

# *Let the Son Shine*

An Australian Catholic Response  
To Climate Change

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# Contents

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## PAGE

Foreword by Geraldine Doogue .....	2
Let the Son Shine: An Australian Catholic response to climate change .....	3
Prayer as a response to climate change .....	4
The 'see-judge-act' model .....	6

## See

The evidence for climate change .....	8
Severity of climate change in Australia .....	10
Three seminal Australian books on climate change .....	11

## Judge

Traditional faith resources help in making a Catholic response .....	12
New interpretations of Scripture .....	14
Catholic environmental ethical principles .....	16
Morally questionable 'solutions' to climate change .....	18
Some initiatives by the Church .....	21
Identifying key sectors for individual and community action .....	23
Agriculture and forestry .....	24

## Act

Learning the language of climate change .....	26
Being fearless truth-tellers .....	27
Fostering government leadership on climate change .....	28
Responding to climate change: deepening faith .....	29

Conclusion .....	34
Prayer in the time of climate change .....	35
About the author .....	36



## Foreword

Father Charles Rue's neat, short guide to new thoughts on environmental wisdom belies its weighty intentions. He wants to prompt Catholics towards a practical new 'calling'; to believe the Earth deserves commitment and compassion in a similar vein to the option for the poor, the Church's great invitation to its followers based on Christ's sentiments about the virtue of ministering to those with no perceived status. Father Rue's work in *Let The Son Shine* proves that Churches and religion definitely have something useful to add to the debates about responsibility for human behaviour change. It is fresh and useful. It is also very ambitious, which is what I like about it most. Mercifully it cuts through the over-supply of rhetoric around this subject, much of which can be quite lazy and unoriginal – and I very much like that about it. Many activists seem to believe the science must be hurled at people, in louder and louder tones, till they 'get' it. For a while now, in my judgement, this has had progressively less effect, a bit like chopping with a blunt axe.

Fr Rue, on the other hand, has had the nous to mine his own tradition, Roman Catholic Christianity, to see what it might offer at both a macro and micro level, if you like. He gives plenty of examples of both. He quotes the German thinker Max Weber's observation that religion can either reinforce the status quo or challenge it to transformation – a very good re-statement of the spectrum of attitudes within the Church. He consults the Gospels alongside the learnings of Vatican II, together with some gems from recent encyclicals. Most interestingly, he returns to the good old Young Christian Workers' dictums: See, Judge and Act. For someone of my age, who spent about four years at high school immersed in this movement, this was genuinely refreshing. YCW was inherently practical, very much a hands-on encouragement to reflect on how your faith might be applied to your particular life arena. It wasn't prescriptive, in the way other religious education was; it was heavily based on discussion, and its theology had a 'get-on-with-it' feel. All that is evident here and results in a deceptively simple but significant work.

What is particularly inviting is his insistence on the power of prayer. During a typical Sunday night suburban Mass, I once heard a Jesuit priest, Fr Gerry Healey, give an illuminating explanation about the supposed 'magic' of prayer. 'Prayer changes people,' he said, 'and people change things.' I've never forgotten this clever logic, citing the link between desire and apparently unreachable outcome so firmly within the human realm. I think it's in this spirit that Fr Rue believes it's worth praying for the Earth. He seeks to focus people's minds via imagining better conduct towards the Earth, then praying for change among those who use (and abuse) it; accompanied by breakthroughs on the part of skilled people seeking to tap science and industry for better answers.

Systems matter, he states bluntly. And a Catholic response must be equally systematic. This was music to my ears.

I consider this quite a prophetic work. Its apparent simplicity and brevity hides an abundance of virtue and will confer wisdom on the reader beyond its stated subject matter, namely climate change. I hope it is not his last word on the matter, for on this issue, there is much to come.



# Let the Son Shine:

## An Australian Catholic response to climate change



*'Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization ...'*

Pope John Paul II

The words 'climate change' are on many people's lips. Scientific evidence has convinced many that humans are largely responsible for this change and must act urgently to address it. Others have been shocked out of complacency and into reflection by fickle weather conditions, ranging from recent hurricanes in New Orleans to a ten-year drought throughout Australia.

There is plenty of information out there for those with ears to hear, and Australian voters seem to be taking



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notice. They voted out the Coalition government in late 2007, pressing for leadership on climate change and a vision for the nation's future.

