

*The*  
**New Urban World**  
*Journal*

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Salt Lake City, showing a grid of streets and buildings. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a cloudy sky. A large, faint circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing a stylized bar chart with three bars of increasing height.

**Cities and  
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## **The New Urban World Journal**

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*Welcome to the first edition of the New Urban World Journal under the Bakke Graduate University (BGU) and Centre for Building Better Community (CBBC) partnership. As co-editors, we're excited to be leading this project and look forward to many editions exploring the role of faith in our rapidly urbanizing world.*

The New Urban World Journal has been in circulation since 2012. Starting as an expression of the International Society of Urban Mission (ISUM), the journal was handed to Urban Shalom Publishing in 2017. Now in 2023, the journal is being restarted as a partnership between CBBC and BGU. Despite its many iterations, the journal has remained true to its original purpose. In the context of a rapidly urbanizing world, the journal provides a space for faith-informed reflection on how to overcome some of the most pressing roadblocks to the creation of shalom. The journal is a platform for faith-informed scholars, practitioners, and leaders to share their thoughts, perspectives, stories, and experiences on this journey. We particularly, though not exclusively, want to share the voices of scholars and leaders from the majority world, who represent the countries most affected by urbanization.

As co-editors, we are both passionate about bringing thinking, practice, and reflection together to inform the way faith actors can best position themselves to work with God and others on the creation of communities where everyone can flourish.

Andre is a recent PhD graduate and practical theologian. For over two decades, he's been involved in community development, engaged in everything from caring for at-risk young people and training local community activists to better utilize the resources of their communities, to running community-wide celebrations and teaching Masters students. In 2018, he co-founded the Centre for Building Better Community and leads its work as Managing Director. He has extensive experience working alongside local governments, schools, faith groups, and the not-for-profit sector. Andre's PhD work focused on the concept of Shalom as a model for creating flourishing communities. He is an author, releasing *Building Communities of the Kingdom* in 2017 as well as various articles on the synergies between the Christian faith and community development. Most recently he has been teaching on flourishing communities and strength-based community development in many countries across Africa and Asia. He lives in Melbourne, Australia, has been married to his partner, Amy, for almost 30 years, and together they care for their senior citizen dog, Sid.

Brian is a veteran educator, beginning as a Religious Education and substitute teacher in the City of Birmingham (UK) and going on to teach as a lecturer in Theology, Philosophy, Research, and Christian Ethics at Ghana Christian University College for over 30 years. During this time he has also taught and supervised students at the post-graduate level in ForMission College, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, and Bakke Graduate University, where he also serves on the PhD Advisory Committee. He has also worked as an educational

developer with the Association for Commonwealth Universities by helping to design and deliver a professional development program for middle-level administrators in African universities. He has taught at all levels of education from primary to PhD, and professional. Brian has master's degrees in religious studies and further and higher education and a PhD in cross-cultural Christian ethics which was the basis for his book *Leading Virtue* (2010). He has published articles on the use of critical incidents in teaching Christian ethics, the professional development of middle-level university administrators, and the ethical virtues of solution-focused practice. Brian lives in Accra, Ghana with his wife, Comfort, an amazing social entrepreneur whom he seeks to support as an ally. Comfort and Brian have founded the Godhead Foundation and are currently building Barnabas House as an adult learning center for those seeking to discover God's transformative presence and purpose in their lives, communities, and organizations so they can 'keep in step' with what the Spirit is doing in their situation.

This edition of the NUWJ focuses on climate change. From rising sea levels to deforestation, air pollution, persistent heatwaves, and floods, the effect on our urban environments is comprehensive and multi-layered. Whilst climate change needs to be looked at holistically, with the majority of the population living in cities an urban lens on the effects and potential resiliencies and solutions needs to be explored. Benjamin Akano from Nigeria writes about the Church's mandate to work for shalom in their communities and the alarming lack of engagement in climate-related mission. Lauren Speeth explores the impact of climate on children, particularly issues related to water ecology, and how critical realism can be used to bolster an ecological ethic. Ransom Afram considers how the Ga people, who are the indigenous people of Accra, can be included as stakeholders in the climate debate as part of Christian mission. Karina Kreminski writes about her experience taking part in a climate emotions workshop at her local community center in Sydney, Australia. Claire Harvey shares about local leadership in the face of climate change and Charles Rukundo from Burundi writes about a community taking matters into their own hands as a response to repeated flooding. We also review David Miller's book *Solved*, about the role of cities in fixing climate change, and William Holden, Kathleen Nadeau, and Emma Porio's short work on eco-liberation theology in the Philippines.

We hope the journal and associated media become a conversation and look forward to hearing your thoughts on this edition and ideas and concepts for articles in the future.

Happy reading and every blessing,

Andre and Brian

# Ecological Ecclesiology: A Missiological Reflection On The Urban Church And Its Environment

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*Benjamin Isola Akano*

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the Church to bring shalom to society includes reconciliation with God, fellow humans, and the environment. It has a significant role in fostering environmental ethics that bring economic security to society. It derives its mission from an all-encompassing mission of God (*missio Dei*) to redeem all creation. Thus, caring for the physical environment becomes an imperative for the Church's mission, directly and indirectly. However, while most cities have many ecological crises, some churches do not seem to have any eco-theology that determines their response to the needs of their societies. Their ecclesiology is not ecologically compliant. Thus, reflecting on the ecological purpose of the urban Church from a missiological perspective, the researcher administered online Google Forms to 73 purposively selected people from different city churches, mainly from southwest and northcentral Nigeria, including Lagos, Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Ilorin, Abuja, Lokoja, Kaduna, Port-Harcourt, and Benin-City. He investigated the involvement of these churches in environmental care, among other tasks. Findings revealed that their environmental care is inconsistent with their passion for missionary activities. This implies they hardly consider environmental care integral to the Church's mission. Consequently, the study suggests the need to re-orientate churches on the missiological importance of environmental care and develop a contextually relevant urban ecological ecclesiology. It considered cognitive learning theories, such as Kurt Lewin's field theory and Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory, as an adequate framework for transforming their traditional to Biblical worldview on environmental care.



## Introduction

The purpose of the Church to bring *shalom* to society includes reconciliation with God, fellow humans, and the environment.

Unfortunately, the practice of Christian missions by some churches shows that they do not believe in this reality or understand its implications for ecological ecclesiology.

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With different ecological crises, it is common in Nigeria to hear churches pray for the government to wake up to a more responsible leadership. They see environmental care as the sole duty of the government agencies. Their attitudes and inactions about their environments are testimonies to this reality. Most churches hardly attend to manageable potholes in their streets; they do not bother about bushes, refuse dumps,

and erosion in their neighborhood. While this paper does not deny the governmental role in responding to ecological crises, it affirms that environmental care is the Church's direct role and means of participating actively in the public space. Thus, the Church has a significant role in fostering environmental ethics that bring economic security to society.

Therefore, this study reflects on the ecological purpose of the urban Church from a missiological perspective to re-awaken churches in Nigeria and, perhaps in Africa, to their responsibility for city environmental care. It reviews relevant missiological literature and uses Google Forms to survey 73 purposively selected people from different city churches to describe the state of involvement of their churches in the care of the environment. The purposive selection was based on the location of the churches of these respondents in urban centers. This study also suggests ways local churches can take part in caring for the environment as part of their missionary mandate. The argument of this study is two-fold. Firstly, the Church in Africa has a significant role in fostering environmental ethics that bring economic security to contemporary society. Secondly, for any local church to live up to its ecological expectations, it must consider environmental care as an integral part of its ecclesiology and act accordingly to fulfil the mandate of its nature and purpose.

## Literature Review

This section examines the place of ecology in the ecclesiology of churches in urban centers. It identifies some ecological crises in contemporary African cities and how churches in those locations can appropriately respond to them.

## Contemporary Challenges of Ecology in African Cities

Ecology literally means the study of organisms at home. The term derives from two Greek words: *oikos*, meaning 'house' or 'dwelling place,' and *logos*, meaning 'the study of.' Sarkar and Elliott-Graves (2016) agree with Sharma (2009) that the German biologist, Ernst Haeckel, first used and gave substance to this term in 1886. Sarkar and Elliott-Graves call it the economies of living forms, dealing with "the construction of models of the interaction of living systems with their environment" (Introduction, para. 1). Similarly, Sharma refers to it as "the knowledge of the sum of the relations of organisms to the surrounding outer world, to organic and inorganic conditions of existence" (p. 1). Ecology consists of the multiple ways the organisms interact with each other and with inorganic elements in an ecosystem. These include the interaction of inanimate water, air, and energy with the animate nature. Further, human beings rely heavily on these other members of the ecosystem, as human survival is practically impossible without them (Conradie, 2020). Assuredly, the creation account reveals that all organisms and elements were created before humans who were given the responsibility to take care of them (Gen. 1, 2).

Different challenges confront the contemporary urban environment in Africa. These include air and water pollution, energy needs, oil pollution, and biodiversity loss (Help Save Nature, 2021). Stott (2006) affirms that the reality of population explosion led to the challenges of resource depletion, reduced biodiversity, waste disposal and climate change in the contemporary world. Other notable environmental challenges include littering, a weedy environment, open defecation and urination, destruction of economic trees, water pollution by oil spillage, air pollution from vehicular, domestic and industrial smoke, and land pollution due to indiscriminate dumping of refuse, and use of chemical fertilizer (Ayandokun, 2016; Omomia, 2016). These common occurrences of African cities are sources of hazard to African dwellers. They are much in the urban centers because of the population. Sowah (2022) asserts that in 2019 alone, over 1 million deaths in Africa resulted from air pollution. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reports that up to 7 million premature deaths yearly may be linked to air pollution (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022).

In another vein, the African Development Bank (AfDB) affirms that not less than 70% of African cities are vulnerable to climate shocks. While some countries like South Sudan, Nigeria, and those in the Gulf of Guinea experience floods, others like Somalia, Algeria, Egypt, and Libya often face the challenge of drought and water shortage (African Development Bank, 2022). The World Bank also reports that "deterioration of environmental quality arising from urbanization is negatively impacting health, income, productivity, and the quality of life in African economies and cities... Africa is urbanizing at relatively low levels of industrialization, motorization, and technology by international standards. However, its heavy reliance on biomass fuels generates high fine and small particulate matter" (The World Bank, 2017). UNEP also asserts that urbanization is a crucial driver of environmental change for which cities

are hotspots for air pollution. The agency reports that nine out of 10 people breathe unclean air (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022).

Oladejo-Babalola (2016) associates the challenges of environmental care with governance and policy. He laments that failure in some human processes constitutes significant challenges to environmental care, these include inequality in the distribution of natural resources, weak governmental framework, mismanagement, and inordinate multinational interest. Mutonono (2020) also agrees that authorities' failure to provide necessary amenities for their citizens has led to people's use of resources in ways that create environmental problems. These agree with UNEP's submission that only 31% of countries in its survey had legal mechanisms for addressing transboundary air pollution, only 57% had a legal definition for air pollution, and most cities in Africa do not even have any action plan in this regard (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022). These have caused prolonged environmental challenges for cities in Africa.

*The Church fails to take up the responsibility of leading others to care for the environment and is guilty of being at the forefront of ecological exploitation.*

While these environmental challenges last and increase in intensity, and as they serve as opportunities for churches in Africa to channel their *shalom* ministry, the most significant concern is about the attitude and action of the Church about ecology. They have either an indifferent or a negative attitude toward their environment. This imbalanced attitude led Onyazonwu (2012) to conclude painfully that "either there are no 'born again' Christians or that such Christians are 'ecological illiterates'" (p. 96). The Church fails to take up the responsibility of leading others to care for the environment and is guilty of being at the forefront of ecological exploitation. While holding that God is the source of creation, its preaching creates attitudes of nonchalance and "freedom to exploit the biophysical world to one's self-gratification" (Ipadeola, 2016, p. 43). For Bartram and Oderinu (2019), the challenges of material and intellectual poverties have worsened environmental issues in Africa. These have led to ineffective coordination and implementation of adequate policies and programs for caring for nature. The implication is that people with economic and intellectual lack would not mind violating the process to get what they need from nature even if it violates the laws relating to the preservation of nature. If the Church took this stance, one would wonder what the position of those outside the Church would be. The light has become darkness in the care of the environment (Matt. 6:23). This calls for urgent attention.

### **Towards a Sustainable Urban Ecological Ecclesiology**

Ecclesiology is that aspect of theology that focuses on the nature and mission of the Church. As a reasoned discourse about the Church, it focuses on the self-understanding of the Church, based on the Bible, and how non-members of the Church also perceive them (Manion, 2007). Thus, it "investigates the Church's manifold identity in relation to a wide range of research areas: the

origins, mission, ministry, governance, authority, sacraments, unity, and diversity of the Church, including its relation to the state and to civil society” (Avis, 2018, p. 2-4). This means it focuses on the nature and mission of the Church worldwide. While there are debates on whether ecclesiology comes before missiology or vice-versa, there is no arguing that both are two sides of a coin because identity, nature, and purpose are closely related (Avis). There cannot be a missionless church because mission is the purpose for which God established His Church on earth.

