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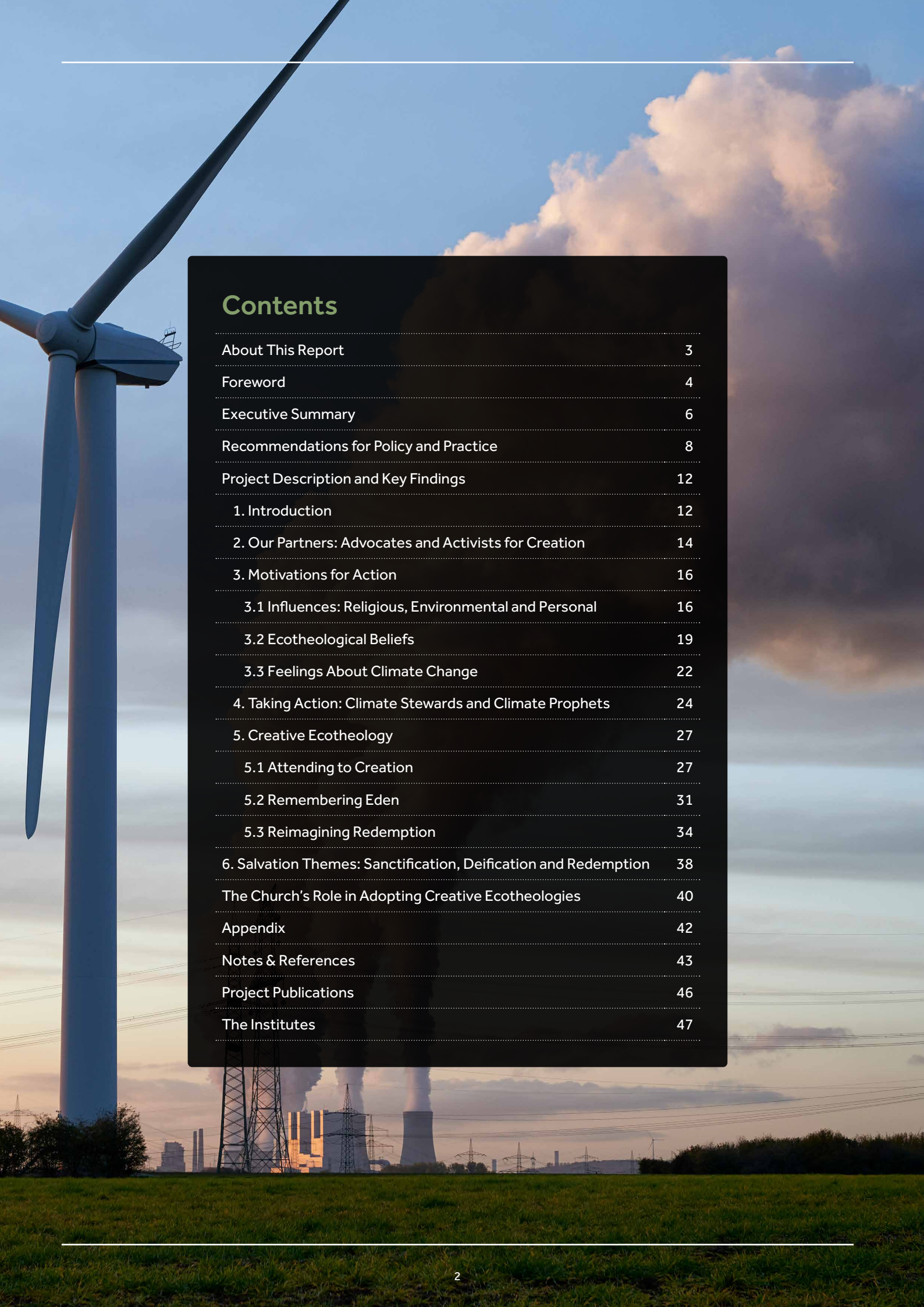
Religion, Theology and Climate Change

Report



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About this Report

This report presents the findings and recommendations from the Religion, Theology and Climate Change project (2022-25), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AH/W004089/1), and hosted at University of Manchester, UK.

The project was led by the Principal Investigator, Peter Scott (Lincoln Theological Institute, Religions and Theology, University of Manchester), with Co-Investigators Celia Deane-Drummond (Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, University of Oxford), and Gemma Edwards (Sociology, University of Manchester), and the Postdoctoral Research Associate Finlay Malcolm (Religions and Theology, University of Manchester).

The project conducted research on the creative ecotheological beliefs and ideas emerging from six UK-based Christian organisations, as well as their attitudes and feelings towards climate change, their motivations for taking climate action, and the practical and organisational responses of these groups.

For this study, we partnered with:

- Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)
- Christian Climate Action
- Church of England Diocese of Manchester
- Church of England Diocese of Oxford
- Operation Noah
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford

We express our wholehearted gratitude to the members of these groups and organisations for their support of the project, and for participating in the research. The project would not have been possible without your willing commitment to participate, share your insights, and provide your time and support to our research.

This report draws significantly on the publications produced from this project, which have been co-authored between the four members of the project team (see 'Project Publications'). Interviews with participants from the organisations were carried out by all four project investigators. This report's lead author is Finlay Malcolm, with co-authors Peter Scott, Celia Deane-Drummond and Gemma Edwards.

The recommendations (see 'Recommendations for Policy and Practice') were developed in part from reflection on suggestions made by our partners during two briefing events held in March and April 2025. Again, we extend our thanks to our partners for their support in developing these proposals.

Foreword

I first learned about this report when I met Finlay Malcolm, one of its authors, at a packed-out church in Waterloo in April 2023. I was frantically trying to keep my then one-year-old occupied alongside 1,000 other Christian protestors gathered at the 'No faith in fossil fuels' service at St John's Church to stand in solidarity with those on the frontlines of climate change around the world.

When Finlay told me of the research project he was part of – exploring how Christian groups are responding to the challenge of climate change – I looked around at those gathered in the room and realised what a fascinating and layered exploration this would be.

Organised by Christian Climate Action (CCA), Tearfund, Christian Aid, CAFOD and others, the service was followed by a peaceful march towards Westminster, led by the former Archbishop of York and Ruth Valerio, and went via Shell's headquarters, to join Extinction Rebellion's The Big One protest outside the Houses of Parliament. As I pushed my buggy with one hand, and held up a homemade placard with the other, I was moved by the sense of mission, the strangeness of the prophetic act of protest, prayer and lament as we walked through the streets of London. Here were Christians of all ages and backgrounds, of various denominations and from all over the country, uniting to take action on climate change – the defining issue for society today. But what had brought us all here?

Religion is often dismissed in environmental debates as un-progressive, obstructive and out of touch. Our own research at Theos analysed British Election Study data found that those who identify as Christian are the least environmentally-friendly demographic[1]. However, we found that there is a clear 'practice effect': practising Christians are significantly more environmentally conscious than non-practising Christians, and frequent churchgoers are more likely to engage in eco-friendly behaviours and activities. This report highlights the ways in which people of faith are engaging deeply – intellectually, spiritually, and practically – with climate change. The report does not just observe their activities or behaviours but digs beneath the surface to understand the ideas that motivate this action. In some ways Christian climate activists are motivated by the same as non-Christians: influenced by climate science, friends and family, and prominent environmentalists from David Attenborough to Greta Thunberg, George Monbiot and

> *...a rallying call to Christian groups and organisations, calling on people of faith to a deeper awareness of the challenges facing creation, the need to take action towards creation-care, and providing ways to work creatively with theology to connect Christians with creation, and motivate them towards its protection and restoration. For all our sakes.*

Wendell Berry. But Christian climate activists also reach for their own scripture and sacred traditions. Some 66% of respondents to the survey element of this research said that the Bible influenced their views, citing psalms and other passages from the Old Testament. It is from these sacred texts that a biblical imagination of flourishing is found – an imagination that leads to the creative theological positions the groups studied in this report wrestle with and employ. They expand on doctrines such as *imago Dei*, stewardship, divine immanence, gift, redemption and the kingdom of God. Christian theology also grapples with the challenges of ecological grief and hope.

The palpable sense of lament we felt as we walked from Waterloo to Westminster on that sunny afternoon in 2023 is echoed in a 2021 book I edited entitled *Rage & Hope: 75 Prayers for a Better World* (SPCK), in which the late theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote of the power of lament. For him: "The public voicing of grief may lead to new social energy... Where there is no lament, there can only be violence. Where there is vigorous lament, new social energy is released." The Christian imagination is a resource that can provide frameworks for grappling with the biggest issues of our times – compelling us to act for the flourishing of all, drawing us towards positive ideas of interdependence, mutuality, justice, hope, but sometimes lament. This report affirms that faith can contribute constructively to our common and public life – even in providing examples of collective lament. It is this articulation of a compelling and valuable vision of human flourishing for society that lies at the heart of our mission at Theos.

This report exemplifies the contribution of these Christian ideas, but also the value of faith itself, by revealing the significant work undertaken by a range of faith groups towards tackling environmental issues. It provides, too, clear recommendations for expanding this work in church contexts, as well as Christian development agencies, and advocacy and activist groups. Finally, it is also a rallying call to Christian groups and organisations, calling on people of faith to a deeper awareness of the challenges facing creation, the need to take action towards creation-care, and providing ways to work creatively with theology to connect Christians with creation, and motivate them towards its protection and restoration. For all our sakes.

Chine McDonald
Director of Theos – the religion and society think tank

Executive Summary

Project Aims

Christian groups and organisations in the UK have undertaken substantial work to address the escalating climate crisis. However, the climate crisis is not only shaping the work of these groups and organisations, it is also shaping their theologies in creative and interesting ways. This project partnered with six Christian groups and organisations to uncover creativity in the theological thought of their environmental activists and advocates, as they respond in their own ways to tackling the climate crisis. This report reveals this creativity, explores their motivations and action-orientations for taking climate action, and makes recommendations for integrating these findings within the practices and policies of Christian groups and organisations across the UK.

Methodology

The project used mixed methods, including participant observation, a large-scale survey (319 responses), and 62 in-depth interviews, to investigate ecotheological beliefs, emotions, influences, and views towards taking climate action. Through reflection and analysis using ideas from several disciplines, but especially theology, sociology, and social science methods – what we call "social science-engaged theology" – we have outlined the theological creativity of our research partners.

Key Findings

1. **Creative Theological Themes:** Significant theological creativity was observed. Participants expanded traditional doctrines such as imago Dei, stewardship, divine immanence, gift, ecological grief and hope, redemption, and kingdom, and drew from sources outside the Christian tradition, such as indigenous thought, to enrich their thinking. These ideas ranged across different aesthetic, emotional and ethical connections to creation and grounded their motivations for creation care.
2. **Soteriological Creativity:** An overarching theme of creativity within soteriological categories was evident. We have placed this within three categories: (1) *Sanctification*, which includes regarding creation as pedagogical; (2) *Deification*, whereby damages to creation are indicative of breaches in relationality between humans, God and the extra-human creation; and (3) *Redemption*, which underlines the imperative to care for creation as a redemptive act.
3. **Influences on Ecotheology:** The study found a range of personal, theological and environmental influences on ecotheological views. Scientific understanding of climate change often preceded and then shaped theological beliefs. Participants synthesised environmental science with Christian teachings to inform their work.

4. **Motivational Emotions:** Strong emotions and feelings—including grief, hope, rage—were central to participants' motivation and engagement. Climate action was frequently tied to spiritual experiences, aesthetic appreciation of nature, and theological commitments to justice and care.
5. **Action-Oriented Identities:** Two core environmental identities or roles were claimed by our participants: "Climate Stewards," focused on creation care-based sustainable lifestyles and organisational practice; and "Climate Prophets," engaged in systemic critique and political activism. Both identities or roles were found across all groups but were distributed differently by organisational context.

Recommendations

The report offers twelve actionable recommendations for Christian groups and institutions (see next section, Recommendations). These include conducting internal theological audits, developing context-specific toolkits, embracing a wider soteriological language, creating pastoral responses to ecological emotions, expanding theological education, fostering cross-organisational dialogue, and issuing formal ecotheological statements.

Conclusion

Christian environmental advocacy and action in the UK is both theologically creative and organisationally active. We have found important relationships between this creativity and a range of influences and emotions. By harnessing and developing emerging ecotheologies, and by collaborating across groups and organisations, Christian communities can and do play a crucial role in responding to the climate crisis. This report recommends how to embed our findings to enrich the ecological work and ecotheological ideas of all Christian groups and organisations in their future work in caring for creation.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Below we make 12 recommendations for implementing the findings of our project into policy and practice. We encourage the use of our findings widely both within and across a range of Christian groups and organisations.

Recommendation 1

Conduct an audit of theological views and other attitudes towards climate change, using the project survey tool (amended to suit).

This project developed a theologically-informed questionnaire to understand people's theological views and feelings concerning climate change, alongside their attitudes towards the justification of different kinds of climate action (see the Appendix). This project survey tool can be used to give all types of Christian organisation or group the opportunity to learn about their own theological views and attitudes. This can be a useful learning exercise in its own right, especially since many of our research participants found it an enriching exercise for themselves. It can also be extended to conversations amongst colleagues, as per Recommendation 10, but also used as a basis for developing toolkits for each organisation based on the findings from our report, as per Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 2

Develop toolkits that can be used in the writing and production of talks, training, teaching and communications with and to members, which can be developed in line with the responses gathered from an organisational or group audit (see Recommendation 1).

This study has revealed a range of creative ideas that go beyond existing concepts typically deployed to motivate and inspire care for creation. For instance, deeper understandings of prophet and steward identities; shifts in ideas of imago Dei, creation as gift, and God's immanence, which facilitate a view of creation as pedagogical; a broader salvation language that encompasses the wider creation; and novel conceptions of stewardship that draw on indigenous and political thought. We have found that these ideas motivate and inspire Christian environmental action and creation care. Christian organisations/groups can take up these ideas for themselves, as appropriate, and use them to inspire a pro-environmental stance in their members, staff, congregants, clergy, supporters and campaigners. Any Christian group or organisation could conduct an audit, as per Recommendation 1, to identify which ideas would be most useful for their organisation. Based on this, the most useful findings for the organisation or group's purposes and audiences could be written up into toolkits for use internally, such as briefing documents, PowerPoint slide decks, blogs and memos.

Recommendation 3

Adopt a broader soteriological language for engaging people, which connects them more intimately with creation and the environmental problems it faces, and develop this strategy based in a variety of soteriologies—this diversity being considered a strength.

One of the most striking findings of the project is the ways in which our respondents think about their environmental role and responsibility in soteriological terms. The focus is partly on ethical terms such as stewardship. Love of God, love of neighbour, and love of creatures are one love, so to speak, in Jesus Christ. In addition, however, there

are clear emphases on creation being a blessing towards humans, that humans face God as co-participants with the non-human creation, and that Christian environmental action that addresses the healing of creation is informed by creation. Christian discipleship can then be encouraged and strengthened in these soteriological directions.

Recommendation 4

Build this creative soteriological diversity into all aspects of environmental work, as contextually appropriate.

The Christian response to climate change is not only ethical, our research has found. Clearly, there is an interest in 'saving the planet'. This ethical stance, however, can be diversified: Christian environmental work can be expanded to include the appreciation of creation and a sense of common creatureliness before God. All three themes—aesthetic, affective, and ethical–may be developed and supported liturgically (see recommendation 11).

Recommendation 5

Acknowledge as an outcome of the audit (see Recommendation 1) the emotional and affective responses by organisation/group members to climate change, and build this into education, homiletics, pastoral care, and communications.

Our project found that affect and emotion play a significant role in influencing the environmental advocacy and activist work taking place amongst Christian groups and organisations. This includes strong and often negative emotions including grief, rage, guilt, anxiety, fear, pessimism and regret, alongside some positive feelings like hope and optimism. Since some of these emotions can be hard to navigate for some people, it would be appropriate to acknowledge that many people experience them, to provide solidarity with others, and to begin to develop appropriate pastoral support.

