

Communicating with Religious Communities on Climate Change: Research Overview and Emergent Narratives

By George Marshall

In late September, my local church in rural Mid-Wales is filled with flowers and teetering displays of food for the Harvest Festival. This is a celebration with roots in pre-Christian faith (held around the full moon closest to the Autumn Equinox) at which communities come together to celebrate and give thanks for what has, hopefully, been a successful harvest. Last year, I was invited by the environmentally minded vicar to speak at the Festival time about climate change and its potentially severe impacts on future harvests and global poverty.

The congregation thanked me pleasantly over the tea and biscuits that followed. But whenever I tried to talk more about climate change, our conversations became awkward and stilted. They were mostly older people from farming families, and they had noticed dramatic changes in the weather over their lifetimes. Yet, despite this personal connection, they were unwilling to accept that there was any major cause for concern. They drew on arguments of continuity, saying that weather "has always changed," or that any changes that might come lie in the far future "when I am long dead and gone." People were very unwilling to stay with this subject and, invariably, steered the conversation as fast as politely possible to another, safer topic.

This anecdotal example contains useful insights for the wider challenge of engaging with people of faith. First, it displays, in microcosm, the complex mechanisms of avoidance and disavowal that suppress discussion of climate change. People are well aware that the climate is changing, but create subtle yet effective boundaries to prevent it being publically acknowledged or discussed.

Second, despite these people's strong shared faith, their attitudes about climate change were entirely consistent with that found among any other British people of their age and political worldview. My community is largely made up of "small-c" conservatives-- wary of ideology, and committed to family, community, and tradition. Balance and continuity are such strong principles for them that they are intuitively skeptical of all warnings of change. In the wider research, personal politics and age are far more important determinants of attitudes towards climate change than faith or any personal connection with the climate.

Third, as I stood in the medieval vestry, I found myself wondering to what extent the time-honored rituals of faith may mitigate against messages of radical change. Harvest Festivals have been celebrated inside this building for at least five hundred years, always at the same time each year. The season in which it is celebrated has been shifting by 2-3 days per decade.¹ The December that followed my presentation was, almost certainly, hotter than any since the church was founded, and spring flowers started blooming in the graveyard well before Christmas.² Yet the church itself, with its thick

¹ R.A. Sherry, X. Zhou, S. Gu, J.A. Arnone Iii, D.S. Schimel, P.S. Verburg, L.L. Wallace, and Y. Luo, "[Divergence of reproductive phenology under climate warming](#)," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **104** (1): 198-202, (2007).

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35119311>

stone walls, gives a misleading sense of sense of permanence and continuity. In our wider research, experts from all faiths commented on the challenge of finding a place for this new and unprecedented issue within their ancient theologies.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is no automatic and easy path from faith principles, even those grounded in a care for the earth and the vulnerable, to an acceptance of climate change. However, the institutions of faith--the church, the Sabbath, and the leadership of the priest--had all enabled me to start a conversation that would not otherwise have happened. I doubt if many people in the church that day had had any previous opportunity to consider climate change in any depth. The language of faith provided a shared code of values and identity that initiated a conversation and bridged otherwise insurmountable political barriers.

In opinion polls, the majority of people recognize that climate change is real, is caused by humans, and is a cause for concern.³ Recent research suggests that the level of concern is increasing. However, superficial answers to surveys can be misleading. Climate change has a very limited hold on people's attention. When asked directly, people often express concern, but when they are asked without prompting what issues concern them, few if any people remember to mention it. Every year since 2001, the Pew Research Center has asked people to choose the policy issue that should be a high priority for the US president. "Dealing with global warming" has never risen above the bottom slot.⁴

There are many reasons for this. It has been suggested by cognitive psychologists and specialists in the psychology of risk⁵ that climate change as an issue may lack the necessary qualities of proximity and immediacy to command people's attention.⁶ But it is not that simple. As my Welsh neighbours told me, changes in the weather are already significant and have already been underway for a generation. It appears that people choose to generate a "psychological distance" from the issue by deliberately creating narratives that place it far away in time and place- at the North Pole, or "after I am long dead and gone."⁷ Climate change is invariably presented as a problem for the future. Scientific models only claim authority for predictions some decades in the future. Politicians, pressured to respond to immediate issues, are mostly satisfied to categorize

³ A. Corner, (2013). A new conversation with the centre-right about climate change: Values, frames and narratives. Oxford: Climate Outreach and Information Network; D. Kahan, (2012). Why we are poles apart on climate change? *Nature* 488, 255; J. Smith, R. Tyszczuk, & R. Butler, (Eds). (2014). *Culture and climate change: Narratives*. Shed, Cambridge.

