

ARTICLE

Defiant Hope

Intercessory Prayer as Spiritual Resistance to Hopelessness in the Climate Crisis

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of intercessory prayer in how Christian climate activists from the Global North engage with the existential challenges of the climate crisis. Based on a qualitative case study of the evangelical prayer network Climate Intercessors, the research draws on participant observation and interviews to explore how prayer functions as a spiritual response to despair and uncertainty. The findings show that intercessory prayer fosters solidarity, helps to process climate anxiety and cultivates defiant hope. This stance resists hopelessness while acknowledging human limitations. The research also shows how digital technologies are a tool that connects people from different churches and geographical contexts, united by their awareness of the climate crisis. The study contextualizes these findings within lived theology, three empirical case studies by Nita, Hall and Schüler, and engages with Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope.

Keywords: Intercessory prayer, Climate change, Digital spirituality, Digital activism

Introduction

"We are here, we are loud, because you are stealing our future" was one of the most prominent slogans of the Swiss Fridays for Future, also known as Climatestrike (Roth et al. 2019). It illustrates how the discourse on the climate crisis in Western Europe often focuses on future developments, such as rising global temperatures and their consequences for life on this planet. But for billions of humans and other creatures, it is already a reality to live and suffer the consequences of global heating. As time passes, the risks to life on this planet increase with the severity of global warming. (IPCC 2023; Edwards 2022)

In the Western European context, where many societies alienate themselves from the existing realities of global warming, combined with the inaction of many

governments and companies, the question arises as to how we can deal personally with this ongoing destruction of our world (Thunberg 2022). This question is particularly relevant for people who are actively involved as activists and consciously engage with the climate crisis and its consequences. Moreover, it is particularly relevant for younger people who still have a significant portion of their lives ahead of them. It is therefore not surprising that many of these people are losing hope that the climate crisis will be mitigated. Furthermore, they are developing psychological problems and anxiety, also known as “climate anxiety” (Hickman et al. 2021).

From a Christian perspective, prayer could be a crucial tool as it is especially connected to overwhelming and hopeless situations, as well as to human and divine action within such interactions. One could look towards intercessory prayer in the Old Testament as an example, where God incorporated human action done in faith, even to the extent of changing his will and withholding judgment in response to the intercession of the righteous. Furthermore, as Gerhard Ebeling argues, prayer lies at the core of the Christian faith, as it is the only way in which humans can realize God is by entering into a trusting relationship. From a practical theological perspective, based on this starting point, the question arises: What role does intercessory prayer play for Christian climate activists in dealing with an increasingly severe climate crisis?

This article explores the role of intercessory prayer as a spiritual practice among Christians who are environmentally conscious and active. It uses a qualitative case study of Christians from the United Kingdom, the US, Canada and South Africa who incorporated climate-related topics in free intercessory prayer outside church services. In this case study, digital technologies are mainly used as a tool to bring people from different churches and geographical contexts together, united by their awareness of the climate crisis.

Methodologically, this research is embedded within a framework of lived theology (Müller 2023). It also remains committed to the principle of openness of an exploratory case study, not defining the central concepts in advance through a guiding thesis, but rather through listening to the voices of interviewees. Finally, the results of the study are compared with other empirical work in the field and the theology of hope of Jürgen Moltmann. The analysis of Moltmann is offered in light of his position as the central German-speaking theologian on hope, thereby providing a solid theological foundation for these findings.

At the same time, this study has limitations. As a single case study, it focuses on one specific form of evangelical-charismatic intercessory prayer and does not explore other expressions of Christian spirituality or denominational traditions. Moreover, the research covers only a short time frame, leaving open questions about how these practices might evolve over longer periods.

The case chosen for this study does not fit perfectly into the classical understanding of online activism, characterized by participation in campaigns and civil disobedience (Neumayer and Svensson 2016). Not all Climate Intercessors participants work in this way, but they are all somehow active within the field of climate justice, whether by engaging in dialogue, running programmes in their local parishes, or serving as observers at the United Nations Climate Conferences (COP).

