

Climate Change and the Communion of Saints

Professor Michael Northcott



The Myth of Now



How the public thinks
lower-carbon behaviour
could be made mainstream



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‘Now people’ are bored by talk of climate change and do not believe future predictions of catastrophe (IPPR)

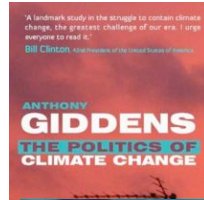
‘Low carbon’ behaviours are unfashionable or ‘hypocritical’

Scientific doom scenarios are part of the problem



‘Climate Porn’ Disables

“Government and green groups should avoid giving the impression that ‘we are all doomed’ and spend less time convincing people that climate change is real. The focus should be on the big actions that people can take to address climate change, like switching to a hybrid car, fitting a wind turbine or installing cavity wall insulation, not just the small ones such as turning down the thermostat or switching off the lights. Climate-friendly behaviours need to be made to feel like ‘the kinds of things that people like us do’ to large groups of people.” IPPR 2009



For Anthony Giddens the problem is that 'the future has less reality than the present'

Cost benefit analysis, and economic discounting make deferral of mitigation attractive, for individuals, corporations and governments

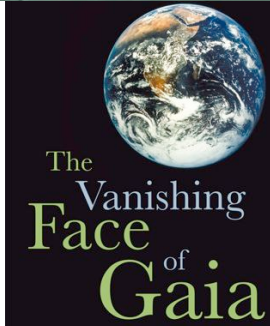
Capitalism and industrial materialism more profoundly exclude the spiritual hope of paradise



The Myth of Mechanism

For Lovelock the future is a hot earth

Gaia is warming rapidly in response to too many people, agriculture and fossil fuel emissions



Refusal to recognise the problem is indicative of the belief that the earth is a machine, amenable to human control

Hence the focus in climate change science on computer models and mathematical emissions targets



The Myth of Scarcity

The American Senate believes the USA cannot 'afford' to reduce fossil fuel use

Energy is conceived as a scarce resource and power over energy sources is the source of American strength

Wars for oil - and ultimately water - are the likely outcome of this perspective

The Failure of the Scientific Narrative of Climate Change

Computer models focus more on prediction than observation

Predictions from present modest changes are resisted

Behaviours most implicated occur in areas least affected

Models suggest emissions targets can guarantee the future

Carbon Saints and Sinners



Lord May, President, BAAS,
proposes that religious
communities could provide
carbon surveillance

Individuals to be 'policed' into
reducing carbon footprint

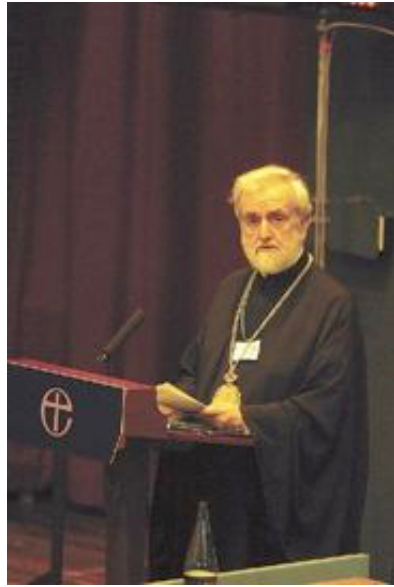
Ecological 'saints' are already doing this

But not most wealthy CO₂ +20t sinners -
inc. corporate, governmental & individual

Global rate of increase in fossil fuel emissions in 2000 - 2004 was 3% per annum, compared to 1% in 1990s

Most of the growth is from rich consumption behaviours not poor African and Asian families





Being *as* Communion

For John Zizioulas, Bishop of Pergamon the ecological crisis manifests a spiritual lack in modern humanity

Modern science and technology train us no longer to see ourselves as 'parts of creation'



Church as Creaturely Communion

1. Sacraments and ministry are indivisible from the mystery of Christ
2. Christology and Pneumatology are *ecclesiologically* related



The Church as
communion of saints
is eschatologically
directed to
restoration of all
things



