

Exploring Hope

John Weaver*

Abstract

This paper has emerged out of a consultation held in Oxford to consider the relevance of the Christian message of hope in the face of global environmental crisis. For many Christians, hope has moved from being a proximate hope that we might change our behaviour, to an eschatological hope, as behaviour and policy change are becoming frustratingly hard to secure. It is recognised that this crisis of hope not only applies to environmental issues but also issues of poverty. The author considers our role as hopeful disciples living between proximate and ultimate hope. He uses Ricoeur's 'knot of reality' to explore the interconnection between suffering, faithfulness and the promises of God. The link between catastrophe, judgment, endurance, and hope are examined. A number of key Bible passages are considered in outline and Col. 1:15-20 and Rom. 8:18-23 are examined in more depth, along with some passages from Genesis and Isaiah.

Church leaders who are aware of the environmental crisis, need to improve their communication to motivate Christians to take seriously the care for creation and for the poor. Drawing on the work of Walsh and Keesmaat, the author calls Christians to be countercultural. The Church can bring the signs of hope and these are found in community. This requires action that embodies Christian virtues. These point to a renewal of creation and show that we are caught up in a bigger story. Our ultimate hope is always in God and is brought into our present world through our faithful discipleship.

Introduction

During the United Nations climate summit in December 2009, Copenhagen rebranded itself with numerous posters and T-shirts with the logo, 'I am a citizen of *Hopenhagen*.' There is hope. The Old Testament prophets speak of the heart of the Creator who loves creation, and the gospel reminds us that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Paul wrote to

* The John Ray Initiative, Redcliffe College, Wotton House, Horton Road, Gloucester, GL1 3PT, UK. Email: jdweaverswbc@yahoo.co.uk

the church at Rome that ‘the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed’ (Rom. 8:19). Creation waits for Christians to become truly Christ-like in the power of the Spirit. There is hope if Copenhagen can be seen as a step on the road, when 192 nations realized the immensity of what needs to happen to address climate change - not the end, but rather the end of the beginning. There is hope if leaders have been listening to each other and will go on listening, and take the economic and political risks. But little hope has emerged. There have been political struggles, prevarication, and a grim sober realism in the face of the intransigence of many governments.

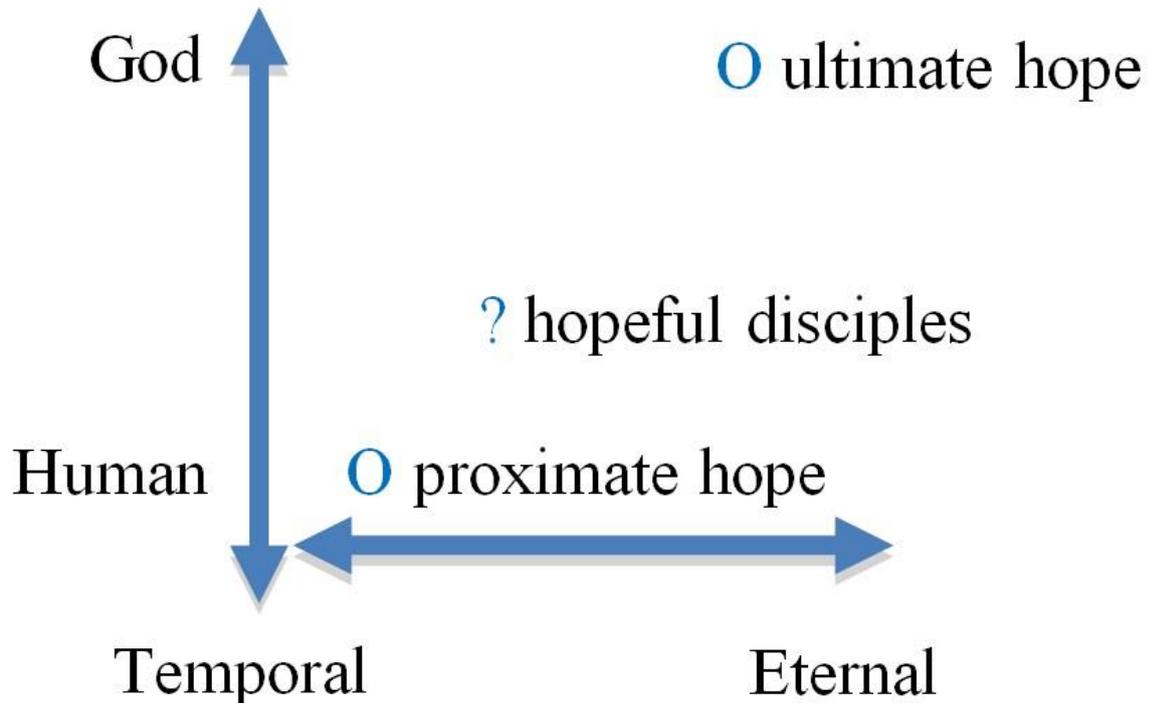
This paper has emerged out of a consultation held in Oxford^a to consider the relevance of the Christian message of hope in the face of global environmental crisis. What role does a Christian theology of hope play within this global concern? Is there any hope, humanly speaking, or are we beyond that? What role should Christian hope play in our ecological message to churches and Christians? Are we just encouraging a ‘pie in the sky’ theology by peddling hope where there is none? Can a message of hope actually become demotivating when the reality seems so different? This cluster of questions represents what we might call ‘the hope gap.’

