



te change together:

The pandemic has been the worst natural disaster of our lifetimes. It is a global catastrophe that has affected every one of us. Leaders have disagreed over how to handle it and what the best solutions are. And owing to its profound impact on the poorest and most marginalised people, it has forced societies around the world to confront deep moral questions.

But this isn't just true of the pandemic: the same can be said about climate change. The only difference is the speed of the impact: the pandemic up-ended all of our lives, all over the world, in a matter of weeks.

Crises bring together unusual allies. We both began our careers in the oil industry, but from there took unconventional - and very different - paths. One of us ran the world's largest renewable energy private equity fund, and was accused by American oil lobbyists of having 'left the church'; the other is now Archbishop of Canterbury.

From these common beginnings, and different middles, we now find ourselves united by the climate emergency. We share a belief in the value of science and engineering, and we are motivated too by the duty of care – one of us would say God-given responsibility – we all have to safeguard the future of our planet and its citizens.

The key to understanding and addressing these existential threats lies in both the practical and the profound: in science and engineering, but also the idea, found in the Christian faith, that each person is precious, worth caring for and has potential.

For a long time, scientific truths about climate change were treated as opinion, something which you might or might not believe depending on your personal point of view. We have come a long way since then. But resolving the crisis still requires commitment to the truth – we owe that to those who will suffer the most if we fail to act.

This journey from opinion to truth is a crucial first step, but the journey that really matters is from truth to sustainable action.

That will require every one of us to play our part. It cannot just be done by governments or companies, by NGOs or faith groups, and it cannot be done in isolation. We will have to work with people with whom we disagree, sometimes profoundly. Indeed, the two of us writing do not agree on everything, but we recognise that we are united by a common cause: that in facing the threat of climate change, there is more that unites us than divides us.

Individual responses need to be guided by hope rather than fear, and the certainty that huge change is made up of small things. We are both realists when it comes to human behaviour: sustainable change rarely comes from asking people to make unrealistically ambitious sacrifice. Instead, we must give people the engineered tools and the economic incentives to make choices that work for them and for the planet. The combined power of engineering, economics and leadership through example makes a profound difference.

Investors and businesses need to go beyond “greenwash”, which sees existing activity creatively relabelled to advertise its supposed sustainability. The world has seen enough of this. It is time to demonstrate authentic change, and an unambiguous contribution to the world’s climate goals. This is about much more than renewable energy: it means rethinking the way that we consume energy, generate waste, and design the industrial processes on which our economies rely. And it means setting emissions reduction targets that are rooted in science, measuring progress against those targets, and being held accountable for achievement.

Governments too have unprecedented opportunity to lead by example and incentivise change, particularly as we approach COP26, the G7 and the passage of the Environment Bill in Parliament. Recent action by the United States, the UK and others suggests that 2021 could be a watershed year for international cooperation on climate change.

Cooperation is the operative word. Above all else, we must build partnerships that bridge disagreement and disunity. It is time to put aside our many differences to save the one planet we all share. The urgency of tackling the climate crisis denies us the luxury of working only with people who are perfect and have never made mistakes. Nor can we partner only with those who agree with us entirely.

Every single one of us – in all of our ignorance and selfishness as human beings – has to be part of the solution. Science and engineering have already provided us with the tools we need to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions. It is now up to us to apply them at scale, to bring their cost down, and to make them part of our shared future. It will take broken people to repair a broken world, and we all have a responsibility to change our ways and bring others with us. With climate change, it is better to disagree and work together than not to take action at all. Nature is no respecter of personal perfection.

Whatever your beliefs, the teaching of Jesus Christ that nothing is beyond redemption offers a powerful message of hope for a wounded world. There is no person who cannot change, no bad that cannot be made good. There is nothing that cannot be redeemed in what Christians would describe as ‘the new creation.’

Let us seize that lesson. We can all be – and it is not yet too late! - part of that work. Each of us can choose community rather than isolation, creation rather than destruction, and life rather than death.

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury

Lord Browne of Madingley, former CEO, bp

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