Recommendation 6

Deliver practical training courses for lay people, clergy, and members of groups and organisations focused on motivating pro-environmental action and care for creation.

The resources from this project can be used as a basis for developing new or existing training courses within organisations. Particularly helpful ideas emerge from the broader soteriological language and the creative theological ideas and trends identified by the project, along with the identities of steward and prophet that the research outlines. Such training courses can be delivered in a range of different contexts. For instance, as part of training courses for lay people, professional development courses for clergy, or formal training courses for seminarians.

Recommendation 7

Review organisation/group environmental aims and objectives to establish what their particular contribution to environmental work is, and findings to be used thereafter to assess which are the key theological resources.

For example, project findings identify a tension between being a prophet and being a steward. However, which is to be preferred are judgments within particular organisations and group contexts. Moreover, it may be possible for one organisation or group to undertake both types of action, and hold both types of identity. These judgements could be shared with other similar organisations in national and international fora, as applicable.

Recommendation 8

Affirm the integrity of Christian witness in the context of climate change by maintaining a range of environmental actions.

Our research identified an unease regarding the effectiveness of 'green' lifestyle changes and to what extent climate change requires political solutions rather than lifestyle changes. That climate change is a structural issue requiring political responses can in turn lead to lifestyle changes being judged as 'too little, too late'. Our research suggests that what is required is change in Christian cultures—this will involve both lifestyle changes and political engagement. 'Everyone can do something; so let's do the something.' Additionally, lifestyle changes can raise environmental awareness and in turn support political engagement.

Recommendation 9

Enhance dialogue across organisations, such as church dioceses, development agencies, and activist groups, to increase shared learnings from each other, and to align strategies for environmental work.

Our research revealed that several people involved in environmental work in Christian organisations work across more than one context. Moreover, some organisations have worked together to co-organise events (e.g. church services, protests and demonstrations), change their policies (e.g. campaigning work around carbon net-zero or use of church land), and co-develop education programmes. Nevertheless, there is still limited dialogue between organisations, and an absence of a joined-up strategy for addressing environmental problems. Organisations could dialogue with one another to, for instance, explore the complementary work towards

the same cause being undertaken between those who engage in more "stewardly" and devotional work, compared with others who are more focused on political or "prophetic" environmental action. Dialogue could also be fruitful in sharing teachings and resources, and for encouraging each other on progress towards targets and goals. Organisations and groups could also consider sharing learnings across inter-faith contexts, which may also benefit from carrying out a similar audit, adapting tools from our project, as suggested by Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 10

Facilitate deeper quality conversations within organisations on issues of ecotheology to allow members to understand better their own personal ecotheological views, and to provide a space for "ordinary theology" to emerge and flourish.

Throughout the research process, many participants in the interviews commented on the enjoyment and insight they gained from taking part. They felt like the interviews provided a unique space for exploring their ecotheology in depth, and in some cases, gave rise to their own creative theological views. This produced a theology from the organisations and groups themselves. All groups/organisations could facilitate discussions like this for themselves. Members of groups and organisations could be encouraged to read sections of theology, carry out friendly discussions using our interview questions, and/or complete our survey questions and reflect on the results for themselves. This is an enriching activity in itself, but can also be used to produce a group/organisational theology, which may be creative, and can be used to move beyond existing theological challenges or restrictions.

Recommendation 11

Deliver spiritual practice events, like contemplative prayer sessions and forest church gatherings, to cultivate affective connections – such as awe and wonder – to creation.

A key finding from our project is that our research participants love creation, and enjoy being immersed within it. They find connection to God through the beauty and wonder of creation, and in so doing, cultivate a stronger desire to care for it. A number of people said that they facilitate connection to creation by engaging in outdoors worship practices, forest church, and forms of contemplative prayer, often inspired by ideas from Celtic Christianity. Organised Church groups could facilitate more such practices with the aim to cultivate awe, wonder and love for creation, while connecting people more deeply with God in fresh ways.

Recommendation 12

Christian groups and organisations can provide leadership on environmental problems by developing and articulating, through formal statements, their own particular ecotheological stance.

Several of our research partners provide an official statement of their theological position with respect to creation as it concerns environmental crises like climate change. These statements are helpful for people, both internal and external to the group or organisation, in providing clarity on the official position. This can commend the importance of caring for creation and motivate people to take action in response. Such statements can draw on the findings from this report, where we have indicated areas of creativity and interest for the group/organisation. They can also develop their own ecotheological stance from their organisation's "grassroots" theology, through an internal audit using our survey and interview tools (Recommendation 1), deeper quality conversations within the organisation (Recommendation 10), and can thereby feed into teaching and training materials (Recommendation 6).

> *This study has revealed a range of creative theological ideas that have been found to motivate and inspire environmental action and creation care. Christian organisations and groups can take up these ideas for themselves, and use them to inspire a pro-environmental stance in their members, staff, congregants, clergy, supporters and campaigners.*

Project Description and Key Findings

1. Introduction

Climate change has become one of the defining challenges of the modern world, threatening to affect almost every area of human and natural life on the planet. According to the most recent IPCC report, 'Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts on food and water security, human health and on economies and society and related losses and damages to nature and people'.[2]

Many Christian groups and organisations are taking action to address the problem of climate change, along with many other environmental crises, including biodiversity loss and pollution. In the UK, Christian groups are engaged in net-zero transition, rewilding of land, political petitioning and campaigning, and even some forms of non-violent direct action. This is happening despite negative reports claiming that Christians in the UK 'are the least environmentally friendly demographic'.[3] While it may be true that some (members of) Christian groups are less environmentally concerned than others, this fact obscures the significant work being undertaken among Christian groups and organisations in the UK to tackle our global environmental crises.

The work of these groups is important, and will be briefly documented in the next section. However, the focus of our research is not on the work being undertaken by these groups as such, but on the views that motivate and inspire it, and which are in turn shaped by it, generating creative ideas. In particular, our project has sought to uncover areas of creativity within the theology of these groups as it relates to ecology, the environment, nature and creation – what is sometimes called "ecotheology". We have tried to understand what creative theological ideas have emerged amongst these groups while they carry out their environmental advocacy and activist work. We have also sought to understand what obstacles there might be to the reception of new theological developments, and how creative insights might be deployed in different spheres of Christian life.

Beginning in October 2022, our project partnered with six organisations to uncover areas of ecotheological creativity. These partners are the Church of England Dioceses of Manchester and Oxford; the Catholic Church of England and Wales Diocese of Salford; the international development agency CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development); and the activist and advocacy groups Operation Noah and Christian Climate Action. Working with these groups, we have focused on **three primary research questions:**

1. **What evidence is there of theological creativity, and of ideology and belief going beyond dominant traditions?**
2. **What are the obstacles to the reception of these developments in church practice, development activity, and advocacy and activism?**
3. **How can creative insights be contextualized and made operative in Christian settings?**

Answering these questions has required us to be innovative in our research methodology. We carried out a mixed-methods project, drawing on a wealth of background ideas from theology, and used these ideas to design novel social science survey and interview tools. Our project carried out **four research activities**.

First, we conducted **participant observation** of the environmental activities of our partners: for example, attending their climate protests, committee meetings and training events, all between April and October 2023.

This included attending 'The Big One' protest in London; the Oxford Community Engagement Meeting, an Oxford Green-shoots fundraising get-together, and the Diocesan Environmental Taskforce Committee; the Diocese of Manchester's Authorised Lay Minister training in ecology and creation; the annual Operation Noah supporter's event; a range of environmental committees for the Diocese of Salford, the Laudato Si' Centre at Wardley Hall, and their end of the Season Creation service; and watching a series of Christian Climate Action Saturday sessions. Participant observation enabled us to see how ecotheological ideas were worked with in practice, and how the practical struggles and engagements of these groups in the course of their daily environmental work provided sources of theological creativity.

Second, we carried out **a survey with 319 responses** aimed at capturing ecotheological views from the six groups, administered primarily between May and August 2023.[4] Our primary aim with the survey was to uncover theological creativity by exploring the theological ideas held by our participants. The survey set out a range of ecotheological ideas in the form of short statements that the respondents could agree or disagree with. Dis/agreement was registered on a scale of 0-10. We then produced an average score across the total sample, and across each partner, to record overall strength of agreement on each concept. For the full results, see the Appendix. We also captured feelings towards climate change, views on which action are justified in the effort to tackle climate change, and a range of demographics.

Third, we conducted **62 in-depth interviews** between July and December 2023 with approximately 10 members from each group. Interviews asked biographical questions relating to faith, climate change concern, emotions, and influences, as well as enabling participants to talk in-depth about the nature of their participation in Christian environmentalism and their reflections on the work of the group to which they primarily belonged. The interviews also probed the participants' survey responses in depth and engaged in lengthy discussions about their theological beliefs and motivations. Our general method was to ask the interviewees to elaborate on a particular score they had on a certain statement from the survey, or to read a brief theological quote relating to one of the themes and invite them to respond. Such prompts were effective tools during interviews for generating in depth theological discussion.

Fourth, we hosted **two briefing workshops** with our research participants to report the key findings from the project, and to seek feedback on how to implement these findings in their working practices. The workshops were held in March (London) and April (Manchester) 2025. The primary aim of these events was to answer our third research question.

In the next section, we will outline the profiles and work of our research partners. In sections 3 and 4, we discuss the motivations for their work, and two identity profiles they commonly adopt while taking environmental action. Section 5 describes the theology of our partners, with a focus on developing and creative ideas that are beginning to emerge, and we discuss this in relation to salvation theology in section 6. The report concludes with a section reflecting on the positive ways that national churches can facilitate creative ecotheological change.

2. Our Partners: Advocates and Activists for Creation

Christian environmental advocacy and activism takes place within multiple denominations and can be found in different regions of the globe.[5] While our research was UK-based, some of the research partners worked as part of international advocacy and activist networks. Our sample draws mostly upon the experiences and reflections of Anglicans and Catholics, spanning six groups who represented varying contexts within which Christian work was being actively undertaken around environmental protection and climate change.

Three of the groups were church dioceses, where significant work to address climate change was being undertaken at a local level. These were the Church of England Dioceses of Manchester and Oxford, and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford.

Environmental work within Church of England dioceses has been shaped by the plan, approved in July 2022, for achieving net-zero carbon emissions within the organisation by 2030.[6] This involves a transition to renewable energy sources within its significant building stock, especially schools and cathedrals. The Church of England also delivers training to ministers and lay ministers on creation care, and supports the Eco Church scheme run by A Rocha, which equips 'churches to care for God's creation'.[7] Through Eco Church, Anglican churches can apply for awards to be recognised for their work in environmental practice and which supports the Anglican Communion's fifth mark of mission to 'strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth'.[8]

A similar commitment to sustainability and carbon transition has been developed in the Catholic Church of England and Wales through the *Guardians of Creation* project, which is pioneered in the Diocese of Salford, and has a focus on environmental education in Catholic schools.[9] The Diocese of Salford is also committed to a carbon net-zero target of 2038.

Moreover, both the national Catholic and Anglican churches dedicate time towards preaching on creation care to inspire congregations, especially around particular seasons, like The Season of Creation, which culminates in the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi on 4 October.

The other groups focused more on development and campaigning work. We worked with CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development), who have turned their anti-poverty work to campaigning around environmental issues and the impacts of climate change (alongside other examples like Christian Aid, the Salvation Army, and Tearfund). CAFOD works within international advocacy networks to deliver aid work in developing countries, many of whom are being affected by climate change, and are active in campaigning by, for instance, petitioning the World Bank to protect the right of farmers to use their seeds,[10] and calling for cancellation of national debts for some of the world's poorest countries.[11]

We also worked with the group Operation Noah, launched in 2004 as the campaigning 'sister organisation' of the environmental group Green Christian. Operation Noah's campaigns include the Bright Now campaign, which helped to secure Church of England divestment from fossil fuels.[12] This campaign now focuses on other key environmental issues, such as the Church of England's use of its land for rewilding to tackle climate and biodiversity crises.

Lastly, we worked with the social movement group Christian Climate Action (CCA), which formed in 2012 to engage in political activism within the broader environmental movement. CCA inhabit the political wing of Christian environmentalism, where since the 1980s, activism has been undertaken by groups like Christian Ecology Link (later renamed Green Christian), GreenSpirit, and the anarchist group Isaiah 58,[13] and Christian involvement in the anti-fracking protests of 2000s.[14] Since 2018, CCA have described themselves as the 'Christians in Extinction Rebellion'. They engage in acts of political campaigning, protest and demonstration.

The work of the six groups captures the broad spectrum of Christian environmentalism, ranging from its 'advocacy wing' focused on personal, local and organisational change initiatives, and its 'political/activism wing' engaged in campaigning, protest and direct action as part of the broader environmental movement.[15] This divide between advocacy and political activism is common in strategies and movements to address climate change, and captures well what were two ends of a spectrum of activities conducted by our participants, with, for example, Eco-Church at the sustainable actions end of the spectrum, and direct action as part of Extinction Rebellion at the political end of the spectrum.

The six groups that we researched, and the resulting sample of participants, provide a diverse lens through which to study the activities of UK-based Christian environmentalists, combining the insights and experiences of lay members of both Anglican and Catholic congregations, local and senior Church leaders, alongside those with a campaigning role within international advocacy networks and social movements. Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of our six

Table 1: Breakdown of participant demographics by organisation. "S" indicates survey sample, and "I" indicates interview sample, with frequencies for each sample in brackets. All numbers in rows are in percentages (%).

	Manchester		Noah		CCA		CAFOD		Salford		Oxford		Total	
	S (30)	I (10)	S (39)	I (10)	S (92)	I (11)	S (94)	I (10)	S (46)	I (10)	S (89)	I (11)	S(319)	I (62)
	Age													
18 – 24	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	2
25 – 34	7	9	8	17	3	7	4	33	0	0	3	8	4	13
35 – 44	0	0	3	8	7	0	6	8	13	30	6	0	8	8
45 – 54	17	27	18	8	12	7	15	8	20	30	15	39	16	22
55 – 64	47	55	23	50	31	54	31	25	33	20	28	31	30	37
65+	8	9	49	17	46	33	39	8	35	20	48	23	38	18
PNS	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	4	2
	Sex													
Female	53	46	49	67	60	80	68	67	50	40	47	46	56	62
Male	47	55	51	33	39	20	31	33	50	60	52	46	40	37
Non-binary	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	8	1	2
PNS	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
	Ethnicity													
White	90	73	93	92	90	87	80	67	85	90	89	92	84	83
GMH	7	18	6	8	3	7	9	25	4.4	10	1	0	5	13
PNS	3	9	2	0	7	7	11	8	11	0	2	8	11	5
	Religious Affiliation													
Anglican (CofE)	97	100	64	58	66	73	2	0	4	0	96	100	52	57
Roman Catholic	0	0	23	25	18	7	94	100	94	100	2	0	38	38
Other Christian	1	0	13	17	15	20	2	0	2	0	1	0	6	5
Other Religious	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
PNS / None	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
	Education													
Pre-University	30	9	31	0	5	0	13	0	15	0	9	0	10	2
Undergraduate	63	27	62	25	47	47	32	25	48	30	48	69	39	38
Postgraduate	7	64	8	75	46	53	54	75	37	70	42	31	49	60
PNS	0	0	0	0	0	-	1	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
	Political Ideology													
0-3 (Left)	50	64	59	75	74	80	53	92	44	70	35	54	51	71
4-6 (Centre)	40	27	21	17	10	13	30	8	24	0	37	31	27	18
7-10 (Right)	0	0	0	8	2	0	2	0	9	20	11	0	5	3
PNS	10	9	21	0	14	7	15	0	24	10	17	15	17	8

research partners divided by survey and interview sample. This data was gathered during our survey, which collected 319 complete responses.

