

Religion and climate change

A look at the perception of members of different faith-based organisations in Groningen on climate change and climate adaptation

Bachelor Project
Thijs van den Berg
S3767744
Faculty of Spatial Sciences
Supervisor: Ethemcan Turhan

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Abstract

While climate change and religion might not always have gone together very well, climate change has become a hot topic in religious discourse in recent years. While certain worldviews such as anthropocentrism in the Abrahamic religions have been criticized for being a bad influence on people's behaviour and even contributing to climate and ecological degradation, on the individual level, people have found ways to connect their beliefs to a concern for climate and ecology. As a consequence people have become more aware of the options and have already started to be more careful about their own lifestyles in connection with the climate. In practice, other than on an individual level, climate adaptation activities, projects or financing by religious organisations have still been very limited. One of the reasons might be that the organisations that are actively busy with charitable causes and community projects mainly focus on people, where the work that one is doing is way more visible. This paper tries to answer the question: how do people from different faith-based communities perceive climate change and climate change interventions within the urban fabric of Groningen? It is an in-depth case study that wherein one focus group with members of a Buddhist community and six interviews with people from Jewish, Mormon and different Protestant communities in Groningen, were conducted. The interview data is combined with statements on climate change by religious leaders and data on different (planned) climate change adaptation projects in and around Groningen.

Findings suggest that people from different religious organisations have found ways to connect the importance of climate change action to their religious beliefs and values. Most welcome climate change adaptation projects in the city of Groningen if they do not reduce practicality significantly, or result in hindrance to a particular group of people. Some organisations have started actively participating in climate adaptation of their own, church communities like the protestant municipality Groningen-Zuid. Whether the start of projects like this is a trend that will continue to happen among the religious community of Groningen or in general remains to be seen. Charitable projects and community involvement from different religious organisations are still often focused on helping people directly instead of climate adaptation projects or charities that only help people indirectly.

1.0 Introduction

“The young, who in recent years have strongly urged us to act, will only inherit the planet we choose to leave to them, based on the concrete choices we make today. Now is the moment for decisions that can provide them with reasons for hope and trust in the future.” (Message of the Holy Father Francis to the Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in Glasgow, 29 October 2021).

A speech by the pope during the climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland. Not only a message from the leader of the Catholic church, but a message that all religious and non-religious people can agree with. That it is not only young climate activists that speak up, but also the biggest religious leader in the world only shows that climate change as a societal problem concerns all and is relevant for all social institutions including religious organisations. Looking at the individual level, everyone has their own set of values and worldviews that they find important in life. With religions, there is often a higher power and other realities than the here and now, with that come religious values related to these. It is interesting to see how these values and beliefs are related to a modern-day problem like climate change which is very much in the here and now. Where it is hard to talk about climate change and ‘religion’ as a single concept, seeing that it is something very broad, one can still look at how people from or within different faith-based organisations see and deal with a societal problem like climate change.

Let us start at the beginning, although climate change has been very relevant for a couple of decades, not all people perceive it in the same way. This perception is influenced by several factors, the actual physical factors and consequences of climate change, but also socio-cultural, political and religious factors (Van der Linden, 2017; Rühlemann and Jordan, 2021). Understanding these factors can be very relevant for understanding someone’s response to climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. The factor of religion is especially interesting here, given that religion and climate change awareness and response have not always had a positive relation (Jenkins et al., 2018). Climate change and some religious discourse might clash in some situations, which could challenge religious beliefs that people had for years. Additionally, different religious communities might perceive climate change and climate change interventions differently, this makes it interesting to look at the different perceptions in a place where these different communities live together.

The Netherlands has, contrary to what a lot of inhabitants think, always been a religiously diverse country. Through the ages migration to the country have brought different religious beliefs, which only recently since the arrival of Muslim migrants is seen as a threat by some people (Beck, 2013). The city is where these migrants have come together to find opportunities, which is why the urban fabric of the city is a melting pot of different people with different beliefs and religions in one place. With Groningen being a student city with a large share of international students, this city is a logical site to research how climate change impacts and climate change adaptation are perceived by people from different faiths. The concept of values comes into play here, different religious beliefs mean different values that people find important. For example, places in the city that are important to people and how these places are affected by climate change impacts or climate change adaptation initiatives. Understanding these values can help us understand what climate

change means to people and how it is intertwined with their beliefs (O'Brien and Wolf, 2010). Williams Jr (1979) talks about the underlying psychological factors that explain how someone's values and beliefs influence decision making. Brink and Wamsler (2019) found that values and worldviews played an important role in seeing climate change as a problem and having the motivation to do something about it, but also found that this motivation did not necessarily turned into action. Making it interesting to see how people in Groningen interpret their own religious teachings and accompanying values and how they, in turn, use this as a reason to take action or not.