The same voters,

however, have put the new Labor government on notice to act urgently in forging a carbon-neutral future for Australia. Recent scientific data has shown that the world climate situation is growing worse, compounded by the peak and decline in world oil production, financial chaos and threats to sustainable agriculture and food security, all of which combined will help radically alter life as we know it.<sup>1</sup>

What can the churches add? In the first place, Christian beliefs can help people to identify the central values they bring to the climate change issue; in the second, faith can be a source of courage to help people to confront the changes needed in their individual and community lifestyles, and the urgency of the need for change. Faith-based learning and motivation can help Christians, and Catholics in particular, make a four-part response to climate change:

- to be truth-tellers
- to be spiritual visionaries
- to be just and compassionate
- to be social activists.

This kind of response is Gospel-based missionary activity for our age, valuing the power of faith.

Ultimately, Catholics need to cooperate with others on the climate challenge at a deep level, but first they must immediately strive to get the Church's own house in order. Neglect would be a sin of omission. This paper will discuss and explore two major ways in which we can address Catholic thinking and acting on climate change in the light of faith. They are:

- prayer at every stage of a Catholic missionary response to climate change
- systematic response, using the *see-judge-act* model.



1. Sean McDonagh *Climate Change: The challenge to all of us* The Columba Press, Dublin, 2007, pp. 137–51; [www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net](http://www.lifeaftertheoilcrash.net)

# Prayer

## as a response to climate change



**‘... in a profound sense the earth is suffering and the greenhouse effect has now reached crisis proportions ...’**

Pope John Paul II

Prayer, talking with God individually and as a community, is at the heart of Catholic life. When considering climate change, every style of prayer comes into play, from thanksgiving to lament, but particularly humble listening.<sup>2</sup> For example:

- *prayers of gratitude* for scientists as truth-telling messengers of God
- *prayers in awe and praise* of the great mysteries revealed in Earth’s systems and our place in its story
- *prayers of humility*, asking God that we accept our proper place in this community we call Earth
- *prayers asking for forgiveness* for our presumptuous lifestyles and arrogant deafness
- *prayers for courage* to change our ways.

Consideration of the full range of prayers in a response to climate leads us to revisit the virtues – wisdom, prudence, humility, fortitude and the like. They speak of values that easily relate to issues surrounding climate change and further focus our prayer. In this way, considering climate change can add substance to our prayer and moral quest.

When considering climate change, *prayers of compassion* are significant – compassion for human victims who lose their lives, homes and livelihoods; compassion, too, for home-owners and business people seduced by the ‘Australian dream’, based as it is on current economic models of profligate fossil fuel use. Understanding and compassion are needed for these people, who are faced with trauma and are experiencing

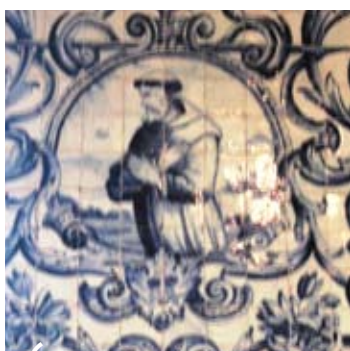
emotional turmoil.

Something new for many people is prayers of compassion for *Earth herself*. She is being violently pushed into a new stage of evolution and losing millions of her species. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and we can weep for God’s creation and our stubborn refusal to listen to what Earth is telling us. Pope John Paul II often spoke of compassion for Earth and wrote in his 1990 World Day of Peace Message:

*... in a profound sense the earth is suffering (Hos 4:3) and the greenhouse effect has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs ... [T]he resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands ... [N]o peaceful society can afford to neglect either respect for life or the fact that there is an integrity to creation.*

St Francis of Assisi shows us how we can make ecological sensitivity a part of our spiritual journey. He showed respect, and particularly ‘courtesy’, towards nature in both its living and inanimate forms: he called it brother and sister, an example of genuine prayer and compassion for every aspect of Earth. Pope John Paul II named Francis as the patron saint of ecology.

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, in their readings of the signs of the times, both put *dialogue* at the centre of mission.<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase Pope John Paul II, since mission is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, entering into



Climate Institute’s Interfaith Statement on Climate Change



## Pope John Paul II on dialogue

this process of mission dialogue needs prayer – both for the guidance of the Spirit to develop a listening and discerning heart, and for the humility to learn and make cooperative responses with all peoples.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, at the same time as Catholics witness to their tradition and what the Spirit is doing in their own lives, they listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking through world events and modern people's movements. Catholics are now discovering that the Spirit is speaking both through the environmental movement and through the events of climate change itself. Notably, Pope John Paul II insisted that the listening, dialogue and cooperation that flows from being attentive to the Spirit is not some missionary ploy but a Spirit-given opportunity for both sides to learn and grow.

