

Mrs Helen Hutchinson – Written Evidence (LBC0045)

Zoom course held during lockdown by the **Green Christian organisation** (www.greenchristian.org.uk). The course was called 'Radical Presence' and examined perceptions of this crisis, not just as a convergence of health/medical, social justice and economic crises but also a spiritual crisis, particularly in the world's relationship with Nature.

Are there any positives you would take from this pandemic

- Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. Covid 19 is no different. In this crisis, far reaching collective resolve to bring down the number of virus deaths has been possible with politicians and the nation working together.
- We have seen incredible sacrifices made across the board by the NHS, by care workers, by funeral directors, by transport staff, by people who kept our supermarkets open and functioning and by a vast number of volunteers helping those struggling on their own or keeping people afloat who were experiencing difficulties in feeding their families
- Working from home has proved its worth to families with more down-time and less commuting stress for working parents. A You Gov poll during the pandemic showed that 42 per cent of people said they put greater value on food and other essentials and 38 percent were cooking more from scratch. Flour and sugar shortages in supermarkets underlined that. More than half interviewed said they will make changes in their own lives and want the country as a whole to learn from this crisis.
- People living in cities have reported cleaner air, quieter roads and skies and safer cycling.
- The health advice to take a walk every day during lockdown was followed by thousands of people and many say they discovered their neighbourhood for the first time and met neighbours whom they were hardly aware of before Covid.
- A spell of warm weather in early lockdown, meant millions of people re-discovered the amazing exuberance of nature in springtime and to me this is one of the most important positive effects of Covid if it leads to a change in our attitudes toward nature and the earth. (See also Changes for the Better, below)

What are the things that you are most worried about

- That we will learn nothing from the changes we have had to make and that the 'new normal' will in time revert to the 'old normal'.

- That the Government will continue to be deaf to the view of most fair-minded people who are willing to pay more in income tax to support the NHS.
- I worry that 'economic' reasons will be used not to pay a fair wage to all those people on whom we depended for our lives. During the pandemic, global religious groups representing millions of people -the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation and the Council of World Mission- urged governments to put more money into healthcare and social protection and suggested progressive wealth taxes at national and global level to resource the response to the pandemic
- My two chief worries are (1) that our public health emergency is symptomatic of a deeper economic crisis. The link between a decade of austerity and poverty, ill health and poor and overcrowded housing across the country has been thrown into sharp relief by this pandemic. How then is this crisis to be tackled when we are facing massive financial bills, businesses going to the wall, possible rising unemployment and the continuing threat of leaving the EU without a deal?
- And (2) quoting the words of a group called the 'High Ambition Coalition for Nature' within the UN Climate Negotiations: "Something is terribly wrong with human stewardship of the earth." This virus is not bad luck or a one-off event that nobody could see coming. It's an entirely predictable result of humanity's destruction of nature. Just one statistic from the UN Environment Programme: "Nearly one million species face extinction, whilst the illegal wildlife trade is the fourth largest illegal trade crime in the world. This trade increases the risk of disease transmission from animals to people.

What do you most hope changes for the better

- As a way of building on the sense of community that emerged in the pandemic I would hope to see much more de-centralisation and local or regional ownership of services ranging from health, education, social care to water, sanitation, renewable energy and the protection of land for agriculture, the green belt, local green spaces etc. The aim of this would be to create more resilient local communities where people and families feel they have a stake in their future wellbeing. I consider the Transition Town sustainability principle as having much to say on this.
- I would hope to see new networks of civil society, social movements and faith communities working together to address the gross inequalities highlighted by Covid death rates, to bring about a more just and caring UK society.
- Now that we know that our relentless exploitation of the earth as an unlimited resource, our exploitation of wild species, our urbanisation and

global air travel have all contributed to Covid 19, I hope the government, corporations, business, the super-wealthy , multi nationals and we the people of this country acquire a new humility not to live in a way that profits us at the earth's or others' expense.

- The theme of the UN's World Environment Day on June 5, whilst we were in a global lockdown was 'Biodiversity'. If nothing else, this reminds us that as human beings we are all inextricably linked with everyone else through the web of life. Covid 19 has shown us how suddenly and unexpectedly we could become utterly dependent on other people and on food and fruit that is grown globally and not locally. Can this finally remove our all-consuming blindness to each other and the planet and bring to an end the destruction of our sacred earth? That is my great hope for the long term outcome of Covid19

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