⁴ <http://www.people-press.org/files/2016/01/1-21-2016-Priorities-Release.pdf>

⁵ S. Van der Linden, (2015). The social-psychological determinants of climate change risk perceptions: Towards a comprehensive model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 41, 112-124.

http://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/slinden/files/jep_0.pdf

⁶ Center for Research on Environmental Decisions. (2009). *The Psychology of Climate Change Communication: A Guide for Scientists, Journalists, Educators, Political Aides, and the Interested Public*. New York.

⁷ A. Spence, et al. (2011). The Psychological Distance of Climate Change, *Risk Analysis* Volume 32, Issue 6, pages 957-972, June 2012.

http://www.climateaccess.org/sites/default/files/Spence_Psychological%20Distance%20of%20Climate%20Change.pdf. T. Isaksson, A. Corner, & C. Shaw, (2015). *Managing the psychological distance of climate change*. Oxford: Climate Outreach. <http://climateoutreach.org/resources/psychological-distance/>

climate change as a long-term problem. The public duly respond in kind--willingly identifying climate change as a major problem for future generations, though not for themselves. Some qualitative research in the US has suggested that a strong belief in the afterlife and divine intervention may be playing a role in leading some Christians to play down the urgency of climate change.⁸

Generally, though, the research suggests that people of faith are not significantly different in this respect than the wider public. Recent polling found that only 4% of British Christians cited climate change as a "major issue facing Britain *today*," far behind thirteen other issues. When the question was rephrased with greater distances: as "a major issue facing *the world* as a whole over the next *ten* years," that level of concern rose to 28%.⁹

As should already be evident, acceptance or rejection of climate change has little to do with a rational evaluation of the scientific evidence. A growing body of research has shown that climate change is interpreted primarily through the lens of people's values and worldview,¹⁰ and understandings of it are held and shared in the form of socially constructed narratives.¹¹ Where these narratives line up with people's existing worldview, and are transmitted between trusted social peers, they can become powerful motivators for change. However, when narratives conflict with people's worldviews, or are received from distrusted communicators, they can create deeply entrenched opposition. As the Australian academic Clive Hamilton puts it, "Denial is due to a surplus of culture rather than a deficit of information."¹²

At present, faith appears to be having little influence on people's environmental views. In the US, just 6% of US adults in the 2010 survey said religious beliefs have had the biggest influence on what they think about "tougher laws to protect the environment."¹³

Polls in the US consistently show that, regardless of religious affiliation, it is the demographic issues of class, politics, and ethnicity that are the dominant determinant of attitudes on climate change. For example, white Catholics have very similar levels of concern (or disregard) concerning climate change to white evangelical Protestants and, in the wider society, Republican voters. Hispanic Catholics, on the other hand are, despite a common religion, two-and-a-half times more likely to be "very concerned" about climate change, which is entirely consistent with the wider attitudes of Hispanics and Democrats as a whole.¹⁴

⁸ A. L. B. Hope, & C. R. Jones, (2014). The impact of religious faith on attitudes to environmental issues and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) technologies: A mixed methods study. *Technology in Society*, 38, 48–59.

⁹ COMRes, 2015, Post-election polling for Tearfund- unpublished, ComRes, London/.

¹⁰ A. Corner, E. Markowitz, & N. Pidgeon, (2014). Public engagement with climate change: the role of human values. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 3, 411-422; S. Van der Linden, (2015). The social-psychological determinants of climate change risk perceptions: Towards a comprehensive model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 41, 112-124.

¹¹ Making Sense of Climate Change: How Story Frames Shape Cognition. *Political Psychology* 4, 447-476.

¹² C. Hamilton, 2010, *Requiem for a Species, Why we Resist the Truth about Climate Change*, Routledge.

