

# Is Religion Relevant for Climate Change?



**Mike Hulme**

**Professor of Climate and Culture**

**King's College London**

**Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain**

**Studium Generale, University of Groningen**

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# Islam and forecasting the rains

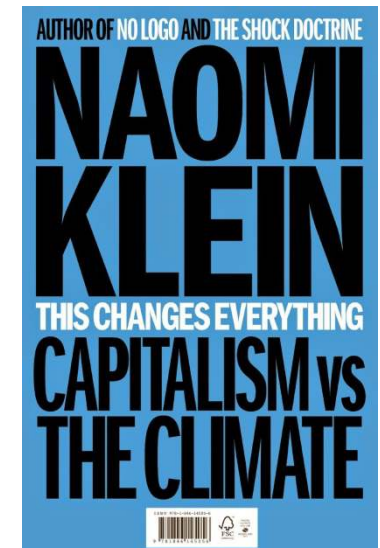
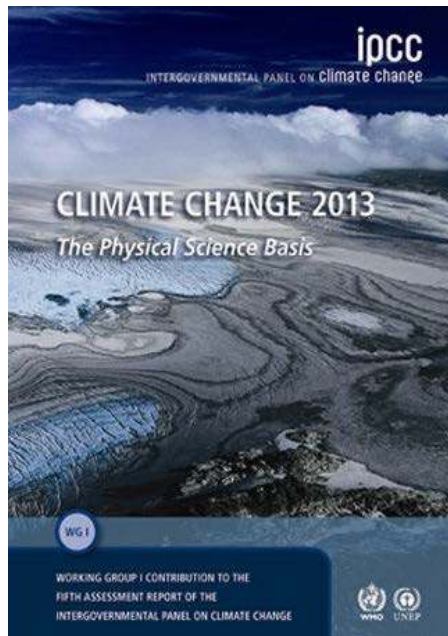
**Semi-arid Sudan**  
**Islamic culture**  
**Climate prediction**



# ‘Blind to religion’

***“All we need is the will to change, which we trust will be motivated by knowledge and an understanding of the science of climate change”***

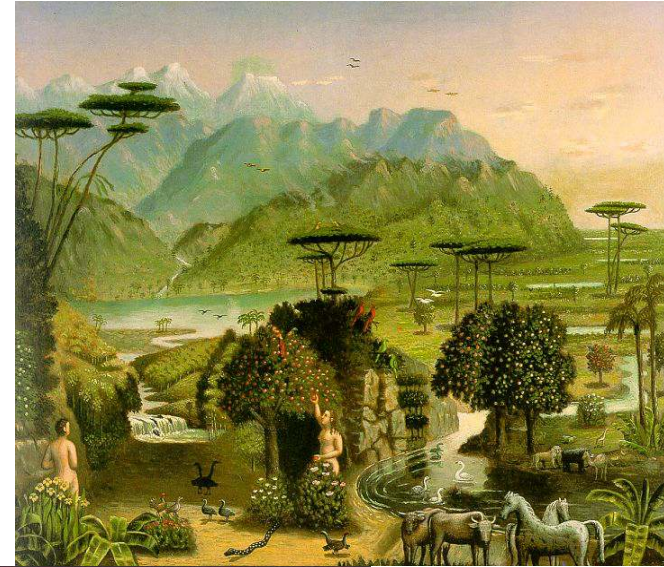
**[R K Pachauri, 2 November 2014]**





# Mythos, logos and narrative

***“The emphasis on [science], consumption, economics and policy usually fails to engage people at any deep level because it does not address the narrative, the mythological, the metaphorical ... The faiths are the holders of these areas and without them, policies will have very few real roots ...”***



# Different religious globalisms

- **Neoliberal religious globalisms**
- **Religious justice globalisms**
- **Neotraditional religious globalisms**



**Dr Erin Wilson**

**Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain  
University of Groningen**

# Diverse responses



**Ash Wednesday Declaration - 12 Feb 2012**

**1934 Barmen Declaration -- *“Operation Noah believes climate change is just such an issue”***



**Protect the Poor: Ten Reasons to Oppose Harmful Climate Change Policies – *“We call on political leaders to abandon fruitless and harmful policies to control global temperature”***

# Religious diversity

- There is immense variability in the phenomenon of “religion”
- So talk about particular religions in particular contexts – e.g. North American Buddhists or South Pacific Christians ... cf. Bhutanese Buddhists or Canadian Christians
- Nevertheless, some religions elicit global-scale responses – e.g. Papal encyclicals; the *hajj* - as well as private and personal ones





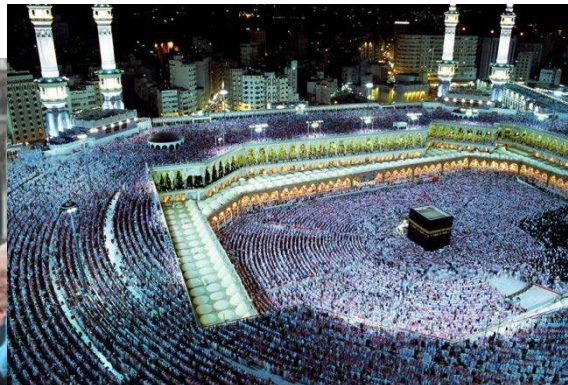
# Why religion is relevant for climate change

