



## *A Call for a United Faith Response To Our Current Climate Crisis*

By Dr. Gregory A. Boyd

At the advice of a friend seven months ago I began looking into the science behind global warming.<sup>1</sup> It has, quite frankly, been the most sobering experience of my life! I learned, for example, that the Arctic was warming four times faster than the rest of the planet, on average, and that it has lost almost two-thirds of its total ice mass over the last forty years. And I learned that this is wreaking havoc with earth's climate.

Among other things, the all-important Jet Stream is slowing down and wobbling, and this is a primary explanation for the increasingly intense and increasingly frequently extreme weather events we've been witnessing, especially over the last decade.

For over thirty years Climatologists have been warning us that, unless we immediately take drastic measures to reduce our burning of fossil fuels, the frequency and intensity of our floods, droughts, fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, as well as pandemics will in all probability continue to accelerate exponentially into the foreseeable future. And while many nations have set goals to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels by such-and-such dates, very few nations have met their goals. Indeed, we are currently pumping 65 percent more CO<sup>2</sup> into our atmosphere than we were in 1988, the year the ICPP was formed to set guidelines for the global reduction of fossil fuels!

As a result, more and more climatologists are conceding that global warming is posing "a direct existential threat," and not sometime in the distant future and not just for

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<sup>1</sup> My primary sources of information are *The International Panel on Climate Change* (<https://www.ipcc.ch>); *Arctic News* (<http://arctic-news.blogspot.com>); *The Climate Emergency Institute* (<https://www.climateemergencyinstitute.com>); Michael Mann, *The New Climate War* (Public Affairs, 2021); Richard Heinberg, *Power: Limits and Prospects for Human Survival* (New Society Publishers 2021); Deite rHeim, *Net Zero: How We Stop Causing Climate Change* (William Collins, 2020);



humans.<sup>2</sup> We are currently losing 150 to 200 species of animals, fish and insects every day. Since 1970 the planet's wildlife population has declined by 79 %, and by some estimates, our oceans will be free of edible fish by no later than 2050! There is no consensus as to when this loss of biodiversity and increasing climate chaos might render humanity extinct,, but there is broad agreement that our window of opportunity to avert the most disastrous effects of climate change is closing more quickly than anyone previously thought.

Now, many put their hope in humanity's often-demonstrated ability to innovate our way out of life-threatening situations, and there are some promising new climate-change related developments in the works.<sup>3</sup> But I am persuaded by those who argue that, even if we succeed at developing technologies that can be applied to the scale that would be required to begin to slow and eventually reverse global warming, this would only buy us a little more time unless this technology isn't accompanied by a rather drastic change in the way we humans tend to envision our relationship to the earth and animal kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

Most importantly, our future survival requires us to abandon the mindset that has gotten us into this climate crisis. For the last two centuries, and especially since the post-WWII "great acceleration," we have adopted an economic model that requires perpetual growth, and hence the perpetual increase of energy, just to sustain itself.<sup>5</sup> Consider that America is currently on pace to double its economy every 22 years. This means that Americans' consumption of energy must double every 22 years, and currently,

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/un-secretary-general-urges-leadership-to-face-direct-existential-threat-of-climate-change/>.

<sup>3</sup> For a review of new technologies to fight global warming, see *Just Have a Think*, (<https://www.youtube.com/c/JustHaveaThink>).

<sup>4</sup>E.g. Heinberg, *Power*. Helm, *Net Zero*; Tim Jackson, *Post-Growth, Life After Capitalism* (Polity, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> J. B. McNeill, Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene Since 1945* (Harvard University Press, 2014).



89% of this new energy comes from fossil fuels! This is simply unsustainable, and unless the populations of first world countries in particular do an about face on a global scale and immediately begin to reduce our consumption and thus our carbon imprint, there is no forthcoming technology that will do anything more than buy us a little more time.

So, while scientists work on climate-saving technologies, the question the rest of us must be considering is how can we hope to change the thinking of the global population, and especially the thinking of those who live in countries that have benefited the most from the use of fossil fuels and thus contributed the most to the heating of our planet.