¹³ Pew, 2010, *Few Say Religion Shapes Immigration, Environment Views*, 2010 Annual Religion and Public Life Survey, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

<http://www.pewforum.org/files/2010/09/immigration-environment-views-fullreport.pdf>

¹⁴ PRRI, 2014, *Believers, Sympathizers and Sceptics: Why Americans are Conflicted about Climate Change*, Environmental Policy, and Science, Public Religion Research Institute, American Academy of Religion, November 2014

An important caveat must be raised here: detailed attitudinal survey research is almost all based in the US, and within it, climate change faith research is predominately with Christians. There is yet to be a major international survey that explores attitudes to climate change across different faiths. Conclusions should therefore be drawn with due caution.

There is sufficient international evidence to show that political polarization is found across the English-speaking world, where surveys of the past ten years have consistently found that political orientation is the single greatest influence on people's attitude to climate change.¹⁵ One poll in the US concluded that attitudes to climate change were a stronger predictor of people's voting preferences than any other single issue, including gun control, abortion, and capital punishment.¹⁶

These obstacles--psychological distancing and political polarization--have led to, and are in turn exacerbated by, a collective silence.¹⁷ The majority of people have never talked about climate change with anyone other than friends and family, and a third of people have never discussed it with anyone at all.¹⁸ As noted in my opening anecdote, people find it hard to initiate or sustain any conversation about climate change. Research finds that this silence is not incidental but socially-constructed to remove climate change from the norms of attention—that is, those issues that are considered appropriate for recognition.¹⁹ This silence follows a similar form to that formed around other issues that challenge collective responsibility, such as human right abuses.²⁰

In June 2015, the Pope issued *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, a much-awaited encyclical that presented the doctrinal basis for all Catholics to respond to climate change. It is the most significant faith-based response to climate change to date, and many campaigners hoped that it would create a sea change in faith-based attitudes to climate change.

A superficial reading of polls²¹ taken before and after its release confirm that there was a small but significant increase in awareness of climate change across all Christian denominations in the US. Unfortunately, we do not have any polling data on the impact of *Laudato Si'* in other countries or with other faiths.

¹⁵ A. Hoffman, 2015, How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate, Stanford Briefs.

¹⁶ C. Hamilton, 2014. Do You Trust Scientists About the Environment? Carsey Institute, Regional Issue Brief #40, Spring 2014 <http://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1213&context=carsey>

¹⁷ Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. MIT Press.

¹⁸ A. Leiserowitz, E. Maibach, C. Roser-Renouf, & G. Feinberg, (2013) How Americans communicate about global warming in April 2013. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication

¹⁹ A. Corner, 2014. Climate Silence (and How to Break It), Climate Outreach Information Network, 2014 <http://climateoutreach.org/resources/climate-silence-and-how-to-break-it/>

²⁰ Stanley Cohen, (2110). *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering*, Polity Press. P 5

²¹ E. Maibach, A. Leiserowitz, C. Roser-Renouf, T. Myers, S. Rosenthal, & G. Feinberg, (2015) *The Francis Effect: How Pope Francis Changed the Conversation about Global Warming*. George Mason University and Yale University. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication.

However, a more careful reading of these polls makes it hard to identify a clear signal of wider influence. *Laudato Si'* was released on the run up to the Paris climate negotiations, when interest and concern was rising across the whole population. The increase of concern among Catholics was no more significant than this wider trend. Curiously, 5% of Catholics became less inclined to trust the Pope as a source of information on global warming after *Laudato Si'*, possibly--though this cannot be said for certain--because climate-skeptic Catholics were rejecting his message.

Laudato Si' may have opened up the discussion, but it did not manage to break through the collective silence around climate change. Only 18% of Catholics discussed it within their place of worship, and after its publication Catholics showed no greater desire to discuss climate change with family and friends than their non-Catholic neighbors, with three-quarters of Catholics reporting they had discussed climate change "rarely or never."

The primary challenge for faith communications must be to break this silence, and the experience of *Laudato Si'* suggests that greater attention needs to be paid a *process* of engagement that initiates an active conversation. Faith leaders should establish that talking about climate change, preaching about it, and bearing witness to it are essential and defining expressions of their faith.

Despite these obstacles, there are many reasons why people of faith should be leading on this issue and why, over time, faith values could become a key determinant in mobilizing public concern.

