



The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Kitchener

ON EAGLE'S WINGS

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The Roots of the Climate Emergency: Two Books & Some Questions

Andrew Brockett

Most of us accept that we are in the midst of a climate crisis caused by human activity; many fear that climate change is heading towards a planetary catastrophe. What part have settler-colonialism and Christianity played in this unfolding tragedy? What can those of us who are settlers and Christians do to ameliorate the situation?

Perhaps, understanding how we got here is a good first step?

In the fall of 2019 Preston preached a sermon in which he referred to a book by Michael S. Northcott (Professor Emeritus of Ethics, University of Edinburgh, a priest of the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church): *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2013). Last year, the University of Chicago Press published a book by the renowned Indian novelist and anthropologist Amitav Ghosh: *The Nutmeg's Curse – Parables for a Planet in Crisis*.

Although Northcott adopts a Christian theological approach to understanding the roots of the climate crisis and Ghosh makes no claim to Christian belief, both books have much in common. Northcott is not easy reading – he describes it as a “dialogue” with various philosophers – much of it above my head. Ghosh’s has the merit of being written by a novelist; he describes it as “parables” and it captures one’s imagination.

What caught my attention in Preston’s sermon in 2019 was the suggestion that the Earth “has agency”: that it is not inert – that the Earth has life because it is the Spirit-breathed creature of a divine Creator. As Northcott points out, there is much to support that belief in the Hebrew Scriptures – for instance in the Psalms, and the writings of Jeremiah and Isaiah (“*the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*”). Israel’s God Yahweh controls the climate. When the rich pile up lands and houses for themselves while enslaving their fellow Hebrews and neglecting to care for orphans, the poor, strangers and widows, the rains dry up, the ground is baked hard, and the vineyard and the field no longer give their increase. Northcott writes: “in these and other ways the earth is said to ‘cry out’ and bear witness against the Hebrews’ unfaithfulness to the everlasting covenant.”

Respect for the Earth as part of God’s creation endured in Christendom for more than 1500 years. But in 1542 Copernicus permitted the publication of his thesis that the Earth is not the centre of the universe but only one of the planets that orbit round the sun. Northcott writes “After Copernicus, scientific humanity set out on a five-hundred year journey to empty the cosmos of agency....” He traces that journey through Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Isaac Newton, John Locke, the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason as humanity comes to believe that it is the most powerful agency in history.

Although (on the basis of his extensive biography) Amitav Ghosh does not

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The next issue of On Eagle’s Wings will be available on September 25th, 2022.

Altar Flowers

Enid Emery

If anyone would like to make a Memorial gift of flowers for the Altar there are several Sunday's still available between now and the end of the year.

June 26th

July 3rd, 24th, and 31st

October 16th

November 6th and 20th

December 11th

If you are interested in any of these dates please contact me by Phone-- 519-896-0637 or e-mail: davidemery@rogers.com

appear to have read Northcott's book, he agrees broadly with his analysis of the root causes of the climate crisis. He has, however, a less philosophical approach and identifies culprits that may make us feel distinctly uncomfortable: imperial violence, settler-colonialism and the suppression of Indigenous culture.

Ghosh's title *The Nutmeg's Curse* refers to the efforts of the Dutch East India Company, in the early 1600s, to establish a monopoly over the valuable nutmeg and mace trade. At that time, the only place where the nutmeg tree grew was the tiny Banda Islands in what is today Indonesia. The Indigenous people resisted; they wished to continue selling their nutmegs to traders from all over the Indian Ocean as they had done for centuries. Ominously (to our post-1945 ears) the Dutch Governor-General who was determined to obtain a trading monopoly, had concluded "that the Banda problem needs *a final solution*: the islands must be emptied of their inhabitants." (My italics.) And so they were: the Bandanese were either killed or enslaved and deported.

In a second "parable", Ghosh then takes the story to New England where English settlers had few scruples against seizing the land

and, if necessary, exterminating its Indigenous inhabitants. He cites a Puritan historian who likened the extermination of the Pequot people in Connecticut to God's command to the people of Israel under King Saul to utterly exterminate the Indigenous Amalekite inhabitants of the Promised Land.