This also brings us to the research gap, O'Brien and Wolf (2010) mentioned that more research needs to be done on what climate change means for the values and religious beliefs of an individual. Furthermore, what does it mean when religious or non-religious beliefs are challenged by the ever-growing notions of climate change. These questions are interesting to investigate in a 'diverse' city like Groningen, where several different religious organisations are present all having their own unique beliefs and things they find important in the urban fabric they reside in. The central question this paper tries to answer is, how do people from different faith-based communities perceive climate change and climate change interventions within the urban fabric of Groningen?

Using the following sub-questions, this paper tries to find answers on the issue and look for new research gaps in the future.

- How do people from different faith-based organisations perceive climate change as a topic or climate change consequences in the city of Groningen?
- What do people from different faith-based organisations value most in the city of Groningen?
- How is climate change linked to the values or religious beliefs of people in the city of Groningen and have they influenced each other?
- Is there a place for religion in climate change adaptation and mitigation?

In this research paper, I first provide the research problem, research gap and the overarching question I would like to answer. The key concepts and theories on this subject will be discussed in the theoretical framework, after which the methodology is shown wherein the ways in which I collected my primary and secondary data are discussed. With the results from the data collection, the above-mentioned research questions are worked out in the findings, and discussed and summarized in the discussion and conclusion.

2.0 Theoretical framework

2.1 Climate change perception, vulnerability, values and worldviews

Perception of climate change does not only depend on the physical aspect of climate change, several other factors influence the way an individual perceives to be at risk from climate change (Van der Linden, 2017; Rühlemann and Jordan, 2021). Vulnerability is one of these factors, people on the island of Java might perceive the rising sea levels as more of a threat when you compare it to people in The Netherlands. Technological, economic or other factors make for a nation to be less able to adapt to the climate change consequences (Adger, 2006). While this paper looks only at the city of Groningen a much smaller scale, it has been found that also within a city, there are different levels of vulnerability relating to the socio-economic and demographic circumstances of the population (Wolf et al., 2010). Looking at religion, different religious groups might live in different financial circumstances and live in different places in a city which can relate to different levels of vulnerability. Looking further into the different places in the city, individuals or groups value or have a meaning attached to different places in the city. This meaning of places in a city, or anywhere for that matter, might clash with certain climate change adaptation or mitigation strategies that will change the city landscape. Here comes into play what people value most in their environment, and with a changing environment because of climate change knowing these values can give helpful insights into how we should adapt to the problems we are facing (O'Brien and Wolf, 2010; Rühlemann and Jordan, 2021). Williams Jr (1979), argues that values are:

“an organized set of preferential standards that are used in making selections of objects and actions, resolving conflicts, invoking social sanctions, and coping with needs or claims for social and psychological defences of choices made or proposed.”

Some of these preferential standards might come from someone's religious background and might be the product of years of religious upbringing. Meaning that someone might value 'being true to god' above everything else. How this affects action and decision making depends on all the other values and how they are standing between each other, with the aspect of climate change relating very much to the part of 'coping with needs or claims for social and psychological defences of choices made or proposed.

2.2 Climate change and religion

Going further into the concept of values, religion and religious beliefs have different values and traditions attached to them. (Haq and Ahmed, 2017; Wolf and Moser, 2011; Christian et al., 2021). In some situations in Bangladesh for example, people believed that the floods that were happening were punishments by god (or gods) because of sins and wrongdoing by the people living in the affected areas (Haq and Ahmed, 2017). When looking at religious values, Abrahamic religious discourse builds on the belief that God put man on earth to rule over it. The story is very similar in the Bible, Koran and Torah, with God creating the earth and man and, using different words, to 'rule, steward, work, use or guard' it. Seeing that all Abrahamic religions talk in the story of the earth's creation about man being the caretaker or steward and standing above all other

lifeforms on earth can be interpreted differently by people reading it. This notion can be seen as anthropocentric and according to White (1967), a reason why we as humans have disregarded nature and ecology through the ages. While not everyone might be open about this, or even aware that they see the world in this way, some groups are. This idea of stewardship directly puts man above all other life on earth, and all the earth's resources at our disposal. While official statements of the different Abrahamic religious organisations on climate change use this belief as a way to say that we as humans have the obligation to care about other life, there are also others who see it differently. A particular religious movement within the US evangelical church, for example, believe that climate change is not at all affected by human interference and fossil fuel is a gift by God and should be used to guarantee human flourishing (Jenkins et al., 2018). The anthropocentric worldview that is mainly visible in the stories of the earth's creation, has thus had some critique by people, saying that they give rise to worldviews like those of the branch within the US evangelical church. White (1967) goes even further and argues that there is a relation between the anthropocentric worldview of Christian theological interpretation and ecological degradation in the world. Arguing that to really do something about present day climate and ecological problems, we need to rethink the way we see and position ourselves in the complex system that we are living in. Coming up with a new less anthropocentric religion or religious stories, or drastically rethinking the way we interpret our old religions. While White (1967) has been challenged by some, many agree with the fact that biblical texts need to be subject to critical reinterpretation (Colgan, 2020).

