

Now that our Parliament at long last has a chance to concentrate on other important issues, and with our Government chairing the Glasgow Conference this year, this is the time to urge our MPs to make climate change and environmental protection a very top priority.

The vast majority of climate scientists have been saying for 3 decades that urgent action is needed to prevent the average surface temperature of the earth rising more than 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. According to UN, we now face a direct existential threat, and have less than 18 months to change course. If action is not taken, we can expect increasingly severe and unpredictable weather events, more flooding, more deserts, more fires, less available safe drinking water, less food security, significantly more migration. Coupled with this is human activity causing the massive loss of biodiversity with huge numbers of species becoming extinct, the acidification of the oceans which effects fish stocks, rising ocean levels, the release of methane, the damaging effects of aspects of industrial agriculture, the decline of rainforests. And of course, the areas of the world most severely affected are not 'the West', but sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia - among the poorest and least developed areas, which have done least to cause climate damage, and are often least equipped to adapt. Which makes this issue primarily one of climate justice.

Although the UK led the way in our 2008 Climate Change Act, we - and most other countries - are falling far short of the commitments made at Paris in 2015; and our current policy of working for zero carbon by 2050 is on far too long a timescale. Sir David King recently said that *'the right date for zero emissions is probably in the past. I think it's not necessary to argue whether or not [zero emissions by 2030] is realistic; we need to look at what is necessary, and... to be doing that well.'*

Now that we in the UK are moving away from the environmental protections of the EU, it is vital that a new Environment Bill will safeguard them when we leave. The draft Bill presented last October does not offer such protections, nor does it provide a clear course to sustainability, nor to zero carbon emissions. Can it protect our agriculture and industry in future trade deals? How will it secure clean air for our children? Will it provide a mechanism to end the export of plastic waste? How is Parliament to hold the Secretary of State to account on these and many other questions?

Sir David Attenborough, Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion, and now Prince William, have all helpfully changed the public mood about the realisation that we are now in a climate emergency. It is up to our Parliament to demonstrate through clear action that it has heard and is responding. This will need among other things to:

- reduce emissions from fossil fuels to zero; stop subsidising fossil fuels; instead give huge subsidies to renewal energy generation; seriously plan for general use of electric vehicles;
- re-invest in carbon capture and storage;
- invest in the planting of trees;
- put a tax on carbon;
- work to reduce the use of agricultural land for cattle, which could be used instead to provide food for hungry people;
- encourage large reduction in the eating of red meat;
- bring pressure to bear against governments which support the cutting down of rain forests;
- show global leadership by encouraging all other signatories, along with ourselves, to the Paris Climate Accord not only to live up to their commitments but to realise the need for even more demanding and urgent targets; to work towards these, and to enable financial support for less developed countries to follow.

Underneath the environmental emergency is an economic model based largely on the assumption of limitless financial growth, which is simply unsustainable on a finite planet. This has to change to an

economic model based on human welfare and the health of the natural environment, in which ecology, economy and equity are thought through together.

The benefits of changing our priorities and our lifestyles are not only an environment safer and more sustainable for our children and grandchildren, who will have to deal with the world we are leaving to them, but are also that it would now give us cleaner air, better health, better food security, more sustainable agriculture.

Our motivation as Christians is rooted in our celebration of the natural world as God's creation and source of joy ('the earth is the Lord's'), and our calling as human beings as God's image-bearers together to care for God's gift. A Christian view points towards mutual interdependence, cooperation and service rather than to individualised competition, selfishness and greed. Now is the time for serious Government action.

David Atkinson

Dr David Atkinson is an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Southwark