The sample was diverse with regards to gender: 56% of the survey respondents were women along with 62% of interviewees. Women were also prominent in the core administration team of groups like Operation Noah and Christian Climate Action. Participants from across the six groups drew from an older demographic: 68% of survey respondents were above 55-years old, and only 5% were below 34-years old. This may seem surprising given that climate activism is often associated with younger age groups, such as Fridays for Future led by Greta Thunberg,[16] and organisations like Just Stop Oil. However, it also reveals the important contribution to climate activism and advocacy made by older members within UK-based faith organisations, which is even the case within CCA in which 77% in our sample were over the age of 55. We did however seek to improve the representation of younger voices by including a greater mix of age groups in interviews, where 55% were above 55-years old, and 15% below 34-years old.

The sample was also predominantly white, reflecting to some extent the broader demographics of the groups themselves, but meaning that Global Majority Heritage Christian views and experiences were underrepresented. 84% of survey respondents were white, while 5% identified as Global Majority Heritage (GMH), and 10% left their ethnicity unspecified. We know that GMH experiences of both Christian environmentalism and the broader environmental movement differ. Christian Aid report that 50% of black Christians in the UK think that the environmental movement is not racially diverse enough,[17] and that more needs to be done to connect climate justice with racial justice, and poverty with colonialism. Christian environmentalism has been subject to criticism around racial inclusion, and the side-lining of black church leaders.[18] Interviews sought to improve upon the representation of GMH Christian views with pro-active recruitment of non-white participants, who constituted 13% of interviewees.

The survey gathered high levels of responses from each organisation, providing a reliably representative sample of the environmentally engaged participants from each group. Overall, the quantitative and qualitative research methods generated extensive data about the beliefs and influences of Christian environmentalists working across multiple and divergent contexts in the contemporary UK and in international advocacy and activism networks. Such empirical data about what Christian environmentalists on the ground think and what influences them is lacking in ecotheological debates. In the next section, we explore some of the motivations our participants had for engaging in their advocacy and activist work.

3. Motivations for Action

In this section, we outline the motivations prevalent among our partners. We consider three kinds of motivation. First, we look at the influences that shape our participant's views on ecology and environment, focusing on the religious, such as theology, scripture and church life; the personal, including the influence of friends and family; and environmental, especially climate science. Second, we consider the ecotheological beliefs of our participants across a range of theological areas. Third, we explore the feelings people hold concerning climate change, noting the prominence of feelings of grief, hope, regret and rage. This section begins to make use of quotations from interviews with our partners. For reference, the first number in each four number identifier relates to the organisation as follows: (1) Diocese of Manchester; (2) Operation Noah; (3) Christian Climate Action; (4) CAFOD; (5) Diocese of Salford; and (6) Diocese of Oxford.

3.1 Influences: Religious, Environmental and Personal

We begin by considering the influences that shape our participant's views on climate change. In the survey, participants were asked to state which *people* had influenced the development of their views on ecology and the environment. Broadly speaking, the influences were divided into those that are religious (e.g. Pope Francis), environmental (e.g. David Attenborough), and personal (e.g. colleagues). Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the results.

As Figure 1 shows, our participants were equally inspired by religious, environmental, and personal sources. This played out strongly in the

qualitative responses participants made. For instance, within the environmental category, many people noted the influence of activist groups, especially Extinction Rebellion, and those connected with it, as well as prominent activists and authors, including Vandana Shiva, Caroline Lucas and George Monbiot. Many also mentioned environmentalists such as Chris Packham and Wendell Berry, alongside environmental groups, especially the WWF, RSPB and A Rocha.

Many of these environmental influences dovetailed or crossed-over with personal influences, especially since our participants were influenced by advocacy and activist groups to which they were personally affiliated. Hence, Christian Climate Action, CAFOD, and eco-leads within dioceses were widely mentioned, sometimes as inspiring colleagues, but also more generally as organisations whose work had moved them to take up action for themselves. Religious influences were also widely mentioned. To provide just a few, our participants noted the influence of Jesus, Walter Brueggeman and Ruth Valerio.

The three categories of influences come together in some cases, as when the influencer is a religious environmentalist whom someone knows personally.

The second area that explored influences on the participant's views on ecology and the environment was in the area of *activities*. Figure 2 shows how environmental activities cross over into the personal sphere, where activities like gardening and watching nature documentaries have been influential. But personal study (72%) and spiritual practices (66%) were the most significant influences. Similar patterns were seen when participants were asked to identify the main *sources* that had influenced the development of their views on ecology and the environment. As Figure 3 shows, the key source influencing their views – an environmental source – comes in the form of *climate science*. Alongside other scientific influences, such as the IPCC, and the work of environmental groups whose work utilises science, such as the WWF and RSPB, climate science strongly influenced the work and ideas of our research participants. Nine in ten respondents to the survey said that climate science had influenced their views on ecology and the environment.

The influence of climate science was often picked up during our interviews. One person said that reading books about climate science had 'been very influential in confirming what I realise is happening and helping me to understand it' (3005). For another person, their introduction to the climate science came through the people and organisations that had influenced them, such as A Rocha and the John Ray Initiative (6002). Another person talked of the way that the climate science can bring unity around the environmental cause: 'this is what the scientists are saying, this is the thing that you can't really argue with, this is the thing that can bring us all together' (5008).

Beyond climate science, Figure 2 also shows that a range of creative religious influences – scripture, prayer, theological writings and church teaching – strongly inspired views on ecology and the environment. In addition to the theological sources mentioned previously, many participants focused on practices of prayer and contemplation in shaping their views, with six in ten respondents to the survey saying that prayer had influenced their views on ecology and the environment. Contemplative prayer, where one meditates or pays close attention to features of the world, was noted several times as an important influence. One person said that they 'see attention as a spiritual practice' (1025). Practising certain forms of prayer had also drawn people to make theological conclusions about the natural world: when 'there's been massive flooding somewhere and I've been praying about that I have that sense of this as...a natural consequence of what we're doing' (1008). Here, prayer draws people to conclusions about the harmful impact humans are having on the environment.

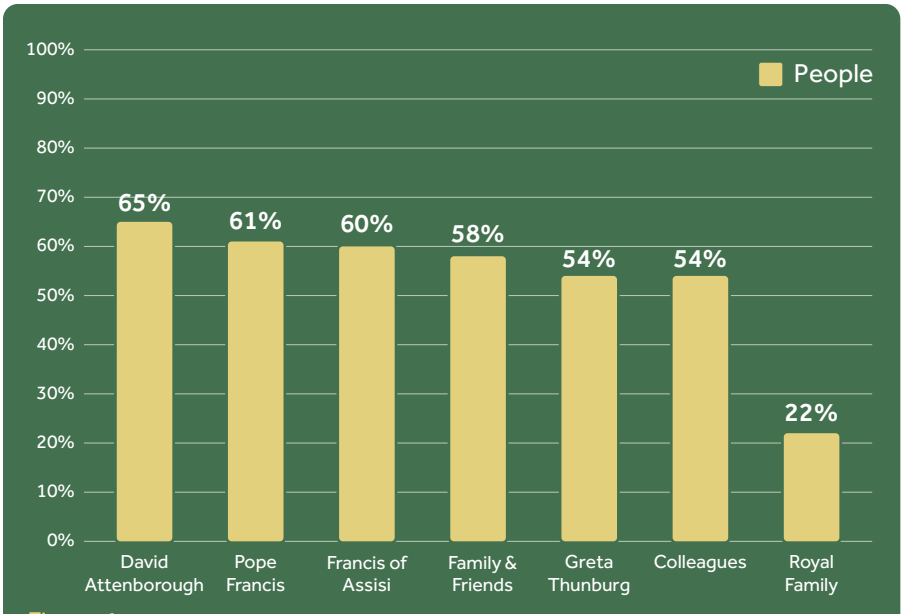

Figure 1

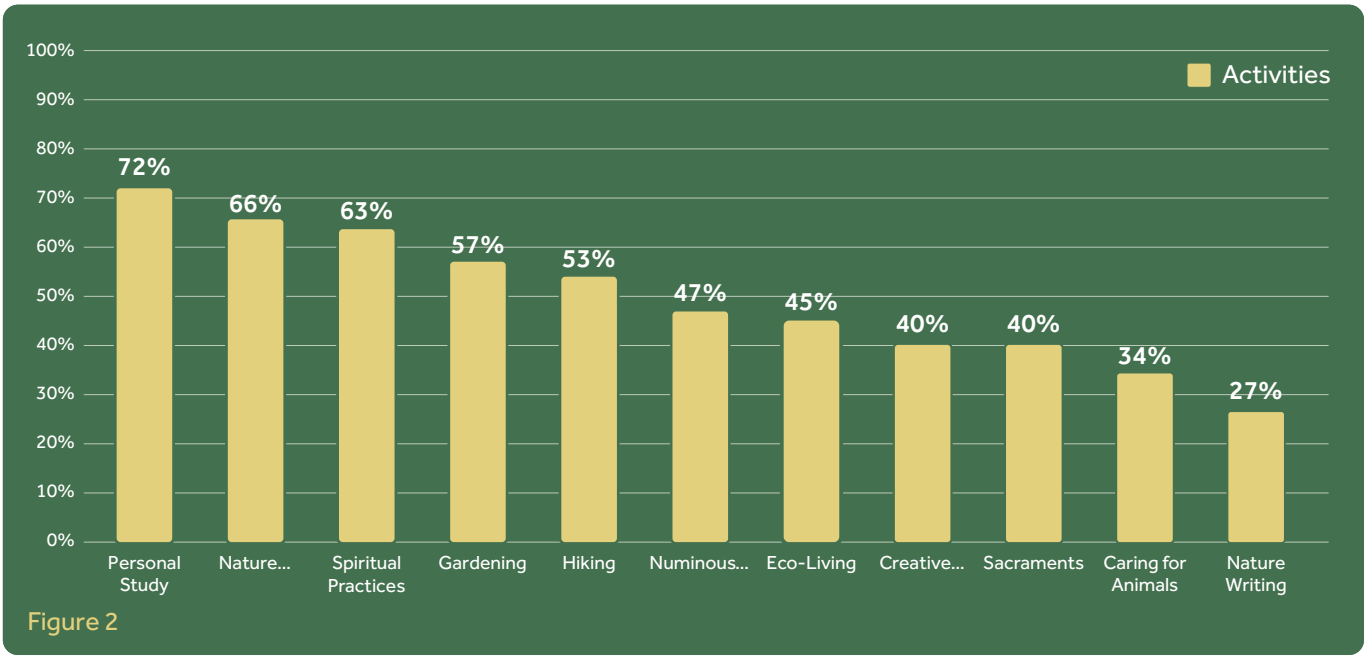

Figure 2

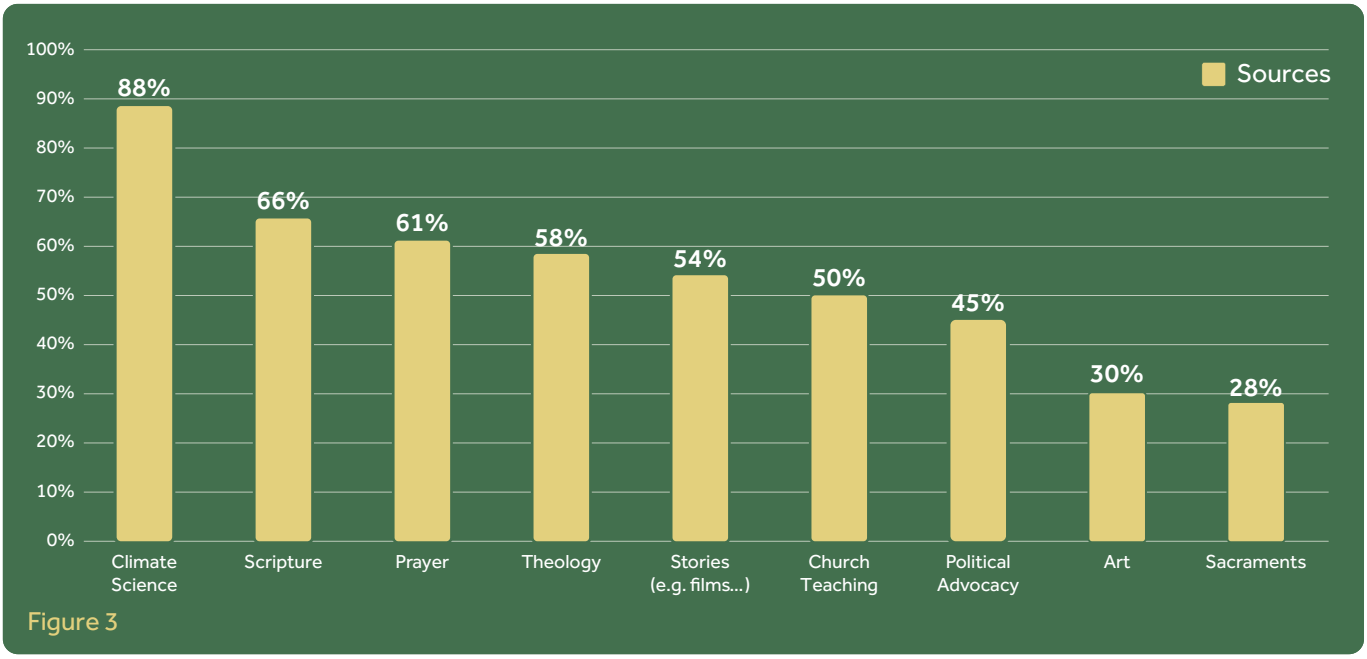

Figure 3

Scripture was also a significant influence on people's views (66%). One person said that the text from the Hebrew scriptures to '"pray and I will heal their land" is quite a strong passage' and that 'it's not just about praying for people but it's about the wider creation' (2006). Another person said that there are 'a couple of psalms which are extraordinary... The one which just labels all aspects of creation...is really quite moving' (5001).

Through most of our interviews, though, we found that the influences from someone's faith – theology, scripture, prayer etc. – were combined in some way with the climate science influences. However, the direction tended to be from discovering environmental problems, either through personal experience or reading the science, and then seeking a way to understand that from the perspective of their faith.

For instance, one person said that they first noticed 'atypical weather patterns' and thought 'something is up here...It's not normal, it's not how it should be. So, that was the thing that got me into it, the world I see around me, creation' (6016).

Some people were clear that the process for influencing their views came first through learning from the science and then seeking out a theology that speaks to it:

> "Here's an issue, what does our theology tell us about it?" And we go in search of the theology and particular theological themes come more to the fore than they were perhaps previously, because they make sense of the situation we're in. (1003)

> My route into it was actually the sort of science and technology bit first, and then the faith came after...My interest to get to there was from the climate science end, and then was kind of a bridge to the scriptures. (6008)

> You read in papers, you see things on the news and it became very obvious to me this was a real crisis...What do I do, how do I get involved? How does this link with the faith? (1001)

But even though climate science and an acknowledgement of environmental problems generally came first before theological and other religious influences, those religious influences are also essential in motivating pro-environmental behaviour.