Overall different religions try to incorporate climate change more into their religious beliefs. Religious discourse tends to change slowly, just like all social structures in society, but since the issue of climate change this process has gone into overdrive (Haluzá-DeLay 2014). According to Hoffman (2015), this is a necessary development seeing that, certainly for many Christians, a speech by the pope inspires way more people than an important politician or other public figures. Keeping in mind that it is not only religion influencing climate change perception and climate change intervention with that, but the other way around, climate change also influences religious discourse and is a very important subject in theological debate (Jenkins et al., 2018). Hulme (2017), argues that it would even be weird if religion would completely ignore the notion of climate change, religious discourse constantly discusses the relationship between humans, God(s), earth and the other forms of life on it. Seeing that climate change is a universal problem, one would indeed expect that religious organisations try to incorporate it into their teachings and make it a relevant subject within religious discourse. Consequently, it could be interesting to see how people in the city of Groningen have experienced changes in their beliefs because of climate change or climate change intervention.

2.3 Religion and climate change action

So how exactly do people link their religious beliefs to climate concerns and how does this result in action? While both secular and religious groups share a concern for climate and ecology, they built on a different set of values (Bomberg and Hague 2018). Religious people tend to fall back on spiritual hope, the care for God's creation and neighbourliness, or charity. With the aspect of God's creation linking with the earlier

mentioned idea of stewardship, something that is also prevalent in the official statements of different religious organisations during the Paris climate conference (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Although being concerned about climate change and linking it to one's religious beliefs is an important step, that does not mean that it will result in pro-environmental action. Brink and Wamsler (2019) found that motivation in the form of climate change concern does not necessarily mean that the people also act on that concern, even talking about a gap between motivation and action. On the organisational level there have not been a lot of faith-based organisations concerning themselves with climate change adaptation. In some smaller Pacific islands states where climate change has often become a more urgent problem, the Christian church is playing an important role in climate adaptation in the form of mobility and forced migration (Kempf, 2012). The FACS in Virginia USA takes a more proactive stance, this interfaith grassroots organisation called The Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions is a faith based organisation with the shared will to do something for our planet because of a collective commitment to god his creation. This organisation is interesting in the sense that it is an interfaith organisation, with even Hindu representatives, which is a religion quite distant from the beliefs of the Abrahamic religions. The organisation mainly focuses on the local scale, where smaller organisations and individuals can make an impact. They have already achieved several results in the relatively short amount of time since they started in 2013, also having a great impact on the funding of the county that goes toward climate change adaptation (Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions, 2021). This is an organisation that does not necessarily experience radical consequences of climate change first hand like on the Pacific islands. This proactive stance to climate change is something that is not seen a lot among faith-based organisations and something that could be set up in other cities or regions like Groningen.

2.4 Conceptual model

As shown in the Conceptual model on the next page and explained in the theory, climate change perception is influenced by several factors. The actual physical climate change impacts and consequences, how vulnerable people are, the religious values and beliefs where we will be focussing on and several other things that are less relevant for this paper. These religious values and beliefs influence how people perceive climate change, but in some instances are also influenced by a modern day problem like climate change. In turn how one perceives climate change affects how someone reacts and takes action. This paper also looks at the possibility of a direct relationship between religion and climate change adaptation in Groningen. In chapter 2.3 we mentioned the example of The Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions in the USA, but it is interesting to see if similar projects or other forms of climate adaptation by religious organisations are present in Groningen.