The Case: The Climate Intercessors Network

Climate Intercessors is an evangelical online prayer network that describes itself as “a global network of people whose prayers are as real and urgent as the climate crisis” (Climate Intercessors 2024). It is supported by evangelical organizations and networks from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, including the Environmental Network of the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Alliance, Tearfund (UK) and the US-based Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. The impetus for the network’s founding was a prayer campaign ahead of the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow in November 2021. It became clear that Christians who care about climate protection have a need to pray together and exchange ideas with like-minded people. This idea was continued after the climate conference in the form of a network.¹

The roots of the network go back further to the involvement of evangelical Christians in the UN climate conferences, which was significantly influenced by Lynn,² a former Baptist missionary and now a member of the Climate Intercessor leadership team, who was also interviewed for this article. The 2015 UN Climate Conference in Paris, which adopted the Paris Climate Agreement, was particularly influential. For the first time, there was a prayer and observation mission by evangelical Christians, supported by the environmental organization A Rocha and the Lausanne Movement. Prayer meetings were held, and dialogues were sought with the participants of the climate conference (Lynn, Pos. 22; David, Pos. 16 – see the Appendix for details of these participants). This led to the development of the Christian Climate Observers Program, which to this day is closely linked to Climate Intercessors in terms of personnel and ideas and, as an accredited ecumenical observer mission, also has access to the negotiating grounds of the UN climate conferences.

In an article on the founding of Climate Intercessors in *The Christian Century*, the network’s understanding of prayer is described as very open. Prayer is seen as being beneficial as an inner resource for the person praying, or in the more traditional

1 A table listing all the interviewees can be found in the appendix of this paper.

2 All participants’ names are anonymized.

understanding of intervention: Moving God to intervene supernaturally in the climate crisis or in climate negotiations. The aim is not to restrict God in this regard (Huska 2021). As one of the network's co-founders, Lynn notes that he never experienced the powerful and intimate intercessory prayer in the Christian climate movement that he had known from his work as a missionary (Lynn, Pos. 79).

Climate Intercessors has an evangelical-charismatic background linked to missionary work. This is evident from the organisation itself and the biographical backgrounds of the members of the leadership team. Nevertheless, the leadership team strives to work in an ecumenical manner, appealing to people from other confessional backgrounds. Such an ecumenical approach is evidenced by a question posed to potential supporters: "Are you willing to bring the best of your faith tradition to being a 'climate intercessor'?" (Climate Intercessors 2024).

Climate Intercessors meet once a month online via Zoom in four different sessions throughout the day, allowing individuals from different time zones to participate. In the period of data collection, each meeting, including the leadership team, had between 8 and 15 participants, with most participants being evangelical/charismatic and originating from the United Kingdom with an Anglican background.

Methodology and Methods

The study is a qualitative case study using the qualitative content analysis method. The case study approach made it possible to address the research question by focusing on the Climate Intercessors prayer network, which serves as a representative example of the phenomenon of praying in the climate crisis. Qualitative content analysis then guided the interpretation of the data.

Furthermore, the study is situated within the realm of lived theology, grounding the research in practical theology, offering not only a description of the practice and self-understanding of the Climate Intercessors but also a lived theology. Lived theology is understood as individually constructed, personally verified, rhythmized, and integrated into the everyday life of the individual human being. Therefore, lived theology is based in the lifeworlds of people and becomes theology through its "reflected expression" and the fact that it finds "public resonance" (Müller 2023: 226, translated).

The initial data were collected through participant observation of six online prayer meetings in February and April 2024. In these meetings, I myself prayed every time in the breakout sessions and also several times in the plenary session, which I noted in the observation log. The study followed the methods of Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2014: 52), who place an emphasis on managing the tension between closeness and simultaneous analytical distance to the observed situation by distancing in the fieldnotes between observation, context, self-reflection, and initial theoretical

insights. Also taken into account was the colonial heritage of the method, given that participant observation was often used by Western researchers in colonial settings to extract knowledge from communities or to portray the people studied in an objectifying and exoticizing manner. Reflecting on these roots, self-reflection of the researchers became a notable feature, bringing awareness of possible power dynamics and biases existing within the fieldwork (Kelle 2018).

