

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: POST BREXIT WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

John Weaver



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Introduction

What is happening to our weather? - a question echoing around the world - it's been the hottest, driest, wettest, windiest; the worst cyclone, hurricane, tornado season since records began. In 2015 the average surface temperature reached 1.01°C above pre-industrial levels, and was 0.13°C warmer than 2014. Already 2016 has smashed previous temperature records with the first half of 2016. It has been 1.3°C warmer than the pre-industrial era of the late 19th century, according to NASA, although this figure was inflated by the El Niño effect. Every month for the last 14 in a row has broken the record average global temperature for that month. This will continue to enhance the extreme weather events for the UK, but even more serious is the effect on food production in the developing world with reduced yields and drought.

Arctic ice cover in 2016 reached the second lowest minimum on record at 4.14 million km² in September. Arctic sea-ice cover grows each autumn and winter, and shrinks each spring and summer. It has long been regarded as a sensitive indicator of change to the Earth's climatic system. The US National Snow and Ice Data Centre believes that in the next few years we will see some very dramatic further losses.¹

There are high hopes after the historic first step at COP21 in Paris that the final agreement by 195 countries may stave off the worst effects of catastrophic global warming.² But the final communiqué has a predominance of vague words, 'resolves', 'recognises', 'urges', 'emphasises', 'affirms', 'takes account of', and lacks a legally binding commitment. Perhaps, following Paris, the world leaders will now ensure that mitigation will begin in earnest. However the noises from the Republican camp in the US are not encouraging, and in a post-Brexit Britain Theresa May's past voting record shows that she generally voted against measures to prevent climate change.

The situation is increasingly urgent. Scientists have warned that if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, we will pass the threshold beyond which global warming becomes catastrophic and irreversible. That threshold is estimated as a temperature rise of 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and on current emissions trajectories we are heading for a rise of about 5°C³ by the end of this century.

A more hopeful sign is found in China⁴ where two wind turbines are being built every hour, according to the International Energy Agency. This is the world's biggest programme of turbine installation, double that of its nearest rival, the USA. The nation's entire annual increase in energy demand has been fulfilled from the wind. But the IEA warns China has built so much coal-fired generating capacity that it is turning off wind turbines for 15% of the time. China's State media has reported that China plans to impose a moratorium on all new coal-fired plants until 2018. Steve Sawyer from the Global Wind Energy Council told BBC News: 'China's build-up of its capacity in wind - and now solar - is truly without parallel.' A decrease in demand and increase in renewables gave China the confidence to ratify the Paris climate change agreement in October. However, China already has more coal-fired generation than it needs yet it is still building one power station a week.

As of October 2016, 191 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change members have signed the Paris treaty, 76 of which have ratified it. After the European Union ratified the agreement in October 2016, there were enough countries that had ratified the agreement that between them produce enough of the

world's greenhouse gases for the agreement to enter into force. The agreement took effect on 4 November 2016. Lagging behind the rest of Europe, Prime Minister Theresa May has announced the UK will back its commitment to climate change by ratifying the Paris Agreement 'before the end of the year' (2016).⁵

European Union Policy on Climate Change

The European Union⁶ was the first major economy to table its commitment in the run up to the Paris climate conference (COP21) and Vice-President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič said in April 2016 that the EU signature sent a clear signal that the EU were signing up to a fundamental and ground-breaking transition to a low-carbon economy and society. He noted that this transition is now irreversible and unstoppable. At the global level, we are seeing the winds of change. Europe is part of this and will continue to be a driving force. That's why the EU intends to deliver the Energy Union and create the conditions for future opportunities, innovation and job-creation that this transition will bring.

In 2014, EU leaders agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels across all sectors of the economy. The proposals this year present binding greenhouse gas emission targets for Member States from 2021-2030 for the transport, buildings, agriculture, waste and land use and forestry sectors. These national targets contribute to the overall EU target. The new framework is based on the principles of fairness, solidarity, cost-effectiveness and environmental integrity. Member States will be at the forefront of deciding how to implement the measures to meet the agreed 2030 target. At least 20% of the current EU budget will be spent on climate action.

In July 2016 the European Commission made significant progress towards agreeing an amendment to the Montreal Protocol for a global reduction in the use of climate-warming hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).⁷ The 196 Parties of the Montreal Protocol agreed the key elements of the amendment proposal. HFCs are fluorinated gases that have replaced certain ozone depleting substances (CFCs) used in refrigeration and air-conditioning systems. While HFCs do not damage the ozone layer, they are potent greenhouse gases, with a global warming effect up to 15,000 times greater than CO₂, and their emissions are rising strongly.