It is useful in our discussion to focus on the difference between ‘ultimate’ and ‘proximate’ hope. Richard Bauckham has provided helpful definitions of these in his paper in this issue.¹ We recognise that for many Christians, hope has moved from being a practical hope that we might change our behaviour, to an eschatological hope, as behaviour and policy change are becoming frustratingly hard to secure. With this shift of emphasis there is a real challenge to find motivation for genuine hope in the present, when the focus of hope is

^a This consultation was attended by: The Rt Revd David Atkinson, former Bishop of Thetford; Prof. R.J. (Sam) Berry, Emeritus Professor of Genetics, UCL; Dr John Bimson, Lecturer in Old Testament, Trinity College, Bristol; The Revd Dave Bookless, Founder of A Rocha UK; Prof David Clough, Professor of Environmental Ethics and Head of Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Chester; The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, OBE, Bishop of Dorchester; The Revd Margot R Hodson, Vicar of Haddenham, Cuddington, Kingsey and Aston Sandford, Bucks and a Director of the John Ray Initiative; Dr Martin J Hodson, Visiting Researcher, Oxford Brookes University and Operations Manager for JRI; Sir John Houghton, former Head of UK Met Office and the IPCC and President of JRI; Dr Dewi Hughes, Theological Adviser for Tearfund; Dr John McKeown, Tutor of The Open University, webmaster for JRI; The Revd Dr John Weaver, former President of the Baptist Union and Principal of the South Wales Bible College, Chair of JRI board; and Dr Ruth Valerio, Living Lightly, A Rocha UK, member of Spring Harvest leadership committee, and trustee for the Evangelical Alliance. All contributed ideas that have been drawn on in writing this paper.

pushed toward the future eschatological consummation of universe. It is recognised that this crisis of hope not only applies to environmental issues but also to the work of aid agencies seeking to address issues of poverty and food security in the majority world.

These struggles raise age-old debates of theodicy and of our role within God's plans: how we live as Christians in this present time, and what in practise it means to partner God. The nature of realised eschatology can be considered together with the question of what it might mean to live as Kingdom people now. We can describe the resolution of these questions through a diagram^b depicting the relationship between the poles of God and humanity along one axis, and the temporal and eternal dimensions along the other.



On this diagram we can identify the two positions of ultimate and proximate hope. Our ultimate hope is in God's purposes and promises, which will be finally accomplished in the consummation of creation. Human hope in this present age is constrained by selfishness and greed, which the Bible calls sin. As Christians we are called to live between the Cross and the *Parousia*, recognising our human limitations but with our eyes fixed on ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes, which inspire our actions in the present. We can suggest that we live as 'hopeful disciples' in the power of the Holy Spirit.

^b This is modified from a diagram offered by David Clough at the Oxford gathering.

Rom. 5:1-5 informs us of our future hope, which strengthens us to live in the present: suffering leads to perseverance/endurance; leading to character and this leads to hope. Such hope in Christ is robust and is able to face the present reality. Alan Jamieson² explores such hope in the face of trouble (Rom. 5:2-5) and introduces the reader to Ricoeur's 'knot of reality'. This is a move to Ricoeur's second naïveté created through forming a knot of realities: 'the reality of pain, suffering and despair that lies within and around us tied to the reality of a deep faith in God,' which brings hope in despair.³ We can imagine a reef knot, which bears all the stress that we place upon it; the realities of life being intimately intertwined with the promises and reality of God.

In our present reality, the role of the Old Testament prophet has much to teach us. Often it was their role to prophecy judgment, where hope only came after a catastrophe that broke the bad system. They saw the chaos of judgement followed by God's restoration. We therefore have to ask what is the relationship between effectiveness and faithfulness? Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked in a BBC interview after the award of her Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, whether or not she considered her ministry in India to have been successful. Her reply was as simple as it was challenging: 'God did not call me to be successful, but to be faithful.'^c It is not the Christian's responsibility to make history turn out right, but to be faithful to our calling as disciples of Christ. But is this enough for the activists?