... influences believers' cosmologies, beliefs and values

... mobilises broad audiences and movements

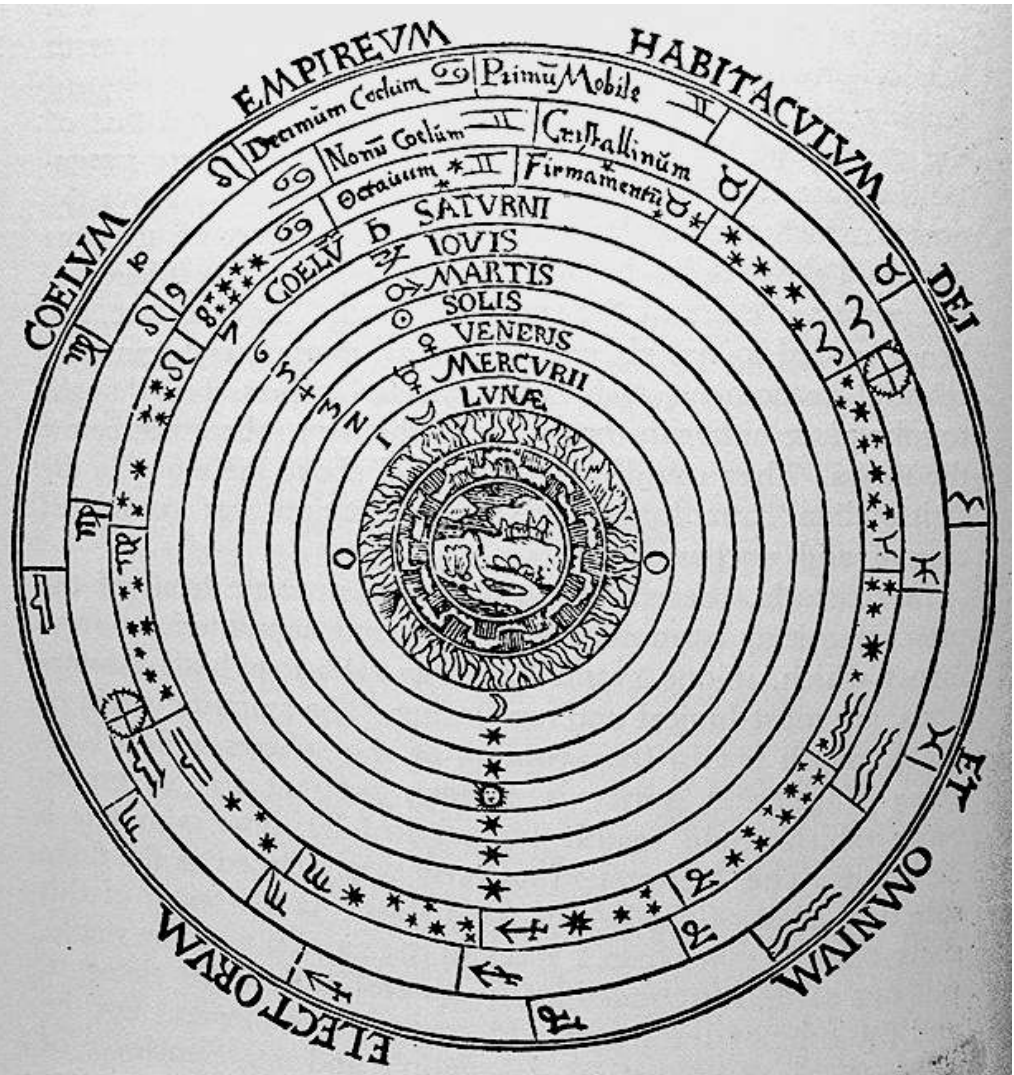
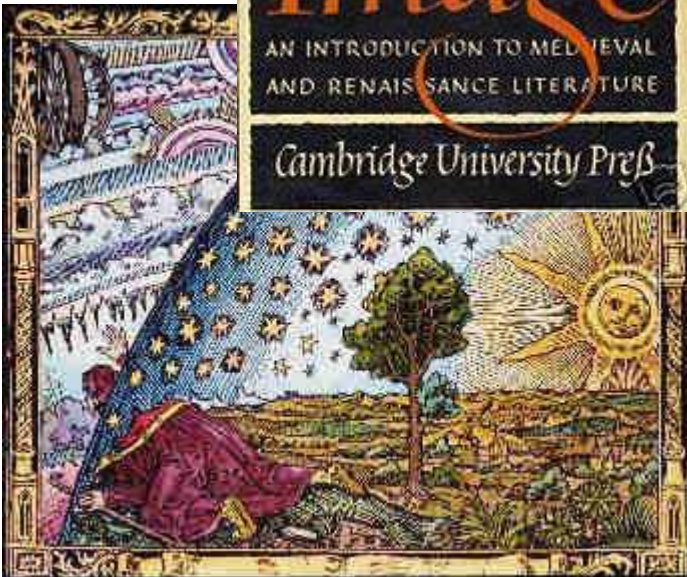
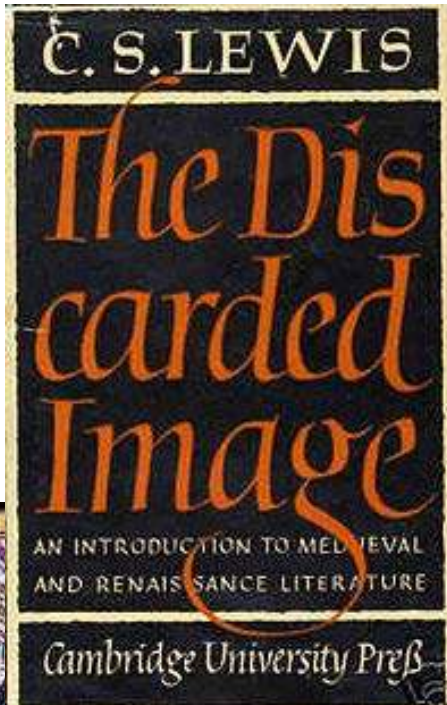
... possesses significant institutional and economic resources

