

Storm of hope

2016

Praise, Pray and Act with
Green Christian

I will praise you as long as I live,
and in Your name I will lift up my hands.
Psalm 63 v 2



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**In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountains start
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.**

W H Auden In memory of W B Yeats (1939)

We know, if we are honest with ourselves, that we live in a sadly disordered world. We too share in the world's disorder – our hearts and minds afflicted, our lives cluttered with stuff and our spiritual and emotional hearing damaged by the roar of static that inhibits our ability to listen and understand. We cannot hope to engage with the world's disorder unless we learn to attend to the disorder within ourselves.

This is where Green Christians can make a crucial contribution. We can recall our sisters and brothers to the work of praising God, God the Creator, not only of the whole world, but of each and every one of us. We praise God for the entirety of Creation, not just mountains, beaches, flowers and sunsets, but also ants, microbes, slugs and wasps – all play their part in God's great chain of being. Creation is holy because God is holy, and we who are part of that Creation must learn anew to praise our maker.

Once upon a time such ideas were commonplace, but somehow we seem to have gone astray. We pay lip service to the idea of God as Creator before hurrying on to dwell on Him as liberator and redeemer. God's creative power has become somewhat suspect to us as we separate matter and spirit in our minds, dismiss as unworthy anything that smacks of nature worship and become suspicious of creation stories in the Bible. A correction, perhaps a conversion is needed. Only praise can save the world.

Praise

We live in a time of grumblers, grouchers and satirists. Praise has become discredited because it has become associated with the banal and idolatrous cult of celebrities and politicians. Yet it is by way of praise and in particular the praise of God that we can recast our imaginations and restore our understanding of the world which is beautiful and good. Poetry offers us a window back into that restored and unblemished world, empowering our hearts and minds and enabling us to offer thanksgivings and praise to the God who made us and the world in which we live. Think of the Psalms which help us to praise God by the account they give of the glory of God in his Creation and the folly of those who prefer to idolise the powerful. Every generation needs new Psalms and new Psalmists so that the work of praise can be renewed and refreshed for a new generation.

**Christ, alpha, omega,
avatar of hope,
whose heart in spite of all
hopes on in spite of us,
hopes on for us, in spite of us –
rain, rain on us
untamed, unconstrained
your wildfire storm of hope.**

**From *That Intransitive Being*
by Daniel Berrigan**



James from Bristol says:

Green Christian gives me opportunities to engage with and learn from the faith elements of the environmental movement. I watched eagerly as the discussions, presentations and media from Paris COP21 took place and recognised this as a significant milestone in human history. For the first time I attended a Political March, with my family, and led a LOAF meal at Church to highlight the Paris talks and raise the importance of a sustainable way of life.

Pray

There is a deep mystery about prayer. Many of us talk about prayer quite casually. But what is prayer, and what can prayer offer to our distressed environment?

Many people speak of a conversation – a conversation with the true God. This is a very special conversation in which the spaces between the words can be more important than the words themselves. Jonathan Rowson spoke at our recent Joy in Enough conference of prayer as “giving attention”, and others have spoken of prayer as “being available.” We are attentive to the word of God and we are available to each other’s need. Prayer is not shouting our demands to God in order that He might fix the world; it is being attentive to what God wants us to be doing within the world that He has gifted to us. Prayer is getting in God’s way – standing before Him and declaring in an insistent, single-minded and childlike way: *Here I am; help me, show me the way it really is!* As we pray and listen to God we become aligned with Him and His heart.

Silence clearly has an important role to play. But the way into silence is preceded by an engagement with God that uses words. Such words can be a gateway into silence when used to still our own inner chatter. Through the use of silence we can tune into the reality both of God and the natural world in a new way.

When we walk through the woods and the fields greeting the flowers, the trees and the animals we are being attentive to them and available for them. In this way we declare our community with all Creation. Creation implies a Creator who calls us into a prayerful relationship with Himself. As we come to know God we find ourselves using a name – a personal name just as God knows each one of us and addresses us by name if we are truly attentive to His presence.

Let’s not forget that God loves us more than we love ourselves, and He loves all that He has made – the planet and every single one of its inhabitants – with a deep and abiding passion. As we consider difficult

Rachel from Coventry says:

I became interested in protecting the environment to safeguard people vulnerable to climate change and pollution. This could be justified as good sense, altruism, or loving our neighbour. When I learnt that the gospel is for the whole of Creation – that Christ came to redeem the whole Creation, not solely humans - everything clicked into place. Loving and protecting Creation is something I'm invited to do as a response to this act of love by God.