3.2 Ecotheological Beliefs

A second area of influence on action came from ecotheological beliefs. Our survey tried to measure the ecotheology of our participants through Dis/Agreement with a range of statements. For the full responses to the survey statements see the Appendix. Many of the statements have high average scores relative to a 0-10 scale: the overall average is 8.0. This is unsurprising since the questionnaire was conducted amongst Christians

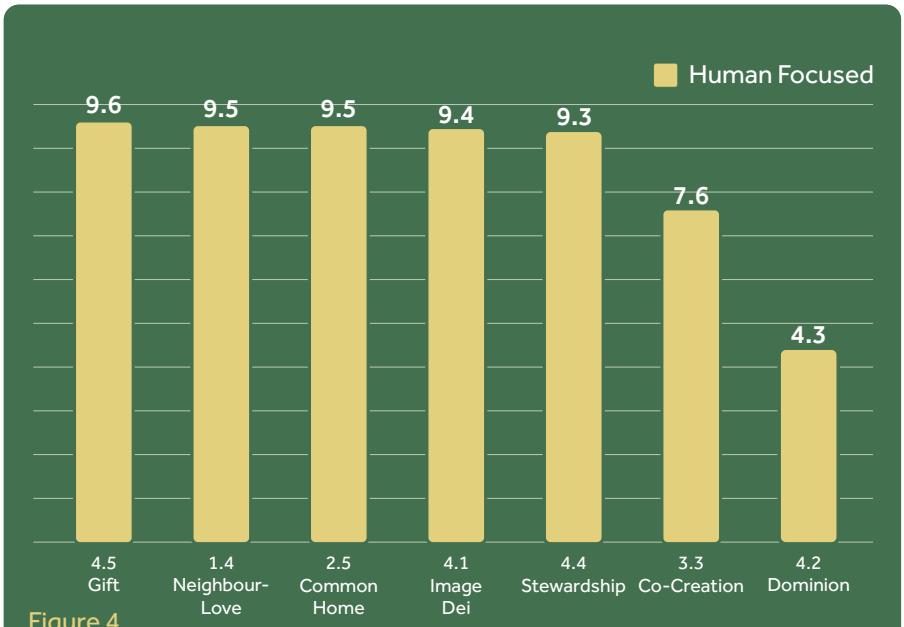

Figure 4

who are highly motivated to care for the environment and have some theological and Biblical literacy on several of the key areas within ecotheology. Where they see ideas as supportive of ecology from a Christian perspective, it is understandable that they would tend to strongly agree with the ideas. For instance, statement 4.4 on *Stewardship* scores 9.3, and themes connected to the idea of stewardship, as we will explore in section 5.3, are key motivating ideas towards creation care for Christians. In contrast, statement 4.2 on *Dominion* has a low average score of 4.3, and, as we will see in section 5.2, is seen to move people away from a pro-ecological viewpoint. Despite the high average scored, we can still detect certain patterns in relation to motivation and ecotheological belief.

One way to track people's motivations from the survey is in terms of the categories mentioned above of statements that are h*uman-focused*, *creation-focused*, and *God- and Christ-focused*. Giving value to the world and to our experiences in one of these ways has been found to correlate with environmental behaviours and motivations,[19] and our survey responses provide an indication as to where people's values align most strongly.

A range of statements have a focus on humanity, as shown in Figure 4. Statement 4.5 treats creation as a gift and locates in this a human responsibility for care and gratitude.[20] Statement 4.4 directly mandates humans to steward the earth as God's creation. [21] Again, with Statement 4.1, stewards are placed under responsibility to care for all creatures, this time locating such responsibility in their role as divine image-bearers. Statements 1.4 and 2.5 require humans to address environmental issues like climate change due to the need to show love for other humans as neighbours,[22] and as bearers of the consequences of environmental harm.[23]

These statements score between 9.3 and 9.6 – almost complete agreement. Such high scores challenge the idea that human focused values either fail to motivate or demotivate environmental concern and action,[24] or worse yet, motivate mistreatment and harm of the environment. Here we see, instead,

that certain beliefs that support a human focused value system do not necessarily demotivate environmental concern, and in fact seem to strongly motivate it. This is the case for human focused beliefs concerning human responsibility to care for creation, including when doing so is to show care for other humans, as is the case with statements 1.4 and 2.5.

These ideas were expressed repeatedly during the interviews. Participants were asked to summarise their theological position and key influences on their views and work around climate change. The idea of stewardship was invoked across all organisations. For instance, an interviewee from the Manchester Diocese said that 'we are beholden to be good stewards of the land, of nature – I think as Christians we should be exemplars of that perspective as well in leading the way' (1006). Similarly, one person from the Oxford Diocese said that 'I believe that God is our ultimate creator. He has made us the custodians of his creation. So, we should custode well and not neglect our duty' (6016). A participant from CAFOD added that 'care of creation is at the core of Christianity' (4003). But the earth was not only given to be stewarded, but given as a gift for this purpose: 'creation is a gift of God, and as any gift, given by someone very special, we nourish, we take care of it, and we want to share with others' (4005).

Often the idea of stewardship of a gift was combined with neighbour-love, thus merging the ideas captured in 1.4, 4.5 and 4.4: 'it's our part of our duty to steward the world and care for our neighbour' (6013). Love for neighbour was regularly said to be modelled on the way that God shows love for people by sending Jesus to the earth: 'God loved the whole world enough to give his own son for it and we need to follow and do the same' (6014). But also through being God's image-bearers in love: 'We are called to be God's image bearers here on earth, and creation care and climate action is integral to all of that' (1004). This was repeatedly understood in relation to the ideas connected with integral ecology advanced by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* in which care for the poor and care for the earth are integrated: 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor, those interconnected cries speak to me' (4009). One person said that caring for the planet is important to them 'because of what God has said about caring for creation and caring for humanity as well. I see the importance of caring for the environment, but also the justice issues of people...who have done the least to cause this crisis but are suffering some of the frontline effects' (2006).

So, we see a web of interconnected theological ideas that play a functional role in motivating environmental care amongst these environmentalists: creation as a gift to be stewarded in love by image bearers who care about justice for all people. Clearly though, not all human focused beliefs support or motivate a pro-environmental stance. Statement 4.2, concerning dominion,[25] registered a degree of disagreement amongst survey respondents, and 3.3, on co-creation,[26] received only moderate agreement. Each statement has in common an idea of humans having power over creation, and this sense of anthropocentrism was deemed suspicious. What this tells us is that human focused ideas are motivational when concerning human responsibility, but less so when they concern human power over creation.

A second value system concerns statements that focus on God or Christ shown in Figure 5. Statement 7.5 where God is seen through creation as a kind of natural theology,[27] scores with strong agreement, as does the idea expressed in statement 1.1 where God is worshipped through creation care.[28] Strikingly, the idea expressed in 6.1 that God is 'embodied' in creation – an explicit form of panentheism – scores above the average with strong agreement.[29] These ideas bring a sense of immanence to creation, and when the world is viewed as imbued with the divine, such views seem to inspire

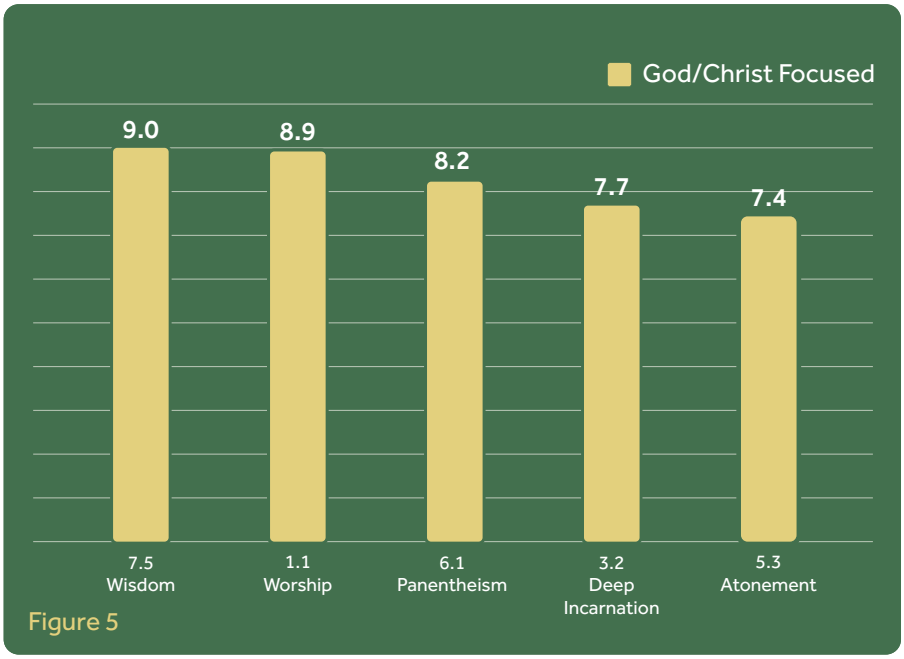

Figure 5

a theocentric outlook that values the world for its divine presence. It should be noted, however, that these statements score slightly lower than the human focused statements with an emphasis on responsibility in Figure 4.

Ideas connected with the immanence of God were highlighted during interviews as being motivational for the participants. As one person said, 'God lives and is embedded in everything that is alive for us, and we need to take care of it and love it' (4007). Thinking about what it is about God's immanence that move them to care for creation, one person said that

> [I]t's something about God's good creation being a wonderful and complex web of life which is bound up in the relationships of the Godhead and is therefore sacred, and as part of that we need to be working with it, not against it. (6001)

Beyond the ideas of immanence, the latter two statements, 7.7 and 7.4,[30] have a focus on Christ. In each case there is an attempt to revisit ideas of Christology, incarnation and atonement in ways that extend those concepts beyond the human. In so doing, the value of the extra-human is enriched for the Christian, by the extension of Christ's person and saving work. There was moderate agreement over these ideas, but they fell below the average, and well below the more human focused statements. This may be due to various factors such as unfamiliarity with these more progressive ideas, or disagreement over the concepts they express. Whatever the reason, we see that ideas focused on Christ are less widely endorsed by the study participants, and so likely play a weaker role in motivating their environmental

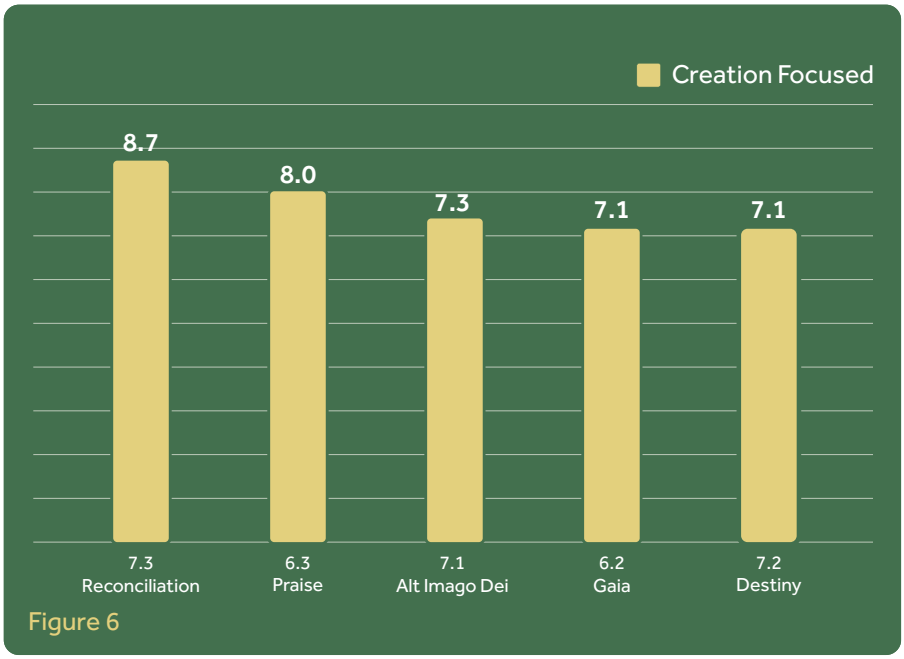

Figure 6

care. (An important exception is the significance of the actions of Jesus for our respondents—more on this in section 4.) This finding also provides an opportunity to explore such ideas further within Christian communities, particularly with respect to expanding a soteriological language that brings Christ into the work of creation care.

In the interviews, one participant modelled an approach to expanding Christology into creation care when they said that the 'incarnation emphasises the sacred nature of the whole of creation', and therefore 'how we deal with that creation becomes more important. To misuse it, abuse it, to destroy it or to exploit it for our own narrow ends, becomes less justifiable' (1003). For this person, then, an incarnational theology promotes care for creation.

A third set of statements focus on creation, and value creation for its own sake, rather than due to its relation to God, Christ or the human, as we can see in Figure 6.

It is evident right away that these statements score lower than the human- and God- focused statements. Those receiving higher support, such as Statement 7.3,[31] which indicates we are in breach of communion with extra-human creatures and require reconciliation, still receives nearly 10% lower support than those statements focused on human responsibility. This idea of a breach of communion featured during the interviews as a motivation for environmental work. One person said that 'as humankind we've lost our way with our relationship with the created world. Two hundred years ago we had a much better relationship

with the land, with the way we produced food, with the way that we appreciated rest, both for ourselves as humans, but also for the land' (1005). This respondent acts to care for the planet in order to heal this broken relationship. Another person extended the broken relationship beyond the planet and towards God and humans: 'climate change is a symptom of a broken relationship between God, people and the rest of creation' (4002). Notably, this respondent represents CAFOD which, in taking significant theological influence from *Laudato Si'*, talks of the need for achieving reconciliation with creation.[32]

Other statements are more radical, and their weaker agreement is unsurprising. Both the idea of the extra-human creation being made in God's image alongside humans, as in Statement 7.1,[33] and the Gaia hypothesis that the earth has its own autonomy in Statement 6.2,[34] are quite outside the mainstream of Christian thought. Indeed, the degree of support they received was somewhat surprising. But in terms of motivation, it seems plausible to conclude, from a comparison between Figures 4, 5 and 6, that our partners are less motivated by creation focused values than they are those that focus on humanity or God. Nevertheless, creation focused values do play an important role in the motivations of our partners. Some participants highlighted some salient creation focused views as their key motivations during the interviews:

> I think historically theologians have overemphasised the specialness of humanity. And I think part of my take is that although we're a special part of creation, we're just a part of creation. And that the rest of creation doesn't belong to us, that we together with all of creation, belong to God. And that we have a duty to safeguard creation for its own sake. (1008)

With creation focused views such as these, the motivations to care for the world, nature or creation arise due to their intrinsic value.

3.3 Feelings About Climate Change

A third area where the survey considered the motivations for environmental work was in the area of feeling, affect and emotion. Environmental or ecological emotions, such as anxiety, anger and grief, have been widely found in psychology to be a key motivator for pro-environmental behaviour and climate action.[35] We wanted to see which feelings were most prominent amongst our research participants, and asked them to identify the three feelings that best reflected the way that they feel when they think about climate change from a list of 12 options. Figure 7 shows the percentage of people from the survey who selected one of the options as amongst their main three.

Unsurprisingly, given that we are researching advocates and activists for the climate, *motivated* was the strongest feeling, with half of all respondents selecting this as one of their primary three feelings. Grief/ sadness, hope, regret and rage/ anger are also important feelings influencing our study participants.