The local Church is
a *natural* creation of
the Holy Spirit
directed towards the
salvation of all life



guardian.co.uk

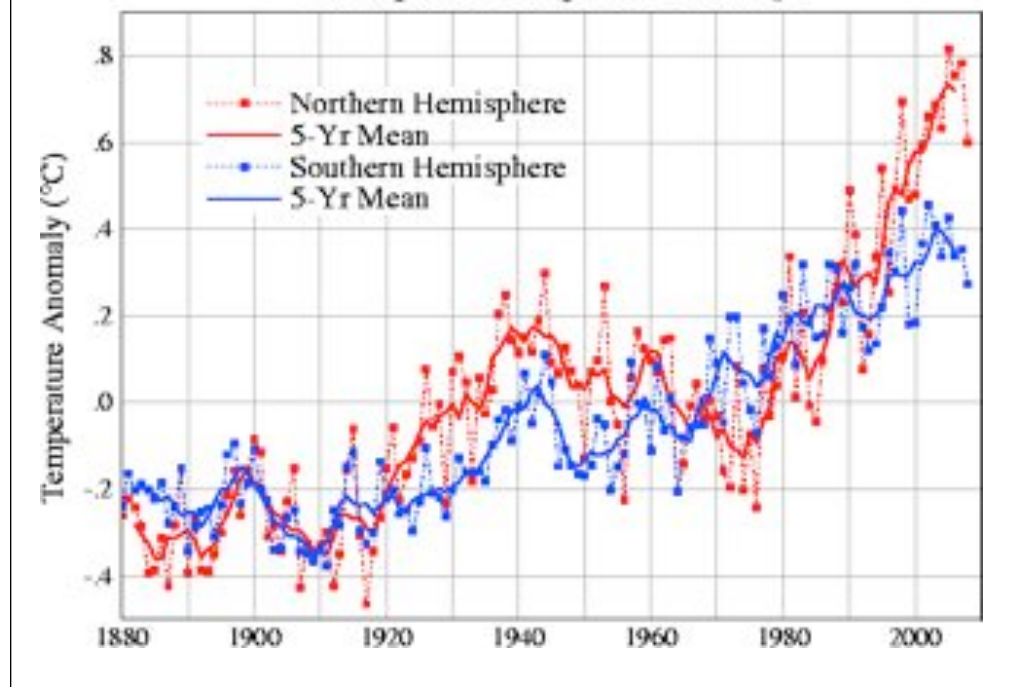
Copenhagen negotiating text: 200 pages to save the world?

Draft agreement being discussed ahead of December's crucial Copenhagen summit is long, confusing and contradictory
David Adam, The Guardian - Published under license by [BusinessGreen](#), 29 Sep 2009



Climate Change and How Copenhagen Can Save The World

Hemispheric Temperature Change



Theology Matters

Presentism: Christian virtues - justice, love, peace
- are directed to relationships in the present as
'foretaste' of cosmic salvation

Gaia: Christians traditionally believe Christ restored
paradise on earth and the earth is alive

Scarcity: Christians traditionally believe plenitude,
not scarcity, is the spiritual *and* material condition of
paradise restored (and greed subverts plenitude)



Early Christian ethic affirmed virtues of equity, love, and peace in the present in hope of just *and* merciful future judgement

Early Christians believed Christ's Resurrection restored paradise *on earth*, and the earth was alive

Early Christians acted from a belief in plenitude - in almsgiving and distribution - not scarcity

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Matthew 25

Christian ethics acquires from such texts a present *and* future orientation

The life well lived is directed towards the hope of future salvation and hence *present* love of Christ in one another

This orients Christians to care for aliens, the poor, orphans, the sick and for widows, and towards almsgiving

Hence the first Apostolic acts are acts of service of the sick and suffering, and the distribution of alms to the poor

And the first formal ministry of Christians is the diaconate



Citizens of Heaven

Early Christian ethic was novel because every individual is a potential member of the communion of saints

Hence the weakest were to be honoured by the strong and many Christian slaves were freed
(Philemon)

Christian mutual love for 'one another' challenges power of Caesar and so 'turns the world upside down' (Acts 17.6)



Agape feast celebrated that Christians are a 'new creation'

The early Christians believed the Fall was healed and paradise on earth was restored in the Risen Christ

In Middle Ages paradise said to be located in the Far East



If because of the tree of food they (Adam and Eve) were thus cast out of paradise, shall not believers now because of the Tree of Jesus, much more easily enter into paradise?

