



What if we actually pulled off a Green New Deal?  
What would the future look like?

The Intercept and Naomi Klein present...

[A Message From the Future With Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez illustrated by Molly Crabapple](#)



# Where we're up to, a brief guide: The Climate Crisis in the news Summer 2020

UK must prioritise "green economic recovery" letter - Chief executives of more than 60 British organisations called on the government to:

- Invest in infrastructure, technology and skills to create jobs that help sustainability
- Exclude companies in "polluting industries" that do not have a proper climate plan
- Restore ecosystems on land and in our oceans by incentivising walking and cycling
- Support sustainable food, farming and fishing
- Swiftly pass environmental laws and bring in targets in law to restore ecosystems
- Bring global leaders together to plan for a sustainable economic recovery

The signatories to an open letter to Boris Johnson included Iceland Foods, Barratt Developments, The Body Shop, Ben and Jerry's, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the National Trust and Greenpeace UK.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-52580291>

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The boss of energy company SSE pushes government to adopt 'greenprint', prioritising investment in renewables

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-52778666>

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Shareholder climate rebellions surge despite Coronavirus crisis - shareholder support for climate change resolutions is up 4% on last year

<https://www.ft.com/content/c10056af-306f-4d9d-8e97-5ffa112ddf49>

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Oxford university study argues for a green stimulus package - Green projects create more jobs, deliver higher short-term returns, lead to increased long-term cost savings

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/05/green-stimulus-can-repair-global-economy-and-climate-study-says>

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Climate adaptation policies are needed now more than ever - The Economist

<https://www.economist.com/schools-brief/2020/05/28/climate-adaptation-policies-are-needed-more-than-ever> (May 28th)

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“Whilst input from scientific experts remains welcome and a useful precedent for further action on climate change, we must be careful that decisions which are inescapably moral and political are not placed solely on the shoulders of scientists, especially when significant uncertainties remain.”

*Dr Gambhir, low-carbon future scientist, London School of Economics*

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# A theological language toolkit... for a climate resilient future

Differing responses to the pandemic have made very clear that we can't just insist on people facing up to what is happening - we also need to offer a vision of how to respond. 'Accepting the science' isn't enough to ensure that we respond with generosity and compassion.

For many of us, this moment feels like we're standing on the threshold of multiple imagined futures - and, as Christians, we want to describe this moment of unfolding in religious or spiritual language. This can be transformative: to remember and to act as though we live within a world created and redeemed by God, who is profoundly interested in what happens to us as material creatures. But using theological language *well* in times of crisis is a real challenge: words are powerful, and the ones we choose to use - and how we choose to use them - has a role to play in shaping the possible futures we imagine.

As we try to articulate post-COVID19 climate resilient futures, here is a reminder of the theological language we can use to talk about the world we hope to build:

## *Lament, Grief, Anger, Despair*

The idea of teaching ourselves to lament in order to respond to the suffering of the world has once again been popularised in church circles. But what are we actually asking people to do when we ask them to lament? And what role does it have in a climate resilient future? Despite the signs that we have the real possibility of government and corporate support for Green New Deal type thinking, we need to come to terms with the idea that most of our lifetimes are going to be characterised by global lament - in terms of climate breakdown, there are thresholds we have already crossed. Things will get worse. But lament is not something we can expunge in an hour-long church service or prayer exercise. It will become the way we position ourselves towards the world. This isn't about manipulating our feelings, or participating in our contemporary obsession over whether our feelings are 'genuine' enough - how can we lament if we feel too burnt out to cry or express anger? How can we lament if we've given up trying to make ourselves care about something beyond our control? The lament described in scripture belongs to a culture which had professional mourners - lamenting was so spiritually important that people were assigned to do it properly - it was an art. How are we developing the art of lament in our communities?

Lament is different from despair, which is why it is so important that we don't play the dangerous game of manipulating the feelings of others or ourselves. We need to be able to make wise choices, which we cannot do when we are despairing. One way I mitigate despair is acknowledging the openness of the future. This is not to say that God doesn't know the future, but it is to say that we don't know the future and claiming we do is hubris - arrogance. We need to be mindful that we are part of a hubristic culture - a culture that is the product of colonisation. The idea of our own power is very hard to abandon. It is very easy, then, to be fatalistic about what will happen if we can't imagine a way out - to speak as though our worst nightmares are the most real. Acting wisely requires a certain kind of humility about ourselves and our knowledge. In despair, we assume that we know what will happen, and that there is nothing to be done. We begin to fear the powers of this world more than we fear God. And if the beginning of wisdom is the fear - that is the awe, the worship - of the LORD, we cannot be both wise and despairing. Our lament needs to clearly differentiate ourselves from despairing narratives: so long as we do not despair, we will always have more moments to act humbly and generously.