Photograph by Flickr

Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 18 v 3.

things, big things – as we prayerfully pay attention to the hungry, the homeless, the dispossessed, pollution, climate change, and the sixth mass extinction – we are changed. We become more loving, more attentive, more willing to act in God’s name. We remember that God cares even more than we do, and we can pray in confidence.

**Farewell, farewell! but this I tell.
To thee thou wedding guest!
He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast
He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all.**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from
The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.



The Peace of Wild Things

**When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.**

By Wendell Berry

God’s Passion for His Creation

Towards the end of the Book of Job, God speaks. His response to Job’s complaints that he is a righteous man and undeserving of punishment is unexpected. God says: “Where were you when I laid the Earth’s foundations?” God tells Job not just that He is the Almighty and the Creator of the world, but how passionately He loves his Creation. (Job 38-41). God is not merely anthropocentric – human-centred – although we often act as though He is. He speaks here of a world without humans, a world that He rejoices in because it is what He has made. A whole chapter is devoted to the whale!



Photograph by Flickr

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6 v 8.

Act

Action springs out of Love. We are encouraged by our deepening relationship with God to act in His name.

We can however feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problems the world is facing – when we consider floods and famines we may feel helpless, and sometimes feel that whatever we do will be useless. But if we are aligned with God and His purposes we can remember that what each of us does is what He is asking us to do.

Flood defences, wind farms and solar panels have their place, but there is so much more. We can all do something to change our lifestyles. None of us can do everything! But each of us can prayerfully consider what we can do. This will sometimes be comfortable and fun; other times it may be challenging and stretch us. Let's honour God by learning to live more gently on the Earth.

- ▶ We can't all grow food, but we can all choose to look at where our food is grown and how it is produced – eating vegetables and fruits in season, eating less meat, buying fewer or no imported foodstuffs, trying not to waste food.
- ▶ We can all think about our energy use – keeping our homes slightly cooler and wearing warmer clothes, changing all our light bulbs to low energy, not leaving devices on stand-by.
- ▶ We can all think about transport – how we travel to work or school, where we go on holiday, cutting down on flying.
- ▶ We can write letters or emails to politicians, policy makers and CEOs showing that we care about environmental matters. As few as 20 letters on a subject makes people sit up and take notice.
- ▶ We can try and lead by example in our lifestyles and purchases, and model this for our children and grandchildren – for they will be living in a very different world from the one we grew up in.
- ▶ We can join a Christian environmental organisation and encourage our Churches and Church ministers to pray and talk about environmental issues.

Pope Francis and the Climate Conference

In 2015 there were two landmark events for the Earth: the eagerly-awaited Encyclical *Laudato Si – Praise Be To You* - from Pope Francis on the environment (June), and the United Nations Climate Conference in Paris (November).

No previous pope has devoted an entire Encyclical to the environment. Pope Francis was keen that his Encyclical – a letter to the Church and to the world – should contribute to the Climate Conference. The title was a deliberate echo of St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Sun (also known as the Canticle of the Creatures). In the popular imagination Francis of Assisi is remembered for preaching to the animals and not much else; but he was a man who understood more than anyone of his time how deeply interconnected everything on the planet is. Today scientists are discovering this truth anew. In many ways the Earth operates like a single organism: earth, sea, and air work together to regulate the Earth's climate, with input not only from rainforests full of giant trees but also tiny phyto-plankton that cannot be seen with the naked eye. Local ecosystems and greater ones are utterly interdependent. Christians understand this to be the sustaining work of God. The entire web of Creation works together and, in an echo of the Body of Christ, we cannot do without one bit of it. If one part suffers, so does the rest. When the web of Creation is damaged, it begins to unravel.

Pope Francis has issued an Encyclical full of encouragement to take seriously the gift of our planet, but also warnings about what may happen and what is already happening environmentally. He reminds us that the Earth is "our common home", and that people are suffering as well as the rest of the created order because of environmental degradation and exploitation. If the world continues to heat up then these things will only get worse.

The United Nations Climate Conference gave the world some surprises. Some of the bigger nations that have in the past been reluctant to sign up to pledges to limit climate heating to two degrees (we are already one degree hotter), showed willingness to limit heating to 1.5 degrees. But there is a long way to go – there are no legally binding pledges and many vested interests keen to avoid any change in the way they operate. But let us not be downhearted: let us watch and pray, taking encouragement from Pope Francis and from each other, remembering that God cares even more than we do. Let's remember to praise, pray and act.