A study of Eastern Europe's painful energy adjustment over the past 20 years by the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies⁸ concludes that the region has, overall, done well in wasting less energy and in cutting CO₂ emissions, but stresses that it could do far better. Central and Eastern Europe still has great potential efficiency improvements and renewable energy increases to be grasped. Any further reduction in EU GHG emissions will require Eastern Europe doing more, not less, because this region, proportional to its size and population, holds Europe's biggest potential for extra energy efficiency and for renewable energy. The policy recommendation of a new EU energy and climate deal would involve a trade-off in which the older, richer member states in Western Europe would pay more to the newer, poorer member states of Central and Eastern Europe, to encourage them to do more to reduce their CO₂ emissions. This should take the form of: allowing, even requiring, a far larger portion of the EU structural aid allocated to Central and Eastern Europe to be spent on energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Post-Brexit

The Prime Minister of the UK, Theresa May, usually voted against environmental measures to address climate change. She often voted for lower taxes on fuel for motor vehicles; consistently voted for selling England's state owned forests; has never voted on financial incentives for low carbon emission electricity generation; and generally voted against greater regulation of hydraulic fracturing (fracking) to extract shale gas. In July 2016 she raised fears about her Government's attitude towards global warming with the decision to abolish the Department for Energy and Climate Change, which has been seen as deeply worrying by politicians, campaigners and experts.⁹ One of her first acts as Prime Minister was to move responsibility for climate change to a new Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy.

The newly appointed Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom's first question to officials when she became Energy Minister in 2015 was 'Is climate change real?'¹⁰ And, after former Energy and Climate Change

Secretary Amber Rudd announced in November 2015 that Britain was going to ‘close coal’ by 2025, Ms Leadsom later asked the coal industry to help define what this actually meant.

Dealing with climate change requires a dedicated minister at the Cabinet table. Experts fear that there is a lack of understanding of the dangers posed by climate change to the UK and the world. Many maintain that if the UK is to continue to have a key global role in environmental action, we need urgent reassurance from the new government that the hard won progress on climate and renewables targets, air pollution and the protection of wildlife will not be sidelined or abandoned in the Brexit negotiations. In July 2016 the government’s own advisors warned of ever growing risks to our businesses, homes and food if we don’t do more to cut fossil fuel pollution.

Craig Bennett, chief executive of Friends of the Earth, said that tackling climate change is an era-defining challenge that must direct and determine what industries we develop, what transport infrastructure we construct, how we manage our land and what our diets look like. It requires a central co-ordinated strategy; if we leave it to the afterthoughts of other departments we will fail. A spokesman for DECC told The Independent that nothing is changing. The commitment to dealing with climate change is still there.

Now Brexit looms large over EU climate agenda.¹¹ Because the United Kingdom has long been a proponent of strong climate policies within the EU bloc, the departure could strengthen the position of European countries that are reluctant to take forceful climate action. Before the Paris talks, the EU had pledged to cut its greenhouse-gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030, relative to 1990 levels. As part of that pledge, industries participating in the EU’s emissions trading system were to reduce emissions by 43%, and other sectors such as transport, agriculture and construction were to achieve a 30% cut (both relative to 2005 levels). The latter target is most exposed to Brexit. In July 2016, the European Commission proposed the amount by which each of its 28 member states, including the United Kingdom, should cut 2005 emissions domestically by 2030, depending on individual states’ economic strength and potential to reduce emissions. The proposals, which member states and the European parliament are yet to approve, range from 0% for Bulgaria to 40% for Luxembourg and Sweden. The United Kingdom has been given a 37% reduction target; once it quits the EU, its extra 7% of the EU target will have to be divided between the remaining countries to keep the European bloc on track. Eastern European countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, whose energy systems rely heavily on coal, will be reluctant to take on any extra emission cuts.

Brexit is unlikely to derail the growing momentum behind global action on climate, but it makes it more likely that the centre of gravity of global climate efforts will shift to China and the United States, which both aim to ratify the Paris deal before the end of 2016. Until the EU ratified the Paris agreement, it had little say on its policy details. But Brexit will certainly not make things any easier in the future.