Pope John Paul has given two very powerful phrases to the Church: *ecological conversion* and *ecological vocation*. They help make environmental concerns integral to Catholic faith. These phrases flagged a new era in the Christian journey and a new task for Catholic leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Catholics are blessed by the gift of faith, and their mission in the world as individuals and Church communities is to witness to God's reign – to be in the service of God's big plan and pray that their missionary efforts may announce and help bring about the *dream of God*.

56. Dialogue does not originate from tactical concerns or self-interest, but is an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements and dignity. It is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills. Through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the 'seeds of the Word', a 'ray of that truth which enlightens all men'; these are found in individuals and in the religious traditions of mankind ... This gives rise to the spirit which must enliven dialogue in the context of mission. Those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side ... Dialogue leads to inner purification and conversion which, if pursued with docility to the Holy Spirit, will be spiritually fruitful.

57. A vast field lies open to dialogue, which can assume many forms and expressions ... Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice dialogue ... I wish to encourage them to persevere with faith and love, even in places where their efforts are not well received. Dialogue is a path toward the kingdom and will certainly bear fruit, even if the times and seasons are known only to the Father (cf. Acts 1:7).

*Encyclical The Mission of the Redeemer*



2. Nathan D Mitchel, 'The Amen Corner' *Worship* Mar 2008 pp. 161–74. He argues that the rule of St Benedict teaches a prayer style that is attentive to the word of God communicated through what the senses tell us.

3. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Mission of the Redeemer) 1990, No. 56–58

4. *ibid.*, No. 21. See also Christopher Jamison OSB, *Changing the Climate: Spiritual Steps for Sustainable Living*, [www.operationnoah.org/resources/religiousinspirations/changing-climate-spiritual-steps-sustainability](http://www.operationnoah.org/resources/religiousinspirations/changing-climate-spiritual-steps-sustainability)

5. General Audience 17 Jan 2001; and Message to UN Summit on Sustainable Development Aug 2002.

## Pope John Paul II on 'ecological conversion'

3. Man's lordship, however, is not 'absolute, but ministerial: it is a real reflection of the unique and infinite lordship of God. Hence man must exercise it with wisdom and love, sharing in the boundless wisdom and love of God' (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 52). In biblical language 'naming' the creatures (cf. Gn 2:19–20) is the sign of this mission of knowing and transforming created reality. It is not the mission of an absolute and unquestionable master, but of a steward of God's kingdom who is called to continue the Creator's work, a work of life and peace. His task, described in the Book of Wisdom, is to rule 'the world in holiness and righteousness' (Wis 9:3).

Unfortunately, if we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations. Man, especially in our time, has without hesitation devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, disfigured the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, disturbed the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, turned luxuriant areas into deserts and undertaken forms of unrestrained industrialization, degrading that 'flowerbed' – to use an image from Dante Alighieri (*Paradiso*, XXII, 151) – which is the earth, our dwelling-place.

We must therefore encourage and support the 'ecological conversion' which in recent decades has made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe to which it has been heading. Man is no longer the Creator's 'steward', but an autonomous despot, who is finally beginning to understand that he must stop at the edge of the abyss. 'Another welcome sign is the growing attention being paid to the quality of life and to ecology, especially in more developed societies, where people's expectations are no longer concentrated so much on problems of survival as on the search for an overall improvement of living conditions' (*Evangelium vitae*, n. 27). At stake, then, is not only a 'physical' ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the various living beings, but also a 'human' ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations and by preparing for future generations an environment more in conformity with the Creator's plan.

## The 'see-judge-act' model

Systems matter. Climate change is being caused by a breakdown of Earth's temperature regulation system. When Earth's climate systems create a hurricane or cyclone to redistribute heat away from the tropical oceans, she is merely cooling herself. It is not Earth's fault that cities like New Orleans or Darwin lie in the way of these weather events; it is humanity's systematic use of fossil fuels that cause Earth to heat up. And business managers are just being logical when they use the cheapest available means of energy in a systematic way. So a Catholic response must be equally systematic as it seeks to understand patterns of climate change systems, expose modern economic systems that push energy-intensive lifestyle choices, and act systematically to address the human causes of climate change.