The current situation

Following the disappointing conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 17), Durban 2011, delivered a breakthrough on the international community's response to climate change. In this the second largest meeting of its kind, the negotiations advanced in a balanced fashion with the implementation of the Second Kyoto Protocol, the Bali Action Plan, and the Cancun Agreements. The outcomes, known as the 'Durban Platform,' included a decision by parties to adopt a universal legal agreement on climate change as soon as possible, and no later than 2015. A policy 'roadmap' was secured leading to a legally binding agreement by 2015, and implementation by all countries to reduce carbon emissions by 2020. But we may note that many hopes and fine words were expressed after the previous climate change conferences in Copenhagen, 2009, and Cancun, 2010.⁴ Prevarication and disagreements have continued to mark the responses of many, and this continued in COP18 in Doha in December 2012.

^c Quoted from an interview with Peter France for the BBC Everyman programme in December 1979

With no sign of the world governments taking action to reduce humanity's carbon footprint, Sir John Houghton (President of JRI and former head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's scientific assessment working group) considers that average global surface temperature is most likely to increase by between 3° and 4°C above the pre-industrial revolution temperatures during this century, rather than the more optimistic 2°C that had been hoped for in 2006. The causes of inaction include the global financial crisis (we can't afford to deal with climate change) and sceptical views concerning the reality of climate change and its human causation. The results of inaction may be catastrophic. A more detailed analysis of climate change and the other serious global environmental problems can be found in Martin Hodson's paper in this edition of *Anvil*.⁵

Discussing Hope

There are a number of significant questions that emerge as we explore the nature of hope in the face of a global environmental crisis. These can be brought together in four groups.

First, what are we hoping for, and what is the relationship between ultimate and proximate hope? What are we hoping for people, for biodiversity and for the planet? What can we legitimately hope for in this 'present age'? How do we manage the tension between ultimate and proximate hope? What is the ultimate hope for the earth? Is 'hope' a Christian get-out clause meaning we don't need to do anything? How do we live out resurrection life now? Can fulfilled Christian discipleship be hope for this world? Christians have a God-given call to be involved, and to be channels of redemption, as the power of the resurrection is at work within the people of God. Prophetic action lived within the gift of ultimate hope, becomes the demonstration of a sustaining present hope. This is God's grace for us. Drawing on this grace, we find hope in the real world and are able to provide hope for others. The challenge is to move from a context of despair to one shaped by God's immanent and transforming hope.

Secondly, we need to consider the impact of judgment and disaster. How is 'hope' diminished or enhanced by the presence of the fear of cataclysm? Are we facing more problems on a global scale than previous generations, and at a faster pace? What may we hope for? What is the link between catastrophe, God's judgment, endurance, and hope? What is the relationship between false hope, judgment, proximate hope, and ultimate hope? Do disasters have a role in changing minds? Does the hope in the ultimate justice of God generate hope in the present? In the Old Testament we find that it was the false prophets who

declared that ‘all is well’ much like some climate sceptics today. Amos and Jeremiah, in contrast to these false prophets, declared that ‘all was not well’, and that true hope lay beyond catastrophe. We might consider whether or not we have reached the point where the only hope is that which lies beyond the catastrophic effects brought about by human degradation of the environment.

Thirdly, what is the role of the Church and how do we communicate to others? How might the Church demonstrate Christian hope now? How can Christians be motivated to take seriously the care for creation and care for the poor, where small steps of change matter? One way is to encourage acorn planters who invest in a more sustainable future. Christians need to live transformed lives for the Church to have a transforming impact on the world. How do we inspire churches and Christians to make this radical shift in their lives and faith? The role of Church leaders is vital in influencing all Christians to see that care for creation is part of our Christian discipleship. It is essential for Christians to grasp the hope God offers. They will then be equipped to demonstrate God’s promises and ultimate purposes to a generation who are convinced that hope in this life is all there is. They can do this through practical actions and care. There is a detailed exploration of these communication issues in the paper by Andy Atkins in this issue of *Anvil*.⁶

Lastly, there are the questions that surround the relationship between effectiveness and faithfulness. Activists may well be motivated by effectiveness, but what motivates prophets and martyrs? Can the aims of effectiveness and faithfulness be held together or do we abandon the emphasis on effectiveness when we focus on being faithful? It is important that the Church explore the call to faithful action whether or not it is deemed to be ‘effective’. Within this we should also explore how to live and act prophetically.