... cultivates social capital – networks, communities, etc. –  
which can engender change

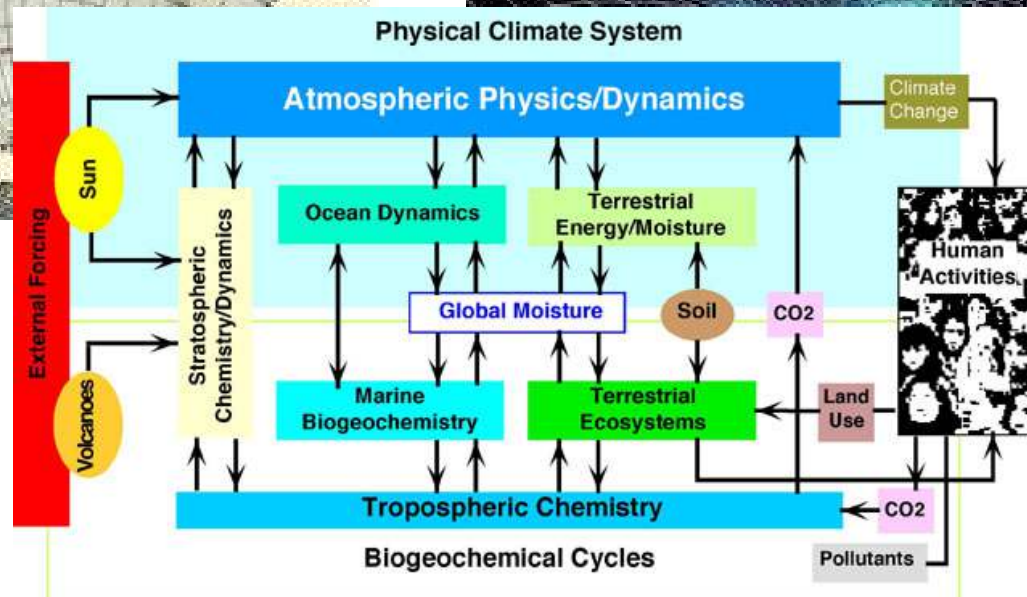
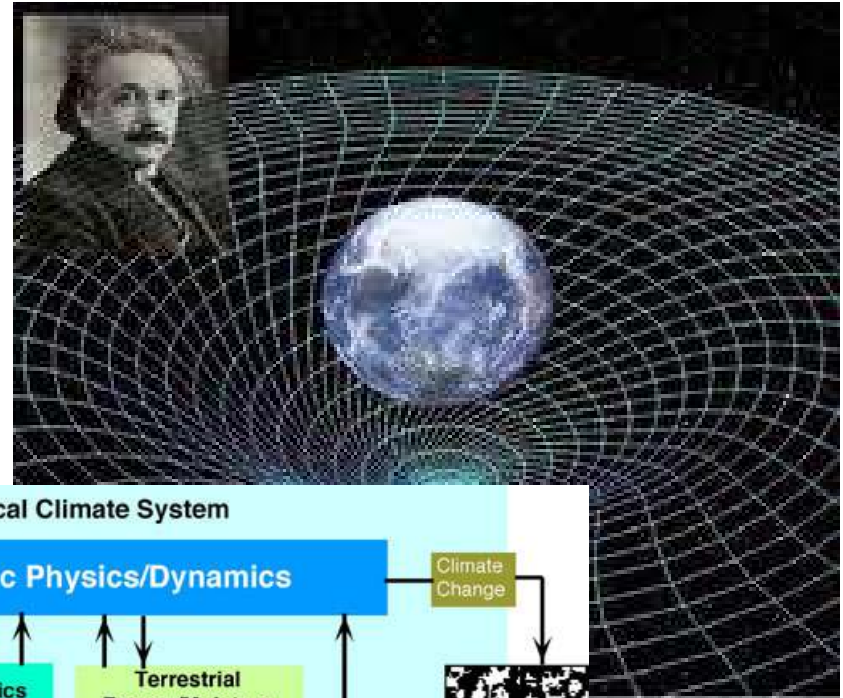
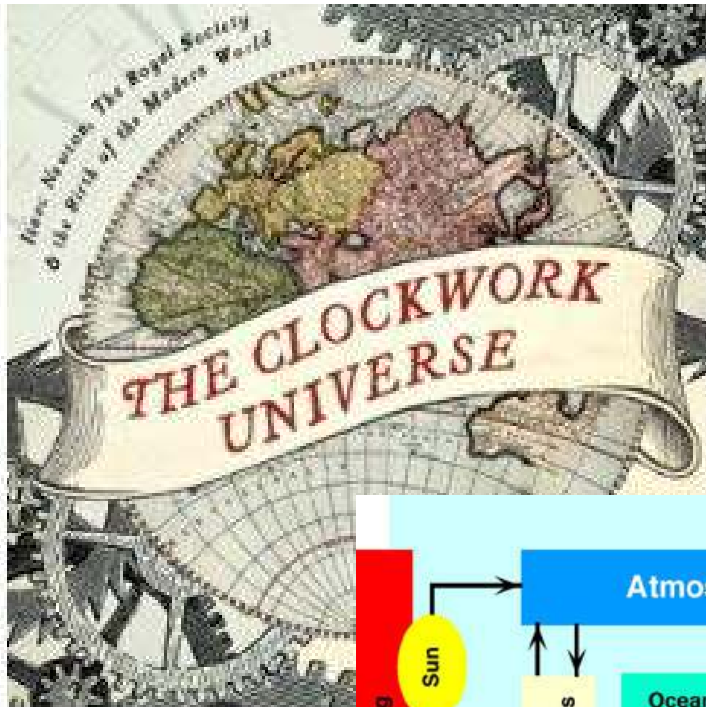