A systematic Catholic response to human-induced climate change could model itself on the 'see-judge-act' method

created in the early 1900s by Father (later Cardinal) Joseph Cardijn for the Young Christian Workers (YCW). The method brought the light of faith to workers' industrial situations: workers were to become conscious of being responsible within their own situation.<sup>6</sup> Pope John XXIII, in *Peace on Earth*, wrote of the need for analysis to apply and reduce social principles to practice, but warned that *analysis* was not to lead to *paralysis*. John Paul II took these insights further when he wrote about analysis of the reality of *structures of sin* and *social sin*.<sup>7</sup>

The Federation of Latin American Bishops' Conferences (CELAM) has repeatedly affirmed the effectiveness of the see-judge-act model by adapting it to their local situation. Working in Africa, Jesuit Father Peter Henriot has named this method of reflection and response the *Pastoral Cycle*. In 2007, Caritas International adopted the Cardijn way as a model for a Catholic







## See-judge-act: discerning God's presence and purpose

The People-of-God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a *new light* [see] on everything, *manifests God's design* [judge] for man's total vocation, and thus *directs the mind to solutions which are fully human* [act].

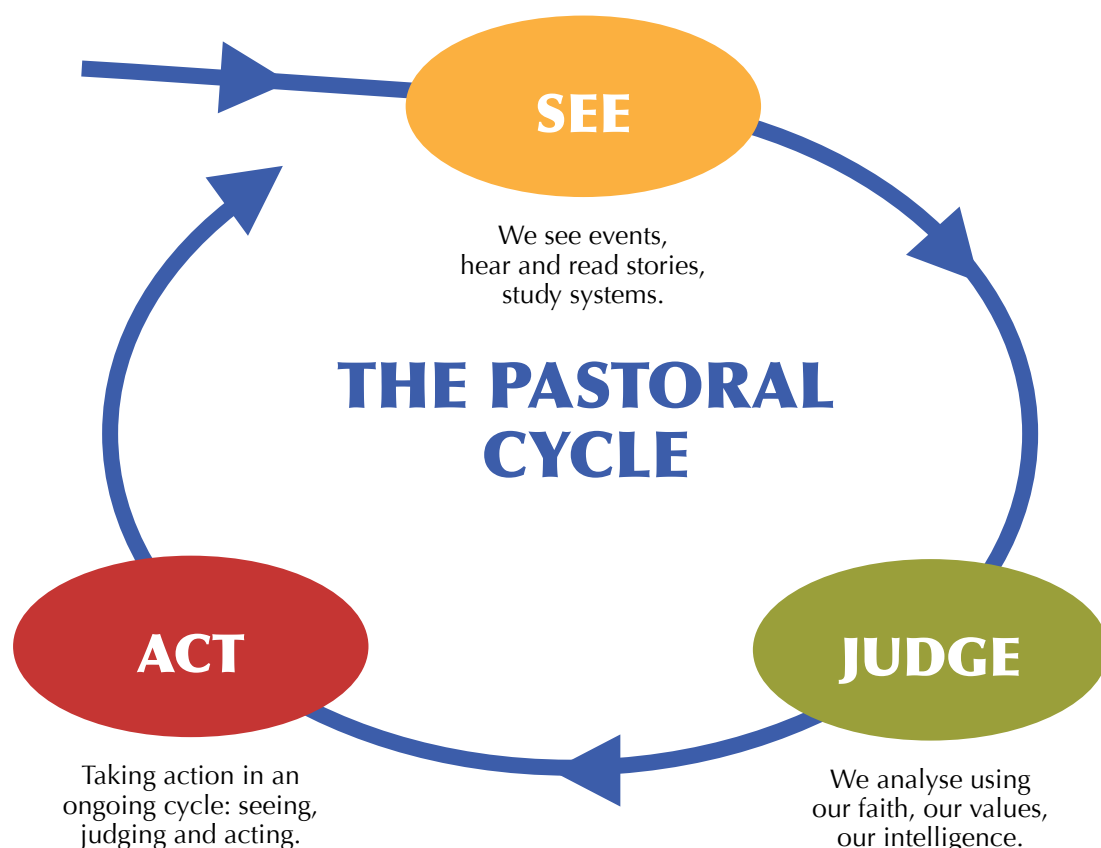
Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World  
*Gaudium et Spes* No 11

response to the United Nations Millennium Goals.<sup>8</sup> The strongest endorsement for this systematic approach remains the Second Vatican Council and its Pastoral Constitution *The Church in the Modern World*,<sup>9</sup> which expresses the heart of the Cardijn way. The