Conceptual model

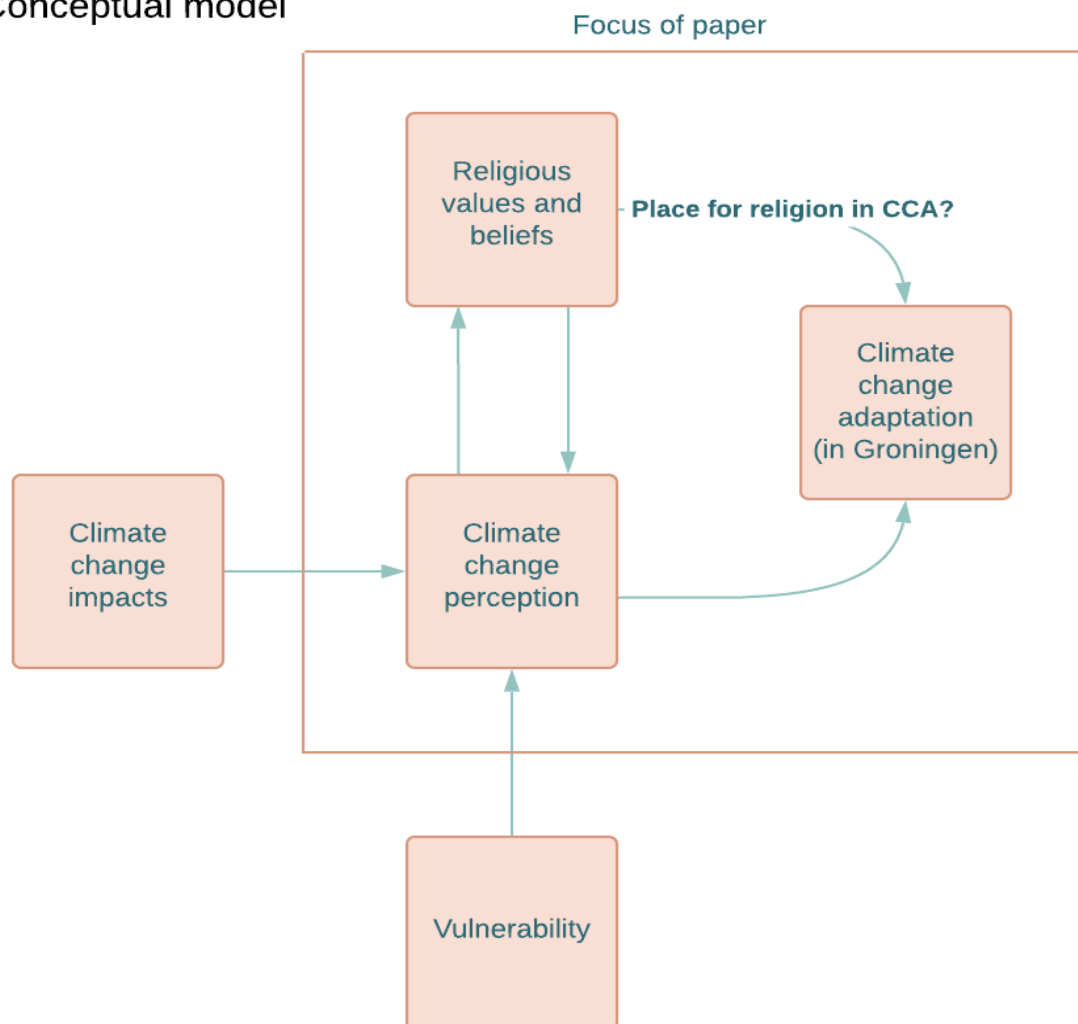


Figure 2.1 Conceptual model (made with Lucidchart)

3.0 Methodology

For this in-depth case study, primary data collection in the form of interviews were conducted among people belonging to various religious organisations in Groningen. Using interviews seemed to have been the best approach, seeing that with interviews one can go more in-depth into someone's perception of climate change, values and religious beliefs. For example, Brink and Wamsler (2019), on the role of values and worldviews in relation to climate change, used a survey in a Swedish municipality as a research method. However, they found that although a survey did provide them with some useful insights, it did not allow them to find out about an individual's perception of climate change and its relation with their values and beliefs.

Although interviews might not give statistical data to draw conclusions from, they will help to get a deeper understanding of what people think and believe. The interview, that can be found in the appendix, was divided into four parts relating to the sub-questions mentioned in chapter 1.0, which made it easier to analyse and find answers to these questions. In total, six Interviews and one focus group were done with people from the Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist and Mormon communities. One interview with an office-holder and deacon of a church of the Protestantse wijkgemeente Groningen-Zuid, which is also a 'Green Church'. Two interviews were done with members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), one with a former bishop of the church here in Groningen, another with a member who is also a student at the university. One interview was done with a member of the 'Vrije Baptistengemeente Groningen' and another with someone who is in between churches, but leaning to the Evangelical church in Groningen. The final interview was done with a member and board member of the Jewish municipality Groningen, who is also working at the University of Groningen. Besides the interviews, one focus group was done with members of the Diamantweg Buddhist in Groningen. These communities were chosen because of various reasons. The Protestant community is the biggest religious community within the city of Groningen and it was also interesting to look at how people from different branches within the protestant church viewed the subject of climate change and their beliefs. The community of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), gives a useful insight into a 'non-native religious movement actively trying to convert people in the city of Groningen. The Buddhist community will show a different viewpoint than that of the previously mentioned Abrahamic religious movements, one where nature and ecology are already more prevalent. More religious organisations like the Islamic community, the biggest migrant religion (Schmeets, 2016) in the Netherlands, and the Catholic church in Groningen were contacted to arrange a possible interview or focus group. They were due to various reasons, non-responsive, not willing or able to participate in a possible interview.

The interviews were in a semi-structured fashion and followed some pre-set subjects based on the research questions shown in the interview guide, but were not limited to this guide. Furthermore, the interviews were altered to be relevant to the person and his or her particular religious organisation. Different religious organisations had different public statements on climate change, meaning that the questions were different as well. The interviews were all between 30 and 65 minutes and were done anonymously to guarantee the privacy of the participants. With the consent of the interviewees, the conversation was recorded to make it

easier to analyse and transcribe afterwards. Furthermore, five of the six interviews were done via online platforms, due to time constraints or Covid issues, this seemed to be the best option in these situations.

