower ordinary people to take back the economy from the economic elite, understand the alternatives, and seek a role the Church can play in the transformation.

Our annual conference
Saturday 29 March, Birmingham

*Joy in
enough*
awakening to a new economics

Our keynote speaker is Dr Dan O'Neill, lecturer in ecological economics at the University of Leeds; chief economist at the Centre for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy (CASSE); and co-author of *Enough is Enough*.

Our annual retreat

Joy in Enough: a weekend with Mary Grey
Friday 24 - Sunday 26 October, Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, North Wales
The journey to a just and sustainable economy will need to engage heart as well as head. For our retreat we will develop the theme of our March conference, exploring the spirituality which can help us conceive the destination and sustain the journey.

Our time will be guided by Mary Grey, former visiting professor at St Mary's University College, Twickenham and emeritus Professor of the University of Wales as well as co-founder of Wells for India. She is author of *Sacred Longings*, *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope* and *To Rwanda and Back: a Spirituality of Reconciliation*. She is currently involved with peace efforts in Israel/Palestine. Join us for a weekend of stimulating input, discussion, quiet reflection, friendship and heartfelt liturgy.

Our Annual Members' Meeting and workshop.

Saturday 8 November, St Aloysius Church, Euston, central London
An opportunity to contribute to the work of CEL, and gain inspiration for your own.

CEL brings together some 900 people in the UK and beyond who are seeking to tell a different story for our times. We offer:

Gatherings: Members meet at least two conferences, retreats or workshops each year.

Local groups: 16 groups are directly affiliated to CEL, and we are pleased to offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: Each month we publish a daily *Prayer Guide* available by e-mail, on our website or by post.

Campaigns: Our LOAF campaign promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. We support the climate change campaign Operation Noah.

Green Christian magazine: Published twice a year, *Green Christian* is packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews and resources.

Exhibition materials: We can provide a range of leaflets, banners and posters for events and displays giving a Christian perspective on environmental topics.

CELINK: Members can join a discussion forum and social network to exchange news and advice.

E-news: We publish regular e-mails for members and non-members on events and resources from CEL and other Christian environmental organisations.

Website: You can find further details of all the above at our interactive website www.greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.