Jill from Leeds says:

I feel passionately about our responsibility for caring for the whole created order (which includes our own species!) and about the world we are leaving our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I am delighted the Christian Church has joined with people and organisations involved with all the issues involved in climate change, believing our ultimate goal should be for a world where people 'honour one another and seek the common good'.

Green Christian **Way of Life**

Green Christian offers a **Way of Life** for people who would like to be more deeply involved and supported in an environmental and faith-based lifestyle, in which care for God's Creation in all its forms is a fundamental outworking of their faith.

People who follow the **Way of Life** are Companions of each other, of God and of the Earth. The Way of Life includes:

- Daily prayer and devotion
- Living gently on the Earth
- Public action
- Encouragement

For more information see www.greenchristian.org.uk/way

Join us

Since 1982 Green Christian 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 (and less with a standing order). Use the form below to send your details to: Green Christian Membership Secretary, Flat 1, 31 St James Terrace, Buxton SK17 6HS.

To find out more 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.



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Facebook
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Post:
97 Plumpton Avenue,
Hornchurch RM12 6BB.

Key Green Christian events in 2016 –
for more details visit www.greenchristian.org.uk.

Green Christian's annual retreat:
'Celebrating Body and Soul – How our Bodies can Save the World'

10-12 June, Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, North Wales LL34 6YF.
Through an exploration of prayer, contemplation and action this weekend is an opportunity for discovery. It is a chance for each of us to pause and pay special attention to our souls and bodies and how intentionally we can let them belong to the Creation that shaped them.

Our annual Members' Meeting

Saturday 5 November, central London. The meeting will be followed by a talk, open to all. An opportunity to contribute to the work of Green Christian, and to gain inspiration for your own.

Subscriptions are lower for those completing the Standing Order (SO) form – see the amounts in brackets below. Cheques, for the amounts in bold, should be made payable to Green Christian.

- Standard individual £30** (£25 by SO)
- Low income £12** (£10 by SO)
- Joint/Family/Corporate £40** (£35 by SO)
- Church: annual donation** (£40 recommended)
- I include a donation** to assist your work £

If you are a UK taxpayer, you can increase your donation by 25% at no extra cost to you! Please sign the Gift Aid Declaration form.

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Sort code 08-90-54, a/c No. 70329203.

This cancels any previous order in favour of Christian Ecology Link or Green Christian.

Date of first payment:

(two months ahead please, to allow for administration)

Signature: Date:

Gift Aid declaration:

I want Green Christian to treat all payments I make, from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations. I confirm I have paid, or will pay, an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give. I confirm that I am a UK taxpayer, resident in the UK for tax purposes and that I will advise Green Christian if this situation changes.

Signature: Date:

Ref No. (Green Christian to complete)

Please notify us if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force. You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying the charity — it will then not apply to payments you make after that date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.



Green Christian brings together some 850 people in the UK and beyond who seek to tell a new story for our times. We offer:

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

Local groups: 11 groups directly affiliated to Green Christian, and we offer support, advice and materials to others.

Prayer: a daily Prayer Guide is available by e-mail, on our website or by post (published monthly).

Campaigns: LOAF promotes food which is Locally Grown, Organically produced, Animal friendly and Fairly traded. In **Joy in Enough** we promote an alternative economy free from growth, debt and the obligation to consume (with A Rocha and SPEAK, the student campaign network).

Way of Life: a dispersed community who value and live by the disciplines of Prayer, Living Gently, Public Action and Encouragement.

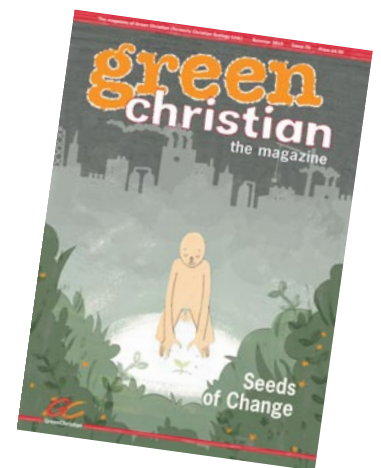
Green Christian magazine: a full-colour magazine published twice a year, packed with news, thought-provoking articles, reviews of books and other media, and resources.

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

CELINK: a discussion forum and social network for the exchange of news and advice.

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

Website: Further details at our interactive website www.greenchristian.org.uk or contact our Information Officer at the address above.



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