Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action

Prof Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackadu*

We stand at a pivotal moment in human and planetary history. The mounting urgency of climate change calls not only for technological solutions or political commitments, but for a radical reorientation of our spiritual, ethical, and communal lives. The climate crisis is a spiritual crisis. It challenges the Christian community to embody prophetic courage, moral clarity, and practical transformation. The World Council of Churches (WCC), recognising the need for such a transformative response, has launched the "Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2034)"—a spiritual pilgrimage toward ecological justice.

Real-World Suffering

The **impacts of climate change** are no longer theoretical—they are unfolding before our eyes with increasing intensity and frequency.

- **Rising sea levels** threaten the very existence of low-lying island nations and coastal communities, forcing climate-induced migration.
- **More intense and frequent cyclones, monsoons, and floods** have displaced millions across South Asia, particularly in India and Bangladesh.
- **Prolonged droughts** are becoming more common in sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Deccan Plateau, devastating agriculture and food security.
- **Glacier retreat** in the Himalayas is accelerating, threatening the water supply of over a billion people in South Asia.
- **Heatwaves** are growing in severity and duration, causing widespread health crises, particularly among the elderly, poor, and outdoor workers.
- **Water scarcity** is emerging as a critical issue in both urban and rural regions, exacerbating tensions and affecting hygiene and public health.
- **Biodiversity loss** is accelerating due to habitat destruction, coral bleaching, and changing climate zones, leading to the extinction of numerous species.
- **Forest fires** have become more frequent and intense in regions such as California, Australia, and even parts of India, destroying carbon sinks and displacing wildlife.
- **Agricultural disruptions** caused by erratic rainfall, shifting seasons, and pest outbreaks are threatening food production and farmer livelihoods globally.
- **Mental health challenges** and climate-related trauma are rising, especially among children, youth, and vulnerable populations.

- On **5 August 2025**, an extremely intense **cloudburst** occurred in the upper catchment of the **Kheer Ganga (Kheergad) river**, triggering a massive **flash flood** and mudslide through **Dharali village**, located along the pilgrimage route to **Gangotri Dham.** Wall-like torrents of water, rocks, and sludge moved at speed, sweeping away homes, shops, hotels, and infrastructure in seconds. In places, mud depths reached **15 meters**, submerging buildings.

The urgency is rooted in real-world suffering. Around the globe, communities are reeling from devastating floods, prolonged droughts, rising sea levels, intensifying wildfires, and food insecurity. The consequences are most severe for those who contributed the least to the crisis: Indigenous peoples, low-income communities, women, and future generations.

Understanding Resilience: Mitigation and Adaptation Resilience,

It refers to the ability of both human and non-human systems to withstand and respond to climate-induced changes. It bridges the gap between mitigation—cutting greenhouse gas emissions to limit temperature rise—and adaptation—coping with the unavoidable impacts of climate change. Mitigation seeks to limit global warming to below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, by reducing emissions by at least 50% by 2050. Adaptation acknowledges that even with reduced emissions, climate disruptions will persist and must be addressed locally, taking into account geography and vulnerability. Resilience integrates these two, providing a balanced and dynamic response to climate change.

The Limits of COP Negotiations

Despite numerous annual meetings under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Conference of the Parties (COP) has often failed to produce decisive outcomes. The reasons include conflicting national interests, reluctance of developed nations to finance adaptation and loss and damage, lack of enforceable commitments, and the influence of fossil fuel lobbies. Promises such as the $100 billion climate finance pledge remain largely unfulfilled, highlighting the gap between rhetoric and reality.

Carbon Economy and the Path to Sustainability

A central aspect of addressing the climate crisis is the shift from a carbon-intensive economy to a sustainable, net-zero carbon economy. Transitioning to renewable energy sources, enhancing energy efficiency, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and supporting circular economies are essential steps. These measures align with Christian ethical commitments to justice, responsibility, and care for creation. The transition to a Solar Hydrogen economy requires deliberate and coordinated efforts across all levels of society. This transition offers vast employment opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable transportation, waste management, agriculture, water conservation, and green construction. The Church must take the lead in preparing communities for this shift by promoting education, training, and a vision for a just and sustainable economic order. Engineering colleges and vocational institutions must revise their curricula to equip future generations with the skills necessary for this emerging economy.

Theological Roots and the Misuse of Dominion

The root causes of climate change lie in an extractive and unsustainable global economy: fossil fuel dependency, deforestation, overconsumption, industrial agriculture, and the relentless pursuit of profit measured by GDP. Tragically, the model of limitless growth has failed to

recognise the Earth's finite limits and the sacred interconnectedness of all life. The dominant interpretation of Genesis 1:28—human dominion over the Earth—has been exploited to justify environmental abuse. But a closer biblical reading reveals a mandate not of domination, but of mutual responsibility and care. Genesis 2:15 commands humanity to "serve and preserve" creation. Psalm 24:1 reminds us, "The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."

