

## **Fossil Fuel Forum Meeting Note**

23 March 2016

### **APPENDIX I POST FORUM COMMENTS**

Dear Bill and John

Thank you for allowing me to come to the Fossil Fuel Forum. I did have to leave before the Plenary session started in order to get back to my pilgrimage and feel that I did not share perspectives that I should have done. I hope that you will accept the attached letter as a "postscript".

I hope that you will feel able to share with others, as my last letters to JACEI were, also with Steve H whose email address I seem to have lost.

I hope that the church investors group gets it's say at the BP AGM on Thursday, but from my perspective, I hope that it helps you to see how slow and ineffective the "engagement" way is. I have amended the views I had when I first wrote to JACEI in 2014, partly due to developing science, and partly through our own local floods, and from meeting climate affected communities elsewhere in the world.

My prayer and reflection leads me to advocate total and swift divestment by churches, together with revitalised interpretation of scripture for the emerging crises.

Very best wishes

**Maggie**

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*Dear Bill*

*Thank you very much for the recent Fossil Fuel Forum at Christ Church Spitalfields, and for extending the invitation to me as well. I found the day very informative, with some interesting presentations, and also gained a little understanding of the position of JACEI and of the CFB. However due to the inevitable slippage on the programme, and my very tight timetable for rejoining my pilgrimage to Lindisfarne, I had to leave without participating in the final plenary session. As a result I felt that I had failed to represent my local church and my District, especially as Richard Teal the Chair of Cumbria District had paid for my rail fare! I therefore hope that you can consider this letter which contains what I should have shared at the Forum, and some subsequent reflections.*

*The Methodist Church in Cumbria is supporting many communities affected by the severe flooding of December 2015. In Carlisle many people have flooded for the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> time in 10 years. Our flooding in Kendal was immeasurably worse than in 2005, with an estimated 2,500 properties flooded. In both cases flood prevention works and urban drainage schemes following earlier flooding proved inadequate because of the increase in rainfall, and the duration of the event. This was no genteel rise in water level, but torrential becks, manholes pushed several feet in the air, culverts bursting under the pressure, and water pouring into Sandylands from at least 3 different directions, none of them from the River Kent which runs through the town.*

*The rivers also rose to an astonishing extent and affected almost everyone in Cumbria because of the impact on roads and bridges, and the number of businesses affected. Many had no insurance because they were never expected to flood, and, as in other areas of the world, it is the poorest areas and individuals who suffer most. People are afraid, because there are no easy answers to*

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*preventing this happening again. The government now estimates up to 90% more rainfall due to climate change for our area, and the money allocated for prevention is limited.*

*Our church at Sandylands flooded, and will not be restored until the end of May but the temporary "Encouragement Cabin" continues to provide the support and help which remains necessary. Two churches in Kendal still serve free meals and demand has actually risen again as family and insurance company help has become exhausted.*

*Sandylands Church had already supported a Memorial to the District Synod calling for disinvestment from fossil fuel exploration and extraction because of our concern for both our environment and the poorest most effected by climate change. There was also a majority in favour of disinvestment at the 2015 Cumbria District Synod, with disagreement (by one vote) only on the time scale contained in the proposed Memorial.*

*Our experiences since December 5<sup>th</sup> 2015 have made this a really salient issue, which those living in safe, apparently ordered environments do not necessarily appreciate. My fellow church members, especially those with a science background, can see that this is urgent on a more serious level than other business ethics issues. We know that the majority of fossil fuels need to stay in the ground, and also that the commitments of all national governments contained in the Paris Agreement are too little and too slow to achieve this. If Storm Desmond was the result of 1 degree of warming above pre-industrial levels, what would be the outcome of 2, 3 or more degrees of warming for both Cumbria and the rest of the world?*

*In this context, can the taking of interest on loans for the exploration or extraction of any fossil fuels really be biblically justified anymore? We therefore believe that Methodist Church funds should no longer be invested in such operations, even if they were financially beneficial.*