Brexit uncertainty also looms over other key EU legislation related to climate and energy, in part, because the level of UK participation in the lawmaking process is unclear. In the second half of 2016, member states aim to finalize the long-planned reform of the EU emissions trading system and to adopt a new directive on renewable energy. As long as the nation has not formally declared its exit, EU policymaking will continue under the premise that any legislation is applicable to it. But experts reckon that the United Kingdom’s political influence in Brussels, on environmental policies and beyond, will rapidly fade. That means that it may become easier for the EU to adopt environmental policies unloved in Britain, such as emission taxes and stricter fishing quotas. As a result of Brexit, the United Kingdom will have little influence on the outcome of EU policy negotiations in the next couple of years. The EU will also be in a position where it can sit lightly to such climate change policies.

Christian Discipleship

In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato si’, mi’ Signore*, the Pope recognised the seriousness of the global environmental crisis and drew out its implications for the world’s poor and disadvantaged. He identified the human causes, and laid the blame fairly and squarely on the activities of the developed world. With St Francis as his inspiration the Pope expressed his concern about our common home and the need for global,

sustainable, integral, development. He challenged us to avoid the short-term outlook that has dominated politics, and called for a new political will. Francis maintained that we recognise that the destruction and wanton disregard for the environment is both a sin against ourselves and against God. He outlined the scientific consensus and developed the thesis of the climate as a common good or a global common. In rehearsing the scientific observations of drought, flood, loss of rainforests, reduction in biodiversity, aquifers, coral reefs and glaciers he challenged the developed world to see the impacts on the poor in the form of water poverty and crop failure. These demonstrate global inequality and injustice, and threaten the breakdown of society. He observed that world leaders fail to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. He concluded that 'In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.' (paragraph 56 *Laudato si', mi' Signore*)

The Baptist World Alliance representing 42 million Baptists worldwide, at their General Council, meeting in Vancouver, Canada, in July 2016 passed a resolution in response to COP21, which affirms that God is the creator, sustainer, and Lord of all; rejoices in the agreement reached in Paris at COP21; laments that climate change is a current reality; expresses special concern for nations with fewer resources to address the negative consequences, including the increasing number of climate refugees; acknowledges that all of us have contributed to historic carbon levels, damaging God's creation and harming our global neighbours; and urges global Baptists to develop a vibrant theology of creation care, educating and advocating for practices based on love of neighbour over economic gain.

As Christians we worship God who created the universe and pronounced that it was good (Genesis 1); God who is in a covenant relationship with the whole of creation (Genesis 9). We follow Christ, who is co-creator with God (John 1:1-4), and who came to redeem the whole cosmos (John 3:16). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's presence in all creation, our role is to become truly Christ-like, the first fruits of the Spirit, as creation awaits complete redemption (Romans 8:18-25). We live with broken relationships (Genesis 3) in a world fractured by human rebellion, which seeks the power, control and wealth that belongs to God (Genesis 3:5). But we also live with the ultimate hope of God's promises and purposes, God who will finally renew the whole of creation (Revelation 21:1-4) and destroy those who lust after power and wealth (Revelation 19). We are accountable to God and are called to follow Christ (Mark 8:34) in his mission in and for the world. We are called to a life of self-sacrificial concern for the world and its people, and worship God through humility, justice and merciful action (Micah 6:8). We see a growing movement of people involved in campaigning for greater, fair and more ambitious action on climate change. Christians have a central role in many countries in these movements keeping their governments accountable and pushing for more and better action both domestically and internationally.

A Circular Economy

This is the essence of a restorative and regenerative system and is an important principle to follow in our care for creation.

Technical: manufacture → product → use → recycle → manufacture ... and so on

Organic: plant growth → produce → consumption → waste/recycle → plant growth etc

There is a need to recognise that land is part of the community and is not a commodity. It is God's and God doesn't do waste: Psalm 24:1; Genesis 2:15; Isaiah 2:4; Ezekiel 39:9-10; and that consumption doesn't satisfy: Ecclesiastes 1:8.

God's natural cycle is growth → decay → new growth.

A linear economy does not consider God's justice and treats land and other resources as commodities. In industrial processes more effort should be made to re-use the heat produced, for example utilising the hot water produced in power stations. We may also suggest that there should be laws that force manufacturers to consider how their products may be re-cycled at the end of life - eco design.

Action

‘Put your money where your mouth is’ is a common call for integrity. Christian ethicist, David Atkinson asks why are we in the Christian Church so slow in responding to the most urgent crisis the world faces - climate change? And why most Christians continue with business as usual? We live in a world where the richest 1% own more than 50% of the world’s resources. The unbridled consumerism of western lifestyles is achieved at an enormous cost for the environment and the rest of humanity.