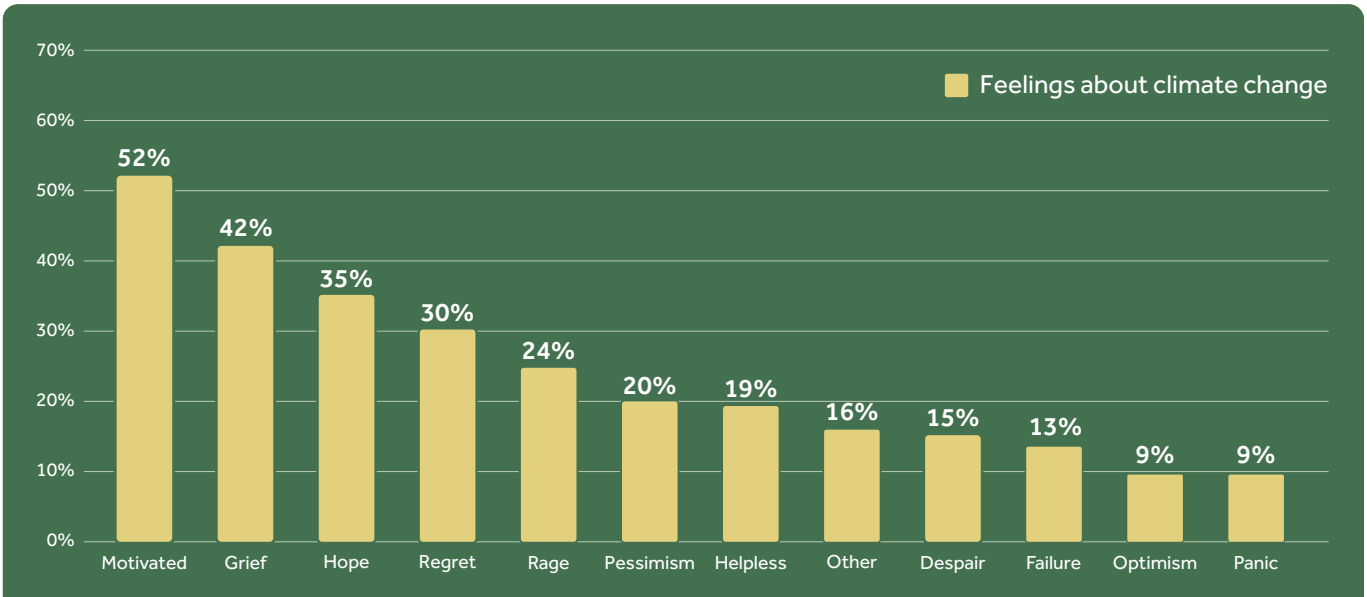

Figure 7

In the next section, we will discuss grief, hope and rage in relation to the identities and narratives adopted in taking environmental action. But it is worth first hearing the reasons our participants gave for why they selected 'motivated' during interviews. Our partners strongly believe in their work, and see it as an imperative, and essential to their Christian faith identities, to take climate action. As one person said:

> I would say that I think [climate change] is the biggest crisis and therefore the biggest issue that human beings are confronted with right now and that both for the sake of future generations and for the sake of people in poorer parts of the world we cannot as Christians not respond to this. And it comes back to loving God and loving our neighbour. It's God's planet, and it's his humanity that is suffering, so all of creation is suffering. (3005)

This person connects their theological views around creation, God's love, justice, and neighbour-love with the need to respond to climate change. For many participants, our environmental crises are pressing and need a response: 'when you see what's going on in the world around you, it's urgent to respond' (2011). One person said that 'we are called by God, by love, to get on and do something' (2002), and another that there is an 'urgent need for us to move forward in a bold, cultural revolution' that will see the 'renewal of humanity itself' (5009). Many agreed with the sentiment that they must personally take action: 'I'm not cool to stand by – you have to do something' (4003). But for many, despite the overwhelming and often negative reports of what is happening to the planet, they found reasons to be motivated:

> It may look like a disaster, but there are still things we can do, and it's not too late. So my motivation is that it isn't too late, and there are small actions that we can take, and there are big actions that decision makers and government and companies can take that will make a difference. (4008)

The feelings of motivation to take action marks a key influence on people's actual environmental motives amongst the participants we studied.

Our participants agree that we must act to address our environmental crises. Findings suggesting that 'Christians are the least environmentally friendly demographic'[36] obscure a rich history of Christian environmental advocacy and activism on environmental issues since the 1980s,[37] and a rich history of Christian involvement in social movement activism.[38] Our participants are a central part of this current and recent history, and as is clear, are leading the way in environmental action – care for God's creation.

We have seen in this section that the motivations to engage in environmental work amongst our research participants are a complex interplay of influences (religious, environmental and personal), theological beliefs, and feelings and emotions concerning climate change. In the next section, we will see how this translates into action in different ways. We will bring together different areas of our participants' motivational influences into two identity profiles that move people in different ways towards different kinds of environmental work.

4. Taking Action: Climate Stewards and Climate Prophets

In section 3, we described two ways in which environmental action is being undertaken in our partner groups: through environmental sustainability and advocacy work, and through political action, such as environmental activism. The idea of environmental sustainability plays out in a range of ways, including through individual actions such as recycling, use of public transport and electric vehicles, reducing meat consumption, and general reduction in consumer habits.[39] These can be taken up at organisational level through schemes such as Eco Church, preaching to congregations to encourage "green" living, and ultimately, net-zero schemes within local and national churches.[40] Typically, including by our partner groups, these environmental practices are captured by the idea of being 'stewards' of creation in which Christians and the organisational Church 'care for creation'.[41]

The second way in which environmental action is undertaken by our partners, through political action, involves addressing the systemic causes of environmental crises, including the widespread use of fossil fuels, and damaging agricultural practices associated with factory farming. Our partners target these systemic causes through actions such as protest, campaigning, petitioning, demonstrations and, in some cases, nonviolent direct action.[42] These actions are often associated by our participants with the Biblical role of the prophet, who 'speaks truth' to the governing powers, urging them to change their ways towards justice.[43] The terminology of the 'the prophet' has been used in a number of contexts associated with current environmental work by Christian groups, including in talks given at The Big One protest we attended in London in April 2023,[44] and by charities such as Christian Aid who run a 'Prophetic Activist Network'.[45]

While both the 'climate steward' and the 'climate prophet' roles were present across all of our organisations, and some people adopted both roles, the steward role was more present amongst the three church dioceses and CAFOD, whereas the prophet role was more common within Operation Noah and CCA. For instance, speaking of the importance of taking individual actions, someone in the Diocese of Manchester said that

> ...every little thing helps, so all the changes we can make, little steps are important...think about what you're doing with meat and dairy...just think of the impact if everyone in the Church of England who came to church last Sunday turned their boiler down one. (1001)

Another person in the same diocese talked of the importance, not only of taking individual actions for themselves, but also supporting Eco Church initiatives:

> Encouraging other people to take steps, as a church, but also personally as well with having a bit more of a focus on the environment and our impact as a church. And so, thinking about our building, and our grounds, and how we operate as well...one of the big things we're trying to do is around disposable cups for coffee. (1019)

In contrast, a member of CCA spoke of the need to take political action, and connected this explicitly to the language of prophet:

> We need ways of helping more people, more Christians, to find that way of being both devotional beings and agents of change, and define their prophetic voice, which means both street protests but also maybe speaking in other contexts and voting. Being political people is part of our calling. (3002)

Many people spoke of Jesus as occupying the role of a prophet who spoke truth to power as a justification for engaging in forms of political, prophetic action. For instance, someone from Operation Noah said:

> My faith very much comes from the example of Jesus in the Bible and Jesus calling out messages of truth to power. I think if Jesus was alive, as a human man, in this day and age, he would be definitely shouting about the injustice in the climate crisis and he would be calling action against quite a few organisations or banks. (2007)

Often the justification for the need for political action was given in terms of the need for systemic change. As one person from CCA said, 'the problem that we're in is not just individual, it's systemic' and although 'all of us in the west have too large a carbon footprint', there cannot be significant change 'until the system changes' (3008). This occasionally generated criticism of the more stewardly approach taken by the church. The same person said that:

> Eco-Church is really good in that it is asking Christian churches and Christian communities to rethink their carbon footprints and their lifestyle and teaching, and a little bit around political engagement... But I think we cannot say we're an eco-church without wrestling with the model of economics. (3008)

However, while the types of action that people were motivated to undertake varied depending on people's stance as more closely aligned with the steward or the prophet, participants across all organisations identified systemic problems that have led to our current environmental crises. This was acknowledged by a participant from the Diocese of Oxford: 'The environmental destruction is caused by the prevailing economic system that we have all around us' (6001). Moreover, a participant from the Diocese of Salford said that in order to address our environmental crises, 'what's required is an absolute turning around in people's minds about this particular issue', which 'needs to come at a political, economic, social level and all aspects of society need to have a focus on every step that they can take to doing that' (5004).

Since systemic problems were identified across all partners, there was some support for political action across the board, even if that meant only modest acts like writing to an MP. However, where actions crossed into stronger forms, including non-violent direct action, the support was largely found within organisations who more strongly held to a prophetic identity. We measured this in the survey, asking participants to select those actions that they thought were justified in the effort to tackle climate change. Table 2 shows the findings.

The more moderate political actions, including demonstrations and protest marches, received around 75% of support from across all groups. So, even groups where the steward identity was more prevalent saw these actions as justified, even though they may not engage in them for themselves. However, with the stronger forms of action, support was much lower across the whole sample. Moreover, support for these kinds of actions was clearly stronger amongst

Table 2

Type of Action	Level of Support
Weaker Actions	
Environmental education in schools	98%
Supporting pro-environment charities	91%
Writing to your MP	90%
Moderate Actions	
Publicity creating events	85%
Protest marches	75%
Demonstrations	74%
Stronger Actions	
Occupying land or buildings	39%
Disrupting transport systems	25%
Interrupting energy supplies	17%

groups where the prophetic identity was more established. Figure 8 shows the degree of support for at least one of these stronger forms of action based on organisation.

Both CCA and Operation Noah, where self-attested prophetic identity was strongest, were most likely to view stronger forms of action to be justified. This may indicate a stronger sense of climate change, and other environmental problems, as a systemic issue that requires political action to address them. This idea receives some support, too, by looking at the emotional profiles of the different organisations.

Figure 9 shows that the participants from CCA and Operation Noah felt grief, rage and helplessness concerning climate change more strongly than those from the other four groups, who felt hope and regret more strongly. A possible reason for this is that members of CCA and Operation Noah see climate change as a systemic problem connected to a capitalist economy requiring political action to bring about change. This is naturally connected to a sense of rage and blame at systemic injustice, and a more noticeable sense of what is lost through the damage brought about through that system. And since system change is hard or even seemingly impossible to accomplish, that would lead to a lesser sense of hope and a greater feeling of helplessness. In contrast, those who see climate change as something that can be addressed through changes in lifestyle, individual and collective actions, and policies within the church, are more likely to have hope that there can be positive change.

While these two identities – the steward and the prophet – have distinct action-orientations, affective profiles and moral judgments associated with them, they are nevertheless two parts both of which are required to tackle our environmental crises, which requires both political action and environmental sustainability. They are both important, and many people hold both identities to different degrees. Organisations can learn from each other about how best to complement each other's work across these areas to provide an integrated approach, and move members from their own organisations to work across each identity, as appropriate.

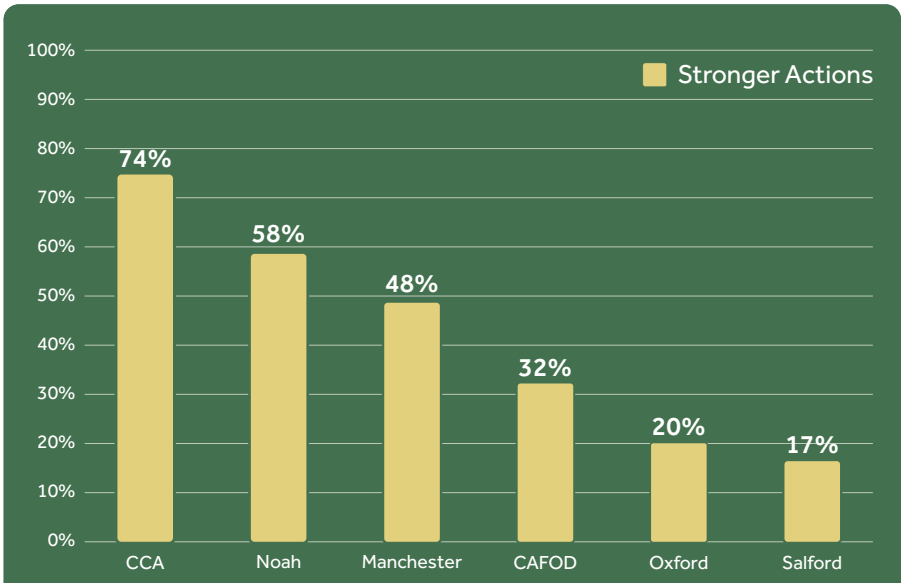

Figure 8

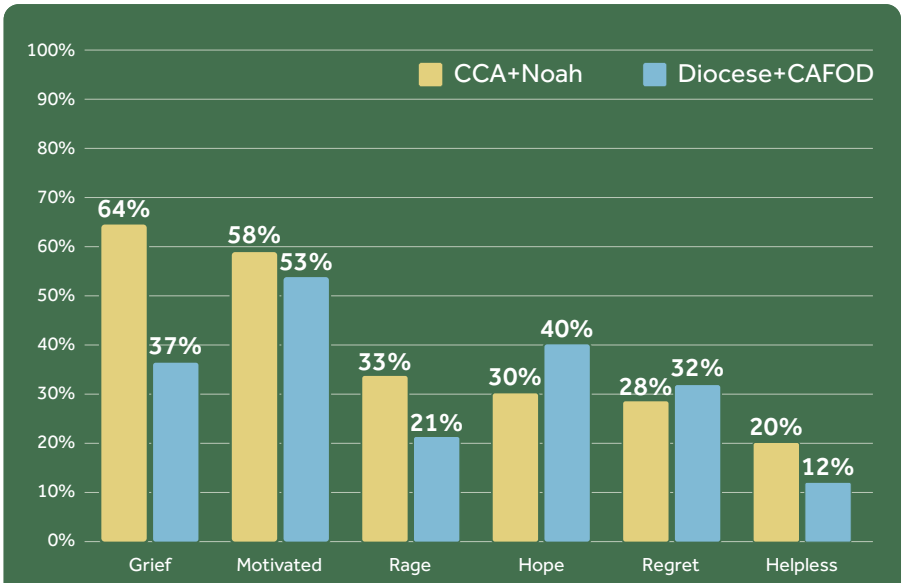

Figure 9

5. Creative Ecotheology

The central research task for this project was to provide evidence of creativity in theology, going beyond dominant traditions, in our three contexts of church dioceses, development agencies and activist and advocacy groups. This was explored partly through responses to the survey statements, but significantly through the 62 in-depth interviews we carried out. The interviews generated a substantial quantity of data on the theological views of our research participants – over half a million words (when transcribed) – which was then coded into around 50 different theological areas. These areas were then sub-coded to reflect where we felt that creativity was emerging within different themes.

This section presents a broad picture of these thematic areas. This is not a description of the general ecotheological beliefs of our participants – responses to the statements provide a better snapshot of that. Rather, here we will describe the creative ecotheological beliefs that we have seen emerging. These are grouped within three areas. First, in *Attending* to *Creation* we discuss the aesthetic responses our participants make to creation – their present experiences of love, awe and wonder, and the spiritual practices that facilitate these. Such experiences mark a key motivation for the work to care for creation, namely, as something that is both loved and treasured. Second, in *Remembering Eden*, we focus on the emotional responses of grief and rage at the destruction done to creation, and the recognition of human dominion as a cause, and sin as acknowledgement of that. Third, in Reimagining Redemption, we consider the ethical responses to the human destruction of creation in the form of stewardship and other practices.

5.1 Attending to Creation

Across all the participants, we recorded a deep sense of love of and appreciation for 'this world and nature…[as] God's creation' (3002). These feelings of love and appreciation were frequently connected to the aesthetic appreciation of creation as 'overwhelmingly beautiful' (3009), particularly as experienced in places that were meaningful to the participants. Such places included Ilkley Moor and Bolton Abbey, the island of Iona, Ashburnham Place, and many local green spaces, rivers, woodlands, and national parks within the UK. Our participants celebrated nature for its abundance, in which there is 'not just one bird, one type of tree – there is that huge abundance of things' (6003). This was typically connected to the idea of creation's abundance as an expression of God's love:

> There is so much extraordinary abundance in the world, there is no need to have the millions of different shapes of green and leaves and flowers and birds and animals–it's extraordinary. And that thing of abundance is a way of love…A scandalous overflow of beauty… that is somehow an expression of love. (4005)

As well as these experiences of love and appreciation for creation's beauty and abundance, it was also appreciated through profound feelings of awe and wonder. One person described their experience of 'looking out at an extraordinary array of stars on a clear night or the stillness of a lake, or watching animals just at play' as 'sublime' and a 'remembering of God' (2005). More generally, people were awestruck by creation and their experiences within it. One person described leaning over a gate that 'backs onto woods' and 'just observing the sun, the trees… that lovely night glow' and then thinking, 'I'm part of something that's just way, way bigger than me' (2008). Others spoke about 'the power of nature, which is much more powerful than any human being can be' (6012), and 'what a gift to be alive in this millisecond of a universe' (5011).

