

# THE VILLAGE GREEN

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Number Twenty-one, April 3, 2020

## ISLAMIC MEDICAL GROUP GREENS, DIVESTS

The Islamic Medical Association of North America (IMANA) has added both a healthcare voice and a religious voice to climate action. IMANA's investment committee has decided to divest IMANA's endowment fund from all fossil fuel companies. Said IMANA:

*“Human activities, especially the burning of dirty fuel sources, are the primary causes of climate change. Like the coronavirus pandemic spread to humans from the exploitation of wild animals caged in close quarters, overconsumption fueled by the exploitation of resources from the Earth has led to an extreme planetary imbalance. Individuals, organizations, and businesses acting in concert to collectively divest from fossil fuel companies is an important step toward increasing attention toward the urgency of the climate crisis and building a healthier future for all of creation. We need to flatten the climate curve... Fossil fuel corporations have known about the harmful effects of carbon emissions, including climate change, for at least forty years. Additionally, many of the largest fossil fuel companies have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on campaigns designed to intentionally deceive the public by downplaying the risks associated with extraction and consumption of fossil fuels, including shifting responsibility for any planetary loss to individual consumers. These companies have also donated large amounts of money to state and federal officials and academic institutions to curry favor and blunt political momentum from the scientific community sounding the alarm bell about the devastating effects of climate change.”*

IMANA cites a depth of Islamic commitment to climate issues, captured in a September 2019 statement (below) from the Fiqh Council of North America, a body of Islamic religious scholars from Canada and the U.S.:

*“We recognize and re-affirm the scholarly work regarding the issues of Islam and the Environment which are found in existing Islamic statements, declarations and religious rulings on these matters. The 2015 Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change was put forward by groups of Muslim scholars, religious councils and organizations around the globe. We acknowledge the 2016 decision and public announcement of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to divest all its financial assets from fossil fuel industries. We acknowledge that there is an urgent existential threat to the health, wellbeing and continuity of life on Earth. According to the Qur'an [the highest source of Islamic teachings], Allah [God] appointed human beings as His trustees [stewards, guardians and care-takers] of the Earth. As such, it is the individual and collective duty and responsibility of humanity to develop Allah's gifts of natural resources for its prosperity. This requires the maintenance of the delicate ecological balance, biodiversity and sustainability of all forms of life on earth. The Qur'an refers directly to such balance [Al-Meezan), not only on earth, but also in the cosmic order and warns against the disturbance of that balance [55:5-9] or corrupting the earth, land and sea, with its adverse effect on all people [30:41]. As humanity should take care of the earth, Allah created the earth also to take care of humanity [45:12-13], so long as we abstain from waste [6:141; 7:31].”*

Throughout 2020, IMANA will roll out a comprehensive sustainability plan that dedicates resources towards reducing its carbon footprint:

*“Our commitment to greening the entire organization includes shifting to more energy efficient building operations at our office headquarters, offsetting international flights for Islamic Medical Relief missions by planting trees, and contracting with eco-conscious caterers for large events following the end of social distancing later on in 2020.”*

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IMANA has also produced a sustainability resource guide to help private medical practices and larger medical facilities to green themselves (<https://imana.org/climate-crisis/green-my-practice/>). It also provides how-to-lobby material and other resources on how its members you can join other public health professionals to advocate for science-based solutions to the climate crisis.

IMANA has affiliated itself with the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health, a U.S. organization that says it *“brings together associations representing over 600,000 clinical practitioners to carry three simple messages:*

- *Climate change is harming Americans today and these harms will increase unless we act;*
- *The way to slow or stop these harms is to decrease the use of fossil fuels and increase energy efficiency and use of clean energy sources; and*
- *These changes in energy choices will improve the quality of our air and water and bring immediate health benefits.”*

## U.K. CITIZEN-SCIENTISTS DIGITIZE RAIN RECORDS

Professor Ed Hawkins of the National Centre for Atmospheric Science at Reading University in the U.K. realized that people would have time on their hands during the pandemic, so he asked them to help digitize historical rainfall data over the next few weeks or months. They said “yes” in droves – more than 11,000 have volunteered so far. Before the 1960s, The U.K.s detailed data on annual rainfall were kept by hand, making the data hard for climate scientists to analyze. Dubbed “Rainfall Rescue”, the results of the digitization project will help climate scientists to reconstruct how rainfall has changed in the past, as an aid in planning for water supply management and flood mitigation. The project has 140 years’ worth of records to get through and about 4 million observations to digitize.