Therefore, urban ecological ecclesiology refers to an understanding of the urban Church’s nature, identity, and purpose concerning its response to the ecological needs and crises in its society. Any suitable ecclesiology requires an authentic theology. Thus, any urban ecological ecclesiology requires an authentic ecological theology, or eco-theology, reflecting their cities’ peculiar needs and crises. Such eco-theology must fit into the mission of the Church. According to Stott (2006), the earth and all things in it belong to God (Ps. 24:1), but He has given it to humans to manage (Ps. 115:16). Thus, the biblical perspective of dominion in Genesis 1 is not domination. Instead, humans are God’s tenants and stewards whose duty is to culture nature. Unfortunately, the environmental concerns due to population explosion, resource depletion, biodiversity reduction, waste disposal, and climate change are manifestations of domination. The Christian perspective to this groaning of the whole creation is to join God in His mission to make them share in the glorious freedom of God’s children (Rom. 8:19-23).

Hunt et al. (2008) and Pope (2016) agree that Romans 8 has an ecological motif that should shape the mission of the Church. Though Hunt et al. warn that Romans 8:19-23 is more than a mantra for Christian environmentalism, the sense of divine ecojustice principles in the passage creates foundations in eco-theology based on creation’s purpose to participate in the glory and liberation of the children of God. According to them, the passage affirms the anthropocentric, rather than anthropomonistic, nature of God’s mission. While anthropomonism considers humans as the only focus of God’s redemptive plan, anthropocentrism maintains that man is central with the rest of creation also having value. Pope’s assertion reveals the evangelical stance tends toward anthropomonism, focusing on the personal salvation of humans at the expense of the rest of creation. He notes that though sin is uniquely human, its dynamics affect the creation and environment, leading to challenges in relationships between human and God, between human and human, and between human and non-human. Consequently, God’s *shalom* must reach all these levels. This ecological mindset is integral to the mission of the Church.

The Church derives its mission, or *missio ecclesiae*, from *missio Dei* or mission of God – a universal loving intention to restore the fallen humanity to His fellowship and under His reign. In this capacity, the Church continues with the role of Israel as His servants and light to the nations. Christian missions emerge from the mission of the Church. Over the ages, the Church has undertaken Christian missions involving various Spirit-inspired activities to fulfil the purpose of God for His world (Ott et al., 2010). Ilufoye (2016) asserts that the

essence of *missio Dei* is restoring humanity to a loving relationship with God and a cooperative relationship with other creatures.

Thus, for any local church to be part of this program of God, it must understand the content of God's mission.

*The mission of the Church is holistic in content. It is to bring shalom to the world.*

The mission of the Church is holistic in content. It is to bring *shalom* to the world. This *shalom* involves spiritual, physical, psychological, and social peace (Moreau et al., 2004). According to Stott (2015), the Hebrew conception of *shalom* in social harmony includes community development, amongst other duties. It involves human–God, human–human, and human–environment harmonies. In another work, Stott (2006) is unequivocal about the place of environmental care in *missio ecclesiae*. He considers it an integral part of (*diakonia*) service functions that cannot go apart from the (*matyria*) witness functions. Asserting that the challenges of global warming and climate change are increasing at an alarming rate, he argues that Christians should join the debate by taking the preservative position of the Bible. This includes seeing God's natural environment as His garden for Christians to culture and faithfully care for as His tenants and stewards. Practically, this can be done in partnership with people of other faiths who have similar mindsets, as long as such common goal does not lead to unbiblical practices such as nature worship. It is a task of agrarianism rather than domination. According to Davis (2009), agrarianism is a culture of preservation that cares for both communities and material means of life in the light of the oncoming generations. This is in contradistinction to domination that results from modern industrialized agricultural culture, which is a threat to biodiversity and ecosystem. Further, it is undeniable that the reality of urban population explosion is causing resource depletion, reduced biodiversity, waste disposal and climate change, especially because of domination mindset. As such, Christians must not allow blindness and inertia about the ecological challenge to overwhelm them Conradie (2020). The Church must be willing to pay the price to deal with the challenge of blindness and inertia.

Faniran (2012) agrees that the Church needs to acknowledge the Biblical injunction as God's stewards to cater for the environment in anticipation of the future generation (Prov. 13:22a; Ezra 9:12b) and God's means of communicating to humanity (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:20; Matt. 6:28-29). In agreement with Stott (2015) on the place of ecology in the theology of the Church, Conradie (2020) notes that the integration of God's acts of creation and redemption, as reflected in The Nicene Creed, demonstrates the integral nature of a balanced theology of the Church. Thus, separating them portends a grave danger for the holistic gospel message. He highlights five essential areas of the Christian approach to the environment. These include: first, being responsible stewards of the creation of God; second, restoring land as a means of establishing ecological balance; third, emphasizing sustainable development that considers the long-term effects of actions and how they affect people's holistic well-being; fourth, raising prophetic voices to challenge the environmental injustice due to abuse of power; and fifth, an emphasis on eco-feminism which focuses on the watch against prosperity theologies which

lead to rape of the earth and tendencies to consumerism attitude. The Church must not practice escapism by focusing only on the spiritual aspects of life at the expense of the material environment.

Osunade (2012) asserts that “Christ’s holistic ministry does not recognize any attempt to separate our responsibility to nature from our responsibility to other people and God... [This is because] the responsibility that people have to nature is not to nature itself or to the nature-creating God, but also towards all people who require nature’s bounty” (xxi). Thus, caring for the environment directly impacts human lives, whose salvation is often considered primary in the redemption story. However, it is not a matter of either one or the other but that of the salvation of souls and the care of the environment together. This is a re-echo of anthropocentric soteriology as opposed to anthropomonic versions clarified by Hunt et al. (2008).

Massaquoi’s (2016) Christocentric perspective of the environment is another dimension to this subject. He identifies two Christological statements that should motivate the Church to care for its environment.

*The creative and sustaining mission of Christ includes both humankind and the biosphere.*

The first aspect considers Jesus, the Word, as the Creator and Sustainer of the earth (John 1:1-3; Heb. 12:3; Col. 1:16-17). The creative and sustaining mission of Christ includes both humankind and the biosphere. The second statement focuses on the atoning work of Christ as being valid for all the creation, which is under

the groaning of pain due to the fall and looking for the manifestation of the children of God (Eph. 1:10; Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:18-23). Thus, there is no distinction between the Triune God’s creative and redemptive work. This is central to Moltmann’s (1986) argument in his theological reflection. The same Holy Spirit in creation came upon the believers at redemption. Therefore, the mission of the Church, which emerges from the mission of the Triune God, is not for only humanity at the exclusion of its environment.

From the above, there is no separation between the spiritual mandate to pursue human salvation and that for the care of their environments. The duo interweave for the fulfilment of the purpose of God in His mission. Therefore, any genuinely missional urban church must incorporate a response to the ecological crises bedeviling its society in its ecclesiology. The plan to respond to the human-environment must not be downplayed for the other aspects of the Church’s mission. Unfortunately, separation is often noticeable in some churches. Their attitudes, actions, programs, and projections focus too little on environmental care. The result of the survey also reflects this.

## Research Method

The researcher used descriptive methods to investigate the state of involvement of local churches in the care of the environment in some parts of Nigeria. It employed Google Forms to survey 73 people from different urban churches. None of the respondents was under 18; 56.2 percent were above

45, while 43.8 percent fell between 18 and 45. The researcher administered online Google Forms to 73 purposively selected people from different city churches, mainly from southwest and northcentral Nigeria, including Lagos, Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Ilorin, Abuja, Lokoja, Kaduna, Port-Harcourt, and Benin-City. He investigated the involvement of these churches in environmental care, among other tasks of their church mission. The researcher posed questions concerning the frequency of their churches' participation in the different tasks of the mission of the Church in the last five years. It aimed to identify their commitment towards environmental care as an integral of the Great Commission mandate. The results were analyzed and discussed.

## Findings and Discussions

Generally, over 96% of the respondents identified themselves as Evangelicals, with 11% as Pentecostals and above 85% belonging to the mainline Protestant denomination, including Baptist, Methodist, and Anglican. The rest were from the Roman Catholic and the African Indigenous Churches. Also, 60.3% of the churches were in the Nigerian southwest, 27.4% were in the north-central, and only 2% came from outside Nigeria. The rest came from across the remaining four geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

**TABLE 1: Frequency of participation in church mission tasks**

| Task                                | Frequency Of Churches' Participation In Five Years (%) |                   |                      |                    |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                                     | Not At All   | Less Than 3 Times | Between 3 & 10 Times | More Than 10 Times |
| 1. Mass Evangelism                  | 11   | 8.2               | 42.5                 | 38.4               |
| 2. One-on-one Evangelism            | 8.2  | 15.1              | 28.2                 | 47.9               |
| 3. Prison and Hospital Evangelism   | 16.4   | 26.0              | 27.4                 | 30.1               |
| 4. Church Planting                  | 31.5   | 37.0              | 21.9                 | 9.6                |
| 5. Medical Outreach                 | 21.9   | 27.4              | 32.9                 | 17.8               |
| 6. Food and Palliative Sharing      | 2.7  | 21.9              | 43.8                 | 31.5               |
| 7. Erosion Control and Road Repairs | 41.1   | 37.0              | 15.1                 | 6.8                |

| Task                          | Frequency Of Churches' Participation In Five Years (%) |                   |                      |                    |
|-------------------------------|--|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                               | Not At All   | Less Than 3 Times | Between 3 & 10 Times | More Than 10 Times |
| 8. Environmental Sanitation   | 24.7   | 38.4              | 23.3                 | 13.7               |
| 9. Tree/Flower/Shrub Planting | 56.2   | 23.3              | 13.7                 | 6.8                |

### Current Ecological Orientation of Churches

For the subject of this research, the researcher discusses only two main inferences from Table 1 above. First, it is commendable to note that churches seem to commit themselves to proclaiming the gospel message. Their commitment to mass evangelism and one-on-one evangelism reflects this reality. One may also adduce reasons for those not involved in these evangelism strategies: 11% and 8.2%, respectively. Perhaps they have other strategies for reaching out to the un-evangelized world around them.

Further, the result reflects that most of these churches demonstrate that they understand the Church's missionary mandate is not only about activities that directly relate to human personal conversion. This is clear from the figures recorded in the prison and hospital evangelism, medical outreach, and sharing of food and palliatives. On the contrary, if their commitment to these tasks is only a means or bait to getting the people whose conversion they were seeking, then there is a problem of understanding the mission of the Church. In such a case, there is the need for proper orientation concerning the two main mission tasks, witness, and service, as two sides of a coin.

The second inference from the figures in Table 1 is that while more churches rate high on items 1 through 6, only a few churches perform well on items 7, 8 and 9. An implication of this is that only a few churches seem to consider environmental care as an integral part of the mission of the Church. For instance, as high as 41.1% of the churches surveyed had not taken part in road repairs and erosion control of their communities. This calls for attention, given the situation of roads and the environment in the areas surveyed. It is challenging to note that as high as 56.2% of the churches did not plant trees, flowers, or shrubs, either for aesthetic or health reasons. Thus, only about 6.8% of the churches surveyed attempted to prevent or correct erosion in their communities. Their ecclesiology is ecologically deficient. This calls for serious attention.



## Creating a New Missiological Orientation

The findings of this research reveal that churches show zeal for missions. However, some embarked on missions based on the traditional understanding, focusing on human personal conversion alone. There is an observable difference between the figures of 'spiritual' activities (items 1, 2, 3) and environmental activities (items 7, 8, and 9) in Table 1 above. This may reflect what Stott (2006) refers to as being overwhelmed by the blindness and inertia about the ecological challenge or what Conradie (2020) calls escapism that focuses only on the spiritual aspects of life at the expense of the material environment. Therefore, there is a need for reorientation of churches on the missiological importance of environmental care as part of their ecclesiology.

Cognitive theories of learning are adequate for re-orientating the traditional worldview of churches on environmental care as an integral part of the mission of the Church to a biblical view. Churches should be helped to develop eco-theology that is both Bible-based and suitable for their contexts. Kurt Lewin's field theory and Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory are typical examples. Both theories conceptualize change as comprising three stages, beginning from the learner's cognitive structure, leading to a change of attitude and action. Lewin's theory emphasizes learning by processing information and spontaneous application of the same to daily life issues based on changes that their perceptions inspire. The learning process should be deep-rooted in the realm of the mind, rather than being a mere physical behavior (Mangal, 2013; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020; Snyder, 1996). An authentic eco-mission must be driven by a sound eco-theology (Pope, 2016, 19). Leaders and members of churches must grasp this eco-theology to translate it into appropriate eco-mission in their contexts.