At a conference organised by Operation Noah in London, October 6th 2016, Sian Ferguson of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts warned of intolerable risks of failing to act to address climate change. Three of the grant-making trusts that she manages are involved with sustainable development and the mitigation of climate change. These trusts agreed seven years ago to stop investing in any fossil fuels and related industries - a change in strategy to take a public approach to disinvestment/investment, taking money out of fossil fuels and placing it in renewables and other non-carbon industries. This has been financially successful, but more importantly financial and ethical aspects have been aligned. The market is responding to investment in renewables, and collaboration with other major investors is creating a political mandate for change. She challenged Christian institutions to recognise that asset owners have great power in being able to invest in accordance with their beliefs and values. Other speakers at this conference considered the opportunities and challenges of investment in renewable energy and climate solutions. They challenged much short-term focus of investment and policy, and challenged us to recognise that if we make the wrong decisions about addressing climate change there will be no opportunity to do something different at a later date - the damage will have already been done. There was general agreement that some carbon-based energy is no longer viable and must cease, namely coal and tar sands. Investment managers are recognising that solar power and other renewables are providing an increasingly competitive alternative, as the technology and cost-efficiency are rapidly improving. They concluded that capital is needed to drive our transformation to a low carbon economy. They maintained that the focus should be on positive investment in areas of opportunity created by the negative view of fossil fuels and the positive view of renewables. There are great opportunities here and Christian organisations need to demonstrate their concern. Those attending the conference agreed that there will be a need to challenge the Government in a post-Brexit situation, when short-term economic considerations will take the place of environmental concerns as the European Union directives on climate change can be ignored. There is a need to emphasise the evidence from a range of investment portfolio managers, which demonstrates that there is no risk in green investments, indeed the reverse is found - financial gains.

Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England gave a stark warning that climate change poses a huge risk to global stability in an address to Lloyd’s of London, September 2015.¹² At this gathering of leading insurers Carney pointed out the rapid increase in weather-related catastrophes and the jump in both the physical and financial costs. He said the challenges currently posed by climate change ‘pale in significance compared with what might come’. Carney said this generation had little incentive to avert future problems. He noted that insurers are among those with the biggest interest in climate change as the syndicates operating at Lloyd’s, the world’s oldest insurance market, are the most exposed to disasters such as hurricanes and floods. He commended the more far-sighted among insurers who were anticipating broader global impacts on property, migration and political stability, as well as food and water security. But he said because the cost would fall on future generations there was little impetus on the current one to fix it: ‘In other words, once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late.’ Carney observed that the vast majority of oil and gas reserves already discovered could now be ‘stranded’ if new rules on carbon emissions are enforced by governments - the oil and gas would be unusable. He is convinced that there are near term risks that are so called tail risks, a series of extreme weather events and pandemics. The crucial point is that the risks build with time, and they build more rapidly with inaction so climate change is a function of cumulative emissions, so the slower the action is today, the bigger the action has to be in the future. ‘That would mean more abrupt change, that would mean bigger shocks to the value of financial assets, bigger strains on banks and insurance companies that are exposed to those assets, so what we’re trying to do is to promote as smooth an adjustment as possible.’ He believes that this can be done by providing better information to industry and government.

In February 2016 Tearfund presented their paper on a Restorative Economy, a thesis based on Jubilee principles. It presents a vision of economic development that goes alongside environmental sustainability. A restorative economy is built on living within environmental limits; it ensures that everyone is able to meet their basic needs; and that inequality, which naturally occurs, is kept within reasonable limits. This will not be without sacrifice, it will require changes in lifestyle: using fair shares of the world's resources; responding generously to the poverty experienced by others; speaking out prophetically; and building relationships with others. This is a move toward transformation of the lives of the poorest in the world: a circular restorative and regenerative system rather than a linear economy, which treats land and other resources as commodities. Markers of transformation include: net zero carbon, carbon jubilee, fair trade and fair markets, tackling tax avoidance so that poorer countries receive the tax revenue that is due to them for their own assets. The call is for a change of relationship with creation - communion with creation rather than consumption of creation. The recognition that creation is holy and that God is in the business of redeeming it; and that human beings, like the 'flowers of the field' and 'the birds of the air' (Matthew 6:25-34), are dependent on God's grace.

There is a need to listen to prophetic voices. For example St Francis of Assisi who called us to see a world in which the deepest joy and hope is to be found in living as brother and sister of creation. Pope Francis has picked up the same theme in his call to see a world of 'global commons'. The challenge to recognise that the reality of climate change and the call for lifestyle change for the sake of climate justice is the prophetic voice of today. On the level of the Church and of individuals A Rocha UK, Tearfund and Christian Aid have presented doable action through the Big Church Switch (to renewable energy); and Eco Church (concern for addressing God's world).