Ghosh writes "If the victors assumed that they had the right to formally extinguish a tribe, it was because European doctrines of empire had indeed evolved in that direction. These doctrines found their fullest articulation in the work of the philosopher ... Francis Bacon. In his *An Advertisement Touching an Holy War*, which was written around the time of the Banda massacre and published shortly before the Pequot War, Bacon lays out in some detail the reasons why it was lawful, in his view, for *Christian Europeans* to end the existence of certain groups: [My italics.] These wayward countries, Bacon argues, are not nations at all, but rather 'routs and shoals of people, as have utterly degenerated from the laws of nature.' Such being the case, it was both lawful and godly for any nation 'that is civil and policed ... [to] cut them off from the face of the earth'."

In Ghosh's words "This argument effectively conferred on Christian Europeans a God-given right to attack and extinguish peoples who appeared errant or monstrous in their eyes." It was a doctrine that subsequently allowed the offering of bounties for "Indian" scalps and the deliberate spreading of smallpox.

What has that imperial violence to do with climate change? In Ghosh's account, when Europeans took over the land that Indigenous peoples had respected and with which they had lived in harmony since time immemorial, the settlers embarked on a process of "terraforming": they saw land as an inert resource to be exploited by the strong; they set about creating a new Europe in the Americas, giving it new names (New York, New England etc.) and doing violence to the landscape by the ways in which they farmed it. They "subdued" (Genesis 1:28) the land in the interests of profit and material wealth.

By contrast to this mechanistic way of envisioning the Earth, many of the Indigenous peoples whom the "civilized" Europeans considered "savages" and "brutes" had accorded a degree of agency to the land. They had been careful to

respect “all our relatives” – “the entire spectrum of nonhuman kin, including rivers, mountains, animals, and the spirits of the land”.

Ghosh remarks: “Now, as humanity faces the possibility of a future in which living will indeed have turned into a battle for survival, it is becoming increasingly clear that Indigenous understandings of terraforming were, in fact, far more sophisticated than those of today’s techno-futurists.”

I think that both Northcott and Ghosh would agree that, in response to the rapacious exploitation of the Earth in the interests of unfettered capitalism, the Earth is now responding through climate change. Both authors mention British scientist James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis (that living and “non-living” parts of the Earth form a single, complex organism named for the Greek goddess Gaia which is now fighting back through climate change to regulate the Earth’s environment). Northcott would not accord divinity to Gaia (in any case, that is probably a misreading of Lovelock’s thesis) but both writers assert that the Earth is a living entity that has its own agency.

I think both Northcott and Ghosh would also agree that a major cause of climate change has been the baleful effect of our Western exaltation of *reason* over reverence and mysticism. And reason requires words and texts. Northcott makes an arresting statement: “At the heart of Judaism is a God who is encountered through nature and events rather than in words or texts. Christianity, by contrast, ... is a form of religion that is less implicated in the weather, climate and political power and more invested in words and texts.” Ghosh, for whom Indigenous culture is seen to be centred in nature, has a fascinating quote from the primatologist Jane Goodall: “It is all but impossible to describe the new awareness that comes when words are abandoned. Words are a part of our rational selves, and to abandon them for a while is to give freer reign to our intuitive selves.”

What of the role of the Christian Church in all this? Too often Christian missionaries tried to stamp out Indigenous beliefs and rituals, regarding them as ignorant and evil. Settler governments cooperated – in Canada for example banning the Potlatch and the Sundance; and, of course, through the “Indian” residential schools. It is hardly possible to disentangle the Western, imperial attitude of superiority from the assumption of Christian exceptionalism; they went hand in hand.

Neither Northcott nor Ghosh minces his words as each of them describes the impending climate catastrophe. Each of them ends with an urgent call to action.