The primary reason, as will be discussed below, is that climate change is one of the key moral issues of our time, having direct impacts on the poorest and most vulnerable people, and future generations. It is incumbent upon people of faith to recognize its importance and be consistent with their moral teachings on these topics.

Second, given that attitudes to climate change are determined by values, identity, and socially-transferred narratives, faith provides an opportunity for reframing climate change around a set of common ethical values that can be shared across political and cultural boundaries.

Finally, seen from the perspective of political expediency, it is essential that faith communities, arguably the largest and most successful social institutions in the world, be fully involved and mobilized. Faith groups have played a central role in previous movements for progressive change, and it is hard to imagine how humanity could generate sufficient momentum for change without them being fully involved.

FINDING NEW LANGUAGE BASED ON FAITH VALUES

The dominant public narrative of climate change is secular and has sometimes been actively irreligious. It emerged from scientific language and dispassionate data. When environmental organizations converted this into wider communications, they applied the framing of their own values and ideology, emphasizing the impacts on the natural world and the role played by personal consumption and political vested interests. Politically motivated skeptics, such as former Republican presidential candidate Ted

Cruz, have applied their own bias and accused climate change of not being "real science" but being "a new religion."²² In return, some scientists have felt it necessary to assert that climate change is solely empirical and adamantly not a "belief."²³

This enforced dichotomy between science and religion is unnecessary and misleading. Sir John Houghton, the founding chairperson of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the United Nations body that presents scientific evidence to policymakers) is a Methodist lay preacher. He speaks often about the synthesis of science and climate science, and has played a key role in reaching out to evangelicals. Texan and climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe, a committed evangelical and wife of a pastor, has received widespread recognition and respect for her commitment to sharing her science with people of faith.

The challenge for people of faith is to find narratives about climate change that will respect and can build on that science, yet can also speak to their own faith traditions effectively and compellingly. For over ten years, the world's main faiths have been designing declarations and making calls for action that convert climate change into the language of their traditions.²⁴ Often, though, these statements have been dry, academic, and theological in tone. Coming from church leaders and scholars, they have also been hierarchical and instructional. The opportunity remains to find language that can have a wider popular appeal and be better disseminated through grassroots movements.

RESEARCHING LANGUAGE

In 2015, GreenFaith, a US-based Interfaith environmental network, commissioned Climate Outreach to identify language around climate change that could speak across all the world's five main faiths (Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam).²⁵ The language needed to be engaging and compelling such that it could support interfaith mobilization leading up to the December climate conference in Paris. In order to work within an interfaith context, it needed to speak effectively to very different faith traditions. Recognizing the dangers of political polarization, successful language needed to be free of any distinct political ideology.

On the basis of 11 expert interviews and assimilation of existing faith materials, Climate Outreach designed trial narratives. These were then tested with six focus groups. Each group had a gender balance and people of diverse political views and countries of origin. The findings of the groups were further refined through an online survey which had 650 participants from 53 countries.

Four key narratives were found to be effective across all the faith groups. The quoted text was tested, in this form, in both focus groups and the survey. The emphasis in bold has been added to highlight the key language frames for engagement.

²² Ted Cruz Interview with Glenn Beck, October 2015.

²³ G. Marshall, 2014, Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change, Bloomsbury, pp. 212-213.

²⁴ An overview can be found at <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/resources/religious-statements-on-climate-change/>

²⁵ G. Marshall, A. Corner, O. Roberts, and J. Clarke, (2016). Faith & Climate Change - A guide to talking with the five major faiths. Oxford: Climate Outreach. <http://climateoutreach.org/resources/climate-change-faith/>

1. **"The natural world is a precious gift.** Caring for the natural world is an act of worship. We have a sacred **responsibility** to care for the earth and be its stewards."

Although the underlying concept of a responsibility to care for and protect the world is strong across all faiths, the most commonly used frame of "Creation Care" does not work well outside the Abrahamic faiths. The terms "natural world" and "the earth" were found to be sufficiently neutral to work across all faiths, but were weaker as a consequence. However, the language of the world being a *gift* that we have a responsibility to respect did work well across all faiths, and was mentioned spontaneously in all of the focus groups.