The reflection of my social and contextual location is central not only to the method of participant observation, but also to the entire research process because it and its relation to the location of my participants shape the entire process (Dube Shomanah 2003). For example, the emphasis in my master's thesis on how predictions of the future are incorporated into prayer is clearly linked to my social location as a Swiss male. This is due to the climate crisis still being perceived in the Swiss context as a future threat rather than an immediate danger. Ironically, several floods that were clearly connected to global warming struck Switzerland in the midst of completing this research in the summer of 2024 (Bundesamt für Umwelt 2024; Titz 2024). My background as a Reformed theologian also shapes my choice of theological works with which to discuss the findings of this study. In terms of personal exposure to climate issues, the Climate Intercessors and I have a similar background, as most of them come from the well-protected Global North. However, they have repeatedly exposed themselves to the existential threat of the climate crisis through prayer and their work as activists and missionaries.

In addition to participant observation, a total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted between early March and late April 2024 using interview guides based on the research question. Interviewees were recruited via announcements at prayer meetings. Each participant then gave their informed consent to participate in the research. This type of qualitative interview combines the openness of data collection, which is characteristic of qualitative research, with a certain degree of content control by the interviewer. The interviewee's narrative, however, remains decisive for the direction of the conversation, because questions are not asked linearly. This combination of openness and control was crucial for addressing the research question, given its clear thematic focus (Meuser 2018). Due to the initial time limitations of the study, only eight of the interviews were analysed. These were selected based on initial case summaries focusing on the interviewees' understanding of intercessory prayer and the future in the context of the climate crisis. The aim was to include as many different opinions, ecclesiastical and social backgrounds, as possible while also achieving a balance of gender.

A third data source comprised the two prayer meeting scripts for February and March 2024 (i.e., the manuals for prayer meeting leaders). All data types were analysed using qualitative content analysis, a method developed by Udo Kuckartz and Stefan Rädiker. In this method, passages in the data are labelled with different

codes. First, codes are applied deductively, based on the research question. Then, in a second round of analysis, new codes are created inductively from the data itself (Kuckartz and Rädiker 2022).

Findings

To understand the role of intercessory prayer for Climate Intercessors in dealing with the reality and future of the climate crisis, the perception of the present and future of the climate crisis, as well as the understanding of intercessory prayer found in the data, must first be presented.

The Present under Climate Crisis

First, it is useful to understand how the Climate Intercessors perceive the current climate crisis. The data from the qualitative research does not present the climate crisis in terms of abstract metrics such as CO₂ levels or climate targets, but rather through concrete examples, primarily in prayers and interviews. Three thematic clusters emerged from the analysis of how the present situation is described: (1) observable environmental changes, (2) human suffering and (3) perceived isolation and responsibility.

Participants first describe ecological disruptions, such as sinking islands, desertification, extreme weather, vanishing ecosystems, and species extinction, which signal a world in disarray. The most dominant theme, however, is human suffering, particularly in the Global South. A striking example was a prayer request on 24 April based on a *New York Times* report about Afghan families being forced to sell a daughter or a kidney due to drought-induced debt (Addario and Kim 2024). This story deeply moved participants, leading to prayers for empathy towards people in the Global South and expressions of moral dissonance regarding how such suffering coexists with protests in the Global North against socially designed carbon pricing. The Afghan case resurfaced in interviews, underscoring its emotional impact.

Beyond acute suffering, participants note growing climate visibility through agricultural challenges. Farmers, though a minority, experience droughts and fires firsthand, as discussed in breakout sessions about droughts on the Iberian Peninsula and Canadian wildfires. These events make climate impacts tangible even in the Global North, though often indirectly (cf. Cara, Pos. 50).

In contrast, participants perceive populations in the Global North as relatively isolated from severe climate consequences. They observe minor inconveniences, such as smaller food package sizes or empty pools in holiday resorts, contrasting these with the catastrophic realities experienced elsewhere. Some participants reflected explicitly on this isolation, attributing it to geography, privilege and technology like flood defences and air conditioning. These factors are seen to both shield

populations in the Global North and create new vulnerabilities. This isolation also extends to the capacity to overlook the crisis, as one participant lamented: “it seems funny that people don’t want to see the truth to just live simply and enjoy life” (Observation Log 9.4.24, 10:00 a.m., 10:38 a.m.). Material wealth and technological progress are cited as causes alongside cultural factors. One interviewee links detachment to enlightenment rationalism and the weakening of creation-centred spirituality, which shapes dominant worldviews in the Global North (Rahel, Pos. 198).

