



# Why I Care about the Environment

Margot R Hodson

## How it all began

Dutch Elm disease galvanised my teenage ideals. I grew up in Somerset and had a long journey to school across the edge of the Somerset levels. The tall majestic elms marked my way for the first few years of secondary school. Then one by one they began to succumb to the dreaded disease and by the time I left for university, most of the elms had been felled. The disease was imported to Britain on infected logs. The damage came from a new very virulent fungus (*Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*) and was spread by bark beetles. Within ten years 20 million elms had died, and the familiar landscape of my childhood had been changed forever. Meanwhile, I had helped to form a local Conservation Corps and left for university to study Geography. It was there that a deepening Christian faith wove together with my concern for nature.



Those Elms were lofty prophets of what would happen to the rest of the planet. Today, we are in the midst of major biodiversity loss and extinction. There is an accelerating pace of deforestation worldwide. Exposed hillsides are vulnerable to subsidence and in tropical areas, the soils are quickly degraded. In many places, denuded scrub and landslips have replaced fertile forests. In addition, the impact of climate change is catapulting every creature on Earth into an unknown and unpredictable future. Is there any hope?

## Environment and hope

My recent project is on environment and hope. This came out of a chance conversation with a friend, Ruth Valerio. Twelve years ago, we knew the global environmental crisis was serious but we both had hope that the world governments would agree to bring in the changes necessary to bring us back from the ecological brink. As the years wore on with no agreement, that present hope began to fade. We found instead that we started looking toward the future hope summed up in Revelation 21 and 22. This promised a bright ultimate future, but what did it say for those who are struggling with environmental difficulties today? As the hope project gathered pace, we reached toward a third 'robust hope' as summed up in Romans 5: 'we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope'. This is a hope that can endure whatever the circumstances. It brings the ultimate hope of restored harmony of creation into the present. This enables us to be hopeful, even when things seem hopeless.

As Christians we have the immense privilege of glimpsing new creation. Our faith gives us sights of leaves of the tree of life that heal the nations (Revelation 22). We are brushed by the spray of the river of life as it gushes forth from the throne of God to restore and renew creation. Not only that

but 2 Corinthians 5:17 states that 'anyone who is in Christ is new creation'. The wonderful and scary truth about our faith is that we are called to be new creation – to bring those healing leaves and restoring water to those around us.

This might mean supporting projects in other parts of the world such as the Kachere Development Project in Diocese of Eastern Zambia which is providing food security by enabling women to work their land more sustainably. It will also mean engaging with these issues in our own lives and communities. You could join a local Transition group or take your church on the journey of Ecocongregation, or simply be more sustainable in your life. Our Christian hope challenges us to bring new creation to our suffering world today and strengthens us to be robust in the face of difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch\\_elm\\_disease](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_elm_disease) (Accessed on 12 August 2014).

<sup>2</sup> [www.anviljournal.org/29-1](http://www.anviljournal.org/29-1) (Accessed 12 August 2014)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.kachere.org/index.php/projects/16-development-programs/10-food-security> (Accessed on 12 August 2014).

## **Biography**

Revd Margot R Hodson is Vicar of Haddenham Benefice in Buckinghamshire and is on the management boards of The John Ray Initiative and A Rocha UK. Margot has published several books including 'Uncovering Isaiah's Environmental Ethics' (Grove Booklet E161, 2011), and 'Cherishing the Earth', co-authored with her husband Martin (Monarch, 2008).