Another widespread idea that cultivated a sense of awe towards nature was the fact that we are 'totally interconnected within this web of life within which we utterly depend' (3008). This led to a healthy respect for creation, and a view of 'the land as sacred' (3006), and even

led some to adopt an indigenous practice of asking for consent from plants before taking from them. One person said that asking for permission to take from their 'blueberry plant at the allotment' made them realise 'that you are dependent on this other thing' (1002). It also promoted a view of the kinship of all creatures. One participant recalled having 'my moments with insects' that 'leaves me with no doubt of our unity' (1024), and another person that 'God's creation is for *all* creatures' (3002). This view was partly promoted by recognizing that 'humanity are the very stuff of the earth' (2012), and led to a rejection of the dominion view, which makes humans want to 'hoard and collect', and so causes 'a rupture of our relationship with each other and with nature' (2005).

Within these aesthetic experiences, our participants saw 'nature, and scenery, and peaceful places, and beaches and mountains, as a gift' from God to 'give thanks for' (4003; 4009). The idea of the creation as gift for which we need to give thanks is a central theological justification for its net-zero policy and work by the Church of England,[46] recurred frequently during interviews, and scored 9.5 on the survey – almost complete agreement across the whole sample. However, the participants expressed a range of creative ideas concerning gift. They saw it not only as a gift to humans, but with a sense of humanity being woven into that gift:

> I think we need to acknowledge that we're part of gift as well, you know, we're part of creation. It's not us and then creation. We're all creation; so humans are part of creation and...we are gifts to each other. (4009)

The gifting relationship is now broadened out so that it is not just humanity on the receiving end, but a novel way of perceiving mutuality:

> Creation is a gift for creation...I think there is a relationship between the whole of creation and God, as there is from a giver to a recipient of a gift. (1004)

The widening of a sense of giftedness to encompass humans can increase a broad sense of obligation and ecological justice. This extends *between* creatures as well, who are each to be a gift to the whole of creation. A creative idea also emerged, in so far as now the gifting is perceived by some not just between animate creaturely beings, but beyond that to include the inanimate:

> It's a gift... we experience it as a gift to us, or I experience it as a gift to me...but surely sentient animals experience the joy of life and creation around them. One can see animals enjoy their environment or some parts of their environment and dislike other bits if you confine them or whatever, and so, they too experience that gift...but in that sense, it's certainly a gift to animals, and I think therefore by extension in a sense, it's a gift to inanimate objects. The mountains that are beautiful, it's a gift to them as well. In some sense, creation is a gift to every bit of it. (2002)

That sense of mutual gifting between and among creatures, and in relationship to God, is part of a broader sense of creaturely inclusivity that was appeared frequently among our participants' responses.

While there was a widening of the sense of gift to extend beyond the human to all creatures, and even to inanimate parts of the creation, this also applied to the understanding of the human itself within the traditional concept of imago Dei. The survey asked participants if they thought that the unique role of humans as imago Dei – humans as made in God's image – provided a basis for creation care. This statement scored extremely highly with an average of 9.4 (statement 4.1). This typical view was found prominently during interviews:

> I do believe that was something unique when humans were made in the image of God, and I think that is something distinctive about humans that you don't have with other animals. (6002)

The survey also asked participants whether they thought that *the entire creation, not just human beings*, is in the image of God (statement 7.1), which scored much lower with 7.3 on average. But this alternative view of the imago Dei, which extends the concept to the extra human, still received some degree of agreement, and was found in creative expressions during the interviews. For instance, a respondent in the Diocese of Salford said they thought that 'all kind is made in the image and likeness of God. It's not just humankind' (5011). Exploring the tensions in the concept, a participant from Manchester Diocese said:

> ...we do talk about humanity being in the image of God, by which we mean humanity together, capturing some aspect of God. But why do we limit it to that? It may work very differently, but I no longer think it's limited to humanity and I want to push it and to extend it. The sense that other things, animal life, bird life, plant life have their own life, and their own being...Yes, I want to push the boundaries of it, I think. (1025)

The idea of extending the imago Dei to all life even came, for some people, from their aesthetic experiences within creation:

> So, I think it's those kind of connections [sc. which bring joy, peace] that make me think the image of God isn't just in humanity, it's in all things. ... Why would God create humans just in his image? (2007)

It is noteworthy that some of these comments seem to remain within the scriptural imaginary. As interview 5011 says, it is *all kind* that is in the image and likeness of God, echoing the terminology of Genesis 1:24-25. Moreover, the extension of the concept of imago Dei to include the extra-human creation may be in order to facilitate a closer connection to it rather than seeing oneself above it.

Another way in which theologies may have been creatively reworked to provide a vector for closer aesthetic communion with creation is in terms of seeing God in creation in various ways. For instance, many people tended to think of God as *revealed through* creation. One participant, in their experiences of the aesthetic joy of creation, reported that they feel that 'God's world is beautiful – the colours, the birdsong. It's all we have to tell us what beauty is, to tell us what God is like' (2016). In contrast, some people took God to be *within*

creation somehow. For instance, the belief that God 'is in everything' (2011; 6001) was commonly reported by respondents. As one person put it, God is 'embodied in the world', adding that 'if I put my hand on a tree, it's alive with the life of God' (3002). These ideas, which are at the core of Ignatian spirituality,[47] express a degree of commitment to panentheistic beliefs amongst our participants,[48] which was reflected in the relatively high-scoring survey statement (statement 6.1; score: 8.2) on God being embodied in the world. However, this view was not univocal, and the idea of creation *revealing* God, rather than God being *within* creation, made for an important contrast for some people:

> God is in the world but is also separate from the world. So, creation reveals God's glory. The trees, the plants, they reveal the glory of God, but God is not embodied in that tree, but is revealed. God's goodness and glory is revealed within that tree for example. God is present but the tree isn't God. (1004)

Whether someone views God as revealed through creation or present within it, these beliefs about immanence provide a ground for experiencing the divine within creation. Describing seeing 'a beautiful sunset', one respondent said they experienced 'a mini mystical moment' in which they felt 'the presence of God' (5012). Other people connected this to hearing God's voice: 'I've stood under some poplars and thought, you are calling something profoundly deep out' (2008), while others point to an experience of God as Spirit within nature:[49] 'there's times when you're just somewhere beautiful and you just can feel something more that is there. That's where I feel the Holy Spirit is, I felt his presence' (6006).

God's immanence within the creation was regularly connected to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.[50] In God becoming a living being, one person said that 'the incarnation emphasizes the sacred nature of the whole of creation' (1003). Another participant added that God is a 'life force [...] that permeates me, and that butterfly

[...] and so all of life is an incarnation of that – all of life is an incarnation of God' (5011).

With a sense of experiencing God in and through creation, many participants connected these experiences to psychological and physical human flourishing. Of creation itself, one person described 'all the wonderful food and tastes and the experiences of getting out into nature and walking, and the views that you can see, they're all things that are so positive and that enhance human wellbeing' (1008). But connected to experiencing God in creation in particular, one person said 'when you walk under the trees, I think God is nourishing you as well, like in that sense of that peace or whatever that comes from you being aware of God' (3010). In particular, engaging in devotional practices in natural places was found to be restorative: 'my refreshment and reinvigoration in all of what is nature, it's sitting in prayer outside...It's sat on a bench or on the soil, and the grass, and realizing that God is around me' (2001).

With an underlying theology of seeing and experiencing God in creation, and finding those healing and restorative experiences, many people chose to practise worship and prayer in natural spaces. One person said that they found it easier to 'see God or encounter God...outside in nature' because 'the veil between us seems a bit thinner' (4018). This led to examples of creative forms of spiritual practice drawn from within different Christian traditions. For instance, one participant described it as 'a marvellous, religious experience', which they 'would consider prayer', to have 'stared at a deer for an hour' (5012). It was thought to be a sacred 'moment with God', for another person, to 'pick up a leaf...in the autumn, a red leaf, and just really meditate on that' (1024). When one of the respondents spent time in nature, they said they are 'praying that God is everywhere, beneath my feet, above me in the trees and sky, but in the hills and in me as well' (3003).

Participants also found creative ways to experience more deeply the beauty and gift of creation through devotional practices within creation. One person described how they often spend time 'sitting on a fallen tree trunk' watching caterpillars and noticing 'when the spiders all come out and start weaving their fantastic webs' (1025). This person lives in a place 'visited by swifts', saying that 'bird watching, for me, is a spiritual practice'. Another participant spent time meditating on 'things that might appear to me to be smaller than myself. Those might be the birds of the air or the flower of the field... It's the ant in the grass, it's the tiny, microscopic creatures in the pond' (2001).

These creative spiritual practices for attending to creation are often cultivated from within parts of the Christian tradition. For instance, one person spoke of the Ignatian 'spiritual exercises' as 'paying attention':

> As you begin to notice where God is and where you've missed God over and over again, it leads you into a deeper understanding of where the presence of God is, and you can find – Ignatius says, finding God in all things. Francis, brother, sun, sister, moon, that everything is imbued with the spirit of God, but you have to learn to see it. So, I think paying attention is fundamental. That is also paying attention to the pain of the world. (5012)

Mysticism was another spiritual tradition upon which our participants have begun to draw more frequently. For one person, they said that 'I've become more and more in a place of mystery, in the mystic' as a way of responding to their problem with 'an over-confidence in what we say' about mystical doctrines (6014). For another person, engaging with ideas from the mystical tradition was a way of grounding their ecological concerns:

> I sit in the Christian Mystic Tradition. Christian Mystics have mystical experiences and those things have just demonstrated the unity and the oneness. So, if we are harming life, external or internal, then we are harming ourselves. Everything sticks together (1024).

This person's experiences bring us back to the primary concern of our partners: to care for creation. This section has explored the aesthetic appreciation for and attention towards creation, and the creative moves within this by our participants, especially in the area of gift, imago Dei and immanence. This aesthetic appreciation marks a significant motivation for their work of creation care. In the next section we explore other motivations, and their associated creative theological movements, in relation to harms done to creation.

5.2 Remembering Eden

In section 3.3, we saw that the second most commonly cited feeling when thinking about climate change was grief. This feeling marks an important motivation for the work undertaken by our partners, but within this grief, there have also been some important creative theological movements. In this section, we see that grief is felt in relation to losses experienced as a result of the destructive human influence on the world towards which our participants felt love and awe (see previous section). In that sense, our participants may be understood as participating in a wider, creaturely communion—figuratively, a "remembered Eden".

Environmental grief is now a widely felt response concerning losses to ecological systems, ways of life and culture, environmental knowledge, or anticipated future losses of place, land and species.[51] For instance, one person said that they felt 'grief because I find the world really beautiful. I love hiking, walking, pilgrimages…I just love the beauty that we are surrounded by. I love penguins and the worst thing recently…is the Emperor Penguins are becoming extinct and I just think, how can we do that?' (4002). This person's grief begins from a place of love and wonder that we explored in the last section. When the place they love is destroyed, and the creatures it contains are driven to extinction, this triggers a felt experience of loss that registers significant sadness. As another person said, 'mostly I feel sad for all the woodland and the wonder that we've lost – all the species that we've lost' (5002). These experiences were widely felt within our study participants. One person spoke of growing up near a beloved mountain, normally covered in snow year-round, but where global warming had left it 'never looking so bare' (2012). Another talked about their local river being 'one of the most beautiful rivers ever', but now 'full of chicken manure…[which] is absolutely destroying it' (4003).

However, our participants' experiences of environmental grief were unique in a number of ways. The first is that their experiences are felt in relation to God's creation. The participants do not experience, for example, loss of the world's beautiful places only as losses to nature, but as damage to *creation*:[52]

> The grief is a sense of loss. When I think about just how awe-inspiring creation is…when we see nature we feel that it is overwhelmingly beautiful…So, the grief is over that majesty and beauty and wild amazingness. (3009)

Expressions of grief over species-extinction were also put in terms of creation:

> You know these species that have gone and it's not like they've just gone to another place or they're in a zoo. They've literally – God's creation will literally no longer see them. (5002)

This focus on creation was also expressed when another person lamented that their 'generation has decimated what God has made' (2016). And so the experience of loss of nature, broadly understood, which is the normal focus of ecological grief, is framed as a loss of creation – of that which God has created.

A second area regarding the uniqueness of the environmental grief our participants experienced was in relation to gift. As previously described, our participants widely held that the creation is a gift from God – a gift given in love. From this place of relationship between God as gift-giver in love, and creation as gift-receiver in thankful gratitude, comes expressions of grief over damage to the gift. One person said that 'if you love God, that comes with a sense that you love what they made. You wouldn't want to damage what someone has made', and within this frame of receiving creation from a God who is loved, this person said that they felt:

> [S]o deeply sad that we live in a world where we have the capacity to make the world a good place to live in, as well as to destroy it, and we seem intent on the short-termism that means we destroy the world. (3010)

They said that their primary emotions were 'grief and despair, because we're clearly on a trajectory that is going to see increasing loss of biodiversity, increasing frequency of climate events that are destructive – destructive on landscapes, but also destructive for people's lives'. Other interviewees felt similarly:

> I feel a grief because the God who is abundant, that we read about in scripture, and is abundant because it is evident in our own lives, has in love, given us all that we have on the earth, and there's a grief about spoiling that... So, that makes me really sad. (1024)

The suggestion here is that the grief concerns not just a despoiled earth, but the fact it was given 'in love', and hence, a damage done to the relationship from gift-giver to gift-receiver.

A third area in which grief was expressed is in relation to a failure to steward well. Stewardship was very popular amongst our partners, scoring 9.3 in the survey statement (4.4). The basic idea behind stewardship is that God created the earth and commanded humans to care for it. And within this idea there were clear expressions of sadness amongst the interviewees for a failure to carry out this task:

> [T]here's a regret for how we are living, how I am living, that it's not more sustainable, not more showing good stewardship of creation. And some of that is a general feeling and some of it is specific, around specific choices that we may have made or I have made. So that's probably, I'd say, regret, which is – there's a guilt mixed in with that. But it's not just guilt, it's sadness as well. (4018)

With this participant, the regret and guilt over failing to steward creation is mixed in with sadness. Some people put this sadness explicitly in grief-language:

> The grief comes in when you look at what we're doing to the earth. If you're Christian, then we would conceive of it as God's earth, and we're absolutely ruining it for other humans. (3003)

A point to highlight from this statement is that the grief over the tragedy of 'what we're doing to the earth' is felt in relation to it as 'God's earth'. And we could infer here that such grief is felt in terms of a fractured relationship between humans and God, because we are then damaging God's creation– someone with whom we desire to be in right relationship, and whom, for some, is an object of love. This clearly connects with the relational perspective of the harms done to creation as God's gift also expressed by the participants.