Said Professor Hawkins:

*“We can certainly trust citizen scientists. Through our previous projects we’ve learned that anyone can contribute very helpfully and accurately. We’re asking very simple questions to read some handwriting, which the human eye is very well trained to do. People obviously make the occasional mistake and that’s fine. We expect that. We don’t have the financial resources to pay people, and that’s fundamentally where we’re coming from. But people are very keen to do this to help science.”*

## ITALIAN CITIZEN-SCIENTISTS MEASURE LIGHT

Italian scientists have also marshalled stay-at-home folks to contribute scientific data. Last week, for three evenings, 6,000 Italians measured light pollution with smartphones. People in every Italian province participated.

The project, called “Science on the Balcony”, was launched by the Italian National Research Council. It asked participants to turn off all the lights in their apartment and launch an app designed for the study. Then they were asked to turn their phone screens towards the main light source they could see from their windows – a streetlight or a sign for example. Using the phones’ brightness sensors, the app measured the light source’s illuminance, or brightness, in lux units.

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Like many nations, Italy has seen a steady increase in night-time light pollution that hampers astronomers' view of space and presents environmental, economic, safety and public health problems (including damage to the immune system).

Widespread data collection on light pollution requires time and money, and satellites detect only light reflected skywards, so they don't give a full picture. The latest project allowed researchers to measure light as seen from inside homes.

## EEL PROTECTION PLANNED

For millennia the European eel has been entwined with the story of human populations in Europe. Spanning a range from the northern tip of Scandinavia to the coasts of North Africa and the Black Sea, eels live in rivers and streams across their range. The eel has been an important food fish for the continent (we of English extraction are aware of the eel pies and jellied eel once prepared from eels harvested in the Thames River).

For most of these millennia, the eel has been one of Europe's most mysterious creatures. It leaves rivers and streams to enter the ocean to head for its breeding grounds, but until recently the location of the breeding grounds was unknown. We now know the eels make a marathon swim to the Sargasso Sea, a vast nutrient-rich kelp forest in the ocean near Bermuda. There in the safety of kelp beds the eels spawn, then die. Their offspring, as larvae, drift for two years and 4,000 miles in the Gulf Stream until they return to European and North African waters. There they morph into transparent fingerlings called "glass eels" and swim up rivers and streams where they mature into full-grown eels. They live in their river abodes for twenty years or more until they seek the ocean and begin their spawning journey.

The number of eels has dropped by 95% in recent years as river weirs, dams and water-pumping stations block their path and as overfishing, pesticides and parasites reduce their numbers. As well, climate change may be shifting the track of the Gulf Stream so that fewer larvae are hitching a trans-Atlantic ride.

In February at the Thirteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), held in Gandhinagar India, participating nations agreed to a proposal from Monaco to protect the critically endangered European eel. The Sargasso Sea Commission and CMS staff will draft a Species Action Plan for the eel. The European Union has agreed to host a meeting of countries that are part of the eel's habitat to finalize the draft before it is approved by the Convention on Migratory Species.

**Editor's note:** Issue #5 of *The Village Green* (August 10, 2019) profiled the Sargasso Sea Commission and the important role a Canadian plays in it:

*"The Sargasso Sea Commission... includes Senator Wilfred Moore, a lawyer and retired member of the Senate of Canada. Moore is a strong advocate of the Sargasso Sea Alliance, and persuaded Canada to become the eighth signatory to the ten-nation Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea, signed in 2016. The Commission describes the Sea as 'the golden floating rainforest of the Atlantic' and as 'a haven of biodiversity' and there is growing recognition of the crucial role it plays in the wider North Atlantic ecosystem as habitat, foraging and spawning grounds and as a migratory corridor."*

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## SEYCHELLES PROTECTS OCEAN LIFE

Last week the East African island nation of Seychelles announced the creation of 13 new marine protected areas (MPAs) that cover 154,000 square miles of ocean, about 30% of its territorial waters. The commitment is a major step forward for a country that protected just 0.04% of its waters eight years ago. In 2015, Seychelles agreed to a "debt-for-nature" deal in which the Nature Conservancy bought us\$21 million of the Seychelles' foreign debt in exchange for a pledge to create marine protections. The new marine protected areas (MPAs) will safeguard biodiversity as well as fish stocks, and protect giant tortoises, dugongs, several shark species, and coral reefs.