*Cognitive theories of learning are adequate for re-orientating the traditional worldview of churches on environmental care as an integral part of the mission of the Church to a biblical view.*

Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory gives a clarification of the process as follows: in the first stage, the new biblical knowledge confronts and disorientates their existing values and feelings about Christian missions. In the second stage, they acquire new cognitive structures of the biblical view of environmental care as integral to Christian missions. At the final stage, the new perception motivates them to practice missions with a new understanding. This reorientation should start with church pastors and other leaders of churches and mission agencies, including mission coordinators, mission committees and mission boards. This will bring the needed change in the overall mission pursuit.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reflected on the ecological purpose of the Church from a missiological perspective. It aimed to re-awaken churches in African cities to their responsibility for environmental care as an integral part of their mission. The study of 73 city churches showed that while there are different ecological crises in cities of Nigeria, as in other major African cities, the greatest challenge is the apathy of the Church to the noble task of environmental care. Their ecclesiology is ecologically deficient due to a lack of adequate eco-theology. While they show great zeal for Christian missions, they do not seem to consider environmental care as an integral part of the mission of the Church. Thus, the researcher proposed a reorientation of churches in this regard using the cognitive theory of education that emphasizes a change beginning with the worldview of Christians on the inseparability of ecology from ecclesiology. Therefore, the following recommendations are germane for consideration:

1. Churches in Africa, through their pastors and other church leaders, must change their orientation and consider creation care as an integral part of the mission of the Church. Instead of abandoning environmental care to ecologists, they must seek to collaborate with governmental and non-governmental agencies, individuals, and corporate bodies, including church neighbors like the landlord associations, youth groups, and artisans, to create awareness and care for the environment. This requires establishing specific contextually relevant eco-theology.
2. Theological schools must intensify their training efforts to help gospel ministers develop meaningful eco-spirituality and eco-theology for their ministry context.



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# Water, Cities, Generations And Hope

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*Lauren Speeth*

## ABSTRACT

Many of the challenges faced by cities are water-ecology related. Water challenges top the list in a global risk perception survey, and many are driven or exacerbated by climate change. Differences in beliefs surrounding climate change modulate our behavior and hinder cooperation. They include gender, religious beliefs, political outlooks, level of cynicism, and economic development. At the same time, the world's children are experiencing grief, eco-anxiety and a sense of betrayal by their elders. In response to the scientific consensus on the climate crisis, many voices have called for a greater emphasis on environmental education (eco-ed) to foster generational leadership. The author's 2022 dissertation research offers some key insights, including support for the use of Critical Realism (CR) to bolster an ecological ethic, as well as an easily taught methodology known as The Seven Pillars. This article includes examples of how CR can be applied in exploring theology and cities, from Genesis through Revelation and touches on engaging non-theistic outlooks and applying the Seven Pillars to grow hope.

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I'm honored to participate in this issue of the New Urban World Journal on climate change and cities. I have an abiding interest in these issues, particularly surrounding water, and in fostering a more hopeful tomorrow. There is a popular Hebrew proverb, *bli mayim ein chayim* (בלי מים אין חיים), meaning "without water, there is no life." Eight of the world's ten largest cities are by water, and 44% of the world population, "more people than inhabited the entire globe in 1950" live within 150 km of the coast (*UN Atlas of the Oceans*: Subtopic, n.d.).

## Is There a Problem? It Depends Who You Ask

A ten-country study published in *The Lancet* querying 10,000 children found climate change universally concerning, with 59% of children “very or extremely worried” and 84% at least “moderately” worried (Hickman et al., 2021, p. e863). The majority, 75%, think of the future as frightening, and over half are “sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty,” with “greater feelings of betrayal than of reassurance” when judging the responses of those in the position to act. This has been dubbed eco-anxiety or eco-grief.

Scientific consensus approaches 100% among papers expressing an opinion on climate change, with only 0.3% uncertain and 0.7% rejecting anthropogenic global warming (Cook et al., 2013). Yet non-scientists are more varied in their opinions. Worldwide, concern over climate change is lower in men than women,, and higher in less developed nations than wealthier ones, as “the perceived benefits of mitigation tend to decrease with economic development, whereas the perceived costs increase” (Bush & Clayton, 2023). In the USA, Yale University’s climate mapping project has estimated that 28% of adults share a narrative that climate change does not exist. Nearly one-third, or 32%, tell themselves humans are not its cause, and over half, or 55%, believe wrongly that scientists are divided on the issue (Marlon et al., 2020). Here, one also finds divisions along political lines, political distrust, and cynicism (Fairbrother, 2017) as well as growing incivility (American Bar Association, 2023).

*A World Economic Forum survey noted water challenges rank highest among all world risks*

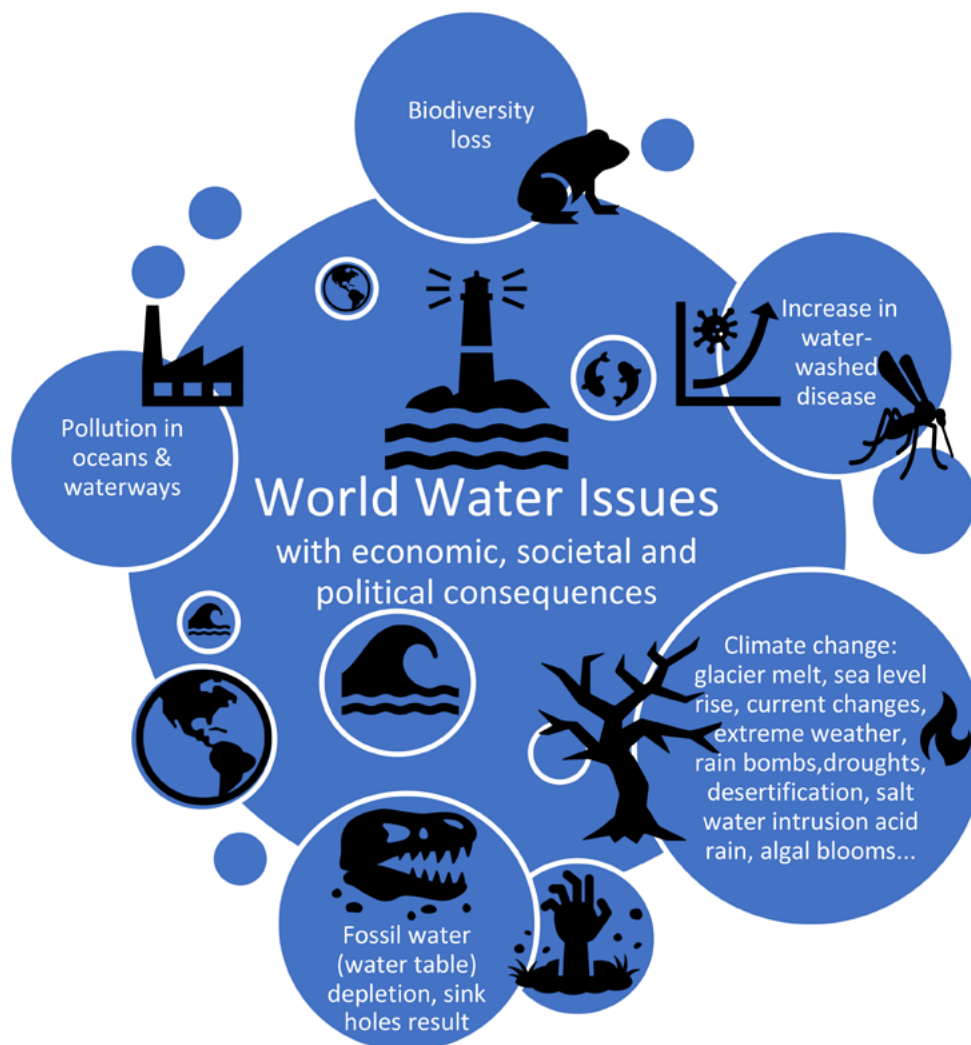
## What Are Some Risks?

A World Economic Forum survey noted water challenges rank highest among all world risks, driving mass migration to cities, sparking conflicts and social instability, disrupting cities, and underlying a host of other ills (World Economic Forum, 2015). There were over 5,000 water-related disasters from 2001 to 2018, accounting for 73.9% of all worldwide natural disasters (Lee et al., 2020).

A Moody’s Analytics report noted that, in U.S. metro areas, “large coastal economies bear by far the most risk,” especially the Carolina coast, from Jacksonville NC to Charleston SC (Kamins, 2023, p. 3). In California where I live, sea level rise threatens the 85% of state residents who live in coastal communities, and the loss of the Sierra snowpack is threatening the water supply (*Climate Change Impacts in California*, 2021). Yet ocean advocate Alexandra Cousteau has noted, oceans are the least funded of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (The Nature Conservancy, 2021a).

Cities face issues with aging infrastructures never designed for high populations and severe weather. For example, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the sewer system overflows during heavy rains, contaminating the parks, yards and homes of diverse, vulnerable neighborhoods with raw sewage. Moreover, “Climate Change makes the sewage discharge problem exponentially worse” (*Save the Alewife Brook*, n.d., para. 8). Worldwide, we underinvest

in infrastructure; our world's dams are now "at risk of catastrophic failure," threatening many large cities (Leffer, 2023). Flooding exacerbates waterborne and water-washed diseases (Omarova et al., 2018) which are on the rise, and climate change can aggravate over half of human pathogenic disease (Mora et al., 2022). Africa is suffering disproportionately, while producing only 2% to 3% of greenhouse gas emissions (World Meteorological Organization, 2021). Food waste, less obviously a water concern, contributes to food insecurity and greenhouse gas and also squanders precious water resources (*Food Loss and Waste*, n.d.). Climate change has exacerbated food instability, as have overfishing (The Nature Conservancy, 2021a), ocean acidification (Jewett & Romanou, 2017), and unsustainable farming practices that deplete the water table (Kirschenmann, 2010). Pollution (Boretti & Rosa, 2019), inconsistent and inequitable access (Omarova et al., 2018) are also key concerns.



**Illustration:** *The Worldwide Water Crisis* (Speeth, 2022, p. 7)



## **Environmental Education as an Answer**

We owe it to our children to equip them to meet the challenges they will face in the cities they will inherit. Among the many voices suggesting fostering a new generation of environmental leaders are conservationists (Audobon Society, 2021; The Nature Conservancy, 2021b; World Wildlife Fund, 2021), ethicists (Burgess-Wilkerson, 2018; Das, 2017; Miller, 2005), and theologians (Bouma-Prediger, 2020; Francis, 2015; Kirschenmann, 2010; Vincent, 2017).

Environmental education (eco-ed), a term coined by Dr. William Stapp (Stapp, 1969), has been defined by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as “a process that allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem-solving, and take action to improve the environment” (US EPA, 2012). I define anyone who helps another person understand or address an environmental issue as an eco-educator. That includes all of us. In the 1970s, eco-ed’s focus was on community issues, morality, and citizenship (Zhang, 2017). Today, opinions vary on what its emphasis and scope should rightly be, with some suggesting it could cause harm if it fosters “cruel optimism,” repeating inconsequential actions taken with unrealistic hope that “ultimately change nothing” (Ruitenbergh, 2020, p. x33). There is a famous saying about repeating the same thing expecting change being the definition of insanity; it originated not, as many suppose, with Albert Einstein, but with Alcoholics Anonymous (Pickle, 1981).

## **My Findings and How You Can Use Them**

I studied how to foster environmental leadership through eco-ed in dissertation research for a PhD in Innovative Urban Leadership at BGU (Speeth, 2022). I was particularly interested in investigating the Seven Pillars methodology I had formalized in an earlier DMin dissertation grounded in wisdom received from former U.S. President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter (Speeth, 2010). Briefly, the Seven Pillars are: Vision; Special Skills; Non-duplication; Partnership; Credit-sharing; Feedback; and Staying power. Without vision, the people perish, so a hope-filled vision is crucial. The other pillars involve working in partnership, sharing the credit, leveraging skills, gathering feedback, and staying the course. After writing a book expounding its use in social entrepreneurship I have taught and used this methodology for over ten years and seen it adopted internationally including in eco-ed settings (Speeth, 2010, 2012).

My research results were generally consistent with the literature, suggesting integrating eco-ed throughout the school curriculum (Alawattage & Fernando, 2017; Azizah & Sugirin, 2019; Esteban Ibáñez et al., 2020; Green et al., 2019; Islam & Kieu, 2021; McCright, 2012) and providing time for unscripted nature experiences (Booth, 2021; Corbett, 2006) but taking care to support students for whom nature may be scary rather than fun (Alderson, 2016; Pihkala, 2020), including the growing number of children living in cities who may prefer nature through a window rather than in the wild.

My research underscored the importance of compelling media and positive storytelling (de Silva & Hunter, 2021; Muthukrishnan, 2019; Saltan, 2017; Vigliano-Relva & Jung, 2021). Even small wins, such as your local city council passing measures reducing light pollution to help local wildlife, are worth discussing. Search for these stories and you will surely find them in your hometown. Finally, I found support for an ethical-spiritual growth component and all seven aspects of my Seven Pillars methodology. In response to the findings on compelling media, I developed various water-themed representations for eco-ed:



**Illustration:** *The Seven Pillars in a Water Ecology Education* (Speeth, 2022, p. 222)

My findings pointed to Critical Realism (CR) as a way forward. CR holds that the world exists independently, outside of our minds. Though knowledge is changeable and fallible, it is possible and rational to choose a path, because not all paths are morally or epistemically equal (Khazem, 2018). As such, CR offers “a way to make sense” of the human experience (Tinsley, 2022). CR echoes ancient Greek philosophers including Aristotle (384–322 BC), student of Plato (c. 428–348 BC), student of Socrates (c. 470–399 BC). Socrates held that virtue could be taught; Aristotle held wisdom was a virtue, and “the good life is, therefore, the rational activity of the soul, as guided by the virtues” (Duignan, 2018, Ethics section, para. 4).