A fourth dimension to the expression of ecological grief amongst the interviewees concerns direct harm to God through damage to the creation. This idea is highly creative, though much less common than the other areas. As was explored in the previous section, some people view God as being immanent within creation: 'God is present, God is present in the soil... God is everywhere in equal amounts' (4009). For some interviewees, a view of God as immanent 'is a sign of the sacredness of the material', which gives reasons for engaging in creation

care: 'how we deal with that creation becomes more important to misuse it, abuse it, to destroy it or to exploit it for our own narrow ends, becomes less justifiable, because it is of God' (1003). From here it is possible to infer that harm done to the earth is in some way harm done to the divine presence within it – if the creation is 'of God' then harm to the creation is a diminishment of the divine presence. One person expressed a view very close to this:

> God lives in everything, and that's why everything that we are doing against nature is an act against God also...God lives and is embedded in everything that is alive for us, and we need to take care of it and love it. (4007)

One interviewee gave explicit expression to this view in the context of the central Biblical narrative of grief for Christians – the crucifixion of Jesus:

> What's been inflicted upon the earth, is being inflicted upon God. So, when, if you watch Mel Gibson's [*The Passion of the Christ, 2004*], you know, the scourging [by the Roman soldiers], now that's exactly - so the scourging of the planet is also the scourging of God. It is, and what we're doing is we're crucifying creation. (5011)

The interviewee draws a vivid analogy between the event of Christ's scourging prior to his crucifixion with the harm humans are doing to the planet. We are harming the planet, they colourfully assert, in the same way that Christ's body was scourged by the Romans. Although not explicit, it depicts at one and the same place two moments of grief – ecological, over the planet; and Christological, over the death of Christ.

Since environmental harm and destruction is concerned with the loss of biodiversity and natural places, it is commonly associated with grief over that loss, as we have seen so far, but also a deep anger or rage at those to blame for it. As one person expressed it:

> I do think there is a right anger of a deep systemic destruction of nature that is ongoing and has been for decades, centuries. Then grief is the other side of that, because of the loss, because of what we're losing. (3008)

Some people connected their feelings of grief and rage to 'all the missed opportunity over so long' (6006) to fix the environmental problems, leading some to also feel guilty that their 'generation has decimated what God has made' (2016). One person starkly put it that the 'anger in my belly about what we're doing to the earth' led them to feel 'sorrow and pity' (6001), comparable to the grief and rage felt by the destruction caused by the two World Wars. Many people felt rage at the 'global economic system that is really unjust and just uses people and the earth for capitalist means' (3003). As we saw in section 4, these feelings of rage and grief are commonly associated with the prophet role.

Although our research partners blamed humans for causing damage to creation, they were ambivalent about calling this *sin*. The survey asked participants to respond to the statement (5.1) *Christians with a large carbon footprint are guilty of a sin for which they should repent*. On average, this scored only 6.7 overall, but this was 7.0 amongst Protestants, and 6.4 amongst Roman Catholics, indicating a greater hesitation over using the word "sin" amongst the latter group. Some people were happy to describe their flying habits, before they realised the impact they were having on climate change, to be 'a sin of ignorance' (1002), but went on to say that 'I don't know if labelling it as sin is terribly helpful'. One of the problems many participants identified is that sin-language elicited a burden of guilt, which 'puts such a heaviness on you' (5002). Some people thought that sin-language making people feel guilty was 'not helpful terminology to convince people on the journey of change and transformation' (5010). Notably, both respondents belonged to the Catholic Diocese of Salford.

Nevertheless, for some others, sin-language could play a constructive role in moving people towards a greater degree of environmental flourishing:

> I think we have a responsibility and we should be caring for it, we should be enabling it to flourish, and we're trashing it. Theologically, that is a sin and we should repent. (6002)

It is perhaps for this reason that as long as the use of "sin" is adequately explained, it becomes a useful term: 'the general concept behind [sin], if it was reworded, I think I'd strongly agree with it' (3009).

Part of the hesitation about the language of personal sin is that it avoids the fact that, given the complex structural causes of our environmental crises, it is not always possible to choose differently, and so environmental sin should be perceived structurally: 'the problem that we're in is not just individual, it's systemic.' (3008). One person said that:

> I think the trouble is that it's – when you look at it as a personal sin, that's quite hard, I think, because we don't actually always have the choice. But if you look at the corporate sin, of which we are part, then yes it is a sin. (3010)

Given the move to understand environmental sin in structural terms, and to feel 'trapped in the system' that one 'can't get out of' (3008), then unsurprisingly the idea of communal lament has become important within our partners. In this case, lament for the whole human race in that everyone is impacted by climate change, though of course recognising the disproportionate contribution of some humans over than others: 'I think to label stuff as a sin and repentance and stuff, I think maybe we should lament for the whole human race, that we've been so blind and still continue to be blind' (3007). It's worth noting that lament is also a key spiritual practice amongst members of CCA, from whom these proposals for lament are drawn.

So, our partners typically experience grief and rage as the affective responses to the environmental losses due to human damage to creation, which are sometimes deemed to be sinful. But a cause that they often attributed to this human damage was dominion theology:

> I think the dominion idea somehow – it implies that humans have a higher position, they're above other parts of creation, and can dominate and can directly control, in a way that doesn't have any reference to the rest of creation. And certainly historically looking back, dominion has enabled humans to be destructive of the environment. (3010)

This idea echoes the injunction by Lynn White Jr. in 1967 that Christianity's anthropocentric approach to dominion contributed to the destruction of the natural world.[53] And unsurprisingly, dominion scored very low in the survey statements, with only 4.3 (statement 4.2).

In the move to reject dominion, we often found our interviewees chose to replace it with the notion of *stewardship*. One said: 'We're here as stewards not to dominate' (3007). Another participant put it like this:

> I think dominion means stewardship for me, being tenants of faith. That we're responsible for the protection of kind of the natural order of the world, and its regulation, be that through, you know, populations of species, the temperature of the planet. (4003)

In the next section, we will move to look at some creative ways in which both dominion and stewardship have been reinterpreted to move people towards responsibilities to care for creation, building on themes we have explored already, and how these ideas serve to reimagine a better future for creation.

5.3 Reimagining Redemption

Attending to Creation (section 5.1 above) focused on the positive aesthetic experiences our partners had in creation, and Remembering Eden (section 5.2) explored the negative affective responses they had to a damaged creation. In this section, we look at the ethical call to repair this damage through redemptive acts of stewardship and creation care. We focus on the moral imperative to take action, what such action looks like, and how it is facilitated by hope.

The central idea that moves many Christians to take environmental action, and the same is true of our partners, is stewardship. This idea is traced back to the creation story in Genesis 1-2, and is generally put in terms of human responsibility: 'we need to be custodians, good custodians, of the created world... And certainly not to do with it as we want...we're responsible for taking care of God's creation' (5008). But while this idea of responsibility is well-established in Christian theology and practice, our partners expressed some creative understandings within it.

One area of focus was interpretations of dominion as stewardship. For instance, some people identified dominion as a descriptive term about the power humanity has to wield over the natural environment: 'we do have dominion on the land, as in we directly influence it, it's within our gift, our control to support it and nurture it or to destroy it and damage it' (1006). But for this person, dominion flags the opportunity to be responsible and behave differently, rather than encouraging an exploitative attitude: 'it's our duty, our responsibility, our imperative as Christians to look after the earth and not to sabotage it or exploit it.' They then returned to the idea of dominion found in the Bible, affirming that 'those Genesis words [are] an imperative to care for creation not an excuse to say, it is mine I will do what I want with it'.

Some people suggested that the concept of stewardship could be broadened so as to see humanity 'as the priests of creation' (3002), 'which I think is a much bigger role than just stewards' (2012). This idea, which can be found in the Orthodox Christian tradition,[54] highlights humanity's role as mediating on behalf of creation before God, who participate in its redemption – a theme that appears in parts of the Christian New Testament – in which 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage' (Romans 8:21). This suggests a sacramentality to stewardly work, in which caring for creation is a sacrificial act from humans to God in the work of its ongoing redemption.

Other participants saw stewardship in more political terms, connected with the prophetic role discussed in section 4:

> I think stewardship, for me, it includes challenging the systems that are wrong. So I definitely have got to a kind of idea that compliance in the system or silence is no better than doing the damage, so stewardship includes…being a voice for creation to cry out about what's happening. (3003)

This idea takes stewardship beyond sustainability behaviours, or positive agricultural or environmental policies, into the political realm. Stewardship requires challenging the systems that lead to the destructive practices in the first place. Such a notion of stewardship would put pressure on Christian groups and organisations to take some form of prophetic action.

Another reinterpretation of stewardship was around the idea of kinship:[55] 'kinship, I think, is a better word [than stewardship]…rather than thinking of ourselves at the top of the tree, maybe thinking of something a bit rounder…us all as a community around a table together' (4009). This idea connects back to earlier themes – feeling embedded within creation through aesthetic experiences, and widening the imago Dei to encompass all forms of life. In this sense, people are to care for creation because they are a part of it:

> Everything is connected, we are here for our fellow human beings, we're here for the animal kingdom, we're here for the natural world, in all its forms, forests, oceans, rivers, lakes… nature supports us, we support nature, it all goes round as a perfect ecosystem that God created for us. (4007)

This idea gives a grounding to stewardship responsibilities in terms of a healthy ecosystem, rather than through divine commands found in Genesis. Others chose to ground these responsibilities in the notion of the incarnation. As one person said, 'God's trust in us and our trust in God came about through Christ being on Earth, so we have to remember that. And remember that our responsibility is to just care' (4008). For this person, the fact of incarnation itself – God assuming creaturely form – is the basis for caring for creation.

There are also people we interviewed who would prefer to move on from the idea of stewardship. The central concern is usually that stewardship expresses a form of anthropocentrism that, as with an earlier interviewee, puts humans at the top of the pyramid. One person said that they find stewardship just 'so anthropocentric':

> …It's like me having a garden and I plant my pretty flowers and suddenly I'm doing to nature. I am in control. I can steward it. Oh please, give me a break. We so much more need to listen to nature, listen to what has been said, learn from it and understand how it's all been linked together and the cry, the cry of these creatures who are just disappearing…I think we need a different word…we need to get off our pedestal with all that kind of stuff. That's a deeply problematic phrase. (1002)

The objection raised by this participant echoes the earlier ideas of seeing ourselves within creation, and nature as an ecosystem with an equilibrium. It can also be seen to connect with some of the ideas from indigenous thought, explored in section 5.2, which patterns ideas of consent and respect. During interviews, the writing of Robin Wall Kimmerer was referenced as an inspirational source for these ideas.[56]

In whatever way stewardship or creation care is understood, to undertake work in caring for creation was often taken to advance God's kingdom – a kingdom involving ecological renewal. As one person put it, taking action to address climate change 'is part of being one step closer to the kingdom being restored' (1019). The idea of a restored kingdom invokes eschatological visions of a future heaven and earth, as alluded to in Revelation 21. And many interviewees saw this, not only as a "renewed" earth (see the good level of agreement on statement 7.4), but that in its renewal, it is renewed from environmental damage: 'We

will see a world that's renewed in this purified form from pollution. We'll see a world where the lamb dwells with the wolf' (2012). Another person added that the Book of Revelation is 'a book of visions and images, [and] there is this amazing image of the kingdom of this new Jerusalem and God dwelling on earth and the leaves of the trees being for the healing of the nation' (3008). Some people thought that this kingdom, which involves ecological restoration, is a kingdom of shalom or peace, and in ecological terms, means a kingdom of 'abundance in every sort of respect' (2013). It also brings about a form of redemption of creation, perhaps from systems of human domination, which is modelled on the redemptive work of Christ:

> The crucifixion and resurrection are an example and exemplar of that redemption, but God is redeeming the world all the time, and we are called to work with God in redeeming the world, so we can redeem some trivial situation that has gone wrong and we can, with some love, put that right. (2002)

In this redemptive, kingdom-building work, our participants thought there would then be a necessary reconciliation to creation, from which we have become 'fractured in our relationship not just with God but with one-another and with creation' (2012).[57] The experience of ecological grief, as discussed in section 5.2, functions so as to point us towards these fractured relationships.

But then, for the same person, 'the salvation that Christ brings is about the healing' and 'the reconciliation of' those fractured relationships. They add that this would lead to far healthier relationships:

> And just as I can conceive of our relationships with one another being greater, being richer, because in Christ we become more human, we become the humans that God intended us to be, so I can imagine our relationship with creation being richer and more authentic. (2012)

But what does it look like to engage in kingdom-building action that cares for creation in stewardly, redemptive and reconciliatory terms? The participants explored a range of options, which expressed creative theological themes. A key idea, which numerous participants traced to the ideas of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, was that 'what's required is an absolute metanoia, an absolute turning around in people's minds about' our environmental crises, and that this repentance/metanoia 'needs to come at a political, economic, social level and all aspects of society' (5004). There are many voices outside of religious groups and organisations who can inspire this metanoia. For one person from CCA, Extinction Rebellion's 'prophetic voice saying, "wake up everyone"' (3008) awakens people on a societal level. Others spoke of secular voices, like the economist Kate Raworth (2008), acting as a prophetic voice to inspire repentance amongst Christian groups.

Another approach to action was to draw on indigenous land practices, and the use of subsistence farming and communal property. Participants also drew ideas from indigenous culture, such as having an animal as 'your Totem' (2005), and referring to creation as 'Pachamama' or 'Mother Earth' (4007), to inspire care for creation. These ideas were combined with Christian themes to show the ecological potential of Christian theology. For instance, the idea of Mother Earth in Latin America is also a reason, for one participant, why the 'Virgin Mary was also so important [as] part of [the] dialogue with indigenous communities and Catholicism' (4007), and why 'the First Nation civilisations in the United States' in their 'idea about protecting the earth' and in 'holding property in common' actually exhibit an approach 'that's a deeply Christian idea' (3002). Moreover, in Jesus being 'very rooted in time but in place and in his surroundings and in the land, and that strong sense of the continuity of the sacredness of the land' (6001), the suggestion may be that Jesus himself embodied an indigenous land ethic.

Some of our participants also mention a range of actions they were taking, in some ways inspired by indigenous cultures: they were active in support of re-wilding, advocating for permaculture, organic gardening in a neighbourhood, and eating what is grown locally and seasonally. They also took part in worship in outdoors spaces, with Forest Church being frequently mentioned. And as already explored in section 2, our partners also take action through national-level schemes like net-zero, local activist work and demonstrations, and campaigning and development work.

In all of this work, our research participants saw that hope was essential. Hope scored third-highest amongst the feelings towards climate change felt by our partners. As a Christian theological virtue, one person felt that 'it's really un-Christian to lose hope', and could even represent 'a denial of your faith to say, "I don't have hope"' (3002).

However, this person did not feel like there was hope that 'we could stop what's happening' – that the systems in place that lead to the climate crisis cannot now be prevented. In this way, they do not hope to recover a now lost Eden – a return to the way that things were before our environmental crises proliferated. Instead, they understood hope in terms of a redemptive vision of a new creation out of environmental destruction:

> I have to think about hope in another way and really begin to think what might that mean. And I now think this is more about rebuilding from the ashes, or maybe not the ashes, but rebuilding from the stuff that we had to come through. It's the shaping of the world to come, and in a way that's a huge opportunity. We don't often get these opportunities in the history of humankind. Maybe this is one of them. (3002)

Amidst ideas of hope being about 'rebuilding' or creating something new from the past, hope was often seen as partly an act, as well as an attitude of optimism towards the future. One person said that 'Hope is about projecting into the future and creating a hope for a future for others' (1025). Here we see the work of hope being the casting of a future positive vision – an idea often connected to the prophetic imagination.[58] But they then added that 'climate action is for me the ultimate in that because what you are doing when you take it seriously is ensuring a future for somebody else'. And so, for this person as well as many others, hope goes beyond optimism for the future, to involve casting hopeful visions for the future, and acting to realise them.

For some people, the source of hope comes from the view that God is involved in the work to tackle the environmental crises, and is able to multiply the work being undertaken. In some cases, this was even put in terms of God saving humanity from climate change:

> God calls us to attempt the impossible, if you like, calls us to do difficult things, to be the grit in the oyster. We are small in number, and in worldly terms, the chances of success are small. God works very differently from that and uses our small efforts and produces miracles and amazing situations and therefore, that motivates me, that I'm an optimist in that I believe we will avert climate change, in one way or another, or God will intervene in one way or another, that we will be saved. We will be saved. (2002)

Here, hope and optimism are related to an account of divine rescue. This idea of hope grounds a resilience to continue the work to avert climate change in two ways. First, this work is a 'calling', much like the calling placed on the biblical prophets to speak truth to power. As such, it is imbued with purpose, and a duty to carry out God's work, regardless of what seems to be a nearly impossible work to achieve. Second, the work that seems small can be miraculously multiplied, and so even efforts that appear negligible in their effects could actually make a significant and lasting difference.