The new MPAs are a mix of strictly protected waters and regulated areas where some economic activities may be allowed. Monitoring such extensive areas will be challenging, and the nation will likely need additional funding for effective monitoring. The Seychelles government is considering levying a \$10 nature tax on each tourist to fund the monitoring of its MPAs. Seychelles, with a resident population of 97,000 spread over its 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, is a major tourist destination.

## POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY WILL THREATEN EUROPEAN UNITY

Achieving common approaches to climate action has been difficult within the European Union. What unanimity has been achieved is now threatened by a new rift within the EU. All European nations will spend vast sums on stimulus and social support packages during the pandemic. A proposal to raise funds to cover the costs of recovery was recently put forward by a group of nine pandemic-hit governments in the euro zone, led by Italy, Spain and France. They proposed a joint bond issue that would combine securities from different European countries. Debt would be "mutualized" and not sit on any country's balance sheet, and the funding cost would be lower than it would be for most highly indebted governments. The proceeds would be spread among Eurozone members according to their actual needs. These "coronabonds," were proposed as an instrument of unity at a time of continental crisis.

But four nations – Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Finland (dubbed the "frugal four") – rejected the idea, reluctant to throw in their lot with countries they view as less prepared for troubled times. This disagreement corrodes what consensus still exists within the European Union, leaving less "consensus capital" to be used in forging common approaches to climate change. It also makes it less likely that the countries hardest hit by the pandemic will be able to create "second wave" stimulus packages that could be vehicles for more targeted stimulus investments aimed not at outmoded or climate-destroying economic sectors, but at green economies for the future.

## GOOD-CRUD-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB: BUG EATS PLASTIC

Humans go through millions of tons of durable polyurethane plastic each year. Much of it – eight billion tons so far – goes to garbage dumps where it leaks toxic chemicals as it very slowly breaks down. A build-up of polyurethane plastic in the body can harm animals and humans.

Recently, scientists at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research-UFZ in Leipzig Germany discovered that a bacterial strain that thrives in dumps – *Pseudomonas* sp. TDA1 – seems to like eating polyurethane.

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Other plastic-eating bacteria have been discovered, but *Pseudomonas* sp. TDA1 is uniquely tolerant to polyurethane's toxic properties. The bacterium severs chemical bonds that hold the plastic together and uses the disassembled chemical stew as its sole source of carbon, nitrogen and energy.

While the bacterium can metabolize a subset of the chemicals in polyurethane, it can't break down these products completely, but Leipzig's researchers hope that in-depth studies of *Pseudomonas* sp. TDA1 will reveal the genes crucial to the bacterium's plastic-attacking abilities. Understanding how these genes and their products work could help scientists engineer synthetic approaches to tackling plastic.

## TRUMP NIXES OBAMA-ERA AUTO MILEAGE STANDARDS

President Trump's administration has weakened automobile emissions standards for cars and trucks. The policy will spare automakers from having to meet ambitious targets to reduce pollution harmful to the environment and public health. Trump's rule rolls back a 2012 standard, put in place by the Obama administration, that had required automakers to cut planet-warming tailpipe pollution by selling vehicles that reach an average fuel economy of about 54 miles per gallon by 2025. Trump's rule requires only 40 miles per gallon. However, the rule might fall in the courts: the Trump administration is already locked in legal battles with California and other states that use California's stricter emissions rules.

It's also possible that automakers, reading the writing on the wall, might eventually all agree to meet standards higher than those required by Trump. The writing on the wall might tell them that:

- they will increasingly be seen as villains if they don't adopt higher miles per gallon standards than the Trumpian ones, and
- if Democrats retake the presidency in the November election, the new President will likely re-impose tougher standards anyway.