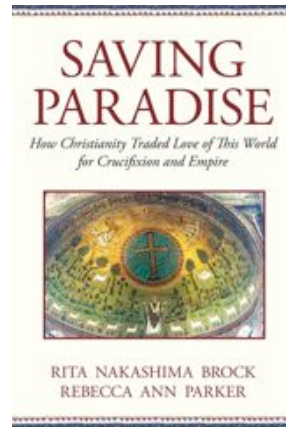
Adam by the tree fell; you by the Tree are brought to Paradise

Cyril of Alexandria,
Catechetical Letters, 13. 2

The Paradise of God

If Christians are 'partakers in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1.4)
they are called like Christ to enact the works of God:

'God stands in the congregation of the mighty; he judges
among the gods. How long will you judge unjustly, and accept
the persons of the wicked? Defend the poor and fatherless: do
justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy:
rid them out of the hand of the wicked.' Psalm 82 3 - 4



Human Divinity

Humanity is 'deified' by the Incarnation according to theologians of West & East

This deification creates the possibility of great good, earthly peace, and saving paradise on *earth*

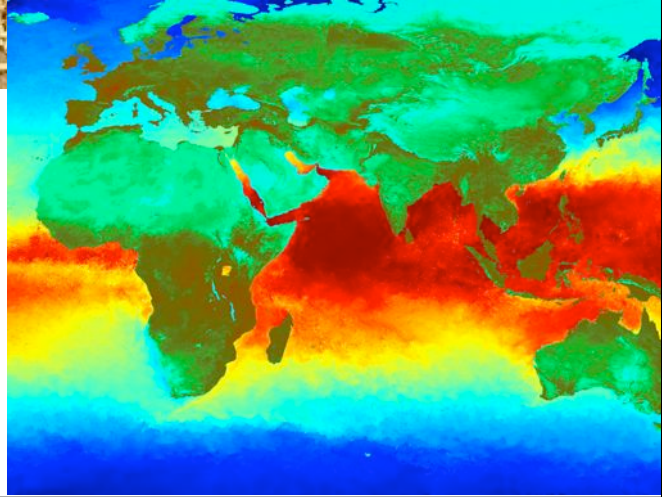


This promotes the idea that Christians 'live in paradise together' and it locates 'spiritual power in the creation of just relationships (Brock and Parker, 2008)



Doing justice through equity

If we give eagerly according to our means, that is acceptable to God; he does not ask for what we do not have. There is no question of relieving others at the cost of hardship to yourselves; it is a question of equality. At the moment your surplus meets your need, but one day your need may be met from their surplus. The aim is equality; as scripture has it, 'Those who have gathered more did not have too much, and those who gathered less did not have too little'. 2 Corinthians 8. 12 - 15



Pleasing the Lord in a Famine

Paul writes to the Corinthians of a famine in Judea and appeals to the principle of equality

‘that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality’
(2 Corinthians 8. 14)

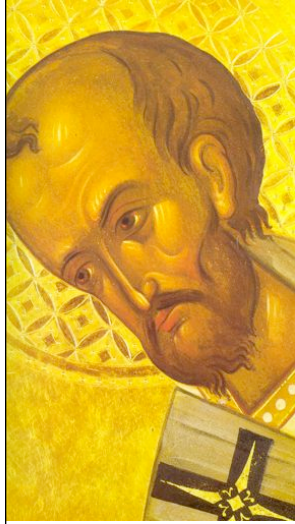
Almsgiving between distant peoples connected in the Communion of Saints has Early Christian origins

Christian society



Against Rome's imperial taxes for war and luxury Tertullian comments that Christians give alms:

'to support the destitute, and to pay for their burial expenses; to supply the needs of boys and girls lacking money, and of old people confined to the home...we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another'



In the matter of piety, poverty serves us better than wealth, and work better than idleness, especially since wealth becomes an obstacle even for those who do not devote themselves to it. Yet, when we must put aside our wrath, quench our envy, soften our anger, offer our prayers, and show a disposition which is reasonable, mild, kindly, and loving, how could poverty stand in our way? For we accomplish these things not by spending money but by making the correct choice. Almsgiving above all else requires money, but even this shines with a brighter luster when the alms are given from our poverty. The widow who paid in the two mites was poorer than any human, but she outdid them all. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*

The new ethic of love - and nonviolence - ultimately
wins admiration of Romans

From persecution in 3C Christianity becomes a quasi-
imperial cult in the 4C

And is then blamed for the barbarian invasions of
Rome

Augustine in *City of God* defends Christians from the
accusation they are responsible

He warns Roman Christians not to set their hopes on
an earthly city founded on violence



