Singing the future

Hymns of hope from a climate crisis

Aim

This collection of hymns aims to internalise climate concerns and build hope as a prerequisite for climate agency. Gardner and Stern (1996) noted how religious, moral and ethical principles have been overlooked as potential drivers of pro-environmental behaviour and Ives et al. (2023) recently demonstrated how these can be increased among churchgoers by a specifically Christian framing of environmental messages.

Target Audience

18% of the UK population attend church services at least once a month (Voas and Bruce, 2019). The 46% who described themselves as Christian are older than the wider population (median ages 51 and 40 respectively) and 55% are female (ONS, 2023a) and, after accounting for age, differ little across other socio-demographic factors (ONS, 2023b). Although Christian leaders acknowledge the climate emergency and strongly advocate urgent personal and political action (Patriarch Bartholomew *et al.*, 2021) there is conflicting evidence (well summarised by Ives *et al.*, 2023) on whether Christians exhibit more pro-environmental beliefs and behaviours than others. In the author's experience, congregations share wider environmental concerns but lack response-efficacy (belief in solutions, Witte, 1994) and self-efficacy (feeling capable of action, Bandura, 1997).

Strategy

The hymns are written to influence the *inner worlds* (beliefs, thoughts, emotions and identities) that Ives *et al*. (2020) suggest underlie the current ecological crises and require reformation as much as personal behaviours and societal structures. These can be likened to the lowest, *mental model*, dimension of the *Iceberg Model* (Goodman, 1997; Maani and Cavana, 2000) or deeper *leverage points* identified by Meadows (1999). They are also written to encourage individual *reflective motivation* (beliefs, self-identity, intention) and *automatic motivation* (emotions, feelings, drives, Michie *et al.*, 2014) and repeated singing should

support the transition from external to internal motivation through the stages of introjection, identification and integration (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Collective singing also reinforces socially shared meanings (Shove *et al.*, 2012), especially community norms (Schwartz, 1977). The hymns thus include strong statements of shared beliefs to protect against *pluralistic ignorance* (Perkins and Berkowitz, 1986), the inhibition of action by incorrect assumptions that individual beliefs are not shared by the community (Kenward and Brick, 2021; Lewandowsky *et al.*, 2021).

To make new ideas relatable (Corner *et al.*, 2018), the hymns are written with familiar tunes, metre and rhyme schemes and draw on Christian imagery, stories and theology. Each is short, requiring a specific focus, but the collection covers the three horizons of Sharpe *et al.* (2016); concern for the present (H1), a vision of the possible (H3) and steps required to drive transition (H2). Through this they build *constructive hope* as a prerequisite for climate agency (Ojala, 2012; Marlon et al., 2019).

Ethics

Communal singing within a religious service may coerce individuals to sing words with which they disagree. This is protected against by the hymns having been written by someone from within the faith community and requiring selection by an independent worship leader on any given occasion. Suggesting old, established tunes avoids issues relating to copyright or performance rights.

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