At present, automakers are split between those that like what Trump has done and those that are willing to meet the higher California standards.

## REVENGE OF THE SCIENCE NERDS: U.S. SCIENTISTS UNDERMINE TRUMPIAN CUTS

A recent *New York Times* article indicates that some career scientists within U.S. agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency have found ways to fight back against ideologically and politically driven elimination of government rules meant to protect the environment and human health.

Largely muzzled by Trumpian political hacks who now manage many government agencies, scientists are nevertheless required by law in some instances to produce reports containing data on proposed rule changes. So even though scientists are not allowed to say "*This rule change would be stupid and dangerous*", they can include data in their reports that can be used by advocacy groups and by other levels of government to fuel lawsuits against rule changes that hurt the planet (data, for instance, on likely deaths resulting from a rule change).

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Even when publicly available reports are not required before a rule is changed, government scientists sometimes produce seemingly innocuous reports – highly technical and very long that political hacks are unable or unwilling to read – that escape political censorship and contain purposely placed data that others can use in lawsuits to prevent harmful rule changes.

Right wing pundits criticize such “data bombs” in public documents as violations of the principle of political neutrality on the part of civil servants. However, many would argue that attempts to prevent the suppression of science-derived information is simply a defense of truth, not an attack on ideological political positions.

## U.K. TOUTS GREEN TRANSPORTATION

The British government has released a discussion paper ***Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge*** that addresses decarbonization of transport as part of its national climate crisis strategy. The plan says that rapid and unprecedented action is required to reduce car use and make the U.K. a hub for green technology. The 80 page discussion paper is at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/876251/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876251/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf) . Using the paper as the basis for community consultations, the U.K. government hopes to produce a final transportation plan by the autumn of 2020

It proposes six strategic priorities to create a “green transport revolution” that will enable the U.K. to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050:

1. Accelerating the shift towards public and active transport (active transport includes walking and cycling)
2. Decarbonizing road vehicles
3. Decarbonizing how goods and services reach people
4. Solutions for emissions reductions developed in, by and for specific regions of the U.K.
5. The U.K. as a hub for green technology and innovation
6. Reducing carbon in the global economy by leading and taking part in international transportation reform efforts, particularly related to air and maritime transport.

The report cites rail travel as one of the most efficient ways of moving high volumes of people into city centres and moving people over long distances and says the UK might shift towards solar-powered trains via the “Riding Sunbeams: First Light” demonstration project, which would be the first time a jurisdiction has connected solar generation directly to rail traction networks to power trains. Information on the project is at <https://www.ridingsunbeams.org/ourwork/firstlight>.

The report comes on the heels of a February announcement by Prime Minister Boris Johnson of a £5 billion investment in local buses (including funding for 4,000 zero emission buses, more frequent bus services and cheaper fares) and in cycling and walking infrastructure.

## COP26 AND HIGH SEAS TREATY MEETING POSTPONED TO 2021

The last issue of ***The Village Green*** (issue #20) contained an article describing the pros and cons of postponing COP26, the meeting of nations scheduled for Glasgow in November at which countries would be expected to enhance their commitments to specific greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. This crucial meeting has now been postponed to an unspecified date in 2021.

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Said the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change:

*“In light of the ongoing, worldwide effects of COVID-19, holding an ambitious, inclusive COP26 in November 2020 is no longer possible. Rescheduling will ensure all parties can focus on the issues to be discussed at this vital conference and allow more time for the necessary preparations to take place. We will continue to work with all involved to increase climate ambition, build resilience and lower emissions.”*

UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Patricia Espinosa said:

*“COVID-19 is the most urgent threat facing humanity today, but we cannot forget that climate change is the biggest threat facing humanity over the long term. Soon, economies will restart. This is a chance for nations to recover better, to include the most vulnerable in those plans, and a chance to shape the 21st century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, just, safe and more resilient.”*

In an ominous related development, Japan – the world’s fifth largest emitter of greenhouse gases – says it won’t increase its emissions reduction target. It will stick to the target it set five years ago, which was to reduce its emissions by 26% from 2013 levels. This may encourage other nations to stick to previously announce targets, even though those targets are utterly inadequate in terms of holding global warming to levels that would avoid global catastrophe.