The focus group with members of Diamantweg Buddhism in Groningen at the Buddhist temple did not go as planned. After an email correspondence with a member of the organisation, I was invited to the temple to ask my questions. However, the people at the temple were not notified and it turned out to be the normal weekly meditation session. Although I could ask some general questions about their beliefs and had a wonderful experience joining a 90-minute meditation session, it wasn't possible to ask the prepared questions that were relevant for this research. Furthermore, none of the people present at the session was able to do a follow-up interview.

The interviews were combined with secondary data gathered from official statements on climate change and climate change intervention by the overarching different religious organisations e.g. Laudato Si by the pope (Hoffman, 2015). Jenkins et al. (2018), provides a good overview of what the different organisations have said on the subject around the Paris 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference. Furthermore, new statements around the Glasgow 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference have been very relevant in the news. The statements of the different religious organisations were gathered and analysed in advance of the interviews, seeing that this was relevant during the interviews to reference and ask questions about. Furthermore, information on climate change adaptation and mitigation plans and projects in the city of Groningen was also used in the interviews and analysis. The climate adaptation week Groningen was held in January of 2021, and various useful present and future plans and projects were presented there (Design Manifestation Act & Adapt, 2021). These plans about further minimising car use in the city centre, in addition, further municipal plans on the reorganization of the Grote Markt and other minor intervention projects were asked about in the interviews.

The shortcomings of the data is the relatively low number of primary data sources in the form of interviews carried out. Furthermore, the people willing to participate in an interview about climate change and climate change adaptation are usually already more open on the subject. Someone who doesn't care about climate change will be less enthusiastic about a possible interview. This makes for the fact that one cannot draw conclusions on how the people of different religious organisations perceive climate change and climate change adaptation, but can find insights into people's individual perceptions and thoughts on if or how there is a place for religion in the climate change debate and climate change adaptation projects.

Interview 1	04-11-2021	Protestant municipality Groningen Zuid	35 minutes	Working
Interview 2	12-11-2021	De Stadskerk (Baptist)	35 minutes	Student
Interview 3	17-11-2021	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	35 minutes	Student

Interview 4	12-11-2021	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	40 minutes	Working
Interview 5	3-12-2021	Evangelical church	35 minutes	Student
Interview 6	8-12-2021	Jewish Orthodox municipality Groningen	60 minutes	Working
Focus group 1	10-11-2021	Diamantweg Buddhism Groningen		All working or retired

Table 3.1 Overview interviews with the religious organisation and stage in life of the participants

4.0 Findings

4.1 The interpretation of religious lessons and scripts and how this is linked with climate change.

Religious texts and scriptures have always been subject to interpretation, the story of earth's creation is a good example of this. In chapter 2.3 we discussed the arguments by White (1967) and Colgan (2020) on the anthropocentric worldviews of the Christian and other Abrahamic religions. While most interviewees did support the anthropocentric notion of seeing humans as 'special' and different from all other life on earth, they did see this concept of stewardship, or *rentmeesterschap* in Dutch, as the responsibility to care for and cherish God's creation. They argued that humans are the only species that was created with the ability to reason and thus the only species with the ability to care for God's creation. In their view, this gave even more of an incentive to think about their way of living in terms of consumption, car use and other aspects. Most did, however, not feel like the things they valued and found important in life had changed because of climate change. Seeing that they were, to a certain extent, already climate and nature conscious. Furthermore, climate change issues had not changed their religious beliefs in any way. Seeing that this idea of stewardship had always been an important part of their religious beliefs and climate change was just a way to show them that we as humans are not really doing a good job in caring for God's creation. As earlier mentioned, it is not possible to make any conclusions from this, seeing that people who agreed to do an interview about climate change were already likely to find it an important topic already.

Going back to White (1967), it has a point in saying that Christian biblical stories like Genesis, and arguably also the other Abrahamic religious creation stories, are written in an anthropocentric way with humans standing above all other species. One could also argue that although this might be the case if people see themselves as stewards and actually take action according to their perceived duty to care for God's creation, is this anthropocentric worldview a problem? An example that positively illustrates that religious texts and beliefs are always open for interpretation and positive action, is an example of participant 6, member of the Jewish community. He told about how for the orthodox Jewish community, eating habits and food according to kosher customs are strict in many ways of which he gave the example of an egg:

“If the egg has only a slight abnormality, it is not considered kosher and can not be used for consumption. A Jewish journalist looked at these kosher rules and regulations and found that there was a lot of food waste due to these restrictions. This journalist went to one of the highest rabbis in the Netherlands with his findings and argued that this amount of food waste did not fit with the vision for a more sustainable world to counter a lot of the present-day ecological and societal problems. The rabbi agreed with the fact that this did not fit in with modern society and went to look at the Torah and other religious scriptures and statements to find a way to connect the notion of no food wastage to other Jewish religious beliefs. He found a way to do this and consequently reduced the food wastage by the Jewish community in the Netherlands.” (Participant 6, 08-12-2021).