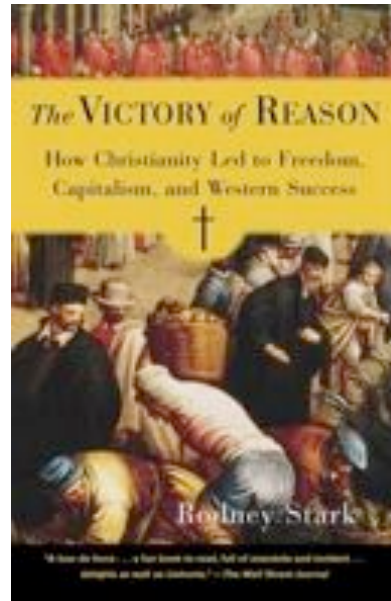
Christ Pantocrator

Duomo, Monreale
Sicily

Spiritual eschatology of Latin Christianity produces a progressive mentality in Western Christendom

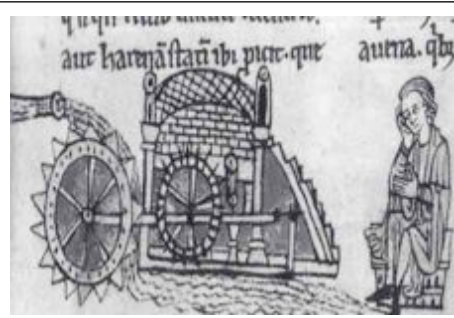
Christ's rule is progressively realised among the saints

Christendom eventually births humanism, law, rationalism, science - and it births *freedom*



Slavery ends by 12C because slaves received the sacraments and so are members of the 'communion of saints'

Urban craftsmen & peasants gradually acquired rights (Stark)



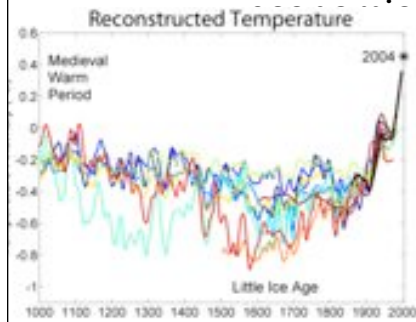
As serfs acquired rights, machines were invented to do more of the work - mostly water and wind powered



Progressive orientation of Christianity explains the rise of the machine in medieval Europe

In China analogous machines are invented at the same time but they do not develop in the same way

Middle Ages sees a turn - theological and
- to human powers in *this* world



Medieval warm period grows crop
surpluses which promote growth of
cities, crafts, merchants, trade &
universities

Increasing specialisation among monks sees
many freed from manual work and the
emergence of more time-intensive liturgy and
scholarship



Communion of Saints envisaged in early centuries as a seamless spiritual web from this life to the next

Prayers by the living could assist the dead

Similarly Saints in heaven intercede for saints on earth

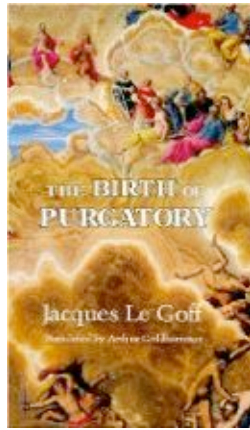


12C move towards *narrative*, and history as progress shifts balance between heaven and earth

Saints in heaven become more ghostly
- saints on earth more *real*

Rights of saints on earth asserted with new clarity

Theologians such as Duns Scotus emphasised progress and power in *this world*



The dominion of the Church is threatened
by rise of towns and merchants

Purgatory is made official by Innocent IV in
1254

Purgatory introduces a break between this
life and heaven

Most will do a 'stint' in Purgatory for venial
& even mortal sins

Alms, prayers, vigils can all reduce time in
Purgatory



For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. I Corinthians 3. 12 - 15

Jacques Le Goff argues that the spatiality of purgatory in Middle Ages represented a new 'mentalite' and created a new intermediate space between heaven and earth

Purgatory was a way in which the church sustained belief in judgment in early modernity when human powers in *this* life - economic, technological - become more important

Mediation in the communion of saints is capitalised by the Church in the form of indulgences which form part of the economy of purgatory

Freedom from the Dead



The Reformers reassert the freedom of the living from the fear of, or duties to, the dead

They largely end the cult of the saints

They also promoted freedom for merchants and nobles from dominion of kings and popes

Reformation did not however recover early Christian emphasis on mediation between saints on earth and heaven