Ecological Metanoia: Repentance and Transformation

The Christian response must begin with repentance—ecological metanoia. The WCC calls churches to turn from systems of ecological sin, including colonialism, consumerism, and extractive capitalism. This repentance must lead to transformation: of hearts, theology, institutions, and public witness. We are called not just to lament, but to act—to reimagine holiness as right relationship with Earth and neighbour, and to live this faith through concrete, prophetic commitments.

Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation and Ecocide Law

One such commitment is support for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (FFNPT), a global initiative to halt new fossil fuel development, equitably phase out existing production, and fast-track a just transition to clean energy. Churches are urged to endorse and amplify this campaign.

Equally important is the campaign to make "ecocide" an international crime. Recognising ecocide in international law would hold corporations and governments accountable, ensuring that the rights of nature are upheld alongside human rights.

A Call for Economic Transformation

The call for climate justice also includes economic transformation. Climate finance is essential to support adaptation and resilience. Loss and damage funding must compensate those already suffering irreversible harm. The cancellation of unjust debts and implementation of fair taxation systems—especially for high-emission industries—are moral imperatives rooted in biblical justice.

Carbon Neutrality Initiatives of the Church of South India

The **Church of South India (CSI)** is committed to becoming a **carbon-neutral church** through two interlinked strategies: transforming parish life and empowering students as ecological leaders. The first approach is rooted in local congregations. The **CSI Synod** has adopted a **Green Protocol**, encouraging all parishes to embed sustainable practices into church programs and community life. This includes promoting **responsible resource use**, **waste reduction**, **eco-friendly celebrations**, and **environmentally conscious choices**. By following the Green Protocol, parishes become more than places of worship—they become **models of ecological discipleship** and **centers of environmental ethics**. The second approach focuses on education through the **Climate-Resilient Schools and Communities (CRSC)** initiative, launched in 2018. This program engages over **2,000 CSI schools** across South India through the **Green School Programme (GSP)**, fostering climate action among young learners. Students conduct **eco-audits**

to assess and reduce their schools' environmental impact in areas such as **energy, water, waste, biodiversity**, and **food sustainability**. A defining feature of the program is its emphasis on **community extension**: students are encouraged to bring eco-friendly practices into their homes and neighborhoods, amplifying their impact beyond school grounds. Through this initiative, CSI is nurturing a generation of **climate-literate, action-oriented young leaders**. These students are transforming not only their campuses but also their communities into **hubs of climate resilience**.

Churches Involved in Climate Justice Ministry

Around the world, Christian churches are embracing their spiritual and moral responsibility to respond to the climate crisis. Grounded in faith, justice, and stewardship, many denominations are actively reducing their ecological footprints and advocating for climate justice, particularly for vulnerable communities.

The Anglican Communion Environmental Network (ACEN) connects Anglican provinces in responding to environmental and climate challenges. ACEN promotes the Season of Creation, supports Anglican participation in UN climate negotiations, and fosters youth leadership and ecological discipleship, especially in climate-vulnerable regions like the Pacific, Africa, and South Asia.

The Church of England, through its Shrinking the Footprint campaign, aims to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. It encourages green building practices, offers theological resources, and trains clergy in Creation Care. The Church has divested from fossil fuels through its Church Commissioners and supports diocesan-level climate action.

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The **Uniting Church in Australia** (UCA) advocates climate justice through its Uniting Climate Action Plan. It supports Pacific Island churches facing sea level rise, promotes **fossil fuel divestment**, and provides liturgical and educational tools to foster **Creation Care**.

Theological Foundations for Creation Care

Theologically, climate action is central to the gospel. Colossians 1:15–20 proclaims Christ as the reconciler of all creation. Romans 8:22 speaks of creation groaning for liberation. Revelation 21 envisions a restored Earth. To follow Christ today is to walk in solidarity with all creation.

Pilgrimage Toward Systemic Change

As we enter the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action, we are called not only to charity but to systemic change. We must challenge extractive economies, unjust trade policies, and false solutions like geo-engineering[i] and carbon offsets[ii]. New economic models such as the Economy of Life[iii] and Doughnut Economics[iv] offer pathways to true sustainability. Both models **align with Christian values** of justice and care for the poor and vulnerable. They challenge the dominant systems of **greed, overconsumption, and ecological sin** and offer hope for a **just and sustainable future**.