Council called Church communities to begin from the world's agenda and cooperate in the light of faith in finding solutions to major problems of the modern world. Importantly for Australia, which is so close to Asia, the Pastoral Constitution in its 'method, spirit, and vision finds

resonance among Asians'.<sup>10</sup>

Since the 1970s, the Columban Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Office has used social analysis as an amplification of the see-judge-act method. This is the spirit in which this paper is written.



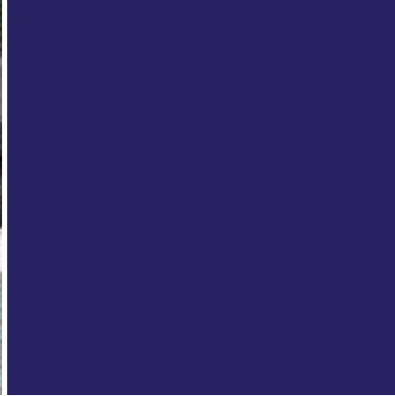
6. To use the later words of Pope John XXIII in his 1961 Encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher).

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, St Pauls, Homebush, 1994, No. 1869.

8. Caritas International, 'Breaking with Business as Usual: Achieving the Millennium Goals', 26 Mar 2007, [www.caritas.org](http://www.caritas.org).

9. Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* Nos. 1, 10–11, 43.

10. Felix Wilfred, 'Asian Christianity and Modernity: Forty Years after *Gaudium et Spes*', *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42 (2005) 1/2.



*In order to enter into the debate, Catholics need some knowledge of the major climate change issues.*



Dick Clark, Enviro-architecture

See



## Evidence for climate change

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), working within the UN Framework on Climate Change, is the most widely accepted authoritative body reporting on climate-change science and politically possible responses by governments. The IPCC names humanity as the prime agent of rapid climate change, because of our use of fossil fuels, which has been constantly increasing since the industrial revolution. The panel has published four major reports, in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007, and specific reports on issues such as carbon capture and storage. The IPCC regularly gives three summaries,<sup>11</sup> which look at the physical science, at impacts, adaptation and vulnerability, and at mitigation.

Its conclusions carry ever-increasing levels of certainty, in many cases up to 95 per cent, which is the highest that science can give.

By definition, the scientific method can never offer 100 per cent certainty, which can be confusing for many commentators and readers and lead to false ideas about the need for 'balance' in reporting. Pursuing balance does not mean giving equal space to both authoritative bodies and fringe speculation. This false need for 'balance' in

reporting has often hidden both the degree of certainty that exists about climate change and the urgency required in addressing it.

General knowledge of climate systems and how they work is a necessary starting point for Catholics. The IPCC reports are but the latest in a series of authoritative reviews on climate change published since the 1960s. Recent climate change debate takes place within wider frames of reference, including the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Kyoto Protocol 1996 and a new round of IPCC negotiations scheduled for 2012.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note, moreover, that in ratifying the Rio agreement in 1992 all signatories, including the USA and Australia, committed themselves *not to environmentally harm other nations*. All governments are aware of the facts and likely outcomes of climate change on the world, its peoples and biosphere; and they recognise the urgent need to respond in substantial ways.

In order to enter into the debate, Catholics need some knowledge of the major climate change issues. Australian data on climate change abounds (even though governments at all levels often do not listen to their own

scientists). Some sources of information are:

- Commonwealth government greenhouse and meteorological websites, which are excellent data sources<sup>13</sup>
- the national science research organisation, CSIRO. Its website can be a source of good information and its magazine, *ECOS*, is largely devoted to environmental issues including climate change.<sup>14</sup>
- state government websites, which carry more localised information<sup>15</sup>

All these bodies detail both problems and solutions, and work from the three major IPCC scenarios: the possibility of temperature rises of two, four and six degrees respectively. A two-degree rise seems inevitable and its consequences will be serious enough. Rises of four or six degrees will be catastrophic.<sup>16</sup> Government bodies identify the achievable outcomes as reducing greenhouse gas emissions 20 per cent by 2020 and 60 per cent by 2050 based on 1990 levels. The most desirable outcome is to become carbon neutral – that is, to achieve zero net emissions.