Mediatorial rites and spiritual practices - eucharist, almsgiving, penance, vigils - declined in public importance and so perhaps did the *moral* hold of the Saints on the living

Economically the Reformation produced a dramatic shift in landholding from Church to State and hence aristocracy

This shift in landed power from Church to State, merchants and nobles, has many consequences

It releases *coal* from traditional restraints on mining

It births a novel form of governance that legitimates the
new form of nation state that emerges under Elizabeth

But the new parliament uses new powers to enclose land

Sheep cows, and then machines, displace free farmers

And this produces a landless labouring class and the
industrial revolution is born

Monks resisted mining coal on the Tyne

Monks and people saw coal mining as an assault on the body of nature, the 'great earth mother'

But Newcastle's merchants keen to sell it to London

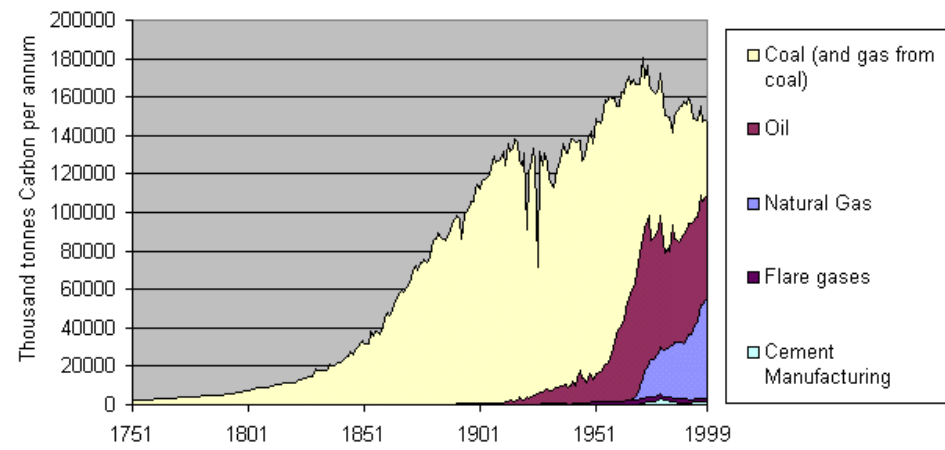
Church ownership of land, and sacramental life, promoted rights of serfs and craftsmen

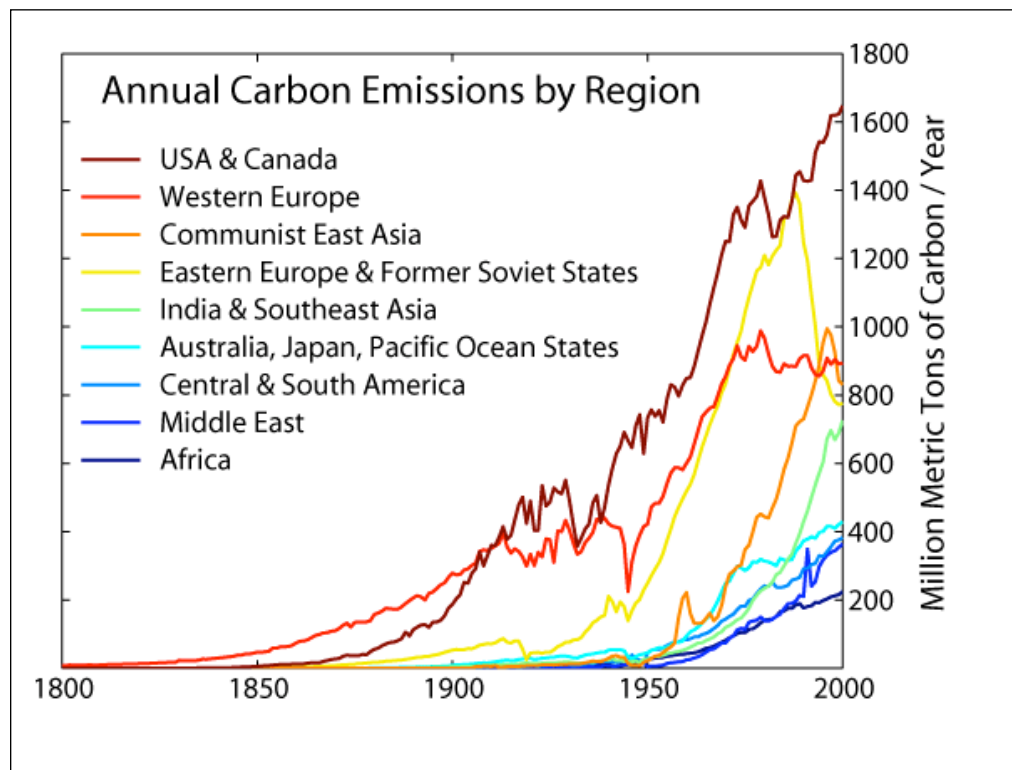
Newly propertied merchants and nobles overturned ecclesiastical restraint on coal, and ecclesiastical support for peasant rights

