

Making Peace with the Earth

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Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice



Edited by Grace Ji-Sun Kim
Foreword by Guillermo Kerber



**World Council
of Churches**
Publications

MAKING PEACE WITH THE EARTH

Action and Advocacy for Climate Justice

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FOREWORD

Guillermo Kerber

This volume draws on the lived *experience* of Christian churches around the world as they address the problems, perils, and possibilities inherent in climate change.

In 2013 the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, concluded by inviting Christians and all people to join a pilgrimage of justice and peace. In 2015, in various countries, pilgrimages for climate justice were organized by churches, specialized ministries, and ecumenical and civil society organizations. Many of these pilgrimages were the result of what churches have been doing on climate and ecological issues for many years. Climate justice is a complementary dimension of peace with the earth, one of the components of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation which concluded the Decade to Overcome Violence, Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace, held in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011.

In recent years, more and more publications in various regions and in different languages are addressing the climate and ecological crises from theological perspectives. These theological reflections have been inspired by concrete actions taken by churches on the ground. At the same time the theological insights have inspired Christians to translate into action a renewed concern for creation.

The purpose of this book is to show through some particular cases how churches and church-related organizations have been translating into practice, through action and advocacy, peace with the earth and climate justice. Together with concrete actions being taken by churches on the ground (green churches and eco-congregations being an example of these), churches' advocacy at the national and international level on environmental issues has a history of more than twenty years. The Earth Summit or United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, can be seen as a catalyst in the international arena as three environmental conventions were adopted there by the international community: the convention on biological diversity, the convention on desertification, and the convention on climate change. Churches, as we will see in one of the chapters of this book, were strongly involved in Rio 1992 and since then, especially at the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change that started in 1995.

The World Council of Churches' Working Group on Climate Change, also in existence for more than twenty years, has been a space where representatives of member churches, other churches, specialized ministries and civil society organizations working on care for creation and climate justice have come together to share experiences, learn from each other and strategize for advocacy at COPs and at the United Nations Human Rights Council. Most of the chapters of this book have been written by members of the Working Group. But, because the group does not cover the full variety of actions being developed on these issues, other people were also invited to contribute to this volume.

Despite this long history of ecumenical engagement, in many places ecology and specifically climate change continue to be a topic far from the action of the churches. Publication of this book is meant to share with a wider public stories and reflections from very diverse contexts and with very diverse styles. The contributions reflect the richness of the ecumenical movement in addressing the challenges and also the difficulty in finding a common pattern. Yet "caring for creation" and "striving for climate justice" can be seen as concepts that reflect what churches have been doing based on a theology of creation which responds to the current ecological crisis and an ethics of climate that recognizes that those countries and communities who suffer today (and will suffer tomorrow) the worst consequences of climate change are those who have contributed the least to the causes, mainly the increase in CO₂ emissions.

The ecumenical work on the ecological and climate crises has been done not in isolation but in close cooperation with other churches, other faith traditions and the global civil society movement.

Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato si* shows how the topics that have been at the core of the ecumenical movement's work for climate justice are also essential to the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Care for creation as our common home, the need to listen to the cry of the earth together with the cry of the poor, the need for profound change from the individual to the international level, a deep spirituality of creation and the relevance of education are some of the key common aspects highlighted by the encyclical.

Recent interfaith statements, like those adopted in New York in September 2014 at the Climate Change Summit or presented to the UNFCCC Secretariat in October 2015, reveal an increasing interfaith consensus in addressing the topic. The statements, based on the different faith traditions, called the international community to agree on a fair, ambitious, and binding treaty to respond to the climate change threat, and express the commitment of faith leaders to implement in their communities the necessary changes.

Campaigns and advocacy at the international level have also been undertaken by the ecumenical movement in cooperation with larger non-governmental organizations and networks. The World Council of Churches has worked especially with the Global Call for Climate Action, linking faith voices to other voices which share the same perspectives and concerns, and with 350.org in mobilizing people all over the world for an effective response to the threats humanity is facing because of climate change. The call to divest from fossil fuels, which has been listened to by many churches, theological seminaries, and other church-related organizations, with the WCC's Central Committee having explicitly included fossil fuels among the list of areas where the WCC will not invest, is one example of this collaboration.