*The discussions I heard at the Fossil Fuel Forum did not reflect the urgency we feel. Mark Campanale highlighted the large scale of "unburnable" fossil fuel resources, but JACEI members did not appear to be convinced by the technical possibilities for energy demand reduction, low carbon generation, or storage of electricity, and therefore unconvinced by the likelihood, or advisability, of a significant or swift reduction in fossil fuel use.*

*Graham Boyd argued that market solutions such as carbon trading could reduce fossil fuels and emissions, which was supported by some on my table (as was his reference to climate change not being necessarily the most urgent global crises). However I did not hear any reference to the Cover, Greenstone and Knittel paper (2016) in the Forum resources which demonstrated both the urgent need for radical reductions in fossil fuel use and the inefficacy of carbon trading and taxation. The authors concluded that activist and aggressive policy choices were essential. Other economists may have raised more recent papers on the costs of climate inaction<sup>1</sup>, and the positive effects on GDP highlighted by Lord Stern<sup>2</sup>, which underline the urgency of the problem and the need for early and decisive action. David Clough quoted from "Laudato Si" a more recent and more radical theological approach than "Hope in God's Future" but this was hardly referred to again. I would have wanted to make a case that "Methodist Church teaching" which you seek to enact in CFB policies needs a further review to include many other scriptural texts that should be guiding us as Christians with respect to climate change and the linked crises of war and forced migration. I am told that emerging theology refers to "co-creation" rather than "stewardship", which also has a subtle effect on how business and development should be conducted or evaluated.*

*For all these reasons it seems to me that the decision over investment of church funds in fossil fuels should be prayed about and discussed widely in the Methodist Church and referred again to Conference. These are no longer issues or judgements that lie solely within the remit, experience or expertise of JACEI. Indeed those who have been involved in large scale business and investment for many years may be: a) uncertain on the latest science; b) less aware of the "front end" of local church work on poverty and climate c) more familiar with a "voluntary" rather than regulatory approach;*

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*and d) find it very hard to recognise that engagement it is not working fast enough (even as BP's latest statements disappoint again).*

*Here in Sandylands the church has had to develop a clear response to our own climate crisis, and try to give hope and courage in dark times. Money is also being put to good use in rebuilding and attempting to adapt. My plea is that those charged with caring for the church's money use it to fund energy efficiency, low carbon energy sources and green jobs, rather than giving any comfort, respectability or support to the extraction or burning of fossil fuels. There is enough money to build a better world, but not if we waste it on having to repeatedly repair flooded homes and broken bridges, or on technologies which lock us into the past instead of the future.*

*Yours in Christ*

*Maggie Mason*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/apr/04/climate-change-will-blow-a-25tn-hole-in-global-financial-assets-study-warns>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/2423415/you-can-fight-climate-change-and-grow-the-economy-says-lord-stern>

Dear Bill

You invited any reactions on the Fossil Fuels Forum.

I thought it was well worth doing, even though we had heard many of the arguments before. The thing that surprised me was the completely different view on the prospects for renewable energy of Graham Boyd on the one hand, who seemed to be saying it was not likely to meet energy needs for a long time, and Mark Campanale and Mark Letcher on the other who both showed the same graph with a rapid increase of solar. I came away thinking that it would be good to have some independent view of this.

Then last weekend I came across this article in the Guardian

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/mar/31/rapid-decline-of-coal-use-leads-to-drop-in-uk-emissions>

This shows an increase in renewables for electricity generation from 19.1% in 2014 to 24.8% in 2015. This is all renewables, and though solar has increased by 50% it is still only 1.7% of total electricity generation. This suggests to me that Graham Boyd was pessimistic, but that the Marks were putting too much weight on their data. Overall, the figures suggest to me that the stranded assets argument has more traction than I had thought (though this is of course not the ethical issue).

Returning to ethics, I think the most useful question to emerge was "When we engage with fossil fuel companies, what is it that we are asking them to do?" I think that for mining companies the answer is to mine other resources and not coal. For oil and gas companies we want them to diversify, to become energy companies not tied to fossil fuel extraction. Others might disagree, and perhaps this is something we should discuss at a future meeting.

Best wishes

Keith Aldred