In addition to the websites of government bodies, there are sites, studies and campaigns run by business groups and NGOs. They add localised economic and community perspectives that are often broader than the scope of government agencies. More rooted in civil society than government agencies, non-government groups also conduct education campaigns for change

and, because of their flexible nature, may offer material that is more up-to-date.<sup>17</sup>

At the 2008 *Transforming Australia* Conference, convened by the Climate Action Network Australia (CANA), Professor David Karoly produced scientific findings that show that climate change effects the IPCC had predicted for 2030 are already emerging.<sup>18</sup> Professor Ove Hoegh-Guldberg reported similar evidence from his work as a marine scientist. Several speakers, especially Dr James Slezak from McKinsey and Company, argued that if government sets the right parameters, the Australian business sector can reduce local emissions by 60 per cent by 2020 with little economic impact. The predominant opinion of the CANA delegates was that there is an emergency that requires urgent action and that the government should set a goal of over 90 per cent climate-gas reductions by 2050 on 1990 figures.

Many delegates also argued that only a dramatic and urgent reduction in greenhouse gases can address related issues of social equity, food security and sustainable agriculture. 'Interconnectedness' is a foundational word in ecological science. It was also stated that Australia must not excuse itself from unilateral action, and is bound in justice to help the poorer nations of the world.

The world's current financial meltdown is another clear example of connectedness, yet it is only a minor storm compared with the cyclone of climate change hanging over us.



11. [www.ipcc.ch](http://www.ipcc.ch).

12. Significantly, the leading emitters per capita of greenhouse gases, the USA and Australia, did not sign Kyoto. The new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, immediately ratified the Protocol at the 2007 IPCC meeting in Bali.

13. [www.bom.gov.au/climate](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate); [www.greenhouse.gov.au](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au).

14. <http://www.publish.csiro.au/?nid=214>.

15. Some examples are [www.greenhouse.nsw.gov.au](http://www.greenhouse.nsw.gov.au) and the Australian Local Government Association: [www.alga.asn.au](http://www.alga.asn.au).

16. A report on agriculture by ABARE Mar 2008 estimates that a 3.6 degree rise is likely.

17. David Spratt and Philip Sutton, *Climate Code Red*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2008. See also [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au); [www.climateinstitute.org.au](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au); [www.planteextinction.com](http://www.planteextinction.com); [www.acfonline.org.au](http://www.acfonline.org.au); [www.greenpeace.org.au](http://www.greenpeace.org.au); <http://www.panda.org/climate/>.

18. [www.cana.net.au](http://www.cana.net.au)



# Severity of climate change

## in Australia

The impacts of climate change in Australia have already begun and will be very severe even with a two-degree temperature rise – the most favourable scenario foreseen by the IPCC. It is important to remember that such effects, including temperatures, will vary from region to region so that in some areas impacts will be greater than Australian or world averages. Part of *seeing* is to be aware of diverse local scenarios.

Australia has quite distinct climate zones, ranging from the tropical north and the arid inland to the temperate east coasts and the Mediterranean southern coast. The continent is subject both to cyclones and

blizzards, and rainfall occurs once in ten years in some places and over two metres a year in others. Australia also has responsibilities for a long coastline, a continental shelf, remote ocean islands and, under UN mandate, a large section of the Antarctic. Already temperature changes in the Antarctic far exceed average world rises. This variation from region to region is paralleled in the northern hemisphere.

For Australia and its territories, the major physical impacts of climate change will affect water, temperature, oceans, infrastructure, biodiversity, food production and human health (see the accompanying table).