England and Scotland uniquely placed for industrial revolution because

1. Coal becomes an extensively used fuel
2. Large unpropertied class available for factory work
3. Steam engine invented and perfected
4. Division of labour introduced
5. Consumer products mass produced in 18C - Wedgwood

UK Carbon Dioxide Emissions since 1750





UK's lead in industrial revolution means we bear the heaviest responsibility of any country - per person presently living - for industrially produced greenhouse gases

But USA has produced the largest quantity of any one nation

Emissions parked in the earth system by our forbears are a form of dominion of the dead

They are a physical simulacrum of *purgatory*

UK Climate Change Bills commit to future fossil fuel
reduction targets - Scotland's at 42% by 2020

But no one in government has any idea how to meet them

Mathematical targets do not deliver certain outcomes in a
destabilised earth system that is losing resilience

They - like computer models - distract from real world

The UK Met Office said last month that the global
temperature could be 7C hotter by 2100

Emissions targets do not guarantee this won't happen

The misleading maths of models

Climate models are complex but empirical observations of climate change exceed their predictions

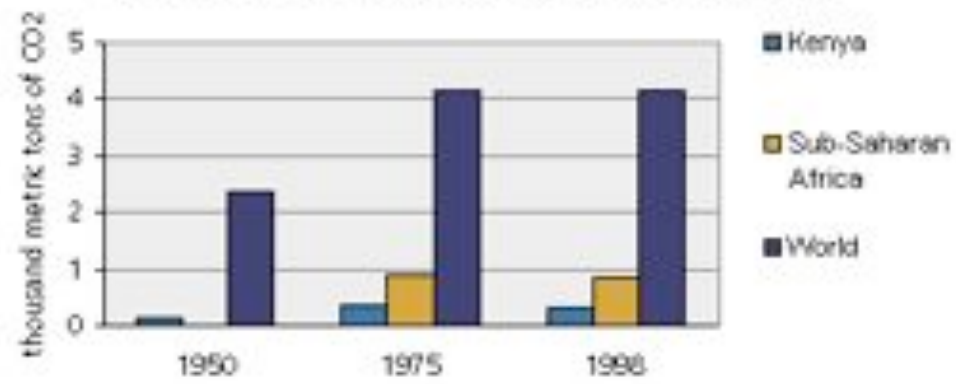
Furthermore climate models do not include key feedbacks such as frozen methane, tropical forest dieback, acidifying oceans, loss of cooling of albedo

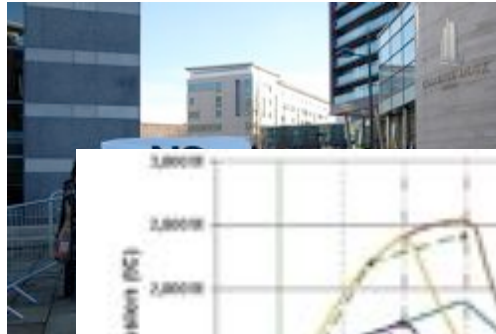
It is entirely possible the earth will move suddenly from a warm to a hot state once enough ice melts

Models and targets also distract us from suffering *now* and from the moral responsibility of the principal polluters