*Beliefs matter.  
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These ancients offered educators three keys: ethos, logos, and pathos. Ethos relates to credibility, logos appeals to the head, and pathos speaks to the heart (Aristotle, 2020). It can be especially useful for “collective action for sustainability and against climate change” (Khazem, 2018, p. 131). In eco-ed, CR also opens the door to eco-theology and eco-philosophy.

Beliefs matter. An ethical and theological frame can proffer guidance, promote hope, and protect against despair. When beliefs influence our actions, they are called gateway beliefs (Linden et al., 2015). For example, someone who self-defines as “environmentally conscious” or accepts the scientific consensus on climate change is more likely to recycle (Funk & Hefferon, 2019). CR can be applied in understanding cities, from Genesis through Revelation, including engaging with non-theistic outlooks.

## Engaging Non-Theistic Outlooks

Today’s youths encompass many different epistemological perspectives, life contexts, and “truth lenses” (Hirst & Hirst, 2009, p. 15). Non-theistic viewpoints, those that either reject or are agnostic towards faith, are widespread and growing (Deutsche Welle, 2021; Lambert, 2006; Pew Research Center, 2014). As Dr. Donald Carson, Emeritus Professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote, “...at the broader level of public cultural discourse we are practical atheists” (Carson, 2019, p. 13). To engage with non-theistic frames respectfully and without resorting to apologetics or proselytizing, the key is to appreciate each point of view, meeting students where they are. I suggest a fair-minded and wide-ranging discussion, trusting the Holy Spirit will guide their search for Truth, and that their conclusions will be stronger as a result of their personal exploration.

Consider the joint statement by theologians, “We are already witnessing the consequences of our refusal to protect and preserve [the environment]” (Welby et al., 2021, p. 3). If the statement seems true to youths, then trace this refusal back to its source. The scientific mind grew to be favored over the physical and seen as separate during the Enlightenment (Zakai, 1969). As German systematic theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1985) noted, “The earlier theological idea of the Creator Spirit who interpenetrates, quickens and animates the world

was pushed out by the modern mechanistic world picture” (p. 98).

Consider nihilism’s view that there are no objective moral values, then share how Nietzsche suffered a breakdown resulting in insanity for the last 11 years of his life... after he became distressed at seeing a coachman whipping an exhausted horse (Magnus, 2020).

Contrast utilitarianism, a form of consequentialism, against deontology, which uses rules in decision-making, without dismissing either (Gaus, 2001). A utilitarian argument for enlightened self-interest could include how an out-of-balance environment can cause personal pain, such as when fires and floods threaten one’s home and can limit the personal freedom of future generations (Moos, 2019). Furthermore, “Given the dependence of all sentient life on the ecological services natural environments and wild organisms provide, an ecologically informed utilitarian ethic must, in some sense, be an environmental ethic” (Wolff, 2008, p. 7). And as for deontology, why not share a few instances where Jesus broke human rules to follow God’s will (Matt. 8:3, Matt. 12:1–15, Mark 3:1–6, etc.)?

*By treating various philosophical positions with respect, one opens the path for theological discussions, from creation through end times, and how they may apply to the environment*

By treating various philosophical positions with respect, one opens the path for theological discussions, from creation through end times, and how they may apply to the environment. And by teaching the Seven Pillars in environmental projects, one demonstrates solidarity and fosters a sense of self-efficacy. Planting trees, you grow hope.

## The Original Mandate

Considering that the Hebrew word for the earth is Adamah, (אָדָמָה), and the word for human is Adam (אָדָם) one finds humanity and the earth explicitly linked. Yet just as a curse fell on creation due to humanity (Gen. 3:17), a blessing is also intertwined with our activities and destiny. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, stated that all creation is groaning as if in labor, awaiting the promised hope (Rom. 8:22). God’s mandate to care for creation still applies (Francis, 2015; Kirschenmann, 2010; Moltmann, 1985), with creation relying on us to play our part in its salvation (Moltmann, 1985). This sentiment can be found throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew have together suggested, “If we think of humanity as a family and work together towards a future based on the common good, we could find ourselves living in a very different world” (Welby, et al. 2021, p. 5).

In the Gospel of Matthew, we find one of the Beatitudes or blessings, when Jesus called peacemakers blessed, promising they would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:9). To Fr. John Dear, this blessing depends on our actions: “If we are nonviolent, Jesus teaches, we will inherit the earth and become one with

creation” (Dear, 2018, pp. 44-45). Likewise, Fr. Jaroslaw Buciora (2018) of the Ukrainian Church of Canada has blamed today’s environmental crises on our incorrect anthropocentric viewpoint, calling it a “deformed relationship of humanity with nature,” noting that “nature is theocentric” and the mystery of a relational, Triune God can be experienced when relating to creation, because its ‘otherness’ in a trinitarian context places it into ecclesiological ‘koinonia’ with humankind and God” (p. 5). Furthermore, to Buciora, “the ultimate task for man is to be in unity with God and to bring the entire creation to redemption” (p. 10). This argument is very similar to one posited by Moltmann (1985): “If we cease to understand God monotheistically as the one, absolute subject... we can then no longer, either, conceive his relationship to the world he has created as a one-sided relationship of domination” (p. 2).

“Nature is resilient, yet delicate,” wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury, Pope Francis, and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in a joint statement (Welby et al., 2021, p. 3). They advised we choose life (Deut. 30:19) and work alongside God (Gen. 2:4–7), cautioning against squandering our inheritance like a prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32) or putting our faith in worldly wealth (Luke 12:13–21). They also decried the profound injustice that the world’s poorest, who have done the least to cause the current environmental crisis, are bearing the harshest consequences. As Pope Francis (2015) pointed out, destroying the environment is also robbing our future: all of us are “silent witnesses to terrible injustices” whenever we benefit at the cost of future generations (para. 36). Similar statements have been, and continue to be released, including an ambitious 2016 statement signed by 270 faith leaders and 4,000 individuals representing 176 faith groups (Interfaithstatement2016.org, 2016) and many others (Davies, 2020; Quaker Earthcare Witness, 2015; World Council of Churches, 2016; World Evangelical Alliance, 2021).

The early Celtic Christians believed God was transcendent yet immanent, far beyond us and greater than we can imagine, yet as close as our very breath; everything was seen as interconnected, including humanity, nature, and God (Bamford & Marsh, 2000; Speeth, 2013). One famous Irish prayer, *The Lorica*, summons powerful aspects of nature, such as the sun, the moon, wind, lightning, and the sea, for protection, while envisioning oneself surrounded by Christ. This Celtic view has parallels in the writings of St. Augustine, who referred to God as both secret and truly present (Augustine & Chadwick, 2008).

## Considering Cities

The popular image of the fallen city, such as that described in the biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), can be challenging to reconcile with an inner vision of God’s plan. Urbanization is increasing, and city dwellers often work inside conditioned spaces (The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). Cut off from farming, the rhythm of urban lives is no longer tied to the seasons or the weather. In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*, arguably the most strongly worded official position the Catholic Church had ever taken regarding humanity’s relationship to the environment, Pope Francis (2015) traced the world’s environmental problems to a modern-

day lack of connection with nature stemming from increasing urbanization, noting, “We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature” (para. 31).

My late mentor, Rev. Dr. Ray Bakke, often argued on behalf of cities, pointing out that God’s story started in a garden and ended in a garden city and arguing that God would not end the story in a city if God hated cities (Bakke, 1997). St. Augustine wrote that even the trees would exalt at the end times (Augustine & Chadwick, 2008). The Bible’s ultimate city includes glorious Edenic garden aspects. The Book of Revelation describes its beauty poetically: New

*Given that Revelation ends in a blue-green city, perhaps there is no need to choose between gardens with flowing rivers and urban life.*

Jerusalem is a city with a river, trees, and fruit. The sun and moon are no longer needed for light. The earth’s orbital relationship with the sun influences seasons, so there could be no seasons in New Jerusalem. Fruit would always be in season.

Given that Revelation ends in a blue-green city, perhaps there is no need to choose between gardens with flowing rivers and urban life. What if our cities could have it all? Some cities are leading the way, and the trend to city dwelling has its benefits.

According to an article published by Yale School of the Environment, in urban environments where the human population is denser, this density is the very thing that makes cities so much more sustainable than suburban or rural living: “If you really want the best environmental model, you need to look at the nation’s biggest—and greenest—metropolis: New York City” (Owen, 2009, para. 1).

In Curitiba, Brazil, a beautiful, award-winning sustainable city (Hamilton, 2010) featured in *A Convenient Truth* (Bello, 2006) the building code requires that greywater be treated and reused and a watershed be installed to reduce runoff. More recently, the City of Minneapolis approved an ambitious Climate Equity plan that included a section on many water issues (Minneapolis, 2023).

In pre-invasion Ukraine, the Ministry of Education reclaimed and restored a lake as an educational resource for students from Kyiv, the capital city, and created an eco-ed film on water ecology (Shirokov, 2021). In eco-action days children planted trees that would beautify the space, provide shade, and help sequester water during heavy rains (The Elfenworks Foundation, 2021a).

In Jordan, where 91% of Jordanians live in cities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2024), most notably the capital city, Amman (Sharp, 2020) half the available water is used for agriculture (USAID, 2020) on under 3% of its arable land (The World Bank, 2021). In one of the driest countries of the world (World Resources Institute, 2013; Zraick, 2022) with “limited natural freshwater resources (and a) declining water table” (United States Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.), a new educational hydroponic farm and ranch offers a chance at a new direction (The Elfenworks Foundation, 2021b).

New York City itself, built on many buried streams and waterways, is home to some of the world's most creative blue-green commons, including Central Park's eight lakes and ponds, a drought-resistant garden atop a train track known as the Highline, and over 20,000 acres of natural areas (Kadinsky, 2016). Its leadership is working towards a goal of 85% of people living within walking distance of a park by 2030 (*Green Space*, n.d.). The city's low-lying land and subway tunnels are particularly vulnerable to sea level rise and mitigating actions are underway (City of New York, 2022; Kamins, 2023).

## Sharing Eschatological Perspectives

Children are fearful of the ultimate end of the earth's story. Sharing theological perspectives can help them ponder the future in ways that point towards hope. Hope for the future is especially important, because at school and in the news they may encounter adults expressing solastalgia, a neologism coined by philosopher Glenn Albrecht meaning emotional distress caused by environmental change (Albrecht et al., 2007), and may even feel the burden of needing to "carry the educator" (Pihkala, 2020, p. 20).

Scottish Episcopal theologian Francis Bridger (1990) has posited that, since the present and future are related, "the qualitative difference between the 'now' and the 'not yet' is not absolute," so "eschatology need not major in doom" (p. 292). Bridger has suggested examining our endings and considering whether we will be called to answer for our actions during the final judgment. In such a case, this "requires from us an ethic that must embrace the values and goals of the kingdom now" (p. 296). In a related approach, Mark Stephens, Director of Integrative Studies and Research at Excelsia College, has focused on the continuity of creation, now and in the future, and has shown evidence for both judgment and renewal (Stephens, 2011). Moltmann (1985), tracing the term ecology to its Greek meaning of a theology of the house, has offered an eschatological doctrine of our shared home based on trinitarian doctrine, where the Holy Spirit indwells in all creation:

The inner secret of creation is this indwelling of God, just as the inner secret of the sabbath of creation is God's rest. If we ask about creation's goal and future, we ultimately arrive at the transfiguring indwelling of the triune God in his creation, which through that indwelling becomes a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21). (p. xii)

Thomas Merton has written that we are called to co-create our future with God (Merton, 1983). The *Theology of Work* (TOW) offers the perspective that work is necessary and redemptive and that our efforts matter (Theology of Work Project, 2016). If one grants that God's ultimate aim is to restore the whole of creation, a Theology of Work perspective would be that work can play an important and redemptive role. Rev. Dr. Wilson Chan (2021) has suggested a way forward by connecting Old and New Testament ethical paradigms, illustrating how they lead forward in time. The Old Testament's chosen people of God can be equated to the New Testament's community, which can, in turn, become the eschatological workplace community. In making his case, Chan

referred to Revelation 22:1–7, highlighting the healing of the nations as well as the description of serving, seeing God’s face, and reigning. To Chan, the vision suggests that the future towards which we are heading will include relationship restoration, shalom-building, and service. As he put it, “We are walking to the eschatological paradigm which will be the new heaven and new earth.” Chan pointed out that between God’s creation of the Garden of Eden in Genesis and God’s Blue-Green City in Revelation, God brought humanity restoration through Jesus Christ. God continues to intervene in creation and care for it. He added, “We are created in the image of God. Shouldn’t we also imitate God in restoring creation?” (Chan, 2021). In this theological frame, since God’s care for creation is ongoing and eternal, and since we were created in the image and likeness of God, our work can, and should, reflect this care. This frame would likely be especially resonant for those who believe in “prevenient grace,” the concept that God goes before us, to prepare the way (Ioveno, 2020).