Hopes and Fears

At the launch of Eco Church in January 2016, Rowan Williams encouraged those who might think that global environmental issues are too big for churches to tackle in observing that there has been a 'tectonic shift' in the minds of Christians. Progress is being made through individual churches and through Christian organisations in the developing world. He stressed that civic society still expects the church to provide a moral consensus, trusted to do the right thing, and as such the church is an 'effective community lever.' But this must be more than talk, we must show what can be done by acting and so shift the moral consensus with regard to the care of the environment. He challenged all Christians to see this as a justice issue: for the world's poor and disadvantaged; and for the generations who come after us. He pointed out that our words 'economy' and 'ecology' both have their root in the Greek word for household. Stewardship is a covenantal concern in caring for God's world and being ecologically responsible is a justice issue. God is faithful in his covenant with creation, God keeps his promises. The church is here to express, embody and communicate God's faithfulness and God's promises. Scripture always points us back to the God who saw creation as good, who promised 'never again' to destroy creation, and who is the ultimate land owner - the Old Testament celebration of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) reminds us that the Earth is the Lord's.



Shutterstock Image, Disposable plastic bags. Image ID:96848818 Copyright: daizuoxin

One positive aspect of our current society is the growing emphasis on recycling. The UK recycling rate of waste from households reached about 45% in 2014. There is an EU target for the UK to recycle at least 50 per cent of household waste by 2020, although Brexit decisions may threaten this. In 2013, 73% of UK packaging waste was either recycled or recovered compared to 69% in 2012. This is ahead of the EU target for the UK to recycle or recover at least 60% of packaging waste. Almost half of the 186.2 million tonnes of total waste that entered final treatment in the UK in 2012 was recovered. The proportion that went to landfill was 26.1%. The number of single-use plastic

bags used by shoppers in England has plummeted by more than 85% after the introduction of a 5p charge in October 2015, early figures suggest.¹³ In 2011, Wales started charging 5p per bag and saw a 71% drop in the

number used by customers. Scotland and Northern Ireland introduced their charges in 2014 and 2013 respectively and have also seen significant drops in usage.

Another, although less hopeful, sign has been the change of opinion of one of Britain's leading climate change sceptics, former Chancellor Nigel Lawson, who has admitted that humans are causing global warming. Speaking to the House of Lords' Economic Affairs Committee, Lord Lawson said he did not 'question for a moment' that carbon dioxide was a greenhouse gas. And he accepted there was 'huge agreement' among scientists that it was having 'some effect' on the atmosphere. But, nevertheless, he argued it would be 'crazy' for the UK to try to stop burning the fossil fuels that produce carbon dioxide, claiming countries like China were simply carrying on doing so.¹⁴ The worry is that the current UK Government may be influenced by these and similar views.

Also, potentially worrying, is the opinion of Republican Party leaders in the United States who are amongst the main climate change deniers. They threaten to renege on the Paris Agreement signed by President Obama, if they regain power. Donald Trump, for example, calls global warming a hoax.¹⁵

Yet there is Hope. Our hope is focused and centred in God. In Colossians 1:15-20, Christ is seen as the agent of creation, the sustainer of creation and, as redeemer, the one who holds creation together. God is deeply and passionately involved in his world; God is no absentee landlord, but indwelling, accompanying, incarnate, and present as Holy Spirit. Our ultimate hope is in God and is eternal, while human hope is temporal and uncertain. Christians are called to a hopeful discipleship in the light of our ultimate hope in God's promises and purposes.

John Weaver
October 2016

Biography

John Weaver was born and brought up in Cardiff. After taking degrees in Geology at Swansea, he taught at the University of Derby. John trained for Baptist ministry in Oxford and was then pastor of Highfield Baptist Church from 1981-1991. From 1992-2001 he taught theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford, and from 2001-2012 served as Principal of South Wales Baptist College. He is a former President of the Baptist Union, and is the Chair of JRI. His main areas of research are: relating faith to life and work; theological reflection; adult education; and the dialogue between science and faith.



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THE JOHN RAY INITIATIVE

The *John Ray Initiative* promotes responsible environment stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and the wise use of science and technology. JRI organises seminars and disseminates information on environmental stewardship.

Inspiration for JRI is taken from John Ray (1627-1705), English naturalist, Christian theologian and first biological systematist of modern times, preceding Carl Linnaeus.

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