2 **"Climate change is a moral challenge.** Climate change is *harming* the poor and vulnerable. We should be generous and care for them. It is our **responsibility** to preserve the legacy of our parents and provide for the future for our children."

All faiths contain sacred values condemning violence and harm to others (and, for Hindus and Buddhists, this extends to all living things), being charitable, and protecting the vulnerable. Future generations are important to all groups. As noted earlier, psychological distancing often leads people to frame climate change as a future problem. For this reason, the narrative places it within the intergenerational timeline of respect for both those who came before us and those as yet unborn.

3. **"Climate change is disrupting the natural BALANCE.** There is a divine **balance** to the world. Climate change is **disrupting** that balance. Climate change is a **message** that something is wrong. By taking action on climate change we can **restore** that natural **order** and balance."

All faiths, especially in their more traditional or conservative expressions, are concerned with order, authority and stability, which are presented in constant opposition to disorder and instability. This narrative works especially well with the Hindu and Buddhist understanding of a universal order. Islam also has a strong concept of balance, embodied in the Arabic word *mīzān*, which denotes equilibrium, balance, and the scales on which all deeds are weighted. The framing of balance appears throughout the 2015 Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change, for example: "*The Earth functions in natural seasonal rhythms and cycles. Climate change is a result of the human disruption of this balance.*"²⁶ The language about climate change being a "message" also works well, although alternative language about it being a specific sign or warning was rejected by the focus groups.

4. **"Taking action brings us closer to God.** Climate change is taking us all away from the divine system, will or plan. Through action on climate change we can become **closer** to God, **deeper** in our faith and **better people** individually and

²⁶ <http://islamicclimatedeclaration.org/islamic-declaration-on-global-climate-change/>

collectively. And by being closer to God we will be better able to take action on climate change.”

Given that climate change is understood through the lens of people’s values and identity, this narrative explored the notion that the best reward for action would be a reinforcement of those values and identity. It worked well with all five faiths.

This finding is important for all communications. Climate change communicators have always tended to assert rewards in terms of external measures (“saving the planet”/protecting future generations) or the defeat of the challenge (preventing climate change, stabilizing the climate). This narrative suggests that people may be motivated by internal rewards measures (becoming *more* the person you believe yourself to be, becoming a stronger member of your peer group). This formulation has been applied successfully by Climate Outreach around national²⁷ and political²⁸ identities.

In testing, we found that some familiar narratives did not work well with all faiths, or across the diversity of people within them. As noted above, the language of Creation Care, a dominant faith communications frame around climate change, works poorly with Hindus and Buddhists whose faiths lack a central divine creator.

The language of social justice (often expressed as the compound phrase Climate Justice) has also long been a central rallying cry for progressive faith campaigns.²⁹ However, in testing it performed badly with Hindus. The word *justice*, like *equality*, may also be politically contentious for conservatives³⁰ who prefer language around fairness. Faith communicators should always be vigilant about the danger that, by projecting their own values, they are inadvertently alienating people of different political worldviews.

Our research also sought to identify the language that might work best within each faith. In this context, Creation Care, and being a responsible steward, or in the Islamic tradition a vicegerent, was certainly the most effective language for the Abrahamic faiths.

For Hinduism and Buddhism, language around the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world, and the divine or cosmic order of universe, was most effective. Although not fully tested, participants and faith experts felt that climate change could be presented as a form of violence,³¹ and action against it framed within the theology of Dharma as an abhorrence of violence and causing harm to others (*ahimsa*).

²⁷ G. Marshall, 2014. [Hearth and Hiraeth: Constructing Climate Change Narratives around National Identity](#), Climate Outreach.

²⁸ A. Corner, (2013). A new conversation with the centre-right about climate change: Values, frames and narratives. Oxford: Climate Outreach and Information Network

²⁹ Climate Justice is a Matter of Faith, US Catholic, Vol. 81, No. 4, April 2016 pp 22–26
www.uscatholic.org/articles/201603/climate-justice-matter-faith-30604#sthash.ovEqjY3N.dpuf

³⁰ See for example its prominent mention in The Liberal Lexicon A Conservative's Dictionary of Libberish, <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news/673701/posts>

³¹ For example, Rebecca Solnit's article "Call climate change what it is: violence"
www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/07/climate-change-violence-occupy-earth

For Jews, language around justice and intergenerational equity was especially meaningful. Compared with other faiths, Judaism has a particularly strong understanding of the morality of inaction and missed opportunities, and requires atonement for the specific "sin of omission" when "a man fails to fulfil the duty incumbent upon him."³² All of these approaches could be particularly relevant to this complex issue that is so often marginalized through a social silence.