As a result of long years of negotiations and strong advocacy being done by faith communities and civil society at large, the 21st meeting of the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change adopted in December 2015 the so called Paris Agreement. The international community has reached a consensus on how to address the climate crisis, which is very much welcomed, but much more is needed to hold "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C," as the Agreement expresses in Article 2. Courageous decisions will have to be

taken by governments to limit the increase in the global average temperature. Actions and advocacy by churches and faith based organizations cannot stop now but should look for other creative forms of engagement to inspire and put into practice the needed “ecological conversion,” as Pope Francis put it, for the care of our common home.

While sharing a host of examples of churches’ action and reflection on the topic, this book will, we hope, also be an invitation to further commit and share stories of action and advocacy for climate justice.

Guillermo Kerber

Programme on Care for Creation and Climate Justice
World Council of Churches

PREFACE

Grace Ji-Sun Kim

I remember visiting my grandmother's house when I was a young girl living in Korea.¹ I have fond memories of playing in the *madang* (a Korean term that describes a courtyard within a traditional Korean home). Most Korean houses are surrounded by a large metal fence with a front gate that leads into the *madang*.

A typical part of Korean homes, the *madang* is much like a family room where family and friends gather to rest, talk, share, and engage with each other. Most of the rooms in the home are entered through the *madang* and thus it serves as a space for encounter and sharing, celebration and fellowship, greeting a visitor and welcoming a stranger. Ancient, medieval, and even contemporary European buildings are built on the same principle. Perhaps the *madang* is something like the courtyard at the Cloisters in New York City, although the surrounding building there is far larger than what my grandmother had or what most Korean homes would have. My grandmother's home was small, with just two rooms leading away from the *madang*.

The tenth assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was held in Busan, South Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013. Participating churches, along with ecumenical organizations and groups, created a *madang* with information booths, cultural performers, and workshops. This *madang* became an energetic meeting place where individuals and groups continued ongoing conversations, shared, brainstormed, envisioned, and reimaged.

The participants in the tenth assembly adopted a message that asked churches and Christians to join in a “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.” Many are now working on what it means to be on this pilgrimage.

Part of this journey and pilgrimage involves doing environmental justice and making peace with the earth. And this requires working on the pressing issue of climate change, one of the most challenging realities in today’s world. People and vulnerable groups—in particular, communities—face climate change in various parts of the world. Churches and other faith-based communities are called to address climate change. Some Christians and churches fail to recognize the reality of climate change, however, because of their views on the Bible and faith. Others do not believe in climate change because of culturally conditioned climate skepticism. Yet others believe that it is not the role of faith communities to address climate change, feeling that it is not religion’s job to engage any political issues.

Why should churches address environmental or climate-change issues? Why should Protestants join Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Evangelicals in caring for creation initiatives? Why should Christians look to join interfaith work with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and other faith traditions? Why should they advocate for climate justice and peace with the earth? These are just some of the questions that Christians, churches, and faith communities face when addressing climate change.

In light of these questions and doubts, the WCC is addressing climate change for two specific reasons. First, churches in various parts of the world recognize how the consequences of climate change affect the lives and livelihoods of their communities. In an effort to respond to these consequences, churches are helping to develop resilient communities, equipped to adapt to climate change. These churches benefit greatly by learning from the work of other faith communities from around the world. Second, at the local level, churches of different denominations are coming together to respond to the impacts of climate change and to advocate at local and national levels for policies that respond to the needs and rights of vulnerable populations. In both instances, the WCC has a unique ability to build networks and relationships between churches around the globe, and to accompany and enhance their work.

As scientific reports confirm, climate change affects the people who have been made the most vulnerable in our societies. Climate change intertwines with issues of land, food, work, devastation, and human dignity. Climate

change often results in people becoming vulnerable to losing their land and being forced to live in other areas that are not devastated by climate change. The rights of the victims of climate change are being violated in various ways and the threats to human beings and to life in our planet will only get worse.

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations must embrace the climate-change issue vigorously. Advocacy for the earth must become a priority. For example, all must work towards preventing Earth's temperature from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius. Unlimited carbon pollution must be stopped. There needs to be a strong mitigation of CO₂ emissions by wealthy countries, so those countries still developing do not suffer from a burnt-out planet, through no fault of their own. All these steps are crucial to address climate change.