*“We are created in the image of God. Shouldn’t we also imitate God in restoring creation?”  
- Chan (2021)*

By contrast, premillennialist Donald Holdridge (2016) of Liberty University has suggested environmental efforts could lengthen the agony of creation writing, “Extreme climate change will take place during the Tribulation Period... It will not be anthropogenic, but ‘theogenic’ (God-caused)” (p. 22). Whether we feel called to help bring about God’s just peace “on earth as it is in heaven” (Bridger, 1990), or believe that such actions are ultimately harmful, is strongly influenced by our view of where we are in God’s timetable or of what God’s timetable may look like.

The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic felt like end times to many people (Dein, 2021). Fires raged, extraordinary weather events occurred, and disease patterns changed. One town, Paradise, in California, was burnt to the ground in unprecedented fires (*Climate Change Impacts in California*, 2021). Paradise lost! At the same time, as humans slowed their activities, nature was rebounding. There were reports of dolphins swimming in the canals of Venice, Italy, and wildlife was seen on the streets of major cities (Battisti, 2021). This provided a glimpse of nature’s resilience, showing us there is reason for hope. The remainder of the story is as yet unwritten.

## Conclusion

As our world grows increasingly urban, we have the possibility to invest in cities that are more blue-green than steely-gray. We also have the responsibility to educate the coming generations and equip them for the future they will face. Our children see this future as stark. They are despairing for the environment, and they need a vision for hope. Whether through formalized eco-ed, youth ministry, or in some other way, all of us can, and should, help foster this vision, joining with them in efforts on behalf of our communities. My research suggests Critical Realism can offer a winning combination of sound science grounded in deep truth, and I offer the Seven Pillars as an easily taught rubric for tackling problems and bolstering a sense of personal efficacy. I pray this article helps



foster a greater connection between you with the young people in your circles, equipping you with seven league boots to wade into the deep waters they care about most.



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# Climate Change Stakeholder Engagement In Globalizing Accra: Glocal And Global Contexts Of Inclusivity

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*Ransom Affram*

## ABSTRACT

The World Bank Report 2023 on Climate Change and Cities has the theme, *Thriving: Making Cities Green, Resilient and Inclusive in a Changing Climate* (Mukim & Roberts, 2023). It indicates that cities have become increasingly vocal advocates of climate action. In a book on Accra as a Globalizing City, an urbanologist shares how Accra urban officials were surprised, at that time, if Accra was labelled a Millennium city at the dawn of the present century. It represented the disparity between those who appreciate and conceptualize the urban world and those who might not be so informed conceptually. In the same vein, the advocacy subtheme might serve as another disparity between the global urban reflection and the lived urban outlook of city leaders. This paper engages such differential, especially that the report makes room for knowledge of the local context and how communities may be mobilized regarding such globally envisioned theme on climate action. In particular, that variance might be rather *intolerable* for the Accra indigenous folks who host the national and international populace domiciled in the city yet are not significant partners in global prosperity. The purpose of the paper is to re-evaluate the inclusivity in respect of indigeneity where the aspiration for livelihoods might overshadow the consideration of any impact of conceptualized climate issues on the city of Accra, specifically, and the global urban world, in general.

## Climate Change Stakeholder Engagement in Globalizing Accra: Glocal and Global Contexts of Inclusivity

Cities have been interpreted in many senses. When Saskia Sassen posed “Who owns the city?” she touched on how globalization makes new claims in global cities (Sassen, 2005). Sassen suggests a new frontier in the global city where economic globalization interprets new geography of what is central and what is marginal (Sassen, 1996). When the city indigene hears “Who owns the city?” that would be odd, as the idiomatic echo in Accra affirms Ga folks own the land of Accra, which might be stretched to imply that whatever the theme about anything to discuss must emerge from Ga as indigenes. Yet globalization has emerged through many a century. What about the discourse regarding climate change?

*The contemporary issues and actions pertaining to cities and climate change represent the most pressing existential crisis of global scale.*

The contemporary issues and actions pertaining to cities and climate change represent the most pressing existential crisis of global scale. The urban lens situates the local existential context in Accra, Ghana to integrate the pre-colonial and post-colonial backgrounds with the African value of wholeness in the urban climate and allied expectations. The relevance of the theme

in question is explored by utilizing stakeholder inclusion for participatory efforts in urban climate change action in view of crucial indigenous realities. The globalizing nature of Accra is also significant regarding global finance apart from urban environment and care management related to the local livelihood aspirations. Global city missiology therefore seeks the faith-informed response to the integral mix of people’s lives and circumstances. While globalization got Accra to join the global economy, its native folks found themselves to be further and further isolated from global prosperity. Urban missiologist Ray Bakke’s assessment that urbanites can be “sinned against” (2002, p. 41), applies to Accra in that hope as a social value was particularly violated at the onset of colonial status of the Gold Coast. Should the foreign initiative of climate change actions serve them well by drawing them into a renewed urban economy? Would their dignity and well-being be axed again like the colonial past denied them of their heritage and excellence in economic entrepreneurship well before the twentieth century that originally attracted global trade in-roads? The nexus between trust and hope as a faith conversation has existential interest in global environment care discourse. Broadening the groundwork for stakeholder engagement is essential to guarantee valued audience, participation, and sponsorship. If the history of urbanizing Accra brought myriads of migrating traders and investors from across the world to domicile in the city, the sentiments of losing ownership of the urban wealth to others might haunt indigenes in their attempt to explore how to care for the environment as part of a global agenda. Remotely, after more than a century of urban Christian faith, does the truth agenda of Jesus foster enough trust to meet existential aspirations? The paper discusses in three parts: firstly, the defining role of urban leadership for climate discourse objectives; secondly, the general context for utilizing a stakeholder approach

for implementation; thirdly, innovative collective stakeholder terms to ensure that indigenous and existential concerns are considered within the implied contextual relevance.

## The Defining Role of Urban Leadership

The relevant theme of Cities and Climate Change resonates in Accra as Ghana's premier and only global city. This was demonstrated by the Mayor of Accra, the Honorable Elizabeth Sackey, when she joined her compatriots to pay a courtesy call on the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican ahead of the World Environment Day in July 2023. The celebration recalled the "Loss and Damage: Finance Now" call that was emphasized for vulnerable developing countries from the COP 27 UN Climate conference in 2022. The Pope commended the Mayor and her delegation for their commitment to ensure the environment is protected in that climate change required developing a sense of "responsible cooperation" among those who contributed least to its occurrence (AMA, 2023, para. 3). City and church indicate an august example of key stakeholders in this regard for such a time as this.

A maiden National Creation Care conference was also held in May 2023 to tackle Ghana's environmental crises to develop a national Christian framework policy to serve the planning goals that safeguard the environment and address climate change-related issues (Pentecost News, 2023, para. 2). Prior to the national conference, "except for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EP) Church, there is a minimal record of the role churches in Ghana play towards

climate change mitigation and prevention" (Okyere-Manu and Morgan, 2022, p. 91). The EP church adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 13 to initiate projects in some northern parts of Ghana. Their initiatives are motivated by emphases in Christian ethics which advocate for environmental stewardship, and traditional African environmental philosophy to underscore the interdependence between humans and nature (Okyere-Manu and Morgan, 2022).

*There appears to be a broad interdependence among cities, churches, and global entities.*

There appears to be a broad interdependence among cities, churches, and global entities. Thus, Graham (2020), put forward stakeholder perspective in managing climate change to build climate resilience in sub-Saharan Africa. African countries expanded their capacity in response to recurring climate shocks of floods, droughts, and storms at the continental level. The present paper proposes a stakeholder-based climate change framework at inter-organizational levels to cater for cities, churches, countries, continent, and global networking groups. Particularly, this network engages cities internally to meet increasingly multi-scale elements in multi-stakeholder format that intend to safeguard peoples' lives and livelihoods across the continent, as well as within cities.

The urban climate change conversation concerns the global funding interests. This is reflected in the World Bank's 2023 report, *Thriving: Making Cities*

*Green, Resilient and Inclusive in a Changing Climate* (Mukim & Roberts, 2023), where it refers to the shocks and stresses impacted from climate concerns. While “*inclusiveness*” includes city residents, racial and ethnic minorities, it is worrying that their voices are rather absent on the discussion of inclusion (p. 17). Urban discourse on climate change occurs at the interface between geography and the phenomenon of existential realities. For instance, urban expansion considers land spatial planning, governance of building and ecology, within which experts examine ecologically sensitive areas (Agergaard et al., 2022). The technical importance of ecological sensitivity reflects a parallel case regarding the sensibilities of indigeneity within the city as a dignity issue of human importance. Should the latter lack voice or inclusivity as key stakeholders, what is technically important, might be questionable even if it is ecologically accurate. To correct such an anomaly, this paper reiterates the traditional value of dignity that defines even the interdependence between humans and nature, across and beyond generations in relation to urbanity.

*...this paper reiterates the traditional value of dignity that defines even the interdependence between humans and nature, across and beyond generations in relation to urbanity.*

The context alluded to in the preceding statement affirms the valued ethos of the defining role of traditional urban leadership but that has largely been denied the people concerned from the moment the official status of colonial capital was imposed on Accra in the then Gold Coast. In actual fact, one Ga chief at the time remarked that 1868 was the year when the country was taken by the white man (Parker, 2000). Thus, the current mention of global climate crisis potentially raises another sentiment of traditional leadership whose inputs into what constitutes resiliencies cannot be denied them at this time. John Parker (2000) reviews the social history of Ga folks in Accra thus: “The decisive shift in the Gold Coast’s urban network” rather complicated the structure of the hitherto established entrepreneurial function of the Ga notables of Accra (p. 146). Urban and social leadership roles shifted from the indigenes of Accra chiefs and was vested into the literate urban elite from the close of the 19th century through the 20th century. Conflicts in recent decades concerned the obligated observing of traditional annual norms for the start of rains and planting seasons required throughout the breadth of Accra townships, whether in indigenous or cosmopolitan areas. As Atiemo (2014) reflects, it was untenable if the gods were responsible for bumper food and fish harvest. Nevertheless, he assesses that focus now regards the Chief as the owner of the land, hence, the expressions of traditional cultural identity and solidarity need to be preserved accordingly.

From the stakeholder viewpoint of church, faith actors and civil society, a broad consensus recognizes climate resilience, environmental stewardship, and ecological consciousness as an urgent global call to limit commercialization, financialization, and exploitation of nature, natural resources, and indigenous people (Beros et al., 2022). That Africa contributes relatively little to the

historic carbon but is disproportionately affected by such anthropogenic climate change is rather upsetting. The 2021 All Africa Conference of Christian Churches raised the burning issues of deforestation, environmental degradation, and protection of biodiversity that concerned their network, with existing African climate advocacy whose perspective largely includes eco-theological concerns and environmental care and climate justice (Beros et al., 2022). In the view of Asamoah-Gyadu (2022), sensitivity to environmental stewardship must include the historical importance of African traditional beliefs because the Supreme Being gave the environment and the custodians are earth-bound deities. Such beliefs contributed to creation care from the primal religious paradigm, hence the lack of inclusion in historical sense can be steered accordingly in the contemporary creation care conversation.

### **Evolving Stakeholder Inclusion with Leader Emphasis**

*African traditional religion shows the intent to respect the land and environment.*

African traditional religion shows the intent to respect the land and environment. Such intent implies how to maintain sacred water bodies, trees, forests and mountains; seasons require folks to observe taboos, rituals, totems, farming and hunting practices, all contextualized to offer alternative strategies for climate change (Shoko, 2022). In the case of mangroves, for example, Nunoo and Agyekumhene (2022) observed and collected data to affirm that water deities were deemed to be the rightful owners of the areas around lagoons; such beliefs aided the viable protection of the water bodies but were limited when they were located near coastal communities. Some lagoons have been ineffective to hold off rainwater because land developers have regrettably flouted urban regulations (La Dade-Kotopon Municipal Assembly, 2022). That is, secularizing climate change has altered the valued indigenous knowledge embedded in traditional spirituality. Reliance on science and technology for contemporary sociological and philosophical thinking has therefore robbed traditional religious patrons of their personal and communal environments for what they consider to be their protective comfort and security in respect of climate experience (Nyawo, 2022). In a fishing community in Accra, for instance, rituals are performed seasonally including what impacts “bumper harvest, conservation of fish stock, building good moral standards among fishers and instilling peace and harmony within communities of fishers belonging to the traditional religion” (Dosu, 2017, p. 71).