Defining Hope

A number of key Bible passages can be cited in seeking a biblical definition of hope:

Jer. 29:4-14 is directed to those in exile, where God encourages them to settle and seek the prosperity of the cities in which they have been placed. God promises to bring hope and work for their future. This passage challenges us to engage with a ‘hopeless’ context through incarnational ministry.

Hab. 3:16-19 focuses on endurance and hope in God in all circumstances.

Rom. 5:1-5 addresses proximate hope, where the assurance is given that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. In the editorial of this issue of *Anvil*, Margot Hodson draws on this passage to develop the concept of a robust hope.⁷

Rom. 8:18-28 speaks of the ‘hope’ of creation and human beings sharing the glory of God, but we will ask what this means in practice?

2 Cor. 4:1-12 assures us of treasure in jars of clay, which is suggestive of proximate hope in the light of ultimate hope.

Eph. 3:14-21 emphasises God’s power and love working through his people, and encourages us to recognise that we are in partnership with God in bringing hope.

Col. 1:15-27 includes an early Christian hymn describing Christ in the world, holding the whole of creation, and reconciling everything through the Cross.

Col. 3:2 encourages a heavenly focus, but what does it mean in practical terms to set our minds on the things that are above?

In his letter to the Christians at Colossae Paul gives thanks for the marks of true Christian disciples: they have faith in Christ which is a genuine spiritual work; they have a sacrificial love for all their fellow sisters and brothers in Christ, which is a mark of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22-25); and they have hope laid up in heaven, which is their ultimate future. They are confident of their assured acceptance before God in Christ.⁸ Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat⁹ re-write the opening verses of the letter in the form of a Jewish *targum*. They include the following section on hope:

But your hope is not the cheap buoyant optimism of global capitalism with its cybernetic computer gods and self-confident scientific discovery, all serving the predatory idolatry of economism Real hope - the kind of hope that gives you the audacity to resist the commodification of your lives and engenders the possibility of an alternative imagination - is no human achievement; it is a divine gift [the] gospel is the Word of truth - it is the life-giving, creation-calling, covenant-making, always faithful servant Word that takes flesh in Jesus, who is the truth God has always intended that creation be a place of fruitfulness. Now the Word of truth is producing the fruit of radical discipleship, demonstrated in passion for justice, evocative art and drama, restorative stewardship of our ecological home, education for faithful living, integral evangelism, and liturgy that shapes an imagination alternative to the empire’s.

Here is our ultimate hope, which is focused and centred in God. Martin and Margot Hodson explore Col. 1:15-20, where Christ is seen as the agent of creation, the sustainer of creation and, as redeemer, the one who holds creation together. They suggest that ‘if Christ is the source of every element in the universe, then no part should be treated dismissively. Our role should be to interact with the world to enable all to flourish’ and ‘if Christ, the redeemer, is the source of all things and is chief over creation, it means that redemption is built into the fabric of creation.’¹⁰ The Hodsons observe that the negative effects of climate change can lead to despair, but if we accept that redemption is for all creation, ‘then we should meet these difficulties with a purposeful hope.’ Their response is to offer an environmental ethic based on this thinking:

A world-view that places Christ at the heart of creation ... generates a distinctive set of values. The intrinsic value of all elements of creation comes from Christ’s creating role. Christ as redeemer and his holding all things together provides a context of hope for any Christian engagement with the world and affirms interconnectedness. His role as supreme over all things and head of the church give a dynamic responsibility to be co-creators and make his Kingdom visible on earth as in heaven. Christ as image of the invisible God is a reminder of humanity’s *Imago Dei* and this also needs inclusion.¹¹

With such a hope we live as purposeful disciples. Walsh and Keesmaat helpfully observe that, ‘Steadfast love, truth, righteousness and shalom are all inextricably related in a biblical worldview. And when God restores covenantal shalom to the land, then truth, or faithfulness, will permeate life so deeply and fully that it will seem as if truth springs up from the ground.’¹²

Biblical truth is embodied or incarnated in the life of the community in the land and when truth ‘dies’ the socio-cultural and ecological consequences are disastrous. Our true humanity is to be located in Christ, and when we locate ourselves outside Christ we find ourselves in disharmony with God’s purpose for the well-being of creation.¹³ Christians have a contribution to make. God created and entrusted the earth, and will redeem the whole of creation (Rom. 8:19-21). In Christ there is a new creation, but as ever in the New Testament, there is a now but not yet aspect. There are the first fruits of the Spirit, but still creation groans as it waits for God’s human creatures to reach their perfection as children of God (Rom. 8:18-23). To believe in Christ in this world is to believe despite the realities of this world. Christ is risen, but we live in a world of suffering, pain and destruction. We have hope

because we trust in the ultimate salvation for all creation, which now appears only in outline. This cannot be a cheap hope. Human beings must act in hope and the Spirit gives us the possibility to be what we are to become, that is: the children of God. We find the same message in Col. 1:19-20:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.^d