Responsibility for the crisis is also discussed and perceived as disproportionately lying with the Global North. At times, this responsibility is acknowledged on a personal level. A recurring theme is conveying distant suffering in an emotional way through vivid narratives and images, such as stories about the drought in Afghanistan. The participants emphasise empathy despite experiential gaps. Some draw on personal experiences, such as surviving floods, to connect with others’ hardships (Alice, Pos. 119). This effort to render abstract climate impacts tangible recurs across prayers and interviews, framing intercession as spiritual and relational engagement.

The Future of the Climate Crisis

Notably, the Climate Intercessors’ visions of the future of the climate are neither utopian nor dystopian. Instead, they are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Despite all respondents agreeing that it might not be achieved, the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C global warming target emerged as the decisive benchmark, with severe consequences if missed. Drawing on his environmental science background, Gerald, an interviewee, warns of exponential risks and unprecedented storms. He stresses that “with climate change all those understandings go out the window, because the risk is exponential” (Gerald, Pos. 48). Beyond infrastructure, the interviewees anticipate escalating biodiversity loss, droughts and human suffering, all of which are already visible phenomena today. Coral reefs exemplify this trajectory; warming seas are causing die-offs, and a 2°C rise would likely destroy most reefs globally. Recovery would take millions of years, if it were even possible (Andrew, Pos. 67, 86).

Future outlooks are predominantly pessimistic. Thea doubts rapid behavioural change, predicting continued fossil fuel emissions and elite privilege: “Rich people are gonna [sic] keep doing what makes them happy” (Thea, Pos. 42). Her only hope lies in divine intervention, though she questions whether God will act. Lynn foresees “eco-fascism” in the Global North, bringing xenophobia, fortified borders, and violence (Lynn, Pos. 60), while Rahel even fears human extinction (Rahel, Pos. 54, 94).

Positive visions are rare and often intertwined with despair. Some describe hope as oscillating (Rahel, Alice), while others root it in prayer or divine agency (Andrew, Lynn, Gerald). Lynn invokes Martin Luther King Jr.’s “long arc of justice”, praying God would bend it toward justice (Lynn, Pos. 21). David introduces a theological distinction: ultimate hope, grounded in Christ’s return and cosmic renewal, versus present hope,

tied to incremental signs of change – reflecting the “already but not yet” nature of God’s kingdom (David, Pos. 41). Prayer scripts rarely address future visions, focusing instead on immediate crises. Across interviews, emotions range from sadness and fear to anger and shame, but above all, helplessness. Andrew captures this vividly: “I felt so small, so insignificant . . . this problem is so big” (Andrew, Pos. 68). Participants struggle to reconcile global suffering with local resistance to climate measures, often admitting they “do not really know how to pray”. Rahel oscillates between exhaustion and seeking hope in God, yet not always finding it (Rahel, Pos. 50, 70).

Amidst despair, an attitude that could be described as *defiant hope* emerges when dealing with this tension. At its core lies the acknowledgement of human limitations, while resisting despair. This hope is manifested through small actions, ideas and good news that one would not have expected, such as picking up litter, local projects and shifts in awareness, which are often seen in the midst of crisis (David, Pos. 42). According to the interviewees, the corresponding inner action is empathy, which is practiced through prayer and by extending compassion to people and creation alike, thereby fostering a deeper connection and sense of responsibility (Thea, Pos. 34; Gerald, Pos. 36).

Intercessory Prayer and its Effects

Analysis of the interviews shows that, despite having different priorities for what to pray, all interviewees share a similar understanding of intercessory prayer. This unity is even more remarkable given the interviewees’ different backgrounds. Intercessory prayer is understood as a practice whereby concerns are presented to God in prayer. This is not merely a listing of concerns, but a sharing and entrusting of them in the hope of God’s power. This hope is not viewed as an attempt to shirk responsibility, but rather as an active plea for divine intervention. This understanding is evident in an excerpt from the prayer script for the suffering of children in Gaza during the war: “Let’s pray in such a way now that children . . . are placed up on the lap of Jesus who is more than capable of addressing . . . injustices associated with all violence.” (Script 12 Mar. 2024, Pos. 43).

Some interviewees describe intercessory prayer as a means of responding to excessive demands and challenges. It involves acknowledging one’s own failures in relation to the climate crisis and hoping for God’s grace, while not rejecting human responsibility. It is also an act of solidarity with those already affected by the consequences of the climate crisis (Thea, Pos. 46; Alice, Pos 50; Andrew, Pos. 86). For the interviewees, intercessory prayer is not just an individual act, but a process based on a relationship with God. This relationship is reflected in the central importance of trusting God in response to prayer requests. It is also an educational process, through which those praying learn about their relationship with God and the climate

crisis. Up-to-date information on climate issues is crucial for intercessory prayer and forms an integral part of Climate Intercessors' meetings.