Other people also pointed to the resilience in their work, grounded in their Christian theology of hope and prophetic calling. For one person, this is what made Christian climate action distinctive compared to work being undertaken outside of Christian groups:

> I've been in this climate change movement for more than two decades now and actually, people come and go. People get burnt out. But I think Christians do tend to stick longer, because this is what we're called to do, whether or not we're successful. It's very easy to feel, there's no point, it's not getting us anywhere, so let's just sit down and watch Netflix. But I don't think that's an option for Christians. I think it does keep us going a bit better. (2016)

Since the climate action work is seen here not only as human work, but the work of God, it gives people a resilience to continue it, regardless of visible outcomes being achieved.

For many people, though, the ultimate motivation for hope is located in the person and work of Jesus. This is found in the paradoxical victory achieved by Christ in the crucifixion:

> I guess it's the hope of the cross which is a very strange and monstrous hope in a sense, because it contains within it this story of what in earthly terms is complete failure, of Messiah crucified as a criminal and only after that, do we then get...the hope of the resurrection. (4001)

In the event of the crucifixion, all hope seems to be lost. But on the other side of the cross comes the resurrection. This recalls the views of the earlier participant (3002), who spoke of needing to 'rebuild from the ashes'. The Christian story offers a vision of life on the other side of death, and in this vision, a picture of renewal – a reimagined redemption for creation, based in the vision of Christ's death and resurrection to new life.

6. Salvation Themes: Sanctification, Deification and Redemption

The presentation of theological change and creativity in section 5 is framed throughout by reference to salvation. This emphasis on soteriology—the study of salvation—was suggested by our analysis of the interviews undertaken with our partners. During these interviews, we found plentiful evidence of a diversity of ecotheologies that returned again and again to the theme of salvation. We came to frame this with reference to encounters with God's grace. These encounters were aesthetic, affective and ethical.[59]

The focus on salvation should be interpreted both narrowly and broadly. Certainly, the reference to salvation invites attention to the individual believer. That is why the language of discipleship often occurs in this discussion. Nonetheless, although salvation refers to the actions of the individual activist and advocate, such soteriological discourse is not restricted to the individual. Christian organisations can and do think of themselves in salvific terms: in their common action they are informed, encouraged and resourced by experiences of God's grace. For example, work towards a carbon net-zero target can be understood as *reconciling* work: a *reconciliation* between the human and the non-human performed by a church in the context of God's creation.

Reconciliation is one of the common metaphors in soteriology—and draws its relevance from interpersonal relationships. *Healing* would be another, and draws its strength from a consideration of bodiliness. *Purity* would be another, and draws its meaning from issues around pollution. *Wholeness* would be yet another, and in contemporary discussion references psychological well-being. *Self-giving* is another, and is resourced by resonances around the life of the early church. *Righteousness* can also be understood as an ongoing relationship, and resonates with the theme of justice. Finally, *freedom* and *liberation* find support in Exodus and Jubilee traditions, and focus on community relationships. We might call these the 'anthropological' dimensions of salvation. There is scriptural warrant for all these metaphors.

Reconciliation is a popular metaphor not least because it enjoys strong theological support: "…in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians, 5:19 NRSVUE). Other metaphors also enjoy theological support. Healing features strongly in Jesus' ministry and the crucifixion has been construed as the place of healing of the fractured relationships between God and humanity. Wholeness may be connected to the theme of the cross being the final and unsurpassable event that reestablishes the covenant between human beings and God. Self-giving may be referred to Jesus' presence as kenotic: as divine and yet also human flesh, and the self-giving that culminates in the sacrifice of the cross. Righteousness finds theological support in the juridical metaphors (including ransom and justice) used to explicate the significance of the cross. Freedom and liberation take us to the theme of victory in soteriological discourse: Christ triumphs over evil and delivers from death.

In Christian tradition, such soteriological discourse is always discourse directed to, resourced by, and interpreting the event called 'Jesus the Christ'. Our analysis follows this soteriological clue. That is, the data is best analysed in a soteriological idiom by reference to this event: the incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, attested resurrection-ascension, and hoped-for return of Jesus Christ.

Our core claim from this evidence is that climate change will only be morally considerable for Christians if it is also *soteriologically* considerable. That is, climate change matters morally for Christians—it is significant for Christian moral experience—if it is also soteriologically significant. As we have sought to interpret the richness of the data, we have found the persistent and creative effort to relate aspects of climate change advocacy and activism to soteriology. The incarnation has been related by our respondents to creation, and God's valuing of creation is seen as an outcome of such incarnational presence. The ministry of Jesus is appealed to by those who wish to amplify the prophetic theme in Christian witness and testimony in the context of climate change: Jesus is presented as a disruptive and controversial figure. Crucifixion is referred to when parallels are drawn between the crucifying of Jesus and the current 'crucifying' of creation. Resurrection identifies the victory of life over death, and this is developed in ecological ways to indicate a future for the non-human creation. Hope is based in the expected return of Jesus and thereby the fulfilled establishment of God's kingdom of justice and peace.

Climate change advocacy and activism is thereby interpreted, and is interpretable, from within Christian soteriological discourse. In a variety of ways, this is how and why climate matters to these Christian environmental activists. We are exploring this with reference to: aesthetic experience that can be understood as sanctifying; participation in deification, in which human and extra-human life are felt affectively to be in communion with one-another and God; and redemptive action that interprets the ethical activity of our respondents. We have used the following three headings to capture this (see section 5): Attending to Creation; Remembering Eden; and Reimagining Redemption.

A creative way opens up of developing Christian ecotheology in service of Christian environmental action in many contexts. In other words, certain heightened experiences of creation may be understood as sanctifying grace; specific affective reactions to environmental damage are an indication of the human creature's graced participation in a wider creation; pro-environment activism and testimony are instances of redemptive grace by which God's kingdom is sketched (weaker version) or advanced (stronger version). Grace is ecologised along these pathways of salvation.

This finding is highly significant in that it does not directly revolve around concerns about anthropocentrism. The critical finding of our research is that motivation and action are resourced by creative soteriological theologies. In one way, these theologies are anthropocentric, in that they often concern taking action for the sake of the human. Yet, the centripetal pull of anthropocentrism is sometimes slackened, sometimes interrupted by soteriological pressures: the blessing of God's presence or disclosure; affective expression over the damage done to the communion of creation by human polluting action; and redeeming grace efficacious through ethical—often, stewarding—action.

The Church's Role in Adopting Creative Ecotheologies

Our research has shown that across Christian communities in the UK, a growing interest surrounds the question of how churches can respond theologically to climate change. Far from being paralysed by the scale of the crisis, many within the church are actively exploring how faith can offer fresh and compelling practical and theological responses. Conversations with clergy, activists, and lay members reveal a complex but hopeful picture—one in which frustrations with old patterns are increasingly giving way to constructive imagination and theological renewal. There is a deepening sense that the church possesses both the resources and the responsibility to cultivate a distinctive and creative ecological vision.

Many people saw the current moment as crucial for the Church. Participants in this study spoke about their desire to see the church step more confidently into a leadership role. Rather than merely responding to external pressure or societal trends, they wanted to see churches offering moral clarity, spiritual depth, and theological creativity in the face of the climate crisis. As one person from Operation Noah said, 'We are asking for the churches to do something that provides leadership at this time' (2016). There was strong consensus that the church can—and should—become a space for nurturing new ways of seeing the world, grounded in scripture, tradition, and a deep love for creation.

At the heart of this hopeful vision lies a growing discomfort with the perception that churches have been too cautious or inward-looking. Some felt that the established national church had become too tied to tradition, and overly reliant on procedural responses. While efforts like Eco Church and net-zero targets were welcomed in principle, they were sometimes seen as risk-averse or lacking in prophetic imagination. One participant asked 'what is the point of the church at this time, for goodness sake, if we can't be prophetic now?' (2016). Yet even these critiques were not expressions of despair—they reflected a belief that the church is capable of much more.

This desire for more courageous leadership was often paired with theological reflections that challenged existing norms. One participant, drawing on the radical example of Jesus and early Christian communities, questioned whether current models of church life allowed enough room for dissent and disruption: 'the church is so unrecognisable now from the early church...mostly it's just a sort of comfortable business that you go to on a Sunday and you have coffee with your friends after' (3005). Others called for greater openness to grassroots theology—insisting that meaningful change must emerge from the lived experience of ordinary Christians, not just from academic or clerical elites, or what they described as 'white, het, middle-class, often Oxbridge-educated men' (3003). In their view, the church's strength lies in its breadth: in its diverse voices and the capacity to draw on these in its efforts to foster creative ideas.

Crucially, many saw this process as already underway. There was widespread recognition that a shift is happening—not only within institutions, but across the wider Christian imagination. Some of the most powerful forces for change, participants noted, are external: climate science, activist movements, and the sheer visibility of ecological damage all provide both challenge and inspiration. One person from

Operation Noah said that 'I think we're pushing at an open door really, aren't we, because everyone can see that climate [change] is happening now and people want to know what to do' (2016). As we have seen, these pressures are prompting Christians to revisit theological themes such as stewardship, immanence, and eschatology, with fresh insight. As one person from the Manchester Diocese put it, we 'go in search of the theology – here's an issue, what does our theology tell us about it?' (1003)—seeking theological frameworks that can speak to the climate crisis.

International links and global solidarity also play a key role. Churches with connections to communities in the Global South are acutely aware of the disproportionate impact of climate change on those who have contributed least to the problem. These relationships are helping to reframe ecological concern not as a niche issue, but as integral to the church's mission of justice and compassion. One participant said that awareness of these issues had increased in the church in the UK because they affect people who have 'connections to the global church in developing countries... [where] they get information from places where climate degradation is already more impacting on people's lives than it is here' (1003). These concerns elicit an openness to creative ecotheological views that can connect with their faith.

Young people, too, are prompting churches to act. Several participants stressed that younger generations view ecological care as a core moral issue, and that a failure to engage risks losing their trust altogether: '[Y] oung people [see] creation care as really important, and therefore, they will vote with their feet if they don't see it happening in church' (1004). But this need not be framed as a threat; rather, it can be seen as an invitation to rethink how Christian formation, worship, and mission can reflect the concerns of a new generation. The Church, in this view, is well placed to offer a theology of hope and meaning in an age of ecological anxiety.

In addition to external influences, many pointed to the positive impact of leadership within Christian communities. The example of Pope Francis was especially significant. His encyclical *Laudato Si'* was credited by numerous Catholic participants with transforming the Catholic Church's engagement with climate issues. This document provided a rationale for new theological thinking in care of creation, and an openness to fresh theological enquiry.

But this leadership does not reside solely with the Papacy. Many participants saw potential within the Church of England and other Protestant denominations to generate similarly transformative theologies. The Anglican "five marks of mission" were frequently cited as a helpful framework—especially the fifth, which explicitly commits the church to care for creation. These institutional affirmations give individuals and communities permission to act, and, in many cases, embolden them to explore new theological frontiers.

Theology itself was described as a powerful tool for change. Far from being static or conservative by nature, it was seen by many as inherently dynamic: something that evolves in conversation with changing realities. One participant described how earlier beliefs had given way to a more expansive vision—one in which theological creativity was not a threat to faith, but a sign of its vitality. This openness to growth was a consistent theme across interviews: even those who had experienced resistance or hostility spoke of discovering new theological language that better captured the demands of the present situation.

Indeed, for many, ecotheology was not a marginal or specialist concern—it was a rediscovery of the heart of the gospel. Love of neighbour, reverence for creation, and hope for renewal were all seen as deeply embedded in Christian tradition. Participants believed that these themes, when brought to the surface, could speak powerfully to today's ecological crisis. Churches, they argued, are not starting from scratch; they are returning to sources that have always been present, but that now provide new relevance. This includes 'words around hope' (5010) and the concepts of 'stewardship and creation' (6008).

In the end, what emerged from these conversations was not only critique, but conviction towards positive change. Participants believed that churches—local and national, Protestant and Catholic—have both the theological depth and the communal structures to foster profound change. They can offer space for lament and hope, for grief and imagination. They can draw on ancient traditions while remaining open to new voices. They can collaborate across sectors and boundaries, grounded in the belief that creation is a gift to be cherished, not a resource to be exploited.

The future of Christian ecotheology is still being written, and the signs are promising. Within and beyond the church, people are seeking a faith that responds meaningfully to the environmental challenges of our time. And as this report has shown, the Church is not merely reacting—it is beginning, in many places, to lead, and to do so in ways that involve not just practical action, but creative theology.

Appendix

	Statement	Av.
1.1	To care for the environment is an act of worship	**8.8**
1.2	To lovingly care for and work with creation is a sacramental act	**8.5**
1.3	Experiences of wonder at God's creation can inform right human conduct	**9.0**
1.4	To love our neighbour requires addressing climate change as a priority	**9.5**
1.5	As Christians, we should stand in solidarity with Christians in the Global South whose lives are affected by climate change	**9.6**
2.1	Land was once understood as sacred, but now the market treats it as a commodity	**8.8**
2.2	The era of climate change is when God begins the final judgment, ushering in the Kingdom	**2.6**
2.3	Caring for the planet is a way of showing God's Kingdom to others	**9.2**
2.4	Those who are least culpable for the climate emergency – the global poor and future generations – will be most impacted by it	**9.6**
2.5	Humanity is one people living in a common home – the negative effects of certain actions affect us all	**9.5**
3.1	In Jesus Christ, God reaches into humanity, and also biological existence, earth and soil	**8.2**
3.2	By his incarnation and crucifixion, Christ shares in the experiences and suffering of all creation, not just human life	**7.7**
3.3	Humans are God's co-creators whose purpose is to create a future that is beneficial for nature	**7.1**
3.4	Human ingenuity to modify nature and make cities, parks and farms is God-given	**7.6**
3.5	As the Word made Flesh, Christ's incarnation expresses an association with creation	**8.9**
4.1	Being uniquely made in the image of God, humans have responsibility to act for the good of all creatures	**9.4**
4.2	Humans have dominion over God's creation	**4.3**
4.3	God blesses and keeps us, so we should bless and keep the earth	**9.0**
4.4	Humans are given responsibility to steward God's creation	**9.3**
4.5	Creation is a gift from God, and so we should care for this gift and thank God for it	**9.5**
5.1	Christians with a large carbon footprint are guilty of a sin for which they should repent	**6.7**
5.2	The resurrection of human life is the recycling of our bodies back into the Earth's body	**3.3**
5.3	Christ's atoning death redeems the whole of the created world	**7.4**
5.4	Christ's ministry of salvation, liberation and healing is for all creatures, including the natural world	**8.2**
5.5	Humanity needs to be spiritually converted away from overconsumption, greed and wastefulness	**9.4**
6.1	God is embodied in the world and universe, rather than separate from it	**8.2**
6.2	The earth is alive and its creatures have freedom and autonomy	**7.1**
6.3	All of God's creatures form a community who join together in giving praise to God	**8.0**
6.4	Creation tells us of God's love for humanity, and how to care for nature	**8.7**
6.5	God has promised that the earth will flourish if people follow in his ways	**8.2**
7.1	The entire creation, not just human beings, is in the image of God	**7.3**
7.2	The ultimate destiny of both human and non-human creatures is to be with God	**7.1**
7.3	The earth and its creatures are our neighbours, with whom we need to be reconciled	**8.7**
7.4	At the end of all things, the earth is to be renewed, not destroyed	**7.9**
7.5	Wisdom and the divine can be seen within nature and the cosmos	**9.0**

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