Paul places the redemption of human beings in the context of the redemption of the whole creation. Creation is brought back into relationship with God through the cross. This takes place as human beings find their restored relationship with the Creator, through the cross and begin to live as hopeful disciples.¹⁴ God is deeply and passionately involved in his world. God is no absentee landlord, but indwelling, accompanying, incarnate, and present as Holy Spirit. There are important implications for our relationship both with the Creator and with creation. Moltmann maintains that:

There can be no redemption for human beings without the redemption of the whole of perishable nature. So it is not enough to see Christ's resurrection merely as 'God's eschatological act in history.' We also have to understand it as the first act in the new creation of the world. Christ's resurrection is not just a historical event. It is a cosmic event too.¹⁵

Often we are tempted to begin any discussion about the state of the planet with a discussion about the role of human beings. When we do this, our hope diminishes because we only see the anthropocentric context. It is better to begin with God: God's view of creation; and God's humanity. It is in God's promises that we find hope renewed.

Gen. 1-11 presents us with the picture of God the creator and covenant maker. In Gen. 1 we have a picture of a world with which God is pleased. We see human beings described as made in God's image and reflecting the nature of God. Gen. 2 shows us the relationships God desires in a world that is good. There are positive human relationships with God, with each other, and with the environment. In Gen. 3 we find that human rebellion and self-centredness leads to the breaking of these three relationships and God's judgement on humanity and the world.¹⁶ This sets the context for the Genesis narrative. Gen. 8:21-22 assures us that lasting change will depend on God's activity in the face of human wickedness. God will not destroy

^d all biblical references from Today's New International Version, Hodder & Stoughton 2005

the earth, but in God's grace the cycle of day and night and of crops and seasons will continue. Hope is found in God's covenant with all creation. It is clear that this hope is based on God's grace alone, and God's promise never again to flood the earth.

The Psalms express creation's praise and the revelation of God the creator (e.g. Ps. 19, 104). The Prophets describe human rebellion in breaking the covenant and the resulting destruction of creation (e.g. Isa. 24). We can also note that Isaiah presents the alternative covenantal way of life, which brings peace and fruitfulness as opposed to the destruction that comes through foreign gods, political, economic and military alliances. In Deutero-Isaiah, hope is presented when relationships are restored between God and humanity, and the earth is restored to fruitfulness and harmony (e.g. Isa. 55:10). Ultimately the earth will be full of God's knowledge and glory (Isa. 11:9, 6:3) and will be made new (Isa. 65:17).¹⁷

The New Testament does not allow any separation between God's purpose in creation and in redemption. The destiny of the non-human created order depicted in the New Testament is not that of a throw-away container which God will discard when Christ finally comes to consummate the salvation of humans. Rather, the final salvation of humans is part of a wider renewal of the whole creation through transformation.¹⁸ The Incarnation shows that Christianity has no place for a strong spirit-matter dualism that denigrates the material world, and the doctrine of resurrection shows us that God will take up the material and transform it, not discard it.¹⁹

The beginnings of Hope

There is an integral relationship between God's purposes in creation and salvation, which has particular relevance in the light of the ecological crises threatening the world today.

'Salvation embraces the renewal of the whole of creation, not just the saving of individual human beings. Therefore to work for that renewal now is to provide a sign of the kingdom of God, in the same way that working for justice in human society provides such a sign.'²⁰

Ernest Lucas links redemption with the coming of the Son of Man (see Dan. 7) when God steps in to establish his kingdom as the completion of his creative purpose. The coming of the Kingdom does not mean the abolition of God's creation, but the restoration and fulfilment of creation (cf. Matt. 19:28, where the coming of the Son of Man in glory is linked with the renewal of all things (see also Acts 3:21).