While all interviewees share a fundamental understanding of intercessory prayer, their interpretations and practices vary, particularly regarding the relationship between prayer and action. This dynamic is most pronounced in Gerald's account. For him, intercessory prayer serves as a starting point for deep engagement with issues and for processing personal wounds within a group setting. Prayer became a paradigm for his activism and professional work in an environmental agency. He recounts experiences of seemingly hopeless situations, such as illegal waste disposal protected by authorities and the privatization of a major ecosystem where unexpected resolutions occurred. Gerald interprets these outcomes as instances where his activism functioned as prayer: Surrendering ego and personal agendas allowed space for God's will to prevail. For him, prayer is a transformative process that encompasses both verbal prayer and activist engagement, often involving painful relinquishment of control amid systemic entanglement in climate harm (Gerald, Pos. 31f, 36, 40).

Other participants articulate different connections between prayer and action. Thea emphasizes spiritual warfare, viewing prayer as a means to confront evil in a spiritual realm, with the heart's disposition being decisive (Thea, Pos. 70). Rahel associates prayer with manual labour and environmental work, framing such acts as worship (Rahel, Pos. 150). Alice and Cara highlight prayer as a form of solidarity: Informing disaster-affected individuals that they are being prayed for fosters encouragement and resilience (Cara, Pos. 35, Alice Pos. 39). Similarly, Lynn integrates intercessory prayer into missionary work, maintaining empathetic concern for communities already suffering climate impacts (Lynn, Pos. 18, 29).

For David and Andrew, prayer complements action by expressing the urgency and intensity of climate-related work, reinforcing commitment without replacing practical engagement. Across their perspectives, prayer emerges as both a spiritual and embodied practice, ranging from inner transformation to external activism, while consistently affirming that prayer does not substitute for action but deepens its meaning and motivation (David, Pos. 16; Andrew, Pos. 35, 56).

The question of the expected effectiveness of prayer remains, as nurturing a relationship with God is only one aspect of intercessory prayer. It is equally important for the Climate Intercessors to believe that God has the power to influence the climate crisis. This is particularly evident in the sections of the data where the effects of prayer are discussed, as respondents believe that prayers are answered. Some reported having experienced this themselves, such as the healing of an illness or the adoption of the Paris Agreement, which was seen as a miracle (Alice, Pos. 48; Andrew, Pos. 56f). Alternatively, they trust in the Bible's testimony and expect change through prayer.

The interviews reveal a consensus that this hope for change brought about by prayer is always in tension with the possibility that prayer will not be answered. All those who comment on this agree that one can never be certain of a connection between prayer and a change in a particular matter. The connection will always remain a mystery and a matter of human assumption. Alice and Andrew illustrate this quite well. They talk about how they prayed, and then a change happened, but they observed that they cannot say with absolute certainty that the change was directly caused by their prayers. For both of them, it remains a mystery. Alice clarifies this by explaining that it is God, not prayer itself, who brings about change, and that God is sovereign (Andrew, Pos. 57; Alice, Pos. 44).

Intercessory Prayer as Defiant Hope

Having seen how the Climate Intercessors perceive the present and future of the climate crisis, as well as how they understand intercessory prayer and its effects, it is appropriate to analyse the role of intercessory prayer in dealing with the climate crisis. In qualitative content analysis, this is achieved by looking at the overlap of certain codes in the data.

It comes as no surprise that most of the overlaps are between codes of prayer and codes of the present. These overlaps include prayer for current and urgent topics, which are brought in prayer before God as the core practice of the network. The clearest example of this is the prayer for the drought in Afghanistan mentioned in the section on the present under the climate crisis, where the feelings of participants were well illustrated by the following quote: “we don’t know how to pray but, we do” (Observation Log 9.4.24 9:00 p.m.). It also comes as no surprise that prayer codes rarely overlap with those describing the visions of the future in the climate crisis, as they are not praying for prospects but actual challenges. In one of the few overlaps with categories pretraining for the future, the discussion revolves around whether prayer should continue given bleak prospects and how the relationship with God and prayer helps in dealing with an uncertain future (David, Pos. 50).