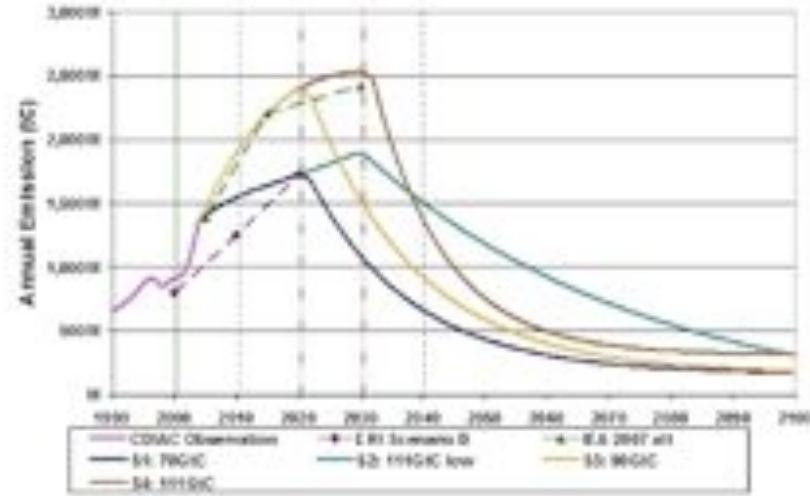


Per Capita CO2 Emissions: 1950, 1975 and 1998





Principal Mitigation Options



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The Market Fix

Carbon emissions trading is the presently favoured approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation

But it is rife with fraud, it is inefficient, and it is not working

It will at best displace emissions from regulated to less regulated domains

It arises from the theological claim that rights over nature are acquired by effort and industry (John Locke)

Pollution is therefore a factor of production (Coase)



Carbon trading is the favoured economic device for mitigating past and present emissions and transferring adaptation funds from North to South

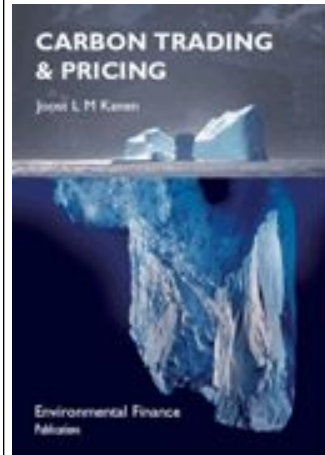
The Clean Development Mechanism means emissions 'saved' in China are tradable with carbon emissions from Edinburgh University's Combined Heat and Power boilers

the majority [of the projects in the CDM] should not be considered for assistance. "They would be built anyway," says David Victor, law professor at the Californian university. "It looks like between one and two thirds of all the total CDM offsets do not represent actual emission cuts



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Carbon trading in emissions permits is not reducing pollution

Corporate climate schemes designed to make money from pollution undermine public case for emissions restraint

Demand management will not work unless fossil fuels are kept in the ground



The Dominion of the Dead

Carbon trading is sometimes compared to indulgences

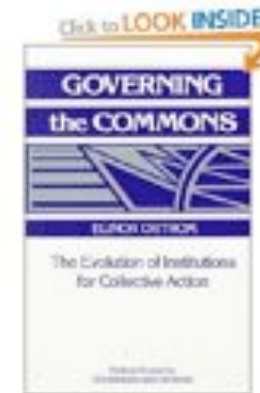
Past emissions affect climate now and for up to two hundred years

Freeing victims of climate change from effects of these emissions is a *present* moral responsibility

Modern social scientists imagine only two forms of collective moral action - State and market



And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Acts 4. 31-2



Climate changed.
Let's cut the carbon



Greenhouse gas emissions in the earth system are a simulacrum of the Communion of Saints

Climate change has become a strong theme in Christian Aid and in other Church charitable action because Christians from Africa & Asia have urged this

Be a love and switch your computers off at the end of the day.



The Communion of Climate Saints?

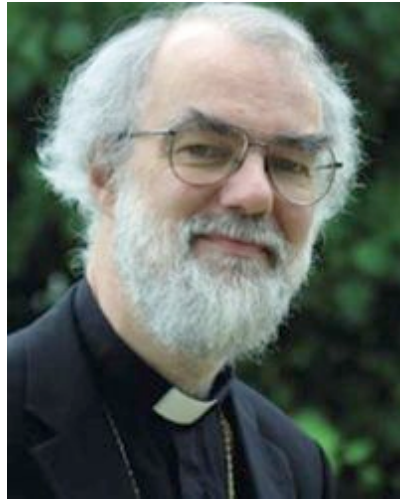


Pope Benedict - solar panels on Vatican and a forest in Hungary to offset Vatican's flights

+ Richard Chartres of London says flying is a sin as he floated up the Thames on a replica Noah's Ark



+Rowan Williams says churches ought to set example & reduce their ecological footprint by conservation, and by Christians 'growing their own'



A Spiritual Theology of Climate Change?