Much of Northcott’s concern is with the macro-politics of the wealthy nations as they devise ways of evading their

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Calling all Friends of the Memorial Garden

Garden Trustees: Laura Doric, Ann Coughlin and Jocelyn Truscott

This is now our third season through Covid that has suspended our annual fund-raising gathering. We have been able to maintain the garden using funds in the memorial garden account but the time has come to call on our Friends of the Garden to update their donations. All members of the congregation are welcome to be a Friend of the Garden with a small donation of \$30.00 to help with the perpetual care. Cheques are to be written out to St John’s Memorial Garden and cash should be clearly marked as a donation to the garden. We the trustees are eager to gather and meet again in a social setting next year as we continue to move into a post covid less restrictive life. In the meantime, come and see and enjoy the garden. If you are willing and able, we are embracing volunteers to help weed and water and tidy to maintain the space for the summer season. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at lauradoric@gmail.com.

Thank you for your support and have a blessed summer.

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Collecting Stamps and Spectacles

Enid Emery

Just a reminder for over the summer. The ACW are still collecting used stamps to send to The Leprosy Mission, now called 'Effect Hope'. We are also still collecting used prescription glasses for distribution by Canadian opticians in third world countries. Please place any donations in the boxes on the shelf in the lower cloakroom just outside the choir robing room.

international agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and their selfish consumption of fossil fuels. He concludes:

“According to the *Venite* [*For the Lord is a great God, And a great King above all gods. In his hands are the depths of the earth;*], the fossil fuels that remain in the depths of the earth are in the hands of God. The climate crisis indicates that, to honour the God who rules over earth and heaven, local and national communities should find ways to conserve their own fossil fuels in the depths of the earth, while at the same time creating and commissioning a new energy economy dependent on sunlight, wind, and biomass, and so re-create the historic and customary connections between nature and culture, land and life, love for neighbour and nature which are central to the Jewish and Christian messianism of empire-challenging love.”

For Ghosh, the first step is a need for humility as we acknowledge the greater wisdom of Indigenous culture. He recognises that such acknowledgement will require “a seismic shift in consciousness”. He calls for a “vitalist” politics based on the belief that humans are not the only “ensouled” beings but that streams, forests, mountains, fields (“all our relatives”) have a vital, living agency and that we should respect and listen to them. He calls on us to embrace the mystical – which reminds me of Hamlet’s words to Horatio: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

What implications does all this have for us in the Anglican Church? For me it raises these questions:

- How does the climate emergency call me to repentance – and what does that mean for me in practical terms?
- Anglicanism has defined itself as being like a three-legged stool, the three legs being Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Have we given too great a role to Reason?
- Should we work harder to incorporate Indigenous wisdom within our Anglican tradition?
- Is it really Scriptural to believe in the primacy of “Man” in Creation?
- Am I willing to learn from our Indigenous sisters and brothers?
- What is the core of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Has our tradition added too many accretions to what is essential?
- The most severe effects of climate change are being experienced by the poor in economically developing countries (*Les Damnés de la terre*). We can anticipate huge increases in climate migration. How do we prepare for them?
- How seriously do I take the promise I make each time we renew our Baptismal Covenant and respond to the question: “Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the earth? with the words “I will, with God’s help.”

I will give the final words to Pope Francis (who, as Ghosh points out, took his papal name from the Saint who was known for his love for Creation - in the [Canticle of the Sun](#), Saint Francis gives God thanks for “Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind, Water, Fire, and Earth”). In his 2016 encyclical *Laudato Si* Pope Francis said:

“A true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg's Curse – Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2021). Both the Kitchener Public Library and the Waterloo Public Library have copies.

Michael S. Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2013).

Deanery Refugee Committee Update

Ann Coughlin

Good news and not so good news:

- So far, we have raised \$10,495.00 towards support for our next family. (With inflation and rental going up, we estimate we could need close to \$30,000.
- Once we select a family, they could arrive very quickly (unlike in the past when we had a longer wait time)
- Because we do not have anyone able to take the role of Chair (mostly coordinating the committee, calling and chairing meetings), nor people to take lead on finding accommodation, and being the Primary contact for the new family, we decided to wait till later in August or in September to select a family. Some jobs are short term – such as finding an apartment, while others are longer term such as primary contact.

SO... we are actively looking for people to fill these roles. There is support offered to those who are willing, from the first group of those leaders.

ALSO, we are looking for someone who might have a garage or other storage space that we could use for about 6 months to store furniture that is collected. Getting offers of furniture is not hard – storing it till we have an apartment to put it in is the challenge.