# Medieval cosmologies



# Modern cosmologies



(from Earth System Science: An Overview, NASA, 1988)



# Traditional cosmologies





# Some different worldviews

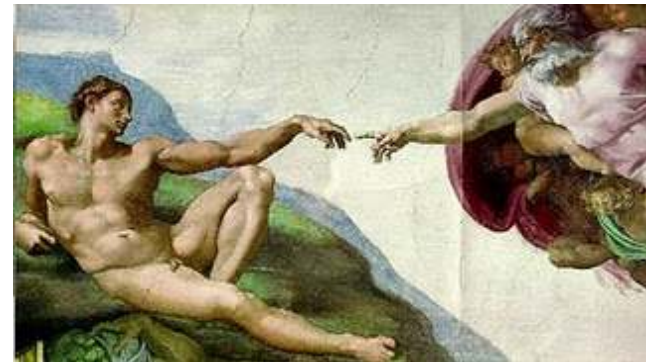
## Traditional

- Animist, Neo-Pagan (deep ecology)



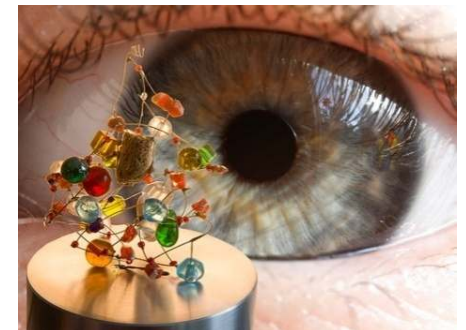
## Theistic

- Polytheistic
- Monotheistic
- Non-theistic



## Materialist

- Secular humanism
- Evolutionary destiny



# Worldviews and agency



Simon Donner (2007)

***“From ancient mythology to indigenous belief systems to modern organized religions, weather phenomena are believed to be explicitly controlled by the sky-dwelling gods”***

# Why is climate changing?

“When I asked a man in Majuro if he believed in climate change [English term] he replied ...

*‘I think it may be true. Because I see that the **mejatoto** is not very good nowadays. Life is harder. Goods are expensive. The sun is stronger. And there are improper relations between kin.’*

I then asked him why the **mejatoto** was changing, and he answered ... ‘*Maybe because life is harder nowadays and things of that sort.*’



Thus a whole slew of perturbations—cosmic, meteorological, geological, oceanic, temporal, moral, cultural, economic—varying from the cost of living to violation of kinship taboos, counted as evidence in favour of the scientific assertion of climate change.”