The renewal of creation at the coming of Christ is also to be found in the Johannine material. Though John uses the phrase 'Kingdom of God,' he favours the term 'eternal life'. This does

not imply that he does not see eternal life in kingdom terms, however, and the New Jerusalem of Rev. 21-22 is established on a renewed earth. Rev. 21:5 suggests a renewal of the old by a radical transformation (cf. Isa. 65:17). So, the redeeming work of Christ is not separated from the achieving of God's creative purpose; 'God is concerned with the renewing of creation, not with saving humans alone and discarding the rest.'²¹ Jesus is the key to our understanding of creation as illustrated in Heb. 11:3; John 1:1-14; and Col. 1:15-20. Recognising that creation is God's creation we submit to what God will do. We base our trust on what he has done in Christ, and what he is doing in our world. As Eugene Peterson states:

We are not spectators of creation but participants in it. We are participants first of all by simply being born, but then we realise that our births all take place in the defining context of Jesus' birth. The Christian life is the practice of living in what God has done and is doing.²²

In Jesus, God is a participant in creation, totally committed and personally present (Heb. 4:14-16; John 1:14; 3:16). It is God's grace, which is our ultimate hope, and we thus move on to explore God's redemptive mission. In the New Testament we read of Christ as co-creator and as redeemer of creation (John 1 and Col. 1). The post-resurrection church lives in the power of the Spirit (Eph. 1:20; 3:14-21) and is called into God's redemptive activity (Rom. 8:18-25). Christians have resurrection life now (John 11:25-26), which is eternal life (John 6:34ff and John 10:10). It is a life in Christ (Rom. 6:3,11; 8:1. 2 Cor. 5:17) and Christians experience the presence of the Kingdom in their midst (Luke 10:9,11; 11:20, and 17:21). We are called to live as Kingdom people, who regularly pray 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.'

Is the situation hopeless? Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die (cf. Ecc. 1:12 -2:26); or as today's hedonists might say: 'Fly, drive and consume for tomorrow you may die.' Walsh and Keesmaat suggest that many people believe that the future is bleak. This leads them to comment that: 'if the guiding narrative of our culture breeds suspicion, not confidence, then history-forming action is paralyzed' and 'the progress myth of democratic capitalism that promised economic prosperity and social harmony strains under the weight of economic contraction, ecological threat, and an ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.'²³ They observe that:

International tensions have increased over the last one hundred years, the environment continues to be raped, and the rise of prosperity for the wealthy has been accompanied

by increased poverty, starvation, homelessness and misery for the majority of the world's population. There is something wrong with this story.²⁴

We recognise the need of a meaning beyond ourselves to give direction, accountability, and hope to our lives. We find this in the purposes and promises of God. We have already discussed the letter to the Colossians. In the face of the dominant empire, Paul claims Jesus as the true image of God (Col. 1:15) and calls the Colossian Christians to bear the image of Jesus in shaping an alternative to the empire. This is where their hope is focused. For Christians today this will include the way in which we approach God's good creation.

Hopeful Disciples

Walsh and Keesmaat note that the Old Testament prophets call Israel to be countercultural to the empires around it. In the covenant, Israel is called to be a people of Jubilee, where slaves are released and life renewed, in contrast with the slavery and death of empire. Israel is called to care for the stranger, the widow and the orphan - the marginalised. While the empires of other nations are frantically caught up in the management of production and consumption, 'Israel is called to a Sabbath keeping that acknowledges the gift character of its life in the land.'²⁵ Israel is to be an alternative society and not like the nations around. Instead they follow the nations and find that they are under God's judgement in exile. Even here God's call through Jeremiah is that they should be a blessing, and bear witness to an alternative society (Jer. 29:5-7 cf. Gen. 1:28-9). Even as exiles they are to live out the vision and hope of Genesis. Even under the oppressive rule of Babylon Israel is called to build a faithful community, living under a different kingship.

Can there be a theology of hope? Can our sinful actions thwart the purposes of God? The promise of the covenant, with Noah, is that while human sinfulness and self-centredness will continue so will God's gracious promise 'never again' to destroy the earth (Gen. 8:21-22). God promises to be with us in the realities of life (Ps. 23, Isa. 43:1-5, and Matt. 28:20), and encourages us to hold onto hope in the face of uncertainty. We learn from both Amos and Jeremiah that the false prophets promised hope without catastrophe, while God's prophets offer hope beyond catastrophe. We can speak of the hope of judgement, where there is accountability for our lack of care of the poor and of the environment. Our hope is based on God and God's justice and grace, which are not thwarted by human sinfulness.

In Rom. 5:1-5 there is a link between hope and endurance. Hope is the motivation to keep on going. We are faced with a failure and crisis in politics and public opinions, in regard

to climate change. This is mirrored with the other environmental challenges that we face. The situation for the poor in the developing world is reaching crisis proportions and at the same time we see a public weariness with the green agenda. There is little sign of many governments reducing their carbon footprint. As a result of scepticism and the economic recession people claim that addressing climate change cannot be afforded, yet all the while consumption levels are rising in an unsustainable way.

Ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain. Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes. We live as those who are created in the image of God and cooperate with God's transformative action in and for the world. As James Hunter suggests, 'to be a Christian is to be obliged to engage the world, pursuing God's restorative purposes over all of life, individual and corporate, public and private. This is the mandate of creation.'²⁶ He maintains that any tendency toward dualism, the division between secular and sacred, public and private, objective and subjective is toxic and must be rejected. The mandate is not for a few but for all: '*all* are participants, *all* are enjoined to participate in ways framed by the revelation of God's word in the creative and renewing work of world-making and remaking. Every person is made in God's image and every person is offered his grace and, in turn, the opportunity to labour together with God in the creation and recreation of the world.'²⁷

Hunter argues for Christians to be a 'faithful presence' in the world. He defines a theology of faithful presence as that vocation of the church to bear witness to the coming Kingdom of God. We do this by being an embodiment of it. Such faithfulness works itself out in the context of complex social, political, economic and cultural forces that prevail in a particular time and place. Christianity needs to produce a thorough critique of the modern world. We can explore Romans 5-8 as a key creation text, where following on from the resurrection we find creation suffering as it waits. While it waits in suffering, it also waits in hope. Christians should be living and acting prophetically. We are called to be faithful rather than successful. Strengthened by our hope in Christ, we can be confident in God's power to overcome (Eph. 3:14-21, Eph. 1:20). When we embody the Kingdom of God, we bring together resurrection and redemption. While ultimate hope lies in God, and God's consummation of creation, a robust proximate hope within God's world is found as Christians realise their discipleship as Kingdom people, finding their role as co-redeemers in Christ's mission in and for the world.

We look for Christian disciples to embody an alternative narrative, sovereignty and hope. If the problem with the empire was idolatry (Col.3:5), then the alternative kingdom is the renewal of the image of God (Col.3:10). In Christ we live as hopeful disciples, restored to our full humanity as God's stewards of creation, embodying the image of God, who has declared creation good and calls on human beings to exercise a godly care.

Conclusion: working with others to bring this about

In our secular context where the worldview is largely based on consumerism, it is important not to present society with an easy or cheap hope. The situation is fragile at present, and we see signs of despair. There are many things that we can do to change our lifestyles that will have positive impacts, such as reviewing our personal carbon footprints, recycling, considering our need of items we purchase, and developing local energy resources. It is good to make those changes but we also need to recognise that they will not be enough to avert severe ecological problems. The changes needed require real sacrifice and our secular society is unlikely to embrace these.

Governments and global corporations will need to ask whether it is possible to have a market economy, which is not based on the value of growth. Is it feasible to move to a position where we have an ethos of 'contentment'? The current economic growth model is based on false hope. It will ultimately fail, as the finite level of resources mean that future growth is limited. We need a model where business success is judged on social and environmental achievement, alongside financial productivity. In this new model, political decisions and technological developments would take economic, societal and environmental aspects into account. The ethics of sustainability must include a balance between the intrinsic value of nature and the needs of humankind in ways that are economically viable and affordable. Sadly our society is based on a false hope that sees the things of this world entirely for their own sake. This hope is based on an over emphasis on unlimited progress and attainable individual happiness.

The church can bring the signs of hope that are found in community. This requires action that embodies the values of: simplicity; respect; blessing; well-being; humility; honesty; perseverance; resurrection; peace; love; justice and gift-bringing. These point to a renewal of creation and show that we are caught up in a bigger story. Creation and incarnation point towards resurrection hope, while bringing a positive endurance in the

present. This presents us with a robust hope that will be relevant to secular culture. It will also be a positive hope alongside those of other faiths, while keeping a Christian distinctive.

With this comes the recognition of a need to make environmental approaches to theology more widely known and accepted. While there may be understanding of the importance of environmental issues amongst the leadership of the Church, there is still more work to be done in the wider church. A theological basis for approaching the environment has yet to secure its place as core teaching in theological institutions and Bible colleges. Creation care is not yet established as mainstream popular Christian thinking. There is still a tendency towards individualism with many Christians. Many see God's concerns as entirely anthropocentric. Therefore there is a need to resource those Christians involved in environment matters, providing them with a robust theology of hope that they can then communicate to others.

Finally for our encouragement, Jeremiah's words to the exiles demonstrate that God had not abandoned the people in exile, but rather exile was the place where God was at work. As the people pursued shalom in Babylon, God provided shalom for his people (Jer. 29:4-7). Our ultimate hope is always in God. This is hope beyond chaos and catastrophe. It is a hope that includes accountability and judgement. This ultimate hope is brought into our present world through our faithful discipleship. This is hope in God, who is creator and redeemer, and who will ultimately make all things new.

