

<b>Institution: The University of Edinburgh</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 33 Theology and Religious Studies</b>
<b>Title of case study: Ethics and Theology of Climate Change</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Michael Northcott's (Professor, 2007) research monograph <i>A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming</i> was co-published by the UK Church-related development charity Christian Aid and the theological publishing houses Darton, Longman and Todd (London, 2007) and Orbis Books (Maryknoll NY, 2007). This co-publishing approach made the book available at a price (£15/ \$20) that was accessible to non-specialist audiences. The book sold 4,000 copies in the first twelve months and was read in a wide variety of ecclesiastical and scholarly settings, and influenced ecclesiastical understandings of and responses to anthropogenic climate change. It led to a wide public discourse impact with invitations in five countries to address non-specialist audiences on the ethical implications of the science of climate change. Further, the book provided the basis for a civil society impact as it challenged readers and audience members to reconsider the potential role of faith communities, and individual users of energy including churchgoers, in responding to climate change.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The core claim of <i>A Moral Climate</i> is that climates and weather states before modernity were situated in cultural representations and behaviours as well as 'natural' cycles and states. The scientific revolution, and the Enlightenment, involved the construction of a division of labour between the sciences and the humanities, and the splitting of natural from human history and climate from culture. This made the scientific claim that human behaviours and values <i>influence</i> the climate implausible to modern ears. But to faith communities shaped by ancient texts - such as those of the Hebrew Prophets and New Testament apocalyptic - the scientific claim that excessive use of fossil fuels impacts the climates of Bangladeshi fishers or African farmers, or of future generations, is more plausible. This is because justice in these texts is not only a human virtue but a divinely given quality which is situated in creaturely relations below the heavens. 'Climate justice' therefore has purchase in Christian ethics and rituals which it lacks in cultures in which ethics and morality are seen as purely human constructs and not as part of the structure of the cosmos.</p> <p>In <i>A Moral Climate</i> Northcott argues that the apprehension of the climate as interactive with human (and creaturely) behaviours acquires traction in the traditional rituals of faith communities - around pilgrimage (mobility), sanctuary (dwelling) and eucharist (eating and drinking). Such rituals have the potential to shape more sustainable approaches to mobility, the built environment, and agriculture, land use and food production and use, which are the three principal sources of anthropogenic greenhouse gases. Northcott has gone on to explore this potential in more detail in subsequent papers and in a monograph treatment of the political theology of climate change (2013).</p> <p>The 2007 book received early and favourable reviews in the church press and on the internet - e.g. by the prominent biologist and former curator of Kew Gardens Sir Ghilleen Prance in <i>The Church Times</i>, and by theologian Sam Wells in the influential magazine <i>Christianity Today</i> in the USA. The wide take up and favourable notices of the book led to many public speaking invitations on the ethics of climate change in the UK, and in Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, the United States from 2008 – 2012. In over a hundred presentations Northcott 'performed' the research in a range of denominations, churches, public fora, and scholarly gatherings using PowerPoint as well as traditional communication devices including sermons and debates.</p>
<b>3. References to the research</b>

**3.1** M. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Christian Aid and Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007; Maryknoll NY, Orbis 2007): **available on request from HEI.**

**3.2** M. Northcott, 'The desire for speed and the rhythm of the earth' in Sigurd Bergmann and Tore Sager (eds.), *The Ethics of Mobilities: Rethinking Place, Exclusion, Freedom and Environment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 215 – 232: **available on request from HEI.**

**3.3** M. Northcott, 'Atmospheric space, climate change and the communion of saints' in S. Bergmann, P. M. Scott, M. Jansdotter, H. Bedford-Strohman (eds.), *Nature, Space and the Sacred: Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 57 – 74: **available on request from HEI.**

**3.4** M. Northcott, 'The Concealments of Carbon Markets and the Publicity of Love in a Time of Climate Change', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 4 (2010), 294 – 313: **available on request from HEI.**

**3.5** M. Northcott, 'Anthropogenic Climate Change, Political Liberalism and the Communion of Saints', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 24 (2011) 34 – 49: **available on request from HEI.**

#### **4. Details of the impact**

The reach of this project was trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific with Northcott providing over 100 presentations to religious and community groups in the UK, US, Australia, and Southeast Asia. The monograph was co-published by Maryknoll Books, New York, United States and widely used in ecclesiastical settings in the UK, North America and Australasia. For example a Benedictine Monastery in the South of England used it for readings at meals. UK churches associated with the 'Eco-Congregations' movement adopted the book for home group study. The book was taken up as a classroom text in the study of ecology and religion in HEIs in the USA and UK. But the book also reached lay religious as well as scholarly audiences in Australasia, Europe, the United States and Canada, and Southeast Asia. The impacts of the reading of the book in these many settings were in shaping beliefs and behaviours about the moral implications of climate change, and in mobilising faith communities as sponsors of low carbon living, renewable energy, local food and other climate change related practices as indicated in the following verbatim testimony details:

1. 'In 2010, the Diocese of Southwell in collaboration with Environmental Sciences at Nottingham Trent University, and the Cathedral Chapter at Southwell held a three day conference: 'Green as a Leaf: Renewing a Theology of Creation' (5.1 below). Michael Northcott's lecture and sermon on caring for creation/climate at Southwell Cathedral had a big impact on the conference audience, as could be seen in the feedback sheets, where people said that he really brought home the importance of locality and the local ecology in care for creation. The sermon in particular highlighted farming and renewable energy, putting these topics in a spiritual frame. Since this conference, we have begun a climate change web community for Southwell, initiated by those who heard Michael's sermon and lecture, and this is leading to public action on climate change in Southwell in the form of proposals for a communal wind farm. His sermon also impacted the Dean and staff of Brackenhurst Agricultural College and made them much more aware of the spiritual significance of ecology, and this has led to continued collaboration between them and the cathedral in services and talks. His lecture at the conference also impacted the Dean and Chapter of Southwell Minster and encouraged them to introduce the sourcing of local food in catering venues associated with the Minster Shop and Cafe.' Member of Clergy Team at Southwell Minster (5.2).