Peter Rudiak-Gould (2011)



# Why is climate changing?

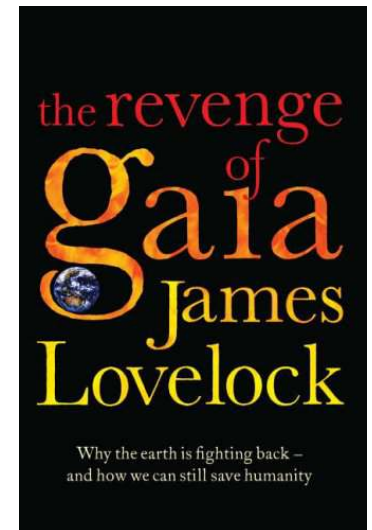
The severe flooding in England in June and July 2007 was a '***strong and definite judgement from God ... we are reaping the consequences of our moral degeneration ... in which every type of lifestyle is now regarded as legitimate ... and where economic structures are built on greed. We are in a situation where we are liable for God's judgement which is intended to call us to repentance.***'

Anglican Bishop of Carlisle, Graham Dow, Quoted in *Sunday Telegraph* newspaper, 2 July 2007



**Michael Northcott (2007) A moral climate: the ethics of global warming**

## James Lovelock (2006) The revenge of Gaia



# Worldviews and agency

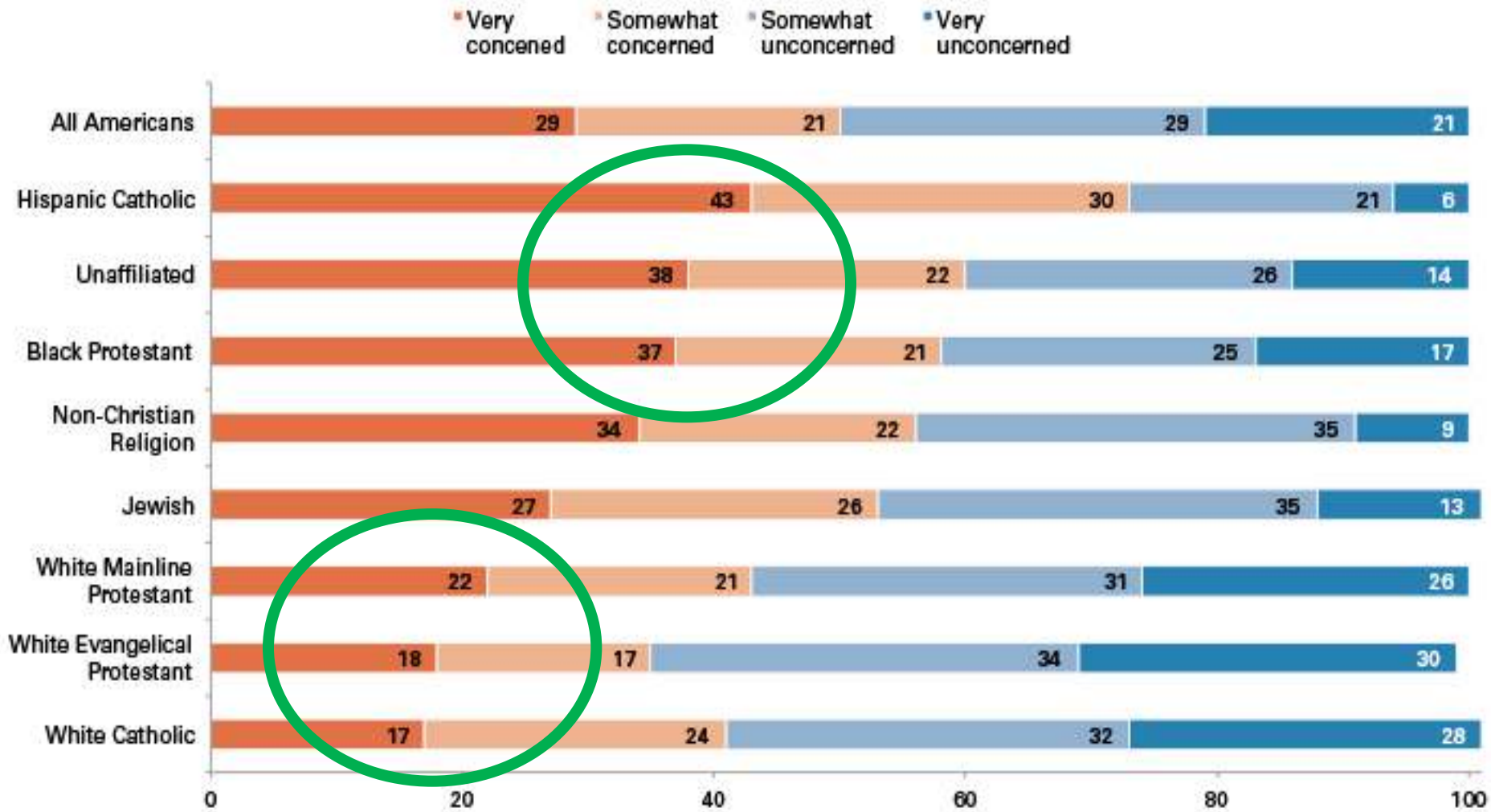
**Different worldviews = different views of  
human and divine agency**