Biography



John Weaver was born and brought up in Cardiff. After taking degrees in Geology at Swansea, he taught at the University of Derby. John trained for Baptist ministry in Oxford and was then pastor of Highfield Baptist Church from 1981-1991. From 1992-2001 he taught theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and from 2001-2012 served as Principal of South Wales Baptist College. He is a former President of the Baptist Union, and is the Chair of JRI. His main areas of research are: relating faith to life and work; theological reflection; adult education; and the dialogue between science and faith.

References

-
- ¹ Bauckham, R. (2013). Ecological hope in crisis? *Anvil* **29**(1), 43-54. DOI: 10.2478/anv-2013-0004
- ² Jamieson, A. (2004). *Journeying in Faith. In and Beyond the Tough Places*. London: SPCK.
- ³ Jamieson, A. (2004). *Journeying in Faith. Ibid.* p.31
- ⁴ Hodson, M.J. & Hodson, M.R. (2013). Climate justice: contemporary developments in science, policy, action and theology. In M. Hoek, J. Ingleby, C. Kingston-Smith & A. Kingston-Smith (Eds.), *Carnival Kingdom - biblical justice for global communities* (pp. 125-143) Gloucester: Wide Margin Publishers.
- ⁵ Hodson, M.J. (2013). Losing Hope? The Environmental Crisis Today. *Anvil* **29**(1), 7-23. DOI: 10.2478/anv-2013-0002
- ⁶ Atkins, A. (2013). Communicating Hope in the Real World. *Anvil* **29**(1), 71-86. DOI: 10.2478/anv-2013-0006
- ⁷ Hodson, M.R. (2013). Discovering a robust hope for life on a fragile planet. *Anvil* **29**(1), 1-6. DOI: 10.2478/anv-2013-0001
- ⁸ Weaver, J. (2012). Hopeful disciples in a time of climate change. In Finamore, S. & Weaver, J. (Eds.), *Wisdom, Science and the Scriptures. Essays in honour of Ernest Lucas*. (pp.134-155) Oxford: Regents Park College.
- ⁹ Walsh, B.J. & Keesmaat, S.C. (2004). *Colossians Remixed. Subverting the Empire*. Downers Grove: IVP. pp. 39-41.
- ¹⁰ Hodson, M.J. & Hodson, M.R. (2011). *Climate Change, Faith and Rural Communities*. Northampton: Agriculture and Theology Project. p. 19.
- ¹¹ Hodson, M.J. & Hodson, M.R. (2011). *Ibid.* p. 23.
- ¹² Walsh, B.J. & Keesmaat, S.C. (2004). *Colossians Remixed. Op. cit.* p. 45.
- ¹³ Houston, J. (2005). Creation and incarnation. In Tillet, S. (Ed.), *Caring for Creation, Biblical and Theological Perspectives*. (pp. 88-89) Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship.
- ¹⁴ Wright, C.J.H. (1983). *Living as the people of God*. Leicester: IVP. p. 19.
- ¹⁵ Moltmann, J. (1995). *Jesus Christ for today's world*. London: SCM Press. p. 83.
- ¹⁶ Bookless, D. (2008). *Planetwise. Dare to Care for God's world*. Nottingham: IVP. pp. 36-45.
- ¹⁷ Hodson, M.R. (2011). *Uncovering Isaiah's Environmental Ethics*. E161, Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd.

¹⁸ Wright, N.T. (1999). *New Heavens, New Earth, The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope*.

B11. Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd.

¹⁹ Lucas, E. (1999). The New Testament teaching on the environment. *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* **19**, 93-99.

²⁰ Lucas, E. (2000). *Decoding Daniel: Reclaiming the Visions of Daniel 7-11*. B18, Cambridge: Grove Books. pp. 8-9.

²¹ Lucas E. (1999). The New Testament teaching on the environment. *Op. cit.* p. 96.

²² Peterson, E. (2005). *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. p. 54.

²³ Walsh & Keesmaat (2004). *Colossians Remixed, Op. cit.* p. 23.

²⁴ Walsh & Keesmaat (2004). *Colossians Remixed, Op. cit.* p. 30.

²⁵ Walsh & Keesmaat (2004). *Colossians Remixed, Op. cit.* p. 66.

²⁶ Hunter, J.D. (2010). *To Change the World. The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. Oxford: OUP. p. 4.

²⁷ Hunter (2010). *To Change the World. Ibid.* p. 93.