This does not, however, mean that the data lacks a future dimension of prayer. There is a subcode called “Hope for Change” that overlaps the most with the prayer codes of all future codes. This code was defined in an inductive manner and included all passages starting from a specific problem, hoping for a change in the future, and actively asking for it in prayers. This seems to be the basic attitude with which participants address the future of the climate crisis in their prayers. This is not surprising, as it aligns with the group’s understanding of intercessory prayer. They pray with the hope in God that something will change through prayer.

Considering the area, this hope enacted in this becomes more significant. Because this area is the perceived and envisioned present and future of the climate crisis, which lasts until the extinction of humanity, and is related to personal oscillation

between hope and despair. Here, praying with hope for change offers a defiant way to lean toward positive change in the catastrophic situation of the climate crisis. The term *defiant hope* used above is suitable for the role prayer plays in dealing with the climate crisis. This is to say that *defiant hope* is the attitude with which the uncertain future of the climate crisis is faced, while intercessory prayer is the central place for the Climate Intercessors, where *defiant hope* for change in trust in God is lived and embodied.

Discussion

Before engaging with Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, the case study results are situated within three empirical case studies by Nita, Hall and Schüler on prayer in the climate crisis and evangelical movements. The most significant comparative work is Maria Nita's ethnographic research on environmentally engaged Christians in the United Kingdom, some of whom are linked to the Climate Intercessors (Nita 2016). Nita conceptualizes prayer as ritual along a "lament-celebration axis", where activists move from grieving ecological destruction to envisioning an ecologically conscious future. Her focus lies on the affective engagement with the climate crisis and its integration into Christian identity through memory culture. Prayer and protest make the crisis more accessible and emotional. This dynamic is reflected in my case study, which shows that prayer fosters cognitive and emotional engagement with the impacts of climate change. Both studies also identify raising awareness as a central intention of prayer.

However, a key difference concerns hope. Nita does not consider hope to be an integral part of prayer. While her "lament-celebration axis" shares transformative qualities with *defiant hope*, the latter term in intercessory prayer resists despair by acknowledging reality rather than merely shifting personal attitudes. Furthermore, Nita primarily views prayer as communication among Christians rather than with God, emphasizing human action over divine action. This contrasts sharply with my participants, for whom hope is underpinned by trust in God and expectation of divine action alongside human responsibility.

Amy Cox Hall's research on New Monasticism offers an additional perspective. She described prayer as a means of contemplating and enacting socio-ecological justice: "Prayer provided the mechanism to bridge the ideal into political acts" (Cox Hall 2018: 693). This idea aligns with the emphasis in my research on God-centered trust. However, it differs in that intercessory prayer petitions for change rather than deliberates on it, which may reflect different prayer practices.

In his ethnography of the 24/7 Prayer Movement, Sebastian Schüler introduces the concept of holistic spirituality, in which prayer permeates all activities and merges activism and devotion (Schüler 2013). A wide range of activities, including dancing in

a club during a mission, are considered forms of prayer, exemplifying a “culture of prayer”. In Evangelical contexts, the dichotomy between prayer and action is often rejected, and transformation is viewed as God’s work intensified through prayer. While my case study shares this integration, it rejects the notion that increased prayer compels divine action, affirming God’s sovereignty.

From the perspective of online activism, the Climate Intercessors do not fit into the classical understanding of activism, such as the typology of Neumeyer and Svensson (2016). They describe four types of activism alongside the dimensions of viewing opponents as either enemies or adversaries, and willingness to participate in civil disobedience. Along the axis of how to view people who oppose strong climate action, participants in the Climate Intercessors do not see them as enemies, but as adversaries who are isolated from the climate crisis and its consequences due to their wealth, geographical location, and cultural separation from the rest of humanity (Gerald, Pos. 40; observation log 9.4.24, 10:00, 10:38; Rahel, Pos. 198). On the dimension of openness to civil disobedience, some participants may engage in it within other groups, rather than the Climate Intercessors, because this group primarily petitions God to act, rather than a government or company. They understand their prayer as aligning their will and actions with God’s, and trusting in God’s will rather than opposing it through civil disobedience, whatever form it might take when directed at God. But as shown in the section on intercessory prayer and its effects, for the Climate Intercessors prayer is always either part of activism or the starting point. Therefore, prayer would need to be a separate dimension in a typology of Christian online activism, as indicated by Steven Taylor (2025: 253).