	Human agency matters	Human agency doesn't count
Divine agency	Religious optimists	Religious fatalists
No divine agency	Liberal progressives	Fatalists, hedonists



# The PRRI/AAR Survey – concern by religious affiliation

Climate Change Concern Index by Religious Affiliation



Source: PRRI/AAR, Religion, Values, and Climate Change Survey, November 2014

# Religion and climate change

- But religion is not just about worldviews and beliefs – cf. the Enlightenment bias toward reason
- Importantly, religious faith also about institutions, meaning-making rituals, cultural imaginaries, moral commitments and individual behaviours



# How religions have responded ...



OPERATION  
**NOAH**  
Climate abuse. Our problem. Our solution.

## Climate Change An Evangelical Call to Action



## Common Belief

AUSTRALIA'S FAITH COMMUNITIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

DECEMBER 2006



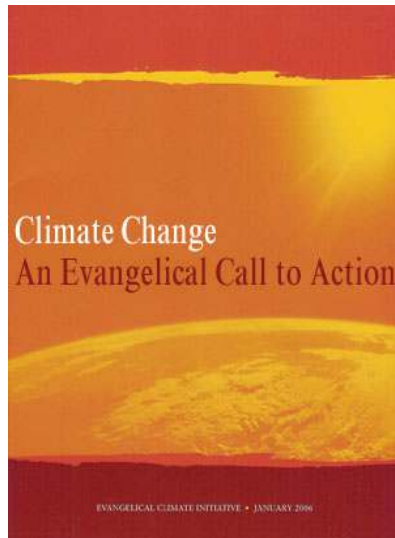
**Catholic Climate Covenant**<sup>SM</sup>  
Care for Creation. Care for the Poor.

**ARC**  
ALLIANCE OF RELIGIONS  
AND CONSERVATION





# The Evangelical Climate Initiative

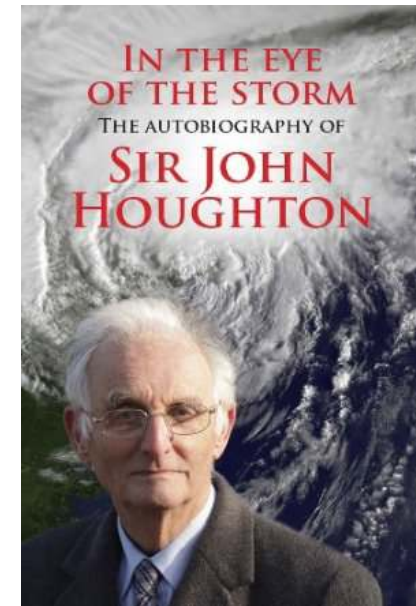


**Our commitment to Jesus Christ  
compels us to solve the global warming crisis.**

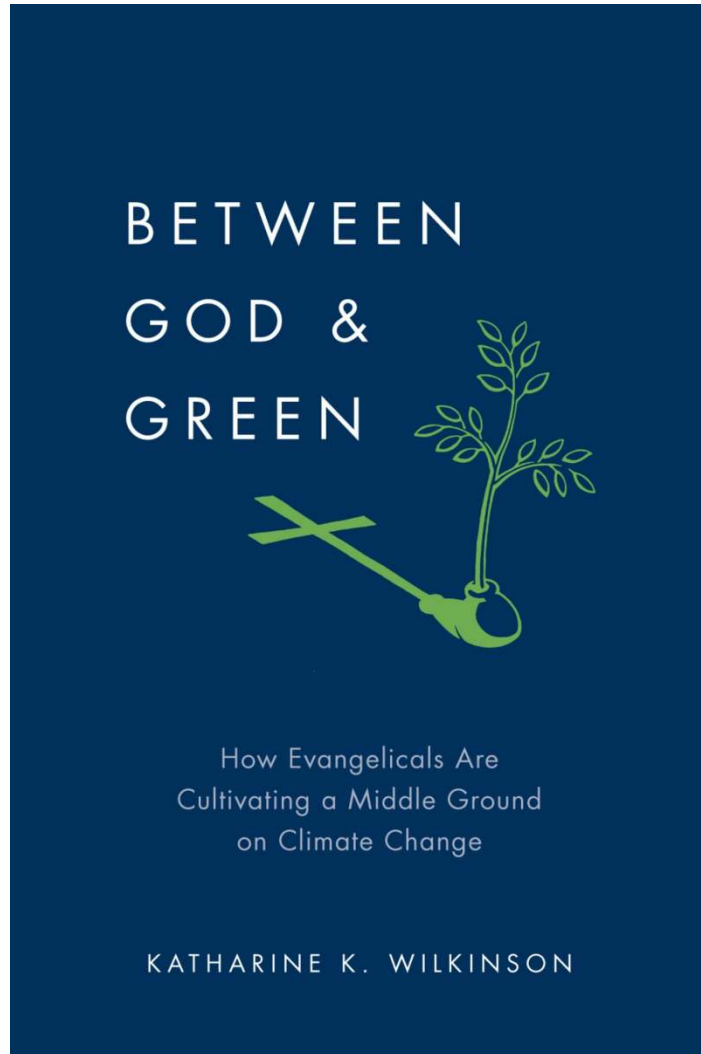
*"For by Him (Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth." COLOSSIANS 1:16*

