

# Climate Change and 2007 Federal Election

## - Mapping a Moral Response



Human-induced climate change is on most people's lips. Scientific logic has convinced some while all Australians have been shocked into reflection by an Australia-wide drought. A 2 degree rise in temperature seems inevitable. A disastrous 4-6 degree rise is not out of the question if we fail to reduce our greenhouse-gas emissions - **20% by 2020, 60%+ by 2050**. Scientific information abounds on the various climate change scenarios *for those with ears to hear* (IPCC, CSIRO, Greenhouse Office, NGOs).

The 2007 Federal election is one opportunity for us as a nation to make a choice about changing our pattern of energy use. It can be a conversion point. It is nearly a decade since Pope John Paul II called Catholics to *ecological conversion*. His 1990 Peace Day Message still gives cause for reflection:

*When man turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order ...*

*Certain elements of today's ecological crisis reveal its moral character. First among these is the indiscriminate application of advances in science and technology. ... This has led to the painful realization that we cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem*



### First, truth: trust you own good sense

Few of us are scientists but we can read, listen and observe. Do not fear to *face up to the lies of those who deny that rapid climate change has already begun or deny that humanity's high level of fossil fuel use is the main cause*. It is not being unkind to say that climate-deniers have vested interests, have been bought off or are just ignorant. In our day, rapid climate change is human induced and not a natural cycle.

*Do not be afraid to face up to those who play on religion and people's good will in their denial of climate*

### Second, moral criteria and spiritual motivation.

Catholic social teaching is about moral behavior in response to all aspects of human life. Rapid human-

*without paying due attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations ...*

*No peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation.*

The teachings of Dr Kubler-Ross on death and dying can help us face the fact that the pattern of energy use we grown used to is dying as the planet warms. Do we respond like the dying person with denial, anger, blame, bargaining or fear? Or can we commit ourselves to vote for creating new sources of energy and new patterns of use? *Call it green development* – jobs, investment. Life will be no less comfortable, perhaps a lot happier and surely more moral.

Faced with the reality of climate change I suggest three aspects to *a faith response*:

- tell the truth about climate change;
- explore Catholic faith to provide moral criteria and spiritual motivation; and
- take personal, community and political action to create new ways of living that respects Earth's climate systems.

*change*. They want to sow doubt that leads to confusion. They may piously ask, how could we be so presumptuous as to think that humans can change the climate and divert God's providence? This is denial. Under the banner of 'concern for the poor' they oppose carbon taxes. With a literalist reading of Scripture they pervert the religious word 'stewardship' to sanction exploitation.

Followers of Christ must be **Truth-Tellers**.



induced climate change is a moral issue because of its effects on humans and on the Earth.

*The Church has developed ethical criteria to guide our responses:*

- the right of all people to a safe environment,
- just development, economic and social structures,
- equitable and ecologically sustainable development,
- the rights of future generations to resources threatened by current over development,
- food security for all nations,
- solidarity with developing countries by sharing technology and welcoming environmental refugees,
- governments must rise above sectoral interests to promote the common good.

Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 New Year Message said *human ecology and natural ecology cannot be separated. 'Therefore the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish' (Hos. 4:3).*

Pope John Paul II wrote, *Clearly, an adequate solution cannot be found merely in a better management or a*



### **Third, Individual and Political Action:**

In addition to being 'truth tellers', offering moral criteria and providing spiritual motivation, Church teaching calls for action. Faith without good works is dead. *Action on climate change is a moral imperative.*

- We need to learn the simple science behind climate change. We can then *judge what are appropriate solutions and which are morally questionable.*
- *Energy efficiency and alternative sources* can be employed now. *Changing transport and housing design is immediately achievable.*
- Long term solutions such as carbon-capture and nuclear energy are decades off, costly, risky and open to *narrow lobbying - often a delaying tactic.*
- *The agricultural community* is already hard hit by drought. Peak oil will affect energy and chemical prices. Bio-fuel is a two edged sword.

Ask all 2007 Federal electoral hopefuls:

**Do your policies set up an equitable framework for citizens to take immediate and significant decisions on climate change?**

**Do your policies on climate change address the long-term economic good of people's jobs, businesses, homes and personal life, and long-term national security?**

**Do your policies structurally respect Earth's climate systems and biodiversity?**

*more rational use of the earth's resources, as important as these may be. Rather, we must go to the source of the problem and face in its entirety that profound moral crisis.*

At a spiritual and theological level, the positive role of Earth itself in the story of Christian salvation must be reclaimed. Within the Christian tradition: the outpouring of God's love in creation is inseparably linked to its culmination in the saving work of Jesus; the Earth is good, revealing of God and integral to Christian prayer. [Sadly, in recent times an almost exclusive Gospel focus on the human, and fundamentalist notions about Scripture must be admitted, and corrected.]

**A spirituality that links the human with Earth delights God.** The Australian bishops support this view. [www.catholicearthcareoz.net](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net)

Moving forward, be encouraged by the closing remarks of Cardinal Martino to the 2007 Vatican Seminar on Climate Change and Development who said, *This seminar deepens doctrinal reflection as the Gospel meets life in society ... the Gospel is always new, adapting as historical conditions change.*



### **Four foundational books**

- Tim Flannery *The Weather Makers* Melbourne: Text, 2005 - Climate history.
- Mark Diesendorf *Greenhouse Solutions with Sustainable Energy*, Sydney: UNSW Press 2007 – available alternatives.
- Guy Pearse *High & Dry* Melbourne: Penguin Viking 2007 - Australian politics.
- Fr Sean McDonagh *Climate Change: the challenge to us all*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2006 - a Catholic reflection.

### **Find Your Politician**

[www.australia.gov.au](http://www.australia.gov.au)

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