Here is where I believe Jews, Christians and Muslims have an opportunity to play a vital, prophetic role in our world. For the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammed as well as the Hebrew Scriptures that Jews and Christians regard as an inspired authority, teach us that this world is created and loved by God and that God has entrusted the well-being of the earth and animal kingdom to humans.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, our spiritual authorities warn us of the dangers of greed and the blessedness of living simply as well as the dangers of exploiting the earth and animal kingdoms and being apathetic about their own well-being.<sup>7</sup>

For Jews, Christians and Muslims, taking responsibility for the welfare of the earth and animal kingdom isn't something we should take seriously only because not doing so has brought us to our current "existential threat." Rather, this is simply what being faithful looks like for us. This is what we should have been doing all along. And in light of our current ecological crisis, I can't imagine more important shared convictions

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<sup>6</sup> On the mandate for Muslims to take responsibility for the earth and animal kingdom, see Ibrahim Ozdemir, *Environment and Islam* ([https://www.academia.edu/36850188/Environment\\_and\\_Islam](https://www.academia.edu/36850188/Environment_and_Islam)). For an excellent source on the mandate for Christians and Jews to do so, see <https://www.creationjustice.org/mission.html>.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. *Quran* 89:15-25; *Luke* 12:13-21. See Himmit Surab Pur, *The Perfect Role Model: The Prophet of Islam*. (<https://www.al-islam.org/perfect-role-model-prophet-islam-himmat-suhrab-pur/living-modestly>). *Luke* 12:13-21.



than these. It's true that, historically speaking, Jews, Christians and Muslims have not been generally known to find common cause with one another. But if ever there was a cause that we should be able to rally around, it is this one. And if ever there was a time to do so, it is now.

So, I've recently been wondering and praying about what it might look like for increasing numbers of Jews, Christians, and Muslims to raise our collective voice on the urgency of addressing climate change? What might it look like for Jews, Christians and Muslims to wrestled together with questions of how we can best reverse our current course and begin to pursue simpler, less waste-producing ways of life? What might it look like for people of faith to join the growing movement of people around the globe who are already voluntarily sacrificing modern conveniences when doing so contributes well-being of the earth and animals kingdom? What might it look like for people of faith to provide examples to the rest of the world of how to live sustainable lives?

In fact, I submit that Jews, Christians and Muslims should be leading this movement, precisely because, as I already mentioned, we are motivated by not just the threat of climate change, but by the call of our shared faith. As the catastrophic effects of global warming grow more intense and become more frequent in the years to come, more and more people will be waking up to the existential threat posed by climate change. And, hopefully, many of these people will begin to explore ways to reduce their carbon imprint and to push back on climate change any way they can. But I believe that Jews, Christians, and Muslims could, and should, together play a leading role in this movement.



Yet, perhaps what might do even more good for our world than our combined voice and efforts combating climate change is the sheer fact that the world would get a chance to witness significant numbers of Jews, Christians and Muslims working together for an urgent common cause! This would not only give instant credibility to our voice on climate change, it would also serve as a magnificent beacon of unity and hope to a global population that is feeling increasingly fragmented and hopelessness.

Finally, I would contend that Jews, Christians and Muslims who embrace an Open-Relational understanding of God and of God's intimate relationship with his creation are in the best position to adopt this call. Whereas many of fellow believers consider everything that comes to pass to be reflective of God's all-determining will, we interpret our sacred scripture and sacred traditions in ways that ascribe significant agency to humans. We understand that God longs to partner with us to see his creation flourish. And we understand that God and his creation is deeply affected by what humans do, and do not do, and we believe that God yearns to partner with us to see his creation flourish. And, perhaps most importantly, we believe that the future is not written in stone but is rather a domain of possible outcomes, which is why we should be of all people most passionate about embracing hope for the better future and most passionate about doing all we can do to bring this future about.

I thus believe that it is incumbent on Jews, Christians and Muslims who share this Open-Relational understanding of God to begin to explore together ways we can better live out our call to care for the earth and animal kingdom and how to best model this for the rest of the world. But we must do so quickly, for our window of opportunity is rapidly closing.