Wilkinson, K.R. (2010) Climate's salvation: why and how American evangelicals are engaging with climate change *Environment* March/April Issue, 47-57

***"Houghton led the IPCC's Scientific Assessment Working Group from 1988 to 2002. He embodies the marriage of devout evangelicalism and expert science and has been the key scientific messenger to American evangelical leaders"***



# The Evangelical Climate Initiative



**Three theological tenets:**

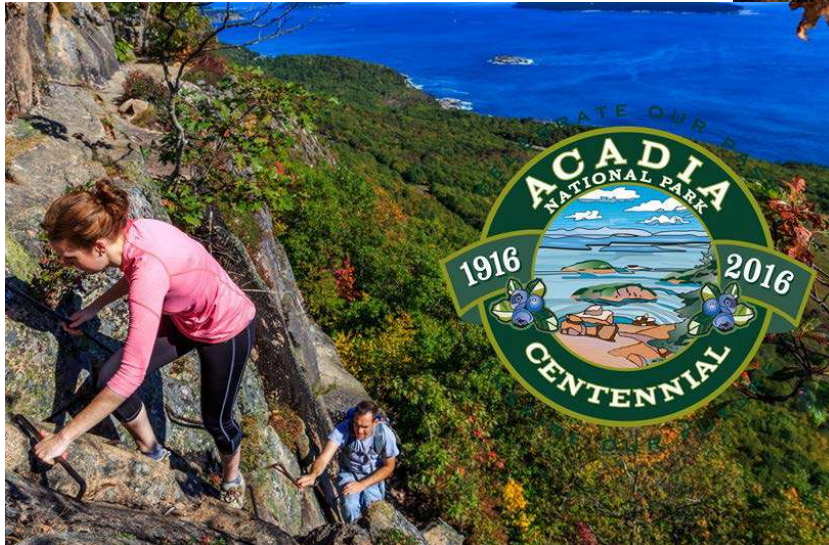
**Creation Care**

**Neighbour Care**

**Eschatology**

# Different paradigms of stewardship

- Preservationist
- Conservationist
- Developmental

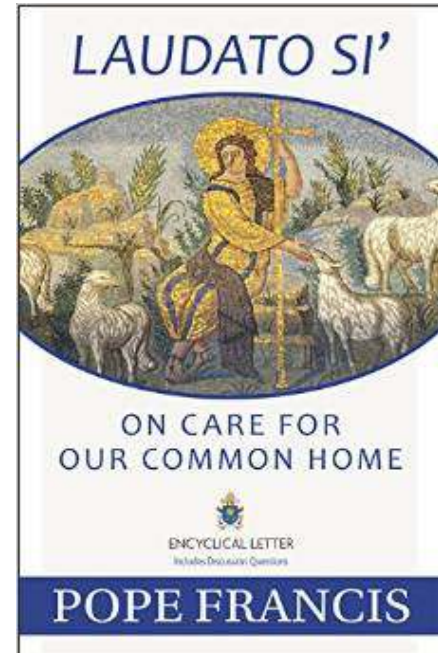




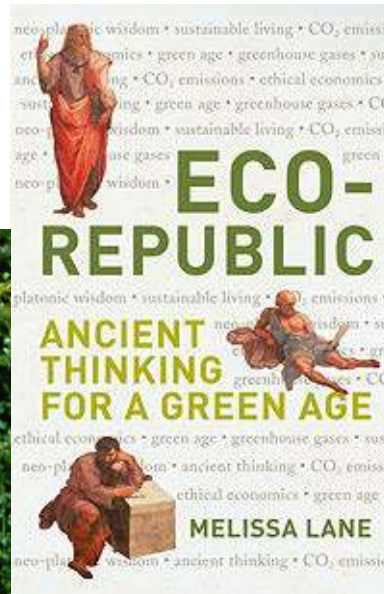
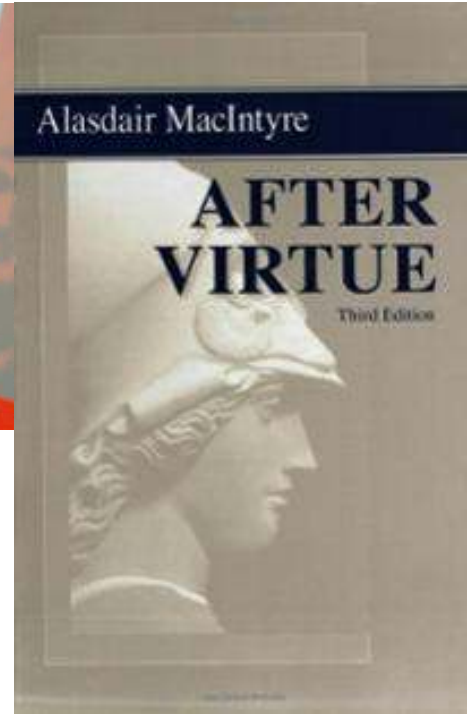
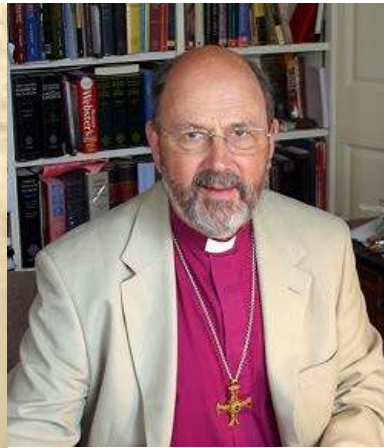
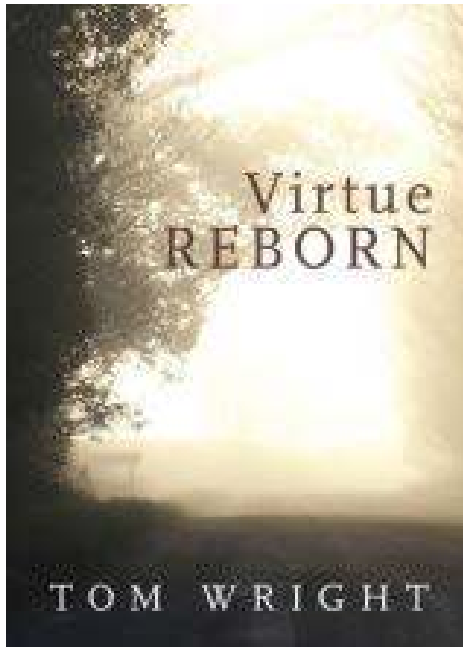
# Papal Encyclical - Laudato Si'

In many ways it transcends these categories:

- About the needs of the poor and the Janus face of technology
- A vision of human dignity and purpose
- The ecological crisis is a summons to an interior conversion



# Religion and behaviours -- virtue traditions



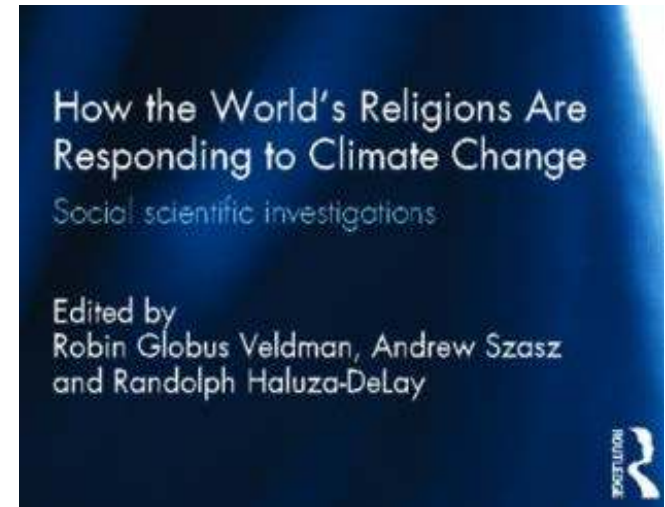
# Wright's virtuous circle





# Religion and behaviours -- adaptation

- Rainwater harvesting in Kiribas
- Disaster recovery in Solomons
- Climate advocacy in Canadian North
- How religious institutions and values affect mitigation & adaptation