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Mt Annan Botanic Gardens



Sculpture by the Sea

## Physical effects of climate change on Australia

Water	There will be less rain in the south but more in the tropics, more intense storms, cyclones as far south as Sydney, more severe droughts and flash floods, and a decline in ground water.
Temperatures	Higher temperatures will result in quickly-drying soil, more arid lands, more intense and frequent bush fires, shrinking snowfields and high temperature increases towards the South Pole.
Oceans	Sea-levels will rise and encroach on coastal land. Oceans will become increasingly acidified, which retards the growth of corals and shellfish; there will be coral bleaching, coastal erosion and migration or death of fish species and sea forests.
Infrastructure	Energy demand will increase; there will be road and rail disruptions and dwindling water supply. Existing building designs and disaster response capabilities will prove inadequate.
Biodiversity	Extinction of species will occur as habitat changes; there will be major wetlands loss, limited time for adaptation, broken migration corridors, loss of key ecosystems and invasive species of plants, animals, birds and marine organisms.
Food production	Planting and fruit budding seasons will change; there will be declining production in the irrigated Murray-Darling 'bread basket', less livestock carrying capacity and failures of industrial agricultural models. Research infrastructure may prove misdirected.
Health	There will be more tropical disease in northern environments and disease will travel further south; there will be heat-stress and food shortages, with less dietary variety and nutritional value.



## Three seminal Australian books on climate change

A major obstacle to *seeing* is ignorance. Sadly, ignorance is to be found not only among parliamentarians and in the media: some religious leaders, too, do not believe what Vatican II said about taking life in this world seriously by reading 'the signs of the times'. Some Church leadership at the pastoral level seems blind to fundamental world issues, as evidenced by the content of many Sunday homilies.

Three books explain well the situation regarding climate change in Australia and its implications for the future of the nation:

Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers: The history and future impact of climate change* (Text, 2005). Tim's seminal book traces climate history through three billion years of paleo-evidence, explains natural cycles and examines the options for renewable energy sources. His book also opens up spiritual messages for the discerning heart.

Mark Diesendorf, *Greenhouse Solutions with Sustainable Energy* (UNSW Press, 2007). Mark presents a practical, science-based and detailed way to act now, and shows how available renewable energy sources could supply base power equal to that of coal-fired generation. Diesendorf's work is based on up-to-date science and, significantly, is remarkably hopeful: it maps achievable ways forward – a positive for any believer.

Guy Pearce, *High & Dry: John Howard, climate change and the selling of Australia's future* (Penguin Viking, 2007). Guy Pearce was a Liberal Party insider for more than a decade. From a political and economic viewpoint, his work amplifies Flannery's scientific work and the alternative energy question addressed by Diesendorf. He exposes the lies Australian voters have been sold, and raises the alarm about the urgent need for an adequate response to climate change and what is at stake as it takes effect.



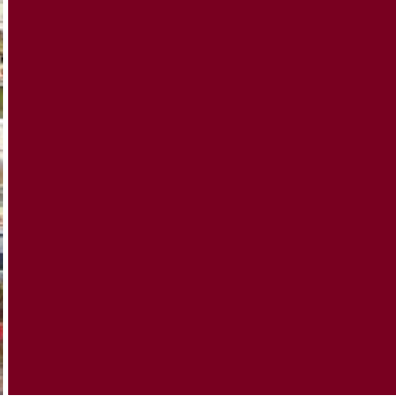
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*Catholic  
judgment must  
be hard-nosed  
and rooted in  
reality if it is  
to present a  
realistic hope  
to the world  
and ourselves.*



Miriam Pepper, Climate Institute



Hunter Botanic  
Gardens

# Judge



## Traditional faith resources help in making a Catholic response

Max Weber wrote that religion can either reinforce the status quo or challenge it to transformation. Catholics can choose to challenge – both to be assertive and to make judgments regarding climate change. They can assert the positive role of Earth in the Christian story – salvation, revelation, incarnation, sacramental signs, mysticism and the promise of life to the full and fulfilment for all creation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explores the place of creation in God's providence.<sup>19</sup> The *Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching* has a whole section on environmental care, which updates Catholic social principles to embrace the ecological dimension and identify it as 'integral to faith'.<sup>20</sup>

Further, the Catechism explicitly rejects past Scriptural interpretations that justified ideas of unrestrained domination of the environment, declares as erroneous

the utilitarian reduction of nature to something to be manipulated and exploited, and says there is an ever-greater need to respect the transcendent dimension of creation itself.<sup>21</sup> Such social teaching is a significant move away from an exclusively human-centred perspective.