## *Hope, Blessings, Opportunities*

What about hope? This is related to proper lament. I am often asked: what makes you feel hopeful? *Feeling* hopeful has very little to do with *being* hopeful. We identify ourselves as hopeful people by the decision to live as though a new creation is coming in, whether that feels possible or not. Hope, much like love, is a choice. If you're constantly looking for things that will make you feel hopeful, you're going to hurt yourself and others around you. If hope is a choice, you can invite people in to make that choice too.

Hopeful living does not replace our lament – it needs our grief and anger, because they declare knowledge of an alternative. Not just as accurate expressions of the state of things but also a tool for change. They remind us that this greed, destruction, and death is a *choice* – is *sin*. It doesn't have to be this way.

In this time of pandemic, I want to emphasise that this hopeful stance is very different to language of disguised blessings, or even opportunities. It's a very normal human response to seek meaning in suffering. But there's a big difference between seeking meaning in your own suffering and trying to seek meaning in the suffering of others. Descriptions of silver linings are cruel in this moment of mass death: they give the suggestion that this is a god-ordained or at least god-endorsed pandemic. There has only been one time in history when the death of a human has brought about the healing of the earth, and that was 2000 years ago. We need to be able to talk about a post-COVID climate resilient future without suggesting that we view a pandemic as an 'opportunity'.

## *Apocalypse*

We might find ourselves turning to apocalyptic language, which I think is helpful. Not because I think this virus signals the end of the world, but in the Bible, references to apocalypse are times of unveiling, where the way things really are become clear to us. We get a God's-eye view of the way we're living: Apocalyptic times are times to examine, and repent, and change direction. A word of caution about 'apocalyptic' language, though - this is a moment to amplify the voices of the most politically and economically oppressed, acknowledging that for them, this moment is not a 'wake-up call' - they have been aware of the state of the world all along. This is not an equal opportunity learning moment.

The other challenge with using 'apocalyptic' language wisely is that it gives the feeling of a passing event. We aren't going to get through this moment and come out the other side within our lifetimes. We need to be aware of apocalypse-language burnout, much like 'crisis' or 'emergency' language burnout. They have real limits.

## *The Kingdom of God/Progress*

Finally, what about 'the Kingdom of God' or ideas of 'progress' towards something. As Christians, we have the difficult job of holding two things in tension: that we participate in God's resurrecting work, and that we will always live with a creation groaning, until the return of Jesus. We long for revolutionary change, and also know that the revolution will not ultimately heal us. Our challenge is to live in the tension of those two things. We can do this because as Christians, we believe that any act born out of love is not wasted in God's economy. It is real - more real than the powers of this world, which are passing away.

As Christians, how do we describe the world we long for?

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## Groups to research, join or partner with:

[Christian Climate Action \(Non-violent Direct Action\)](#)

[Operation Noah \(Campaigns, particularly on divestment\)](#)

[Green Christian \(Resources, workshops/retreats, campaigns\)](#)

[Young Christian Climate Network \(18-30s network for Christians interested in climate justice\)](#)

[A Rocha \(focused on ecological restoration\)](#)

[Eco Church \(transforming worship buildings and communities\)](#)



[The Climate Coalition - Faith Members - The UK's largest group of people dedicated to action against climate change](#)

[Contact your MP!](#) - Find your MP and all about their parliamentary contributions here: <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/>

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## Follow up 2020

Issues around the climate crisis are not going away. Following the summer school session on the environment we will be hosting a zoom meeting to discuss what Christians on the Left can do to continue the conversation. This will be an opportunity to connect with other Christians on the Left working to tackle the climate crisis, interested in environmental justice or who just want to continue the conversation. We will be talking through questions including...

- What role can we play as Christians with this issue?
- What role could Christians on the Left play?
- What could the political left's policy be locally, nationally, globally on issues around the climate crisis?
- Is there a campaign we can put together around environmental justice / decarbonisation / biodiversity / creation?
- Is there a support network we can put together for people in the faith / politics / environmental activist sphere?
- Where else should we be signposting to? Who is doing good work in this space?

Autumn 2020