# Is religion relevant for climate change?

**“Humanity’s ecological relations have religious and cultural dimensions. Failure to recognize and interpret those dimensions impoverishes environmental understanding, whereas engaging them has the potential to connect environmental questions with fundamental human questions of meaning, value, and purpose”**



Willis Jenkins

**Willis Jenkins, University of Virginia, 2016**

# What sort of a problem is climate change?



Ditch the 2°C warming goal



**Does GDP Growth  
Improve Our Well-  
being?**





# 'The world we want'?



**THE  
WORLD  
WE WANT**



***“Gathering priorities of people from every corner of the world, this project will build a collective vision that will be used directly by the UN and World Leaders to plan a new development agenda launching in 2015, one that is based on the aspirations of all citizens!”***

# Is religion relevant for climate change?

**Yes – religions influence interpretations of climate change: causes, moral culpabilities, responses**

**Yes – religious identity influences climate politics and (in)activism**

**Yes – religious institutions mobilise and constrain actions in different ways**

***... “because environmental issues are entangled with human ways of being in the world, they are [necessarily] entangled with religion. [And] insofar as religion is involved in how people inhabit and interpret their world, it is involved in ecologies”***



**Professor Mike Hulme**  
[www.mikehulme.org](http://www.mikehulme.org)  
[mike.hulme@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:mike.hulme@kcl.ac.uk)