Environmental justice is intimately related to economic justice. The environment affects our economy, and people who live in poverty are the most affected. To emphasize and illustrate the link between these two intertwined issues, the WCC adopted the term *eco-justice*.

Furthermore, without environmental justice, there cannot be peace. The WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, held in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011 clearly stated that there can be "*no peace on earth without peace with the earth.*" The way we have related to the earth, however, is with little conservation and no restraint. We have lost any tradition of being stewards of the earth. This path of violence and domination may not lead to open war, but it contributes to the destruction of the earth.

The earth cries out and pleads with us to join together to work toward climate justice and environmental justice. We need to advocate for the earth and be at *peace with the earth*. We need to come into the earth's *madang* and be in that space to share, communicate, fellowship, greet a stranger, and welcome a friend. We need to bring Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, individuals, communities, politicians, churches, and corporations into the *madang*, so all can challenge each other to live a life of stewardship rather than of greed, domination, and destruction. We all need to turn to the God of life and ask God to lead us to social justice and peace.

To respond to this threat to humanity and to earth as a whole, even climate-change skeptics must join in the journey for the protection and sustainability of the earth. This book tackles the important ecological-justice questions of our time. It is a collection from climate activists, faith leaders, theologians, and others who are on the pilgrimage of justice and peace, reflecting on climate

justice and peace with the earth. The concrete experience of churches around the world can be instructive for the reader's church, and this volume gathers that hard-earned knowledge. This book seeks to provide imaginative possibilities of how the church, faith communities, individuals, and the academy can move forward to help save God's creation. It serves as an example of a virtual *madang*. It is my hope that readers will create *madangs* around the world: linked-together places for the worldwide church to work together to make changes in the world that will help lead toward peace on earth. The *madang* is open; let us come in, converse, envision, and reimagine. The journey has already begun and our hope is that everyone will join in this journey of justice and peace with the earth.

Acknowledgments

This book rose out of the 2014 Climate Change Working Group for the World Council of Churches at Wuppertal, Germany. Through the various discussions, site visits, and presentations, it became very clear that a published book was necessary to address the concern about climate change and sustainability of the church and the academy.

I thank the World Council of Churches for their dedication and work for climate justice. The WCC has placed high emphasis on the importance of creation care, social justice, and sustainability. It has shared its deep social concern by responding to the heightened alarm resulting from the increase of pollution and carbon waste and how it affects the people around the globe who are the most vulnerable.

My deepest thanks to Dr Guillermo Kerber, who has coordinated the work on Care for Creation and Climate Justice at the WCC for more than ten years. He understands the tensions and dynamics of how churches work, or resist working, toward climate justice. His deep theological understanding and approach to climate justice helped launch this book project. He provided guidance and support for this project.

I thank Michael West, the editor at WCC Publishing, who showed great interest and understood the necessity of this project right from the start. His constant care for this project from the beginning to its publication is commended and appreciated. His wisdom and knowledge helped strengthen this book and make it a reality.

I express my gratitude to each of the contributors to this book. Many of the writers are part of the WCC Climate Change Working Group and are engaged in their own churches and organizations on working toward climate justice. Some of the contributors are not part of the Climate Change Working Group, and I appreciate their faithful work on climate justice and their contributions to this book. Each writer showed support and patience with the editing process.

Lastly, I thank my family. My sister, my brother-in-law, my nephew Matthew, and my niece Naomi supported me and encouraged me. Naomi was helpful in her editorial suggestions and assistance. My husband, Perry, showed faithful support in helping me start, write, edit, and complete this book. He stood by me as I showed despair and loss of hope during the difficult times of finishing it. I thank my children for their constant wonder and amazement in my writing, research, and work. My daughter, Elisabeth, who is sensitive to environmental issues, is concerned that such a book on sustainability be published. My two boys, Theo and Joshua, accompanied me to various climate-change events held by the WCC. My youngest, Joshua, was with me in Wuppertal, Germany, when we decided to write this book. To my family, I owe my deepest gratitude and love.

This book is dedicated to my children, Theodore, Elisabeth, and Joshua, and to their generation, who are experiencing the effects of climate change and in whose hands we lay our hope for climate justice.

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