

An Epiphany Message About Climate Change

An Epiphany message about Climate Change from Professor Ian M. Arbon, Chartered Engineer, Chartered Environmentalist, Visiting Professor, Centre for Energy Policy University of Strathclyde. This was originally published in St John's, Stranraer's church magazine.

It's never easy to write a New Year message that does much more than bemoan the tradition of making resolutions that we never keep for more than a few days, so I decided to try to stick with the theme of Epiphany and what that could mean to us in a practical way. By the time you read this, I should have preached on the subject of the Epiphany, when we observe it, on Sunday 5th January, so I don't want to repeat myself too much. However, what I noted then was that each of us could expect to have times in our lives when we experience a personal epiphany –that moment when the “lightbulb comes on” in our thinking, as a result of a revelation from God.

A number of you have been asking me questions recently about practical ways in which we can help deal with Climate Change, a field where there still seems to be some confusion in many people's minds – not least among our politicians in the UK! Maybe we could have an ‘Epiphany’ on this subject?

As some of you know, I have worked in the field of sustainable energy for over 40 years (in industry, learned societies and academia) and I am excited because 2020 is shaping up to be a crucial year for our attempts to deal with the impacts and effects of Climate Change. This is especially true for the UK and for Scotland in particular, as the UN's COP-26 (26th Conference of the Parties) is coming to the SEC in Glasgow from the 9 to 20th November 2020.

Given that COP-25, in Madrid, has recently ended inconclusively, there is now great pressure for COP-26 to produce some tangible result, not least to justify the need for an estimated 30,000 people to jet into Glasgow, with all of the attendant greenhouse gas emissions they produce. 2020 is also a significant year because it is the target date set, a decade or so ago, for the achievement of many of the international commitments which our Government has made on our behalf.

It is ironic that by the time of COP-26, it will have become very apparent that the UK will have failed to achieve almost all of these commitments, at least without resorting to the manipulation of statistics! It has been fascinating to observe the international outcry over the spectacular New Year firework display in Sydney, Australia, at the same time that thousands of people in and around that city are losing their homes and even their lives as a result of the raging bushfires which are generally believed to be caused by Climate Change! Yet the protests centre around the enormous financial cost and the insensitivity of the firework display with no acknowledgement of the resultant atmospheric pollution. Similarly, the environmental damage wreaked by huge firework displays all over the world are ignored; in Edinburgh, the year of COP-26 in Glasgow was ushered in by throwing more dioxins into the sky in one night than would be emitted in a year by an energy-from-waste plant which could provide clean energy and handle our waste problem! But such plants are

invariably opposed by many in Scotland. The inconsistencies are staggering.

As a Christian who passionately believes that God has given us the responsibility for the proper 'stewardship' of His Creation, I have been trying for decades to get people to take Climate Change seriously and to significantly change their lifestyles - since long before Greta Thunberg was born or Extinction Rebellion was thought of! I absolutely share these young people's frustration over the prevarication and inaction of world Governments, even though their tactics and proposed 'solutions' are not conducive to a successful outcome.

Rather than swamp the Church Magazine with more on the same, I will close with just one practical illustration of where we, as concerned individuals, could make a difference – by considering cutting down on the number of flights each of us makes in a year. We must not 'demonise' air travel – often there is no realistic alternative but we can at least think about the consequences of our flights. Aircraft are notoriously responsible for an enormously high level of greenhouse gas emissions, yet they are not even included (particularly international flights) in our Government's published statistics. Nevertheless, recent analysis has shown that the vast majority of commercial flights made within and to and from the UK are for 'leisure' purposes – it's no longer mainly business people who are jetting around the planet but holidaymakers, just like you and me! I would be the first to agree that holidays are very important to us but we can hardly claim that they are 'essential travel'! It is becoming increasingly obvious that, despite all the so-called commitments, our Governments are not going to be able to find the solutions to these problems; the answer lies in every one of us changing our own behaviour patterns and living more 'sustainable' lifestyles.

As we begin a new year and a new decade, instead of making banal and pointless 'resolutions', let us ask God for a new epiphany or revelation of how we can change our lives for the better – surely an eminently Christian response! And a good place to start might be to see how we can cut down our 'air miles'!