Elizabeth Sackey, the Accra Mayor, called for “more collaboration between the global south and global north cities to tackle climate change urgently” (Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 2023, para. 5). However, the knowledge continuum outside the global south has over time rather nestled in liberalized Eurocentric and antireligious secularization that “leads to one-sidedness when it downplays the autonomy associated with modernity and secularity against moments of domination and then diminishes them in the name of religious freedom” (Wohlrab-Sahr & Burchardt, 2012, p. 879). Climate change mostly stems from human activities that emerged from beyond the global south “because of

colossal appetite for consumerism and modernity” (Maseno & Mamati, 2022, p. 50). A quick glance at the global Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) shows Morocco is rated high, Nigeria and Egypt are rated medium, and South Africa is low, while Algeria is very low. All other countries in Africa are not rated (CCPI, 2023). The strong and continuous growth of industrial products as the reason for the emission of greenhouse gases has eventually propelled national economies to become subjected to the will of mainly speculative global investors and to the laws of short-run profitability, even to the most remote corners of the earth (Goudzwaard, 2009).

*Would the human initiated crises of the earth ethically find response from the supernatural creation mandate of the earth?*

Global warming and climate change are both directly connected with the use of energy, that kind of resource which alone forms the heart of the industrialized societies outside the global south (Goudzwaard, 2009). Would the human initiated crises of the earth ethically find response from the supernatural creation mandate of the earth? The Apostle Paul was prophetic to imply such crises in chapter eight of Romans as the groaning of the whole created universe, a groaning with hope that God’s people can recognize in the cross and resurrection of Christ (Goudzwaard, 2009; Mapangdol, 2022). The Christian response takes the clue in this groaning in that it is global, birthed by globalization, in capitalism whereby “all values, all beliefs, and all meaning to a matter of taste, preference and consumption habit” are dis-embedded and redirected to serve consumer markets (Williams 2009, p. 132). The invasion of foreign ideas, customs and values thereby makes a commodity of place, while global finances as currency emanates from the whims of individual and social preferences and consumption habits (Williams, 2009).

If climate change discourse can be interpreted as a foreign idea, it is precisely because a centralization of power dictates what to embark on as a global agenda in a globalized village networked in economic, political, and cultural dimensions. The integrating and interlinking function of global finance operates in metropolitan hubs to subtly increase inequality and instability, and thus undermines rooted communities struggling to survive as they innately strive for their lives and livelihoods (Cosden, 2006; Williams, 2009). Accra fits into such metropolitan hubs in a developing urban phenomenon variously labelled as ‘world city’, ‘megacity’ or ‘global city’. Looking at climate change as a global issue therefore revolves around glocality or the global entity of location with global outlook. Central to this glocality is how the nature of place is undermined and replaced by a borderless world that seeks to include everybody, but nobody is at home in community.

Accra was founded on six townships bordered by water bodies, the sea, and the countryside. The sea is prioritized when an annual ban on noisemaking for one month of quietness allows the solemn sounds from the sea to engender self-introspection and meditation ahead of the coastal communal township festivities that celebrate the harvest to hoot at hunger (Akwetteh, 2023). Somehow indigeneity gets diffused and deemphasized when the climate

change conversation appears to serve foreign agendas, yet it seeks local or indigenous knowledge with seemingly no genuine regard to its inhabitants except their voice in advocacy. Williams (2009) reflects on the alternative understanding of globalization that reconstitutes local and particular community as contrasted with the universalizing claims of globalization.

As Affram (2020) has noted, Accra has an international dimension of socio-urban economy that continues to change with major global penetrations. It is illustrative that Richard Grant (2009), from his eleven years of studying the city, tagged Accra as a millennium city, but the city's government policy makers considered Accra more in local terms than an internationally oriented city. In this contemporary sense, the international dimension in the urbanization processes in Accra is informed by the powerful dynamic of global orientation because Accra participates in the globalization of economics. Accra and another city Tema are the most urbanized cities in the Greater Accra region, the most populous region in Ghana, which has an urban population of five million, of which GaDangme forms indigenous population of 1.12 million (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2021, 3A, p. 35; 3C, p. 51). GaDangme is the broader ethnic group for Ga people by way of "common language, culture and history with which a person identifies" (GSS, 2021, 3C, p. 25). The data reveals that more than 70% of urban Accra are hosted by the 22% indigenous ethnic Ga people.

Reference to significant efforts by the World Bank to define cities in climate change investment initiatives, the basis for inclusivity is largely about city categories and vulnerable places and thereby technically engages audience such as practitioners, government staff and investors. Therefore, the factual reports about Sub-Saharan Africa being one of the world's fastest urbanizing regions, unfortunately excludes the voices of urban residents about poverty, income or socio-economic mobility (World Bank, 2023).

The report expresses more about the statistical urban data than about people's lived experiences. Cities are certainly populated by people, which explains why the World Bank report "is silent on some important dimensions of inclusion," such as the voices of urban residents (p. 17). This paper recognizes that gap in view of its people-oriented focus in the climate change discourse. Therefore, stakeholder engagement is offered, based on the construct of stakeholder inclusion, to cater for a breadth better suited to place and voice and advocacy. Stakeholder inclusion considers the perspectives and knowledge of stakeholders so that they can improve on value creation (Kujala et al., 2022).

*...climate change discussion could take the initiative to recognize and respect indigeneity...*

## **Clarifying Stakeholder Components and Terms**

The value of creation implies appreciating the natural environment as well as the lived environment, where people's lived viewpoints are non-negotiable: that is, the environment-based intervention management of climate change can go beyond its organizational structure (Kujala et al., 2022). Stakeholder



theories suggest that creating value provides hope by stimulating change and innovation beyond the priority of business strategy (Freeman, 2005). The significant place of relationships is a matter of survival, not just organization. This refers to the multiple relationships implicit in people-centered discourse of climate change (Freeman, 2005). In an extended literature review (Kujala et al., 2022), three components of stakeholder engagement were identified: moral, strategic and pragmatic. Therefore, this paper proposes that climate change discussion could take the initiative to recognize and respect indigeneity to empower the landowners and those who historically derive their lived wellbeing from Accra as the moral component of stakeholder engagement. In the long run, the objective is to fulfil their wants, needs and capabilities as autochthonous stakeholders (Kujala et al., 2022). This moral stakeholder engagement seeks good intentions as well as reciprocal and voluntary relationship which augurs well for the bona fide citizens of Accra. As the moral component conducts inclusion, the strategic component establishes co-creation and interaction. The pragmatic component integrates to organize mutual value creation (Kujala et al., 2022).

Conradie (2022) reviews multiple layers to assess in the climate change crisis to the extent that it requires multidisciplinary approach. In this sense, Christian response can be considered the spiritual component that adds value to the stakeholder engagement beyond moral, strategic, and pragmatic aspects. Personhood and wellbeing perspectives, for instance, can add value in moral terms. There is a moral disconnect when affluence undergirds consumerism, yet it thrives on economic inequalities. So Conradie (2022) thinks that global responsibility for the whole world does not translate the truth of the wealth crisis that potentially augments greater inequalities of poverty.

The global climate change conversation, from the multidimensional approach, entails framing the agenda from without in the context it has been devised and designed from beyond the majority south. In this wise, Africa evangelical theology helps a Christian response build relevance and find a significant place for “actively engaging African primordial narratives ... to identify ... the questions Africa is asking [and] also the logic and manner of presentation” (Kombo, 2012, p. 146). Furthermore, Kombo (2012) recognizes that a valued leadership ethos is required to ask questions emerging from African grassroots. Such conversation gives some breadth to Africa’s current multidimensional challenges and opportunities within which to introduce the technical innovative discourse of climate change. The globalizing nature of Accra is more than one century dynamic and complicated impact of tensions from global influences on local realities. As Grant (2009) assesses, “globalizing forces become more powerful and their control more spatially extensive. Local forces are relatively weaker but also can be geographically extensive” (p. 14). What is certain then, according to Grant (2009), is that Accra gets weaker in market, legal, financial, and technological systems, thereby undermining further the frameworks already weakened in the urban environment. Here is the humanly felt data of groaning that calls for hopeful response. It is worth noting that a political Non-Governmental Organization, the GaDangme Council, was founded to utilize a “local political prism with strong associations between land and ethnicity” to

seek collaborations because of uneven economic and political power (Grant, 2009, p. 125). The group aims to develop, promote and preserve GaDangme welfare and heritage (GaDangme, 2023).

*The global topic of urban climate change finds its purpose in relation to the glocal context of existential needs of a people's well-being.*

The way to approach the climate change agenda is to situate it within Africa's quest for life and wholeness which guides religious and social outlook (Ijatuyi-Morphé, 2014; Affram, 2020). The global topic of urban climate change finds its purpose in relation to the glocal context of existential needs of a people's well-being. In this way, utilizing inter-group contact theory, stakeholder inclusion and engagement help to establish how key stakeholders could be networked together while valuing the ethos of wholeness. The conceptual theme of climate change becomes a focus in a broader complex outlook on society and religion. Within the currency of globalizing cities, African urban environments cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of the world in that the general society needs to be prepared in glocality to participate in the global economy (Grant, 2009). Otherwise, society is pressured to pursue subsistence and sustenance. Accra hosts increasing global financing which tends to favor the wealthy but widens the divide between those in poverty and those enriched in the urban economy (Grant, 2009; Affram, 2020). The threat limits indigenous capital accumulation and investment culture, frustrates wealth creation, and forces livelihoods to sustenance or resources of human survival and flourishing (Affram, 2020).

Inter-contact theory serves to facilitate how to engage stakeholders, granted the traditional leaders are respected as supra-stakeholders because they oversee the traditional territory and culture of Accra. Effecting valued contact with them might be enhanced by the steps Affram developed elsewhere for five processes of change (Pettigrew, 1998; Affram 2011). (1) Initiate contact with stakeholders, (2) build agenda among stakeholders, (3) resolve what and how to foster decision for change, (4) generate affective ties, and (5) celebrate outcome for stakeholder inclusion in value creation or positive results from stakeholder engagement. Such stakeholder phenomenon unveils the element of trust. As Kramer, Brewer and Hana (1996) posed: "Under what circumstances are individuals likely to assume that other members of an organizations will act in a trustworthy fashion?" (p. 359).

Putting these all together, the trust factor places another layer worth critical reflection by way of missiological relevance. The global climate agenda makes demands beyond mere climate concerns. The context to prioritize is that Accra as a global city hosts a driving money economy with consequential existential questions worth their valued responses. As far back as the precolonial era, the influx over many generations of people, ideas and capital has overwhelmed the indigenes. But why should that be the case that people who move to Accra interpret the city more optimistically? Accra has evolved to become evidently a place for making money, carrying out profitable ventures or maintaining active vocation beyond mere existential aspirations such that *faith* seemingly means

much more about making it in the city than making it in salvation, not to talk about tradition, social or religious demands and objectives (Affram, 2020). But it also means that majority of people likely experience the city of Accra as a location for hope, joy, glory, and grace in existential sense by way of expected returns or real benefits as people pursue faith in and even love for the city. The city connotes the place where identity offers another good news in the global city (Affram, 2020). Personal well-being, for those who are able to do viable business, engages focus on safety and healthcare, recognizes inequality and environmental issues, thereby informing and demanding successful personal involvement in the global city business (ATKearney, 2016). Faith as an urbanity theme might suffice for further research “on the basis of faith in God as our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer” (Brummelen, 2009, p. 353).

As part of further research, a Christian response can frame another layer that is contextualized in the missiology of the global city (Affram, 2020). Constituting the stakeholder strategic and pragmatic groups can include framing the missiological response such that, over time, the good news of the city for others, and even the unfavorable news for others, might be best formulated in terms of Christian faith. A good care of environment can support the best news of Jesus agenda of salvation. This paper therefore anticipates utilizing the outcome of this study to better interpret what it takes to disciple *ethnos* (Matt. 28:18-20); the particular reference is the autochthonous people of Ga, but lessons might apply to other indigenous settings. If trust undergirds respecting their land regarding matters of concern for life and godliness, then a Christian response and initiative can make real the eternal life agenda of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

A pattern of disempowerment, with historical roots in pre-colonial and post-colonial eras, reveals how the indigenous hosts lost their social hierarchy of urban leadership and wealth to largely 70% who domicile in the city from the country, West Africa and beyond. Prioritizing the place for indigeneity in the environment and climate care conversation thus adopted the stakeholder inclusion for foster respect for traditional eldership of Accra. The environment and care agenda mooted from other than the Ga hosts might best be situated within the African value of wholeness so that other matters of existential interest are captured together accordingly. Valuing the definitive role of traditional urban eldership thus considers them on supra-stakeholder status framed for moral, strategic and pragmatic stakeholder components to mobilize and implement the value creation of concerted city environment and care by experts, practitioners and professionals. Therefore, urban missiology as a Christian faith response can show leadership in collective active trust as proposed in five steps of process based on inter-contact theory. Engendering trust in stakeholder engagement might constitute a social dynamic needful for further research.



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# Climate Emotions In Urban Spaces

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*Karina Kreminski*

*When it comes to climate change, people often ask: “What can I as an individual do?” The answer: “Don’t be an individual.”*

This is one of the nuggets of wisdom that emerged from a Climate Emotions Workshop held at the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre this year. Surry Hills is an inner-city suburb in Sydney. The City of Sydney council which looks after Surry Hills, prides itself on its goal to build resilient communities. Resilience for the council includes fostering a safe space for the community as the planet warms up and the weather becomes more unstable. The city for instance notes that one of the three greatest impacts on communities today is climate change.