Many of our findings confirmed existing practice. However, there were some surprises, and these show that language can never be assumed to work, and that communications should always be carefully tested.

For example, we had not anticipated that there would be any problems with the phrase "the world contains all we need but cannot provide all we want or desire." The idea that the world's resources are finite and limited is central to modern environmentalism, especially since the seminal 1972 club of Rome report, "The Limits to Growth." Yet, this language was consistently and strongly rejected by Muslims who argued that Allah is always bountiful. In the words of one workshop participant, "The problem is not meeting the greed, but the gluttony itself."

We were less surprised that language around blame and punishment worked poorly. Climate change is a complex issue with dispersed responsibility and is difficult to align with traditional edicts about personal behaviour. As with the wider public,³³ people of faith are unwilling to shoulder personal moral responsibility for a problem with is systemic and widely distributed.

However, we also found that the context effected how language about personal responsibility was received. People were resistant to judgmental language when it was presented as a form of collective failing using the "we" form: "We need to control our desires and stifle our greed. If we need to make sacrifices we will do so as our duty," Yet similar language around responsibility and duty was strongly approved in both groups and the survey, when it was presented as a personal statement: *"I pledge to change myself from within and reduce my own contribution to climate change. To do this I will gladly live a simple, contented, and fulfilled life. I do this as a duty and an offering to my God/creator."*

This is potentially an important finding. All formal faith declarations on climate change have been expressed in the collective "we" form, calling for collective action. Our research suggests that calls to change behaviour may be more effective if they are voiced as personal commitments. The process of engagement could therefore be to initiate and encourage people to make and share their own commitments rather than the assertion of doctrinal principles.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Among the faiths, three specific audiences deserve particular focus and further research: Hindus, Muslims, and US evangelicals.

³² K. Kohler, 1906, Atonement- entry in the Jewish Encyclopaedia.

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/2092-atonement>

³³ <http://talkingclimate.org/guides/using-scare-tactics-does-it-work/>

There are over one billion Hindus in the world, 85% of them in India. Our research identified multiple opportunities to develop a Hindu narrative around climate change and traditional values of responsibility, duty, and respect for nature. To date, there has been no formal research into Hindu attitudes to climate change or language testing. India is an increasingly important and sometimes obstinate player in the international climate negotiations, and the creation of distinctly Hindu narrative for action could have a major global importance.

There have been more attempts to mobilize an Islamic voice on climate change; the 2015 Declaration by Islamic scholars³⁴ was especially noteworthy. But far too few people have yet recognized that the most severe impacts of climate change will fall disproportionately on Islamic countries, especially those in the hot and arid latitudes. This, and the predominant role of Islamic countries in international petro-politics, creates an urgent need for a parallel, faith-driven discourse.

Substantial in numbers, no denomination exerts greater political influence in the US, and, by extension, in global politics, than American evangelicals. Successive surveys have found evangelicals to be the most skeptical faith group on climate change in the US. They require a distinctive narrative of their own but, if mobilized, they would undoubtedly shift the polarization of American politics.

Finally, it is time that the wider environmental community respect faith communities and recognize the need to engage them better as partners in mobilizing change. Even the most cursory overview of history cannot ignore the central role played by people of faith in the key political struggles of the past two hundred years, and always their involvement has been fuelled by narratives drawn from their traditions and identity.

As I look out my window, I can see the tower of my village church standing high above the surrounding houses and fields, a beacon of permanence in a rapidly changing landscape. As they struggle with denial and disavowal, climate-change campaigners actually stand to learn a great deal from the faith traditions that have for so long sustained strong communities of shared belief and held such a central role in people's lives.

George Marshall is the co-founder of Climate Outreach, a non-profit based in Oxford, UK, the leading European specialist in climate change communications. He is the author of *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*.

³⁴ <http://www.greenfaith.org/religious-teachings/islamic-statements-on-the-environment>