This shows that with the right attitude and the right people who are willing to make a change, even religious beliefs that have been in place for hundreds of years can be altered to fit the present-day problems we face. The question then arises: do religious organisations have the right people, with the right attitude within the right places? Like we have seen at the climate summits in Paris and Glasgow, religious leaders have tried to make compelling statements on the danger of climate change and our duties to god (Jenkins et al., 2018). Although Hoffman (2015) argues that a speech by the pope, like *Laudato Si*, inspires more people than any President or other county leader would, in the end, it is to the people themselves to make their own choices. The pope, an important rabbi, or even religious texts can only encourage people to make the right choices. A good example of this was given by participant 4 of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

“There are certain Commandments within our church that prescribe us to only eat meat when necessary, in winter times when food is scarce. That is definitely not something that is followed by every member of our church, and a lot of people still choose to eat meat every day. The church can give us guidelines and advice on what to do, but in the end the people make their own choices.” (Participant 4, 12-11-2021)

While the church cannot order people to do something, that does not mean that important subjects like climate change and what people can do about it should not be talked about. An international figure like the pope, but also people in religious organisations on the local scale can always inspire change. Seeing that conversation and discussion about a subject is always a useful way to raise awareness and encourage action.

4.2 The perception of climate change adaptation in the city

The participants were all for furthering climate adaptation and mitigation measures in the city of Groningen and were not experienced as a hindrance in any way. Most participants were not very big car users or not car users at all which meant that the complicated traffic situation was not very much of a concern. In the interview, an example of a plan to further minimise the use of cars in the city centre of Groningen (Climate Adaptation Groningen, 2021), was put forward. Many of the participants liked the process that was going on in making Groningen, even more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly, but not all think further limiting car use was the best option. They stated that traffic in the city should remain practical and no particular group in the population should fall victim to the measures. The example of the elderly was mentioned a lot here, where all participants felt that it would be fine for them to go everywhere by bike, they did have concerns for older and less mobile people. While limiting car use would be fine, it should still be possible if necessary to reach the city centre by car. Participant 1 gave the example of some German cities where they have implemented certain time slots where it is possible to reach certain areas by car. Furthermore, additional measures like a climate label for cars, where clean cars were able to enter certain places while cars with a lot of emissions were banned. Others did not see these as feasible plans and thought it would be better to find other ways for the city to adapt to climate change.

“I like how they try and make more space for buses and bicycles, but don’t see a reason to make it even harder for cars in the city, it is already very difficult for them.” (Participant 5, 3-12-2021).

More green in the city was seen as a positive trend by everyone, not only because of climate concerns but also aesthetically. Most participants enjoyed being in nature anyway, some even saying that they felt closer to god and at peace in nature. One of the examples of more green in the city is the plan of the municipality to redesign the Grote Markt, with new water features and trees (Ruimte voor jou Groningen, 2021). These plans are mainly to make the Grote Markt an attractive place where people like to go, but also have climate change adaptation aspects to it. The water features and trees will make for, both a cooler place during the possible hotter days in summer and a way to limit the water drainage peak during heavy rainfall. Both things will happen more frequently due to climate change. While the Grote Markt could be seen as a historical square, nobody seemed to mind the idea of planting trees. Participant 6 did mention:

I’m all for plans like planting trees on the Grote Markt, but that does seem more symbolic than really something that would adapt Groningen to climate change in the coming years (Participant 6, 08-12-2021).

4.3 Is there a place for religion in climate change adaptation and mitigation projects?

Statements of different religious leaders before the climate summit in Paris and Glasgow, have shown that climate change has become an important topic within the religious community. If we then focus on the actual part of taking action in the form of climate change adaptation and mitigation, the role of religion and religious organisations are still limited. Christopherson (2020), for example, argues that in the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the billions of dollars in funds of the church that are meant for charities should go to climate change mitigation and adaptation. With other large religious organizations, the argument is exactly the same (Root, 2021). The chance that this will become reality anytime soon is probably quite slim. A possible reason for this was also mentioned in the interviews several times.

I know that our church community is very much centred around people, helping around in the neighbourhood is mainly to help the people than to do something good for the climate (Participant 3, 17-11-2021).