Industrialised humanity finds it hard to imagine that past emissions influence the present or that present emissions influence the future

The rituals of capitalism train us to be 'now people'

Hence sense of solidarity between dead and living, and the living and the unborn, is increasingly attenuated

Ecclesial footprinting still does not quite get it!

The Mentalities of Climate Change



Lovelock and Giddens both look for a new mentality

The one wants us to have a new sense of connection with the reality of the future

The other wants us to have a new sense of humanity's interdependent place in gaia - the living biosphere



Prayers for the dead sustain
solidarity between the dead
and the living

Such prayers go back to
early church tradition

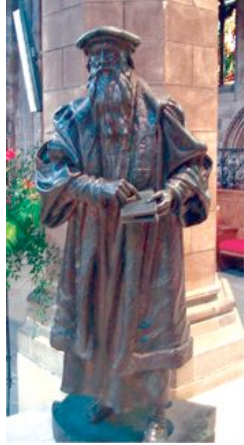
All Souls





Purgatory was at times a hopeful mediating realm between this life and paradise where sin & death's dominion are ended

Belief in saving paradise underlines the destiny of the cosmos and of the Saints in Christ - a paradise imagined in *this* world and not just the next



For Reformers indulgences, and purgatory,
both represent the hold of Rome, and of the
dead, over the living

But they excised purgatory without
recovering paradise

'Freedom of the Christian' without
mediating practices of the Church slides into
freedom for merchants and nobles and
thence industrial servility

This world is consequently freed for
dominion of capital and the machine

Rise of Purgatory accompanies a loss of a sense of Paradise
as a domain close to the present

But the Reformation project to abolish Purgatory does not
recover the proximity of Paradise

If anything the way from the sinful present to the future
hope of heaven is made harder

And some of course - Max Weber among them - suggest
that the lack of mediation provokes the rise of the
Protestant work ethic and hence capitalism



Capitalist time replaces medieval balance
of work and holy-day with unremitting
factory servitude

But for many in post-industrial Scotland
factory servitude would be preferable to
enforced unemployment & poverty



Climate justice at home
and overseas?



Darfur 'climate refugees'

Almsgiving, pilgrimage, prayer, penance are the key practices for removing guilt of the dead and freeing them from purgatory

Almsgiving - for drought and famine victims and for sustainable development - is crucial device for freeing poor farmers from the dominion of the fossil fuels of the dead

Presently there remains an outflow of funds & natural resources from Africa and poorer parts of Asia to Europe and North America



This flow of funds and resources fuels climate change

And it undermines development of resilient local economies

Adaptation, as well as mitigation, requires fair trade

It also requires a new focus on food self-sufficiency

Almsgiving





ACTS Vigil

Climate Change Day of Prayer

October 4th 2009 - St Francis Day



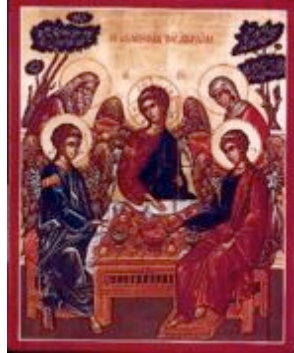
Penitential Action - Solar Panels on the Sanctuary



Patriarch Bartholomew's Pilgrimage to Antarctica



Purgatory or Paradise?



If as John of Pergamon argues the ecological crisis of Western culture is because we no longer regard ourselves as 'parts of nature' we need to recover consciousness of the earth as the realm of Spirit

The loss of a sense of co-creatureliness is advanced by growing dominion of humans over nature since 15C

Efforts to recover a spirituality of creatureliness offer a more positive vision of ecological rituals

Purgatory or Paradise?

How to deliver Scotland's magnificent 42% emissions reduction target?

Core Scottish policy task is to connect climate change mitigation to equity, flourishing and justice and the Scottish government's 'solidarity target'



Living Off Present Sunlight for Future Wellbeing

Locally sourced renewable energy promotes *spiritual* sense of dependency on divine power, as well as reducing pollution and promoting climate justice



Celebrating Plenitude

Locally sourced food promotes *good* work, composting, reduced waste, lower emissions from food production



Growing food, living in touch with the seasons, also promotes mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing



Bridgend
Community
Health
Allotments,
Edinburgh

Overcoming Mechanism

Muscle substituted for machine power promotes better public spaces and greater wellbeing



The Spirituality of Walking





When the Celts laid a fire they laid the three pieces of peat with a prayer to the Trinity, the source of spiritual and biological energy

Key Sources

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