While not fitting perfectly into the typology of Neumeyer and Svensson, this case study emphasises that online and offline activism are connected, as Neumeyer and Svensson suggest. Climate Intercessors pray online and are supported by the offline activism of themselves and others, as it is the case with the COPs. This online activism influences their offline behaviour, deepening their defiance and solidarity, and resulting in small actions such as speaking about the climate crisis or picking up trash.

Overall, these comparisons confirm and enrich the case study’s findings: Prayer shapes religious identity and communal attitudes toward the climate crisis. In this study, intercessory prayer cultivates hope and reinforces the belief that prayer itself “does something”, influencing both individuals and their communities.

Alongside the discussion of other empirical work, it is also important to reflect on the theological dimension of hope cultivated in prayer. In his book *Theology of Hope*, Jürgen Moltmann develops a theology of hope inspired by the work of Ernst Bloch and contemporary research that constructs in the Old Testament a line of *Verheissungsreligion*, i.e., the promise lies at the core of the religion: “God promises a new

world of comprehensive life, of justice and truth, and with this promise he constantly calls this world into question; not because it is nothing to the hopeful, but because it is not yet what it is promised to be.” (Moltmann 1969: 149, translated.)

This promise opens the history for the individuals because it gives the future a direction and is no longer just an open space with possible development. For Moltmann, this promise is the salvation history, which is continuously deepened and opened by God in that God reveals himself as the God of All, vanishing all separations. As such, the defeat of death is something eschatological which humans don't have yet, but is promised and of which, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, humans have a foretaste.

Contrasting this with the findings of the case study reveals differences in basic attitudes toward the future between the two positions. While Moltmann emphasizes God's promise, *defiant hope* acknowledges the dramatic present and makes forecasts. Small signs of hope emerge through local projects and positive news. Moltmann, however, also acknowledges injustices and suffering. The promise of God drives humans to contradict these injustices and sufferings. Both approaches are rooted in trust in God, describing small present changes as signs of hope. Moltmann's principle that a future under God's promise can contrast with the present is consistent with the concept of defiant hope.

Conclusion

This case study shows the role of prayer in how Christian activists in environmentally protected areas are dealing with the uncertainty and existential danger of the climate crisis. It is a practice of hope, simultaneously defiantly working for change. This makes sense when we acknowledge that the present and future in the context of the climate crisis are paths of great unpredictability involving much suffering and destruction. In this context, intercessory prayer can serve as a means of facing this future squarely, without denying human responsibility. Rather, prayer is a search for and a plea to find new ways to fulfil this responsibility. This type of prayer stems from a relationship with God and trust in him. Intercession is not simply presenting a wish list for God to fulfil; rather, it is the persistence of concerns within the relationship with God. With this understanding comes the knowledge that prayers do not necessarily lead directly to the requested changes, but rather, the belief that prayers play a role in the changes brought about by God's actions. They believe that God is continually at work in this world, even when things do not improve. This hoped-for change is referred to in this study as *defiant hope*. Further, praying in environmentally protected contexts means consciously engaging with the dramatic effects of the climate crisis. Learning more about these effects and praying specifically for those

already affected is a way to enact solidarity and empathy. In short, praying in this way does not mean falling into despair, but believing that even through unimaginable suffering, things can change for the better and daring to work for it by petitioning God and others.

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Appendix

Name	Gender	Country	Church background (self-declared)	Other Background
Rahel	F	UK	Anglican, Low Church	Retired
Thea	F	USA	Nondenominational-evangelical	English teacher
Cara	F	UK	Anglican, High Church/Anglo-Catholic	Retired physician
Alice	F	South Africa	Conservative church with a charismatic evangelical character	Farmer
Andrew	M	USA	Comes from a conservative Reformed church, was an agnostic for a long time	Works for a charismatic missionary organisation
Gerald	M	Canada	Various denominations, from evangelical and mainline to liberal; currently Presbyterian, but critical of his congregation's conservative stance on LGBT issues.	Retired environmental scientist
Lynn	M	USA/Canada	Evangelical, Baptist	Former missionary in Asia, now author and activist
David	M	Canada	Evangelical with charismatic influences	Pastor, urban planner