Centering the Marginalized and Collaborative Leadership

In this pilgrimage, **youth, women, Indigenous peoples, and climate migrants** must be at the center. Their wisdom and leadership are essential. Churches are called to collaborate ecumenically and interfaithfully to amplify action.

Conclusion: Faith in Action for Creation

The Christian response to the ecological crisis must be holistic, prophetic, and rooted in faith. It must combine **prayer with protest**, **theology with action**, and **repentance with restoration**. We are called to rise—across nations and generations—**to dance in rhythm with God's renewing Spirit**.

"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

(This paper was presented by Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu at a joint theological consultation organized by Faith Theological Seminary, Manakala, and United Theological College, Bengaluru, on 8th

August 2025. Dr. Punnackadu currently serves as a Commissioner for Climate Justice and Sustainable Development with the World Council of Churches.)

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[i] **Geo-engineering** refers to **large-scale, human-made technological interventions in the Earth's climate system** designed to counteract global warming. Reflect sunlight back into space to cool the Earth. Extract CO_2 from the atmosphere and store it.

Why Critics Call It a "False Solution":

- **Unpredictable side effects**: Could disrupt rainfall, monsoons, or ecosystems.
- **Moral hazard**: May reduce pressure to cut actual emissions.
- **Control and equity**: Who decides when, where, and how to deploy such technologies? Could impact vulnerable nations without their consent.
- **Distraction**: Focuses on techno-fixes instead of addressing root causes (like fossil fuel use, overconsumption, and ecological degradation).

[ii] Carbon offsets are **credits purchased to compensate for greenhouse gas emissions** by funding projects that claim to reduce or absorb carbon elsewhere.

Examples of Offset Projects: Planting trees. Renewable energy projects in developing countries
Methane capture from landfills, Forest conservation

Why They're Often Criticised:

- **Lack of real emission cuts**: Offsets allow polluters to keep emitting without changing behavior.
- **Questionable effectiveness**: Many offset projects don't deliver promised reductions or are hard to measure/verify.
- **Land grabs and injustice**: Some projects, especially forest-related ones, have displaced Indigenous peoples or restricted local land use.
- **Greenwashing**: Companies or governments claim climate leadership while continuing business-as-usual.

In Theological and Justice Terms:

- Both **geo-engineering and carbon offsets** may **ignore ecological humility**, relying on **control and compensation** rather than **repentance and systemic change**.
- They often **delay true transformation**, allowing extractive economies to continue exploiting both Earth and the poor.
- A **faithful response** calls for **real emission reductions**, **justice-centered adaptation**, and **ecological restoration—not shortcuts**.

[iii] **Economy of Life**

The **Economy of Life** is a **faith-rooted economic vision** developed by the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** and partners like the **World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)** and **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**. It proposes a just, sustainable, and life-affirming economy that serves all people and the planet, not profit or power.

Key Principles:

- **Justice and sustainability** over exploitation and profit
- **Dignity of all life**—human and non-human
- **Redistribution of wealth and power**, especially from polluters to vulnerable communities
- **Economy guided by ethics**, compassion, and responsibility
- **Ecological conversion**—shifting away from extractive industries

Actions Promoted:

- Divesting from fossil fuels
- Promoting renewable energy
- Tax justice and debt cancellation
- Supporting local economies and food sovereignty
- Integrating economic ethics into theological education

Biblical Inspiration:

- *John 10:10*: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
- *Amos 5:24*: "Let justice roll down like waters…"

[iv] **Doughnut Economics** is a concept developed by economist **Kate Raworth**. It visualises a new economic model where humanity can **meet everyone's needs within the limits of the planet**.

The Doughnut Image:

It looks like a doughnut with two rings:

- **Inner ring (social foundation)**: Ensures everyone has life essentials—food, water, education, health, housing, income, etc.
- **Outer ring (ecological ceiling)**: Keeps humanity within **planetary boundaries**—climate, biodiversity, oceans, air, etc.

The goal: Stay within the "safe and just space" between these two rings.

Core Values:

- Equity and inclusion
- Planetary boundaries (climate, water, biodiversity)
- Circular economy and regeneration
- Systems thinking and long-term well-being
- Moving beyond GDP as the measure of success

Cities like **Amsterdam, Brussels, and Nanaimo (Canada)** are applying Doughnut Economics to shape **climate-resilient and socially just urban planning**.

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To be continued

In the next issue

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Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action

Churches Involved in Climate Justice Ministry

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[Second part of the paper 'Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action']

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To be continued

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Season of Creation 2025

Pursue 'Peace with Creation'

Theme Presentation

>>> Contd. from Page 1 Col. 4

Isaiah 32:14-18

"For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks. Until a spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness, and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places." Isaiah 32:14-18 (NRVUE)

Peace is more than just the absence of war. In the Hebrew Bible, *shalom* represents a far deeper concept — one that extends beyond the absence of conflict to the full restoration of broken relationships, as illustrated in Isaiah's vision. This restoration encompasses our relationship with God, ourselves, the human family, and the rest of Creation.