What becomes clear from the interviews is that religious organisations that do participate in charitable work, community activities and kinds of work outside the church environment are focused on the human part. Most of these projects and charities tend to be about helping people directly in an, at that moment, visible way. On the local scale in Groningen, some of the members of different faith based organisations said they participated in national community projects like ‘NL Doet’ and ‘De nationale natuurwerkdag’ (freely translated to ‘NL makes themselves busy’ and ‘The national nature work day’). While these are projects that have a positive impact on nature and ecology in the area, some of the individuals did mention that participating in these activities was not necessary with the environment, but rather to make themselves visible, helping others and doing something good for the community.

Looking at the international scale, donations and other forms of charity often go to people in areas affected by climate disasters like floods or droughts. Focusing on helping the people get back on their feet and being able to see the results rather than money or resources for climate change adaptation or mitigation projects that might result in not needing to react to disasters in the first place. These reactive projects have results that are way more visible to the organisations themselves and others, and definitely, something that is preferred by organisations who concern themselves with missionary work and converting others to their religious beliefs. That does not mean that the organisations do not see themselves doing anything that might be more proactive in the area of climate change adaptation and doing something good for the community in that way. This does mean that these organisations should think of ways to make these projects and activities more visible to the community if this is something that they find important.

Willingness is one thing, but the scale of the organisation is also something that has to be kept in mind. While it might be easy on the national level to make plans relating to climate change adaptation on the local level, where there is an organisation of no more than 70 people like in the case of the Jewish orthodox community in Groningen this is a lot harder. Seeing that this is also not an organisation that is actively

spreading the word of god or trying to convert people, using activities and projects for that reason is also not a necessity.

5.0 Discussion

The participants have all found ways to link their religious values and beliefs to environmental concern. These values and beliefs were very much in line with the values Bomberg and Hague (2018) mentioned, with the care for God's creation and neighbourliness being the most prevalent. Arguments by White (1967) and Colgan (2020) that the anthropocentric worldviews related to the idea of stewardship would not fit modern day problems like climate change were not recognised at all and most participants found more motivation to care for God's creation. Where Brink and Wamsler (2019) found that there was a gap between the motivation to adapt and actual climate adaptation, most participants participate in several forms of minor climate adaptation on the individual level. Ranging from watching their consumer patterns to changes in mobility. On the organisational level, there have also been some developments from religious organisations that have been busy with climate change adaptation. On the local scale in Groningen, one can already see some examples of how it can be done. Participant 1 is a member of the Protestant community Groningen-Zuid, with the church also being a 'Groene Kerk'. The platform 'Groene Kerk' or green church is a platform that churches can join to, as a church and individually start doing more in the area of climate and sustainability. Where the churches that are part of it need to take at least one step towards a more sustainable church and community a year (Groenekerken.nl, n.d.).



Figure 5.1 Logo of Groenekerken (Groenekerken.nl, n.d.)

A project like the in chapter 2.3 mentioned Faith Alliance for Climate Solutions would also not be unthinkable to be implemented in Groningen. While the religious organisations in the United States are of another scale, seeing that The Netherlands and other European countries are generally more secular than the US (Casanova, 2007), that does not mean that these kinds of projects on a smaller scale could not work in a city like Groningen.

These are good examples where the organisations not only believe in the fact that they have a duty to care for God's creation, but also actually act on it. Then again, these organisations are often still based on the premise that we need to take action because it is our duty to god. Not necessarily because of the will to save a Pacific island from sinking beneath the ocean, or the Orang-utan from losing its habitat to deforestation. To combat criticism on the anthropocentric worldview that the bible is written in, religious scholars in Australia came up with the earth bible (Habel, 2000). A perspective of the bible, that is based on eco-justice principles and gives agency to earth and the ability to speak up against injustice. It is also written in the premise that Earth and everything on it is very much like a community of different things that are all interconnected and mutually dependent on one another. If one still does not think this is enough of and really ought to look towards less anthropocentric new religions like White (1967) and Colgan (2020), argued. New age religions like those that Taylor (2010) calls 'Dark Green religions'. These are religions or other forms of spirituality that are more ecocentric or biocentric, seeing humans as part of the system and just one wheel among others components that keep the machine working. This last part is very much in line with the earlier mentioned earth bible only with the fact that humans are often not seen as special at all. There is a wide range of opinions on how we should react to the worldviews presented in different religious teachings. What is prevalent, is that although some criticize it, the idea of stewardship and the duty to god to care for his creation has led to people actively participating in climate change adaptation, sustainability and other forms of pro-environmental action.

6.0 Conclusion

That one cannot see climate change and religious discourse separately anymore has become quite clear. Religious organisations and their members face the same present day societal and ecological problems as any other person on the planet, which means that, also in religious discourse, climate change should be a relevant subject (Hulme, 2017).