The postponement of COP26 comes less than a month after a decision by the United Nations to postpone another major environmental and climate related summit – the deadlocked talks on a global treaty to protect marine biodiversity in the high seas, scheduled for April. The delay due to the pandemic would give countries extra time to seek compromise. Talks have been stymied by disagreements about how much of the profits from resource extraction such as seabed mining on the high seas would go to the private sector firms extracting those resources, and how much would go to developing nations affected by high seas resource extraction.

The anticipated treaty is meant to safeguard sea life beyond the national jurisdiction of coastal states, a poorly regulated region covering two-thirds of the global ocean. Over-fishing, shipping, plastic pollution and the potential of seabed mining are among the threats to marine ecosystems. Climate impacts such as warming waters, rising acidity and shifting current patterns also undermine the resilience of marine biodiversity.

## CONSTRUCTION TO START ON ALBERTA-TO-NEBRASKA KEYSTONE PIPELINE

After a decade of unsuccessful opposition from environmental groups, local landowners and U.S. Aboriginal nations, construction is about to begin on the Keystone XL oil pipeline from Hardisty Alberta to Nebraska, thanks to a major funding infusion from the Alberta Government. Alberta is investing us\$1.1 billion in the project and it will also provide a us\$6 billion loan guarantee for the project, which is expected to cost us\$14.4 billion to build. The pipeline is owned by Calgary-based TC Energy, whose massive energy portfolio includes part ownership of Bruce Nuclear in Bruce County. TC Energy is also the proponent of a controversial proposed gravity-fed hydroelectric generating plant on Georgian Bay near Meaford. When completed, the pipeline will carry 830,000 barrels of crude oil a day to Nebraska, from where it will be transshipped by pipeline to U.S. Gulf Coast refineries. The Obama administration had refused to grant a permit for construction of the U.S. leg of the pipeline, citing concerns about environmental degradation from oil spills. The Trump administration overturned the Obama-era prohibition.

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Alberta is betting that today's era of low oil prices is transitory, and that higher future prices will make Alberta's oil economically viable again, necessitating, in Alberta's eyes, the Keystone pipeline to deliver its oil. But it has committed itself to an expenditure of us\$1.1 billion that is thereby not available for other socioeconomic investments for Albertans in tough times.

## WORLD WEATHER ATTRIBUTION: "WHY IS IT RAINING?"

The connection between weather and climate is complex. It seems that every time a major weather event occurs, climate activists blame it on climate change and skeptics say "It's just the weather" when neither side has evidence to support its opinion. The World Weather Attribution Initiative, created in 2015, helps close this information gap by analyzing major weather events to determine the degree to which an event was created or influenced by climate change. Recently, it issued a report indicating that most but not all of the factors that created the 2019/2020 Australian wildfires show evidence of the influence of human-caused climate change.

The World Weather Attribution Initiative is a partnership of six climate research institutions across the world. Its web site at <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/> provides access to information about its recent weather attribution reports.

## DEATH TOLL LIFE TOLL

Today  
Officials of the Crown  
sit in front of their computer screens  
counting those  
we do not want to count.

Here  
between the counters and the counted  
stand and lie the vast and vivid rest of us,  
afraid, encircled,  
fearfully and wonderfully human –

We,  
rememberers of when it was not here,  
dreamers of when it will be gone,  
sharers and shapers  
of each other's  
destinies.