If you are interested in being involved in this team, or want more information about what is included in each sub-team's responsibility, please speak to David Whitfield or Danny Chirilenco. We are offering an information meeting on July 27 by Zoom and we will send out the invitation with Zoom link closer to that date.

Coffee Hour Returns

Eleanor Brown

After a 27-month hiatus, Coffee Hour returned to St. John's on Sunday, June 5.

It was a beautiful early summer day, and spirits were high as about 50 people gathered in the Upper Parish Hall to reconnect with each other over coffee and tea after the 10:00 service. We also celebrated the Queen's birthday and Platinum Jubilee with scones provided by Jennifer Uttley and Judy Shantz. It was a festive way to welcome everyone back - we have all missed our Coffee Hour!

For the summer, Coffee Hour will take place on the first Sunday of the month, and we're hopeful that we'll be able to return to regular weekly Coffee Hour in September and see a few more faces - old and new!

VOLUNTEERS ARE STILL NEEDED! We still need a few more teams so if you'd like to help out, please call or email Eleanor Brown (519-578-9519 or southpaw66@rogers.com) or speak to Eleanor Brown or Carol McNamee at church.



Creating a Place to Call Home: The Interfaith Community Breakfast

Ann Coughlin

Interfaith Grand River presented the 47th Annual Waterloo Region Interfaith Community Breakfast on June 1st, at the Kitchener Market building. This event brings together people, ordained and lay, from across the Region, representing a variety of faiths: Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, First Nations, and others.

The focus this year was on the need to create homes – certainly physical homes, but also places to feel at home mentally and spiritually. I found it really interesting that the Jewish rabbi told us that home is considered central to personhood, and that God did not allow them to take a person's home in settlement of debt! (Deuteronomy) He also spoke of the practice of returning land to original owners (Jubilee) so that the ability to provide home was never lost to a family.

Three focuses on the theme enabled three speakers and three religious leaders to share their perspectives.

1. Nadine Green spoke about “being homeless in your own land” and of the experience of developing and living at A Better Tent City. She told us of how, after she was evicted from her convenience store across the street from our church (which she said she allowed to be a sleeping space for some homeless men “as a protest”,) she met one of them at the bus station. He cried and said “I am Canadian. Help me.” She too cried and asked God if He was listening. When she returned home she got a phone call from Ron Doyle, who met her for coffee and offered the use of the space at Lot 42. And so, A Better Tent City was born. Just a few weeks ago, Nadine was honoured as one of this year's Women of the Year for her work there. God is listening, she said.
2. Saifullah Mohammed, a Rohingya young man who left his home in Myanmar (Burma) as a teen, and who came to Canada after being a refugee in Malaysia and Pakistan, spoke of “finding refuge and home in a new land.” He has completed a degree in Peace and Conflict studies here in Waterloo, and while he fully intended returning to Pakistan to work with and for his people there, he felt called by Allah to stay here and serve the community here – and that he is doing. His gratitude and surprise for the warm welcome he has seen in Canada, the willingness to share this home with all who come, is what has made Canada and specifically Waterloo Region become home for him.
3. Dan Driedger, of Menno Homes spoke of the partnership with the Lutheran Church to build affordable housing for people and for groups at the corner of Bridgeport and Lancaster. Recently completed and opened, there are 48 units occupied by people of varying needs, including some for Parents for Community Living, which also has their own space for support and programming on the main floor. St Paul's Lutheran Church is now meeting in person (after the Covid Virtual experience) and is back “home” in this new building, sharing the space with many others who also call it home! He called on the City and Region and individuals to continue to raise the funds needed to build a second set of apartments on the same property – there is room!!

Father Miroslaw Tataryn of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, after sharing his own family's story of exile in the early 20th century, of refuge in England and finally settlement in Canada, noted how quickly we moved to provide housing for our most vulnerable citizens when Covid struck, and how again we are moving quickly to help Ukrainian refugees now, challenged levels of government and all of us as citizens, to move quickly. We can do it IF WE WANT TO.

Creating places to feel safe, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, places to grow and create healthy relationships, places to call home – all who were there heard and prayed for this from many different faiths. We are not alone. God is listening. We are called to act.