*The impact of climate change on communities, economies and the environment is increasing. We need to be prepared, by planning for impacts to ensure our cities can adapt to a changing climate* (Resilient Sydney Office (RSO), n.d.).

The council states:

Cities are complex places where large numbers of people rely on the systems in a city to function well. Improving these systems and networks will increase our overall resilience (RSO, para. 16).

Resilient cities can withstand and better recover from shocks and stresses. They emerge stronger after tough times and are better places to live in good times.

The city is therefore trialing creative solutions to manage the impacts of climate change in the complex urban space where people rely on systems working well. One strategy is to have cooling hubs where people who have little or no access to cooler spaces can gather to find relief from the heat. Currently, businesses, churches, and other spaces are being investigated for their appropriateness to be such spaces. Another strategy is to have “200 bespoke temperature gauges [that] will be placed across the City of Sydney area to measure local heat island areas” (Johnson, 2023, para. 2). This helps in identifying microclimates and will help to establish natural processes and places for cooling.

One aspect of climate change that is not often focused on is the area of climate emotions.



Climate psychologist Dr Sally Gillespie who facilitated the climate emotions workshop in Surry Hills, believes that these days, when there is such distressing news about climate change and general world events, more than ever we need to gather to take action but more importantly to share how we feel. Dr Gillespie is a writer, workshop facilitator, lecturer, and public speaker with a background in depth psychology and ecopsychology. Her book *Climate Crisis and Consciousness: Reimagining Our World and Ourselves* (2020) explores the psychological experience of engaging with climate change and related ecological concerns.

The statistics tell us that many people, especially the young, are feeling a sense of doom about the future. How do we cope with the loss we are feeling about our imagined future? In the workshop we talked through the whole gamut of emotions such as fear, anger, apathy, grief, and even disbelief. With certain animals becoming extinct and planetary warming causing more and more natural catastrophes, we will certainly have to adapt and become more resilient. So, we realized that it's actually sane to feel anxious! However, Dr Gillespie believes that a doom-and-gloom approach is unhelpful – instead, she focuses on hope. We need to come together and avoid atomization and talk about how we are feeling, and then this will inspire us to take action, preferably locally.

So, what can we do? We can form small pockets of community to encourage one another. We can plant community gardens and connect with indigenous understandings of the land. Local, practical actions give us a sense of agency, moving us away from doom towards hope.

The research on post-disaster recovery shows that the stronger a community, the more likely it will recover from those unfortunate events. Famously, Daniel Aldrich's book *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery* (2012) has as its central thesis that when community relationships are strong this helps communities to build up again after catastrophic events. We could apply this to the negative effects of climate change also. As we feel the impact more and more, what will help us recover, manage the change, and thrive will be the networks and relationships we form. So, coming together locally to talk about our emotions regarding climate change and then taking action expressing “radical hope”, is something that can only help us in the urban spaces during these challenging times.

The workshop was curated by Neighbourhood Matters in partnership with the Surry Hills Neighbourhood Centre. Neighbourhood Matters works with others to facilitate community locally. We will be starting a Climate Café and an intentional Community of Hope in 2024, both in Surry Hills in order to help build a resilient city as we increasingly feel the impact of climate change. Please contact [info@neighbourhoodmatters.com.au](mailto:info@neighbourhoodmatters.com.au) for more information.

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Rev Dr Karina Kreminski is co-founder of Neighbourhood Matters and the author of *Urban Spirituality* (2018). She is an ordained minister, has a doctorate in missional formation and was a Lecturer in Missional Studies at Morling College. She is Mission Coaching Consultant at Uniting Mission and Education.

# Navigating The Waters: Gatumba's Battle Against Recurrent Floods

*Charles Rukundo*

Gatumba is an informal settlement on the edge of Bujumbura, the economic capital of Burundi. It is located on a peninsula between the Rusizi River in the east and Lake Tanganyika in the south and borders the DRC swamps in the west. Gatumba's population has livelihoods in agriculture and fishing, as well as informal trade across the border between the two countries to and from the city of Bujumbura. The area has been home to recurrent floods from the Rusizi River on one side, and Lake Tanganyika on the other side, with the rising waters transforming the village into a vast swamp of mud and stench, for five consecutive years. In the midst of all the hazards in the region, Gatumba stands resilient.

This article sheds light on the ongoing efforts by Rema Burundi, in collaboration with local leaders and partners, to tackle the challenges posed by the annual overflows forcing thousands of families to take refuge in makeshift camps on the other bank of the Rusizi River. Despite governmental suggestions for relocation, Gatumba's citizens are rallying for alternative solutions, such as constructing a dike or strategically sandbagging the river.



## Mapping Skills and Agencies

Rema Burundi has taken a proactive approach by working closely with Gatumba's local leaders to map the skills and agencies within the community. Understanding the strengths and resources at their disposal is crucial for devising effective intervention strategies. This grassroots initiative aims to empower Gatumba's residents to actively participate in finding solutions to the water-related woes that plague their homes and destroy infrastructure such as roads, schools, and health centers each year.

## The Human Element

At the core of Rema Burundi's intervention strategies is a focus on the human element. By involving the community in the planning and execution of flood control and mitigation measures, the aim is to foster a sense of ownership, empowerment, and resilience. Gatumba's residents are not mere victims; they are essential contributors to the resilience-building process. This approach aligns with global efforts to recognize the agency of local communities in addressing climate-related challenges.



## Governmental Recommendations vs. Community Resistance

While the government has suggested relocation as a solution, Gatumba's citizens are resisting the idea, calling for alternative measures. The proposed relocation poses social, economic, and cultural challenges, and many residents believe that with the right interventions, they can stay and thrive in their ancestral lands. This resistance highlights the importance of community-driven solutions that respect the aspirations and unique identity of Gatumba's people. "Leaving the land of our ancestors would be denying our identities as Burundians," said one old man in Gatumba.

## Constructing a Dike

One of the primary suggestions from Gatumba's residents is the construction of a dike to contain the rising waters. A well-designed dike could serve as a formidable barrier, protecting homes and livelihoods from the annual inundation. Rema Burundi, in collaboration with local engineers, has suggested this as a potential solution. However, the government of Burundi seems reluctant about this solution as they consider it not to be an effective way. They are also worried about the feasibility of such a project as it would be very costly. While the dike could potentially offer a sustainable, long-term solution to Gatumba's flooding woes, ensuring the community's ability to withstand the challenges posed by climate change, the community would rather cope with adaptive methods to be more resilient, than opt for the government's simplistic idea of relocation.

## Sandbagging vs. Dredging the River

Another innovative solution proposed by Gatumba's citizens is the strategic sandbagging of the Rusizi River. Although the method has been effective for a while, its effectiveness is questionable. Rema Burundi has found the effectiveness of this method is reduced due to the fact that the Rusizi River doesn't have banks now due to the amount of sand and dirt in it. However, dredging the river would seem to be the most effective way, though it would also be costly. Dredging, if executed thoughtfully, could prove to be an adaptable solution that aligns with the Gatumba community's desire to maintain their current way of life. Their prayer is that God can provide enough means for the country to be able to dredge the river.



## Conclusion

In the face of climate change-induced floods, Gatumba stands at a crossroads, with the government advocating relocation and the community seeking alternative solutions. While the government sees impossibility, Gatumba people see possibility and Rema Burundi supports them. Rema Burundi's collaboration with local leaders reflects a commitment to empowering the community to be at the forefront of finding sustainable solutions. We are for the biblical scripture that declares God will bless the work of our hands. By mapping skills, agencies, and exploring options like constructing a dike, sandbagging, or dredging the Rusizi River, Gatumba's residents are not merely resisting relocation; they are actively shaping their destiny against the invading waters. As the whole world faces climate-related challenges, Gatumba's journey serves as evidence of the power of community-driven resilience. In this context, Rema Burundi, in close collaboration with specialists from around the world, the administrative authorities, and local residents, intends to develop a strategy to better protect the community and its inhabitants against recurrent flooding in Gatumba.



Charles Rukundo, an advocate for Christian and peace values, contributes to Rema Burundi, a non-profit focused on long-term reintegration of forced displacements. As the head of climate resilience and food security component, Charles holds a university degree in Education and a Higher Certificate in Project Planning and Management. He has experience in Education, leading conferences and seminars. Charles continues to grow professionally through courses like Flourishing Pathways facilitated by CBBC.

# Civic Engagement In An Age Of Disruption: Lamentations From The End Of The Line

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*Claire Harvey*

Every city, across our increasingly globalized world, is characterized by unique opportunities and challenges that are particular to its history and geography. Yet there are recurring themes that echo with deep familiarity across many developed Western contexts. The pressures seem similar. The tensions and divisions follow a pattern. My own context is Frankston: a designated metropolitan activity center on the outer suburban fringe of Melbourne's South East. It's a place of extraordinary socio-economic diversity, with a hard-to-shake reputation for being home to bogans and wearers of sheep-skinned slippers called moccasins. Frankston boasts multi-million-dollar cliff-top mansions, yet just one postcode away is one of Victoria's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. We recently recorded the highest rates of family violence incidents in all of metro Melbourne.



My own journey onto council was, in part, inspired by a bold attempt to develop an eight-dwelling cohousing community in the heart of the city. Our plans went before council in 2016 and were unanimously opposed by councilors (despite securing the approval of the actual planning officers). As much as one councilor commended us for being “gutsy”, another inquired with a skeptical bewilderment how we intended to “force people to share

things"! My deep sense was that our elected leaders lacked imagination: not only could they not envisage a better way to live and relate to one another within neighborhoods, they seemed to have little understanding of how bleak the future looked without serious efforts to mitigate against and adapt to our changing climate.



Fast forward four years, and I found myself sitting on the other side of the fence, as an elected councilor, having run an understated, collaborative campaign during one of Melbourne's many COVID lockdowns. It is a small miracle in itself that an introverted and spotlight-averse single mother got across the line, all without using flyers or signs (due to my deep aversion to waste). Three years in, with one year to go, I describe it as an incredibly steep learning curve, and a decision that I don't regret but that I might not make again in any hurry!

Yet these have admittedly been years of deep disruption. Tensions within communities and households continue to run high, for a range of complex reasons. COVID certainly acted as an accelerant, adding fuel to already simmering fires of discontent, mistrust, and frustration. Social media provides a perfect platform for inner rage to be vented, amplified, and distorted. The emerging Sovereign Citizens movement was seeded in Frankston: those who felt locked-out of the economy and broader society, through their refusal to embrace mandatory vaccines, found solidarity and purposefulness in their vital connections to one another. While we've not been targeted as fiercely as some other local councils, I am still escorted to my car by security guards after each council meeting, as a precaution. It's not quite what I signed up for, and leading with compassion, graciousness, diligence, and skill often feels like a fraught and unenviable task.

Some councilors ran on a platform of listening to the people and doing what they wanted, even referring to residents and ratepayers as their 'boss'. This populist stance betrays the reality that we are, at times, a deeply divided people. The classic tension between the imperative for development and the need for conservation refuses to go away. This past year has brought about a serious community-led campaign to stop the approval of high-density developments alongside Kananook Creek (also just a hundred meters from our foreshore, on Port Phillip Bay). Amidst the unfair vitriol that centered around



groups being stereotyped as being either for or against development within a part of our city that really does need attention and investment, scant attention seemed to be paid to the logic of incentivizing that density of development in areas that will be highly vulnerable to inundation before this century's end.



The decades ahead will undoubtedly bring many more wicked problems our way. How do we appropriately facilitate the expansion of our city, because our current economic model demands never-ending growth, and because people everywhere simply need adequate and affordable housing, which is in increasingly short supply? How do we satisfactorily accommodate our city's most vulnerable, including those struggling to secure stable employment, those fleeing family violence, and those living with disabilities, when NIMBYism (not-in-my-backyard) remains such a compelling force within neighborhoods (and now we also need to combat NOTE, which stands for not-over-there-either)? How can we protect our green spaces, and increase our tree canopies, when their immense value is not properly understood or appreciated? How do we build civic pride, and make our cities places of rich culture and deep beauty, without the kind of gentrification that forces out those who cannot afford to pay and stay?



My abiding concern is that we, as individuals and communities, lack the emotional, psychological, and moral maturity to navigate myriad intertwined challenges. I grow weary of the narrative of ‘inevitable progress on the back of growth at all costs’ that is too often still spun, while our scientists issue warning after warning regarding increasingly fragile planetary boundaries and the troubles that lie in store for us as vulnerable ecosystems collapse. Optimism and positivity will not be what saves us and our cities. A courageous and humble willingness to see our mistakes and to name our pain might just help us to confess that business-as-usual is not serving us well, and that perhaps it never really did. That might, at the very least, be a good place to start.