This research paper tried to find the answer to the question, how do people from different faith-based communities perceive climate change and climate change interventions within the urban fabric of Groningen? Using data from seven interviews and focus groups, combined with official statements of different religious organisations and data on different climate adaptation plans and projects. The findings show that people from different religious organisations have found ways to connect their religious beliefs and values to climate change and reasons to do something about it. On the other hand, charitable projects and community activities by different faith based organisations are still usually initially focused on people, rather than motivated by climate concerns. This does not mean that these activities and projects might not also have a positive impact on the climate. Furthermore, members of religious organisations in Groningen welcome further climate adaptation and mitigation projects if they do not greatly reduce practicality or cause hindrance for a particular group in any way.

Seeing that this paper used a relatively small amount of interviews, more research needs to be done on the perception of climate change by people of different religious organisations, also including members of Islamic or Catholic communities. Also looking at other cities in other countries where the religious fabric might be different than in the city of Groningen. Furthermore, looking at people from the earlier mentioned alternative religions or other forms of spirituality like the Dark Green religions (Taylor, 2010), seeing how they position humans and the earth in their religious beliefs. Trying to keep in mind to (critically) look at the arguments by White (1967) on the anthropocentric worldview of the most powerful and influential Christian and other Abrahamic religious movements. Where it might not be necessary to come up with a 'new religion', he makes a solid argument on the slightly egocentric position of humans in their religious worldviews. Where it is to change this anthropocentric worldview, or think about how to use the idea of stewardship to promote taking action, in the form of for example climate change adaptation and mitigation plans, projects. Even if these actions might not be (directly) visible to the organisations themselves or others, because of the fact that they are more proactive. In the end, a religion has the power and means to change people's behaviour and can definitely play a role in present day societal and ecological problems like climate change we face.

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Appendix

Interview guide in English

Introduction

I'm doing research about the climate change perception of people from different religious or faith-based organisations in the city of Groningen. Seeing what they value in the city and how this is affected by climate change or climate change interventions. I am asking you to do this interview because you are a member of such a religious or spiritual organisation and can give me useful insights into the subject.

The results of this interview will be analyzed and reported about in my research paper. The intended reader is only our instructor and possible coordinators under this member of faculty. Meaning that the coordinators and myselfs are the only individuals with access to the report. With this, I hope to ensure your privacy and openness throughout this interview.

I need to ask you if you are alright with me recording this interview? This will make it easier for me to transcribe the interview and analyse the findings. Furthermore I would like to make clear that if there is anything that you don't want to talk about, just mention it, and we will continue with something else. The interview will take approximately 40 minutes. If you have no further questions we will now start with the interview. Feel free to go into as much detail on your opinion as you would like, for my research I would like to have a clear view on your opinion on this subject.

Introduction questions

Can you tell me about your church/ spiritual organisation here in Groningen?

- Can you tell me a little bit about what you do within your church/ spiritual organisation?
- What are some important values that are connected with your church?

How do people from different faith-based organisations perceive climate change as a topic or climate change consequences in the city of Groningen?

In what way have you encountered the subject of climate change in your daily life?

- Are there examples of this that you encounter in Groningen?
- Do you believe that climate change is a problem?
- Do you feel responsible for climate change in any way? If yes, in what way?
- Do you believe that there is anything we as humans can do or is it something that is not in our power?

If yes, would you say that you are actively thinking about and busy with limiting your own footprint?

(Tuin vergroenen, huis isoleren en/of zonwering installeren)

Do you think that you are in a position to think about limiting your own carbon footprint? Looking at your economical situation and the time you have?

The overarching organisation of your church says this about climate change... (Based on particular religious movement)

What do you think about these statements?

- Do you think that it is the duty of important figures within the church on the international or local scale to address the problem of climate change?
- Is there something you like to add to these statements?
- Anything you do not agree with?

Would you say that there are still religious teachings that clash with climate change, in the sense that it debunks the importance?

What do people from different faith-based organisations value most in the city of Groningen?

Can you think of places in the city that you find important for your religious beliefs? Or a certain place in the city or region, you have attached a certain religious meaning to?

Have any of these places been influenced by any form of climate change impacts?

Have you noticed climate change intervention/adaptation projects in the city of Groningen?

- If yes, have these projects influenced your life in any way?

There are plans to make the city of Groningen even less car friendly. Making it impossible to get close to the city centre by car, but promoting other ways of sustainable transport.

(also use other examples like the trees on the Grote Markt)

What do you think about these plans?

How has your church organisation taken steps in climate adaptation when taking a look at your own religious building?

Is there a place for religion in climate adaptation on the international or local scale?

- How would you see that in practice?

- To what extent would you say that money of your religious organisation for a charitable purpose should go to climate change adaptation projects?

How has climate change influenced the values of religious beliefs of people in the city of Groningen?

Have you sensed that your values and things you find important have changed due to the issue of climate change? (compared to a few years ago)

In what way have your religious beliefs or your view on the church changed due to the issue of climate change?

Closure

I have come to the end of my questions, before we finish, is there any additional information you want to give or thoughts you want me to know about? Anything that you might want to add or something that I forgot to ask? I am also open to additional comments on the way I interviewed you if you have them.