John Butler



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## FACTS THAT HELP YOU CHANGE THE WORLD

A major COVID-19 outbreak in any major developing country could lead to an almost unfathomable number of deaths. The U.S. has roughly 33 ICU beds per 100,000 people. That number drops to around two in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is even worse: Zambia has 0.6 ICU beds per 100,000; The Gambia has 0.4; and Uganda has 0.1.

source: Robert Malley and Richard Malley, *When the Pandemic Hits the Most Vulnerable*, *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2020

Warming ocean temperatures are causing some species of whales in pursuit of food to stray more frequently into shipping lanes. At least three right whales died from ship strikes in 2019, out of a total world population of right whales of only 400. All three deaths were documented in the busy shipping lanes of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, where scientists say the whales are spending more time feeding now that waters off New England have warmed.

source: *Time* magazine, March 28, 2020

## OUR READERS KNOW A THING OR TWO

### The Plight of Climate Refugees

Paul Watson of Collingwood recently led us to a striking lecture by environmentalist, author, and journalist Bill McKibben, given in Aspen Colorado in January 2020 (on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x91RvHuqao>). A good speech! Below is an excerpt of what McKibben said:

*“For the most part the iron law of climate change is the less you did to cause it, the sooner and the harder you suffer. I was reminded of that today when I saw news from the Marshall Islands in the South Pacific... The highest point in the Marshall Islands is a metre above sea level. That’s a bad place to be on a warming planet... You’ve seen what happens when a million refugees arrived from the Middle East, many from Syria, at least at some level climate refugees because the deepest droughts in the history of what we used to call the Fertile Crescent helped kick off the revolution, the civil war that led to that exodus. A million of them were enough to fry the politics of Western Europe, just like a million people arriving on our southern border has helped to fry the politics of the United States. Many of those people are climate refugees as well...”*

*The U.N. estimates that if we let the temperature keep rising, if we let it go up three degrees, we’re likely to see – high end – a billion climate refugees this century, so multiply the chaos caused by a million climate refugees by a thousand times, and try to imagine what that world looks like. If nothing else, it’s clear that we need some policy beyond walls and cages – some new ethic of human solidarity emerging, because these people didn’t cause the problem from which they’re suffering.”*

**Editor’s note:** Bill McKibben edits a free newsletter, ***The Climate Crisis***, published by the *New Yorker* magazine. It’s the best among dozens your Beloved Editor receives each week. The current issue, at <https://link.newyorker.com/view/5bd67bd33f92a41245df1a37buket.4km/2523818a>, includes a link for those who want to sign up to receive it.

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## Health, Pandemics, Climate Change

In *The Village Green* Issue #20, we included **A Tale of Two Crises**, an essay by Nick Clayton, a teacher at Collingwood Collegiate and a resident of The Blue Mountains, with (in his words) a “passion for mitigating the climate crisis”. In a recent paper, **Health is Planetary**, he summarizes the insights of a four-person panel convened in webinar format on March 18 by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment to explore the connection between health – particularly the pandemic – and climate change. Among its salient points (as summarized by Nick):

*“Climate change has not contributed directly to the spread of COVID-19... [but] global heating... creates the conditions for an increased spread of vector-borne diseases in Canada, such as Lyme disease, as a warming climate expands the territory of the ticks that carry pathogenic bacteria... Harm is spread disproportionately it favours the impoverished and vulnerable. During a global pandemic, it is the elderly, immunocompromised, people experiencing homelessness, incarcerated, and indigenous communities who are most affected. If we had measures such as a universal basic income in place, adequate rights for workers, paid sick leave, and benefits for the most vulnerable, it would have been far easier to roll out effective and humane measures to mitigate this crisis.”*

Nick’s full summary paper is at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/16jb3QQ6HOt8PY-tuD1a2wYXfDF9PAhUFpVYUuQQUKVk/edit>. The website for the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment is at <https://cape.ca/>.

## She Sang / He Sang

As a morale booster, a dear reader sent us a connection to a video performance of the hymn **It Is Well With My Soul** performed by 31 of Nashville’s studio singers, using their cell phones during that city’s stay-at-home pandemic order. It was recorded to share a message of hope and encouragement during challenging days. As a morale booster, it worked! The performance is at <https://1funny.com/stay-at-home-cell-phone-choir/>.

The first verse’s message of equanimity (not the same as complacency) in turbulent times is a helpful get-through-it tool for both religious and non-religious folks, whether the turbulence is a pandemic or the manifestation of the climate crisis:

***“When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll,  
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.”***

## IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: PARABLE, NOT PUNISHMENT

In the last issue of *The Village Green* – thanks to dear reader Jean-Loup Dalle – we published his English translation of a recent French parable – a dialogue between the Earth and “Little One” – the virus that causes COVID-19. Many readers commented approvingly on the story. As parables go, it’s excellent – a necessary lesson in the dangers of operationalized human arrogance. But all parables belong in scriptures or story books, not history books or works of science. When people interpret them beyond their imaginative instructive role, parables become dangerous.