War on Creation.

"The palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and watchtower will become dens forever, the joy of wild asses, a pasture for flocks" (Isaiah 32:14).

The prophet Isaiah portrays a desolate Creation, devoid of peace due to injustice and the broken relationship between God and humankind. Devastated cities and wastelands reflect the destructive impact that human activities can have on Earth. Notably, animals readily move in and claim parts of what was once an exclusively human habitat, as if human settlement had deprived them of sufficient space. While the joy of a pasture for animals [Isaiah 32:14] is undoubtedly a good thing in itself, it comes at the cost of human displacement due to conflict.

Though God's plan for Creation is rooted in justice and peace, human sin disrupts this, leaving Creation in ruin—from wealthy palaces to poor farmlands, forests, and oceans. Isaiah vividly describes the results of human estrangement from Creation. Moreover, the abandoned and ruined watchtower and palace (or citadel, in some translations) suggest that warfare is ultimately frustrated by God.

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Methane capture from landfills, Forest conservation

Why They're Often Criticised:

- **Lack of real emission cuts**: Offsets allow polluters to keep emitting without changing behavior.
- **Questionable effectiveness**: Many offset projects don't deliver promised reductions or are hard to measure/verify.
- **Land grabs and injustice**: Some projects, especially forest-related ones, have displaced Indigenous peoples or restricted local land use.
- **Greenwashing**: Companies or governments claim climate leadership while continuing business-as-usual.

In Theological and Justice Terms:

- Both **geo-engineering and carbon offsets** may **ignore ecological humility**, relying on **control and compensation** rather than **repentance and systemic change**.
- They often **delay true transformation**, allowing extractive economies to continue exploiting both Earth and the poor.
- A **faithful response** calls for **real emission reductions**, **justice-centered adaptation**, and **ecological restoration — not shortcuts**.

Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu is presently the Commissioner, Climate Justice and Sustainable Development of the World Council of Churches

Economy of Life[iii]

The **Economy of Life** is a **faith-rooted economic vision** developed by the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** and partners like the **World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC)** and **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**. It proposes a just, sustainable, and life-affirming economy that serves all people and the planet, not profit or power.

Key Principles:

- **Justice and sustainability** over exploitation and profit
- **Dignity of all life**—human and non-human
- **Redistribution of wealth and power**, especially from polluters to vulnerable communities
- **Economy guided by ethics**, compassion, and responsibility
- **Ecological conversion**—shifting away from extractive industries

Actions Promoted:

- Divesting from fossil fuels
- Promoting renewable energy
- Tax justice and debt cancellation
- Supporting local economies and food sovereignty
- Integrating economic ethics into theological education

Biblical Inspiration:

- ***John 10:10*: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."**
- ***Amos 5:24*: "Let justice roll down like waters…"**

Doughnut Economics[iv]

is a concept developed by economist **Kate Raworth**. It visualises a new economic model where humanity can **meet everyone's needs within the limits of the planet**.

The Doughnut Image:

It looks like a doughnut with two rings:

- **Inner ring (social foundation)**: Ensures everyone has life essentials—food, water, education, health, housing, income, etc.
- **Outer ring (ecological ceiling)**: Keeps humanity within **planetary boundaries**—climate, biodiversity, oceans, air, etc.

The goal: Stay within the "safe and just space" between these two rings.

Core Values:

- Equity and inclusion
- Planetary boundaries (climate, water, biodiversity)
- Circular economy and regeneration
- Systems thinking and long-term well-being

Moving beyond GDP as the measure of success

Cities like **Amsterdam, Brussels, and Nanaimo (Canada)** are applying Doughnut Economics to shape **climate-resilient and socially just urban planning**.

Centering the Marginalized and Collaborative Leadership

In this pilgrimage, **youth, women, Indigenous peoples, and climate migrants** must be at the center. Their wisdom and leadership are essential. Churches are called to collaborate ecumenically and interfaithfully to amplify action.

The Christian response to the ecological crisis must be holistic, prophetic, and rooted in faith.
It must combine prayer with protest, theology with action, and repentance with restoration.
We are called to rise — across nations and generations — to dance in rhythm with God's renewing Spirit.

Conclusion: Faith in Action for Creation

The Christian response to the ecological crisis must be holistic, prophetic, and rooted in faith. It must combine prayer with protest, theology with action, and repentance with restoration. We are called to rise—across nations and generations—to dance in rhythm with God's renewing Spirit.

"Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

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