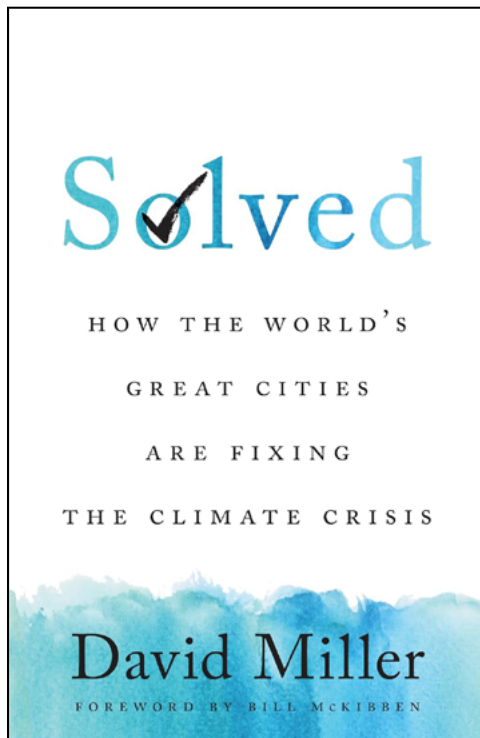
What will we choose to do? Who will choose to become?



Claire Harvey was elected to Frankston City Council in 2020. She serves as the Chair of the South East Councils Climate Change Alliance (SECCCA), representing one million residents across Melbourne’s South East, and sits on Frankston Council’s Housing Advisory Committee. Claire serves on the board of Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity & Society and is the Uniting Church Vic/Tas rep on the CoPower board. She works as a vocational coach, is an Honorary Justice of the Peace, and is an active member of The Village Church in Mount Eliza.

# Cities As Climate Solutions

*Brian K. Jennings*



## Book Review:

David Miller (2020) *Solved: How The World's Great Cities Are Fixing The Climate Crisis*. University of Toronto Press.

Given the slow progress made by national governments toward addressing the climate crisis, it is encouraging to read *Solved: How the World's Great Cities Are Fixing the Climate Crisis*. David Miller's account of how the cities and their mayors in the C40 network have stepped up to the climate challenge, even in defiance of national policies. Since 2007 most of humanity has lived in cities, including those minorities most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Moreover, cities produce over 70% of greenhouse gases so if action can be taken in the urban world it will be of immense significance for the climate. The good news is that action can and is being taken. The world's great cities largely have the independence and regulatory power to exercise significant control over the urban environment. This means they can be solutions not just villains or victims in the climate crisis. Miller, the former mayor of Toronto from 2003-2010, identifies four areas where cities have taken positive steps to engage with the climate crisis, since the beginning of the twenty-first century: power generation, buildings, transportation, and waste disposal.

## Planning

Miller notes that such steps must begin with careful planning to set goals for accountability and measurement. Good planning involves a process of consultation to educate and gain the support of the citizens who will be affected by these changes. He gives the examples of Paris and Barcelona which sought to include the poorest communities, who would bear the greatest impact from global heating. The result was that not only were their concerns addressed but their wellbeing was also improved. Miller comments “The best city climate plans reduce greenhouse gas emissions effectively, in line with scientific requirements to hold overall temperature rise to 1.5 degrees. The best climate plans also do something else: they address issues of prosperity, health, and inclusion, thereby putting cities in a unique position to deliver on both meaningful climate action and social justice” (p. 21).

## Power

Many cities, because of their size, either run their own electricity utilities or can set the terms for electricity supply. This means that city governments can promote the use of renewable power either by adapting their own generating facilities, by their clout as major customers, or by regulation. Cape Town in South Africa for example, has been able to insist that the national electricity supplier accommodate and distribute solar power generated from the roofs of the city’s buildings despite its attachment to coal.

## Buildings

Buildings, according to Miller, are the major source of CO2 emissions in cities. He goes on to relate how the city governments in New York and Tokyo used the threat of higher taxation to compel owners of existing buildings to measure the emissions for their buildings, refurbish them to lower emissions, and then develop alternative means of heating and cooling their buildings such as heat pumps. In New York, one of the principal beneficiaries of this policy was the Empire State Building. Other cities such as Toronto and Sydney were able to achieve similar results through voluntary schemes involving soft loans and advisory partnerships. Both owners and tenants benefited from these initiatives through more efficient use of energy and the city benefited by lower emissions. For new buildings city authorities can prescribe building codes that insist on the use of low-carbon materials and more efficient designs for warmth and coolness.

## Transport

A further source of high emissions is transport. The most progressive step that cities can take to address this challenge is to introduce low-carbon public transport systems – either light rail or electric/hydrogen buses has been done by cities by cities in Brazil, Chile, India, and China. Efficient public transport systems can do much to reduce the need for private transport. Miller features Addis Ababa as a pioneer among African cities with its mixed transport system

of light-rail and low-emission buses. In addition to introducing efficient low-carbon public transport cities can take measures to restrict high-carbon personal transport by introducing low congestion and low emission zones and encouraging pedestrian and cycling zones, as has been done by London and Paris. Some cities are aiming to have zero emissions from transport by 2030.

## Waste

The last area Miller addresses is that of waste where there are two key issues. The first is the 'throw-away culture' of built-in obsolescence, 'fast-fashion', and single-use plastics. Cities like San Francisco and Ljubljana have introduced systems of reuse, recycling, and bans on single-use plastic. The same cities are seeking to address a second issue, emissions of methane from waste, which produces higher levels of atmospheric heating than CO<sub>2</sub>. Much of this requires careful separation and careful treatment of different kinds of waste, especially organic waste so that it does not end in landfills to leak methane into the air. Instead, the methane can be broken down or used to generate power. Accra, Ghana has sought to introduce measures to reduce methane emissions by creating employment for the 'Waste Pickers.' Previously they collected rubbish from the city's informal housing areas and either burnt or dumped it in open spaces, they now bring the waste to centralized collecting points where it can be processed more efficiently thus reducing emissions.

## C40 Cities

Miller closes by narrating the history of the C40 group of cities. In 2004 when Ken Livingstone became Mayor of London, he was exploring ways to make London a 'greener' city. He learnt of Miller's efforts who was then Mayor of Toronto and the steps he had taken to make Toronto a cleaner city. The two formed a learning partnership that they then expanded to other great cities around the world. The C40 network (<https://www.c40.org/>) is now an extensive international network that played a key role in the COP28 event in Dubai (<https://www.c40.org/events/cop28/>).

Miller closes by urging his readers to use their voices to raise awareness on climate issues and campaign for climate action, act to reduce the impact of their lifestyles, and vote for those who will act on climate.

I found this to be a very encouraging book. Along with many others I'm convinced and concerned about the climate crisis and try to take to small steps that are possible for individuals and households, but in the meantime look on with a sense of hopelessness as national and corporate leaders constantly fail to step up to the challenges necessary to mitigate global heating. It is reinvigorating to see that so many of the mayors and leaders of the world's great cities are doing exactly this - and setting the pace for their nations and for the multinational corporations that operate within their urban boundaries. And, because these are local initiatives it leaves room for you and me as citizens to be involved to campaign and act for sustainable climate interventions in our cities in the areas of energy, buildings, transport, waste,

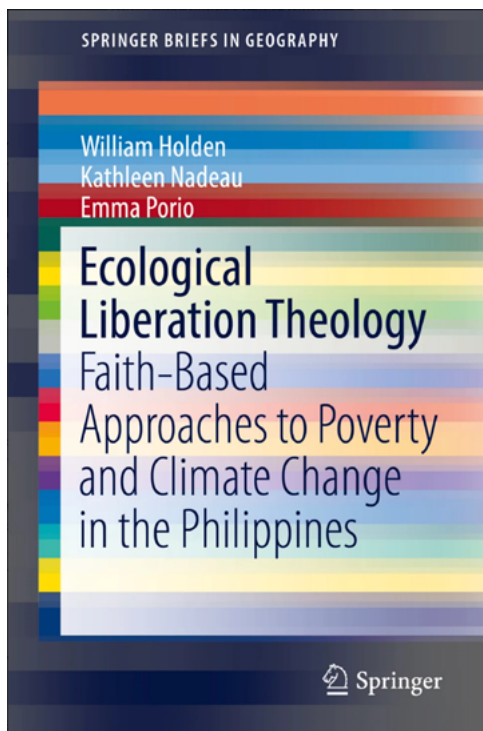
community gardens, and other spaces. The most effective ways to do this are through community organizations, especially our local churches. Congregations themselves can step up to the responsibility for Earth care. This is accessible to us, let us do whatever the Lord puts into our hands for He is with us (1 Sam. 10:7)! Amen!



Dr Brian K. Jennings has taught ethics, philosophy, and theology for over 35 years at Ghana Christian University College, Accra, Ghana, and now in addition, is an adjunct faculty member with Bakke Graduate University in their PhD program. He is also co-editor of the New Urban World Journal.

# Base Ecclesial Communities: A Light In A Dark And Stormy Ecological Future

*Andre Van Eymeren*



## Book Review:

William Holden, Kathleen Nadeau & Emma Porio (2017) *Ecological Liberation Theology: Faith-Based Approaches to Poverty and Climate Change in the Philippines*. Springer.

Holden, Nadeau, and Porio's work on eco-liberation theology, based in the Philippines provides a succinct examination of the effects of climate change, how these effects are exacerbated by neo-liberalism, and the alternative response that basic ecclesial communities, fueled by eco-liberation theology have provided to the archipelago.

The authors argue that since the time of colonization (Spain 1565-1898; Unites States 1898-1946; Japan 1942-1945), the Philippines has become more susceptible to the effects of climate change. Since that time many of the

ecological and biological resources like forests have been eradicated due to mal-development and misuse of resources. Trees were felled for use in various industries and land was cleared for crops grown for commercial sale. The trees were not re-planted and instead, homesteaders took the land, often displacing indigenous communities.

Throughout the Marcos era (1965-1986) poverty was entrenched in many communities by logging and mining agreements between government and favored developers. Overdevelopment caused mudslides which dislodged many communities from their traditional lands. Green spaces around cities were also cleared for gated housing developments and golf courses, often placed alongside urban slums. Overdevelopment led to a Metro Manila that is essentially treeless with badly polluted thoroughfares.

Holden, Nadeau, and Porio use their third chapter to outline a conceptual framework for climate change. Acknowledging that anthropogenic climate change is essentially a given, they argue along with Pope Francis that it 'represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day' (p12), with the veracity and frequency of floods, cyclones, and droughts increasing. The Philippines as an archipelago coupled with its placement on the Pacific Rim of Fire, is one of the world's most susceptible countries to the effects of climate change. On November 8, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan / Yolanda hit the Philippines and was one of the strongest tropical cyclones on record. With Metro Manila on the typhoon belt, the communities made up of the urban poor are experiencing flooding and inundation at increasing levels.

The authors place the blame for a lack of preparation at the feet of neo-liberalism, which tends to downplay climate change even seeing it as a trojan horse of the socialist movement. In the Philippines, this has seen a reduction in state involvement in the economy and an international and private sector push aimed at investment to get goods to market, with most of the benefit going to lenders, for-profit organizations, and multinationals. Wages have been kept low and other incentives offered to encourage this type of investment. Sitting behind these investments is a myth that countries like the Philippines need to 'catch up' to developed countries. In reality, the push towards modernization has left many behind, including the poor in wealthier countries.

A counter to top-down neo-liberalism based on eco-liberation theology is happening in the Philippines with frontline churches developing communities of compassion. These communities span different faiths and philosophies, bringing them together in a revolutionary social and environmental movement for peace and justice. In this way, religion is grounded and practical, rooted in context. These communities form part of the Catholic Basic Christian Communities or Base Ecclesial Communities. They are places where new ideas and cultural forms are explored, as well as traditional methods of farming, that existed before colonization, adopted once again. The communities are not subordinate to church hierarchy and are able to advocate for the rights of the poor and oppressed. In the Philippines, they share an ideology based on environmentalism, human rights, justice, peace, and grassroots democracy.



Participants come together to seek solutions through prayer, study of the bible, collective planning and decision-making, and negotiating with various officials, development workers, and landowners.

Holden, Nadeau, and Porio point out that liberation theology is talk of God and as a method it is inductive, discerning the divine presence in the life of the people and, taking into consideration their aspirations, exploring what the bible says about them. The theology starts with the people, rather than an absolute, and enables them to reflect on their experience. In the context of the Philippines, these communities have a long history of livelihood projects designed to improve the lives of the members. These include handicraft production, food processing, garment making, soap making, cooperative stores, and farming.

Even though a little dated, I found this publication helpful in its easy-to-understand outlining of complex issues and concepts. It succinctly focuses faith, urbanization, and climate and provides hope in the form of base ecclesial communities. Liberation theology, the practice at the core of these communities, has a long history of empowering both the rural and urban poor to move out from under oppression and become self-determinate. Add an environmental focus to this process and the communities are able to become more resilient to climate change and its effects, drawing on their ability to reflect and stand in solidarity with each other.



Dr Andre Van Eymeren is a practical theologian and an international consultant, trainer and practitioner in community development. For the past 25 years he has worked with communities considered 'vulnerable' around Australia and in places as diverse as the UK, US, South Africa, Pakistan, Zambia, Kenya, and Cameroon. Andre brings expertise in uncovering the strengths and assets of a community and delights in up-ending traditional needs-based approaches which are well-meaning but inevitably flawed. He has extensive experience working with local governments, schools, faith groups and the not-for-profit sector. Andre co-founded CBBC to catalyse positive change towards individual and community flourishing.

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