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I don't believe there is literally a vengeful creature called Mother Nature or Earth or God who is punishing us or giving us a bitter lesson by sending us a catastrophic coronavirus. Nor do I think there is evidence of a causal connection between fossil fuels run amuck and the genesis of this virus.

It would be morally comforting for me to sit in the relatively secure and well-supplied self-isolation that I face, all the while telling myself that we brought this on ourselves and we deserve to be chastened for what we've done that brought this latest bogeyman from out under the couch.

Here's the problem. The "we" that degraded the earth, and the "we" that will suffer most from the apocalyptic horsemen called pandemic and global heating are not the same people. We in the developed world, or our surrogates, developed a carbon-fueled economic system and lifestyle that got the world into today's mess. For most of the last century we didn't know we were getting the whole world into a mess. For the last few decades we knew or should have known. Yet for us in developed nations, our carbonated lives are still relatively comfortable. We are not on the edge of drowning or starving or roasting or choking to death.

But others are, and their lives will become even more unbearable in the future as we in the developed world continue to spew more than our share of poisons and consume more than our share of earth's bounties. We have V.I.P. access to the lifeboats, reserved seats on the last flight out. Those in places like Vanuatu, Bangladesh, the Philippines, the Gambia and tenements in inner-city Winnipeg do not.

Any of us who over-literalize our world's climate friendly parables, those of us who believe with something between glee and "I told you so" self-satisfaction that God or nature is consciously punishing the world for its environmental sins, would do well to remember that the future will fall most heavily and tragically on those fellow humans who will leave behind them the smallest carbon footprints when they die.

Respectfully submitted to the Polis,  
John Butler

## SHE SAID / HE SAID

***"The six stages of climate denial are: It's not real. It's not us. It's not that bad. It's too expensive to fix. Aha, here's a great solution (that actually does nothing). And — oh no! Now it's too late. You really should have warned us earlier."***

Tweet from Canadian climate scientist Catherine Hayhoe, March 25, 2020

***"Even if COVID 19 does prompt mass deaths and/or societal collapse, if there are any historians still around to argue over the origins of our demise, they will be unlikely to pay much heed to the Corona outbreak itself. Instead, I expect they will puzzle over a paradox that did not befall the dinosaurs. How did humans manage to create a society so technologically advanced that they could predict the apocalypse(s), develop the technology to stop it (them), yet adamantly and proudly refuse to do so?"***

Paul David Beaumont, *Apocalypse Yesterday?*  
Disorder of Things website, March 24, 2020

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***“Conspiratorial interpretation of unfortunate events, actually diminishes our preparedness for nature’s own mischief. Conspiracy is for the weak. Understanding science takes strength.”***

Seth Itzkan, Manager, Africa Centre for Holistic Management

***“There is a lot of talk about returning to ‘normal’ after the COVID-19 outbreak. But normal was a crisis.”***

Greta Thunberg (via Liz Zetlin)

***“American government’s aid legislation has failed to address clean energy or the climate. The \$2 trillion stimulus bill passed by Congress this week, the largest fiscal stimulus package in modern American history, includes direct payments to individuals, expanded and extended unemployment benefits, and \$500 billion in loans to bail out affected industries. It does not include relief for renewables, such as crucial tax credit extensions for solar and wind. This isn’t likely to be the last stimulus. Already, there is talk of the next phase of economic relief, and climate and clean energy advocates are looking to future legislation that might aim to relieve specific industries.”***

Meehan Crist, *What the Coronavirus Means for Climate Change*,  
New York Times, March 30, 2020

**the night almost past,  
through the white plum blossoms  
a glimpse of dawn**

Yosa Buson (1716-1784)

In January 1784, on his deathbed, poet and artist Yosa Buson wrote this vision of optimism.  
Today, 236 years later, in troubled times,  
we too need a glimpse of dawn through white plum blossoms.

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