2. 'I read *A Moral Climate* soon after being challenged on the need to respond to raising

awareness on climate change in 2007. The sections on environmental justice and ethics framed my own views considerably which in turn have helped prompt subsequent actions (an active 8th Day discussion group in my church which has influenced the decision to install underfloor heating in our church and a Photovoltaic array on our parish centre as well as ongoing lifestyle challenges). The book's prophetic challenge and encouragement to provide a spiritual frame for public action on climate change has been a useful stimulation for the board of Operation Noah (Michael was a board member for two years). His presentation at the AGM in 2009 on the faith implications of climate change fired the board and members and encouraged the formation of the Carbon Exodus campaign: <http://www.operationnoah.org/carbon-exodus>.' Secretary of Operation Noah (5.3).

3. 'A *Moral Climate* has helped provide a discerning theological and spiritual framework for public action on climate change here in Australia. The book is well researched and has a prophetic urgency about it. His chapter dealing with Tasmanian forests obviously has particular relevance in Australia. Northcott's presentations at Ethos' mid 2011 'Consuming Creation' conference in Melbourne on the faith implications of climate change brought home the moral responsibility of Christians and churches to care for creation (link at 5.4 below). His work was the catalyst for 12 workshops on Australian ecological issues and actions that could be pursued e.g. Ethos' Cut Your Carbs program for tracking churches and parachurch groups' ecological footprint taken up by c. six groups, the Uniting Church's ecological audit solar panel program for church roofs, Church gardens at St. Mark's Spotswood and Ringwood Baptist etc. Michael's interviews on two ABC radio programs broadened the impact of his book and the conference. He also spoke to the Australian Public Theology Network extending his work's influence through a number of agencies represented. Zadok Perspectives and Papers in September 2011 further publicised key papers and workshops from the conference Michael keynoted. It also indirectly led to our December edition on Local Food. All in all it made an enormous impact, both on church and parachurch groups, seminaries, and Green groups he dialogued with.' Director of ETHOS: EA Centre for Christianity and Society, Melbourne (5.5).

4. 'The insights in *A Moral Climate* around climate justice – especially the intergenerational debt which our continuing despoliation inflicts on today's & tomorrow's children – strongly influence a diocesan working party on which I sit, working now to sharpen the Diocese of Southwark's environmental policy. Below diocesan level, and benefitting communities beyond the Church of England, Professor Northcott's advocacy of a revived localism and of Christian witness by communities to climate crisis is demonstrated here in south west London. Readers of *A Moral Climate* established Wimbledon Green Churches, our locality's first ecumenical faith group co-ordinating practical, ecumenical responses in environmentalism, ranging from energy conservation and ecumenical worship to food localism; Northcott's book is frequently mentioned. His thinking on energy decarbonisation has led several Wimbledon faith groups to investigate solar generation on church properties, and of lobbying & protest directed at safeguarding that possibility.' Renewable Energy Consultant and Member of UK Low Carbon Communities Network, (5.6).

5. 'The interface between climate change, religion, and public action, is one that is very important for us in New Zealand. Dr Michael Northcott's visit from Scotland came at an especially opportune time for us. We were thinking our way into personal action and public action, in relation to climate change, water quality, and mining. We wanted to resource congregations and community groups to (a) reflect on their own lifestyles and (b) to engage in public debate and action to encourage our own government, and governments generally, to act for the benefit of our immediate environments, and for the global environment. Michael Northcott's book *A Moral Climate* was important for us, and his visit, involving face-to-face gatherings in urban and rural situations, enhanced the benefits of his writings and widened the awareness of academic groups, church groups, and local community groups. One of the highlights of his visit was the leadership he provided in the Wanaka Summer School on "Living Hopefully", and the manner in which he related to the spectrum of resource speakers

and participants from universities, churches, Indigenous groups (in our context Maori), and community groups. He equipped us to reflect better on our own lifestyles and to engage more effectively in the public debates. Conversely, he has taken our insights back into the global community.' Past President, Methodist Church in New Zealand (5.7).

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[The following weblinks are to original webpages but should these be unavailable a pdf of the page can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/oboupzw> ]

**5.1** Lecture and sermon at Southwell Minster for 'Green as a Leaf' conference on theology, ecology and care for creation, 16-19 September 2010, attendance 350, [http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf\\_view.php?id=469](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/pdf_view.php?id=469)

**5.2.** Corroborating contact at Southwell Minster <http://www.southwellminster.org/who-s-who.html> Corroborating impact of lecture and sermon

**5.3** Corroborating contact at Operation Noah <http://www.operationnoah.org/> Corroborating impact of book and presentation

**5.4** 'Consuming creation: climate change and the call to transformation', 4 - 6 March 2011, Ridley College, Melbourne 3 lectures, audience 120, 48 hours, sponsor Australian Religious Response to Climate Change <http://www.arrcc.org.au/4-5-mar-2011-melbourne-qconsuming-creation-climate-change-and-the-call-to-transformation>

**5.5** Corroborating contact at Ethos: EA Centre for Christianity and Society, Melbourne, <http://www.ethos.org.au/> Corroborating impact of conference presentations and workshops

**5.6** Renewable Energy Consultant, National Management Committee, UK Low Carbon Communities Network, Member Christchurch, Wimbledon. Corroborating impact of book

**5.7** Past President, Methodist Church of New Zealand and Reader in Geography, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Corroborating impact of book and visit/meetings