Modern theologians, from Father Teilhard de Chardin SJ to Father Thomas Berry CP, have been taking scientific findings seriously and developing a positive view of Earth's role. More recently, a number of books by Adelaide-based diocesan priest Father Denis Edwards detail how environmental concern is rooted in the Catholic tradition. Theologians such as Rosemary Ruether establish eco-feminist insights within that same Catholic tradition. There is ample material in Catholic tradition to meditate on and discern faith-filled responses regarding climate change.<sup>22</sup>



Catholic judgment must be hard-nosed and rooted in reality if it is to present a realistic hope to the world and ourselves. Pope Benedict's 2007 Encyclical *Spe Salvi*<sup>23</sup> says genuine hope is rooted in human history and not to be found in trying to hide in 'a private corner of happiness'. Genuine hope-filled and enlightened ways forward emerge when humanity purges itself of the superficial and comfortable, and frees itself from hidden lies. The Pope promises that only prayer worthy of God's designs will achieve realistic hope for the world.

A modern Catholic spiritual journey not only embraces the natural world, including the reality of climate change, but revels in the mystery it reveals. Images of God leading the dance and waiting on us at the heavenly banquet are not out of place. When launching Catholic Earthcare Australia, Archbishop John Bathersby said:

*The entire life of Christians is an exploration into Christ. Each generation pushes back ever so slightly the envelope of his mystery ... One of the most significant developments in Catholic understanding of the Christian mission in more recent times is its embrace of creation in all its beauty and vitality.*

The Australian Catholic Bishops' 2005 position paper on Climate Change<sup>24</sup> said:

*We believe that the Earth is a gift from God, valuable in itself, and that human life is irrevocably linked with the Earth. Catholic faith believes that the cosmos displays the goodness, beauty and power of God.*

Gaining an expanded vision of Earth as part of the mystery of salvation is a frightening thing. Not only does our responsibility as the most conscious beings within creation become more onerous, but the intimate connection between humanity and Earth opens up realms of mystery that are also spiritually frightening.<sup>25</sup> The incarnation of Jesus has deep implications as the whole cosmos is revealed as holy and sacramental. 'Matter is a risk taken by the spirit' wrote Donald Nicholl.<sup>26</sup>

The mystery of God immanent in Earth makes lesser spiritual aims seem paltry. Pope John Paul II, in November 2000, said: 'Within the movement of nature, tranquil and silent but rich in life, there continues to palpitate the original delight of the Creator.' Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his 2008 World Day of Peace Message: 'Earth is the human family's common home.'

## What is prayer?

Saint Augustine, in a homily on the First Letter of John, describes very beautifully the intimate relationship between prayer and hope. He defines prayer as an exercise of desire. Man was created for greatness – for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched ... To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness.

When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God – what is worthy of God.

We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment – that meagre, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. We must free ourselves from the hidden lies with which we deceive ourselves ... Yet my encounter with God awakens my conscience in such a way that it no longer aims at self-justification, and is no longer a mere reflection of me and those of my contemporaries who shape my thinking, but it becomes a capacity for listening to the Good itself.

Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi* 2007 no 33.



19. Multiple entries in the *Catechism's* index link the material and the spiritual worlds in an integral way.

20. To quote the words of Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message, 1990.

21. *Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching*, St Pauls, Homebush, 2004, Chapter 10, specifically Nos. 461–463.

22. Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology*, Paulist Press, New York, 1999. Teilhard's writings on the relationship of science and religion, on mysticism and other aspects are explored in Celia Deane-Drummond (ed.), *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on People and Planet*, Equinox, UK, 2006.

23. Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (30 November 2007), no. 33.

24. [www.catholicearthcareoz.org.au](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.org.au)

25. Ecumenical Group, *Liturgy in the Forest*, Melbourne 1995.

26. *The Tablet*, 5 Jul 1997



**‘Even to continue speaking of nature as separate from humanity in some way fails to appreciate a basic insight of ecology - connectedness.’**

Scripture has insights into humanity's relationship with Earth as one of the twin pillars, along with the living Tradition, on which Catholic faith stands. Scripture witnesses to God's wisdom imbedded in the Earth: *If you would learn more, ask the cattle, seek information from the birds of the air* (Job 12:7; 38:2). Modern biblical scholarship is rediscovering Earth as a *voice of the Holy Spirit*. Pope John Paul II called creation the first revelation.<sup>27</sup> Much of the thanks for rediscovering the voice of Earth in Scripture must go to women theologians such as Rosemary Ruether. Australia can also be proud of Adelaide's Earth Bible Project team, led by Rev. Dr Norman Habel, which has further developed this insight. To carry this voice into communal prayer, Habel has developed a lectionary for a *Season of Creation* over the four Sundays leading up to the feast day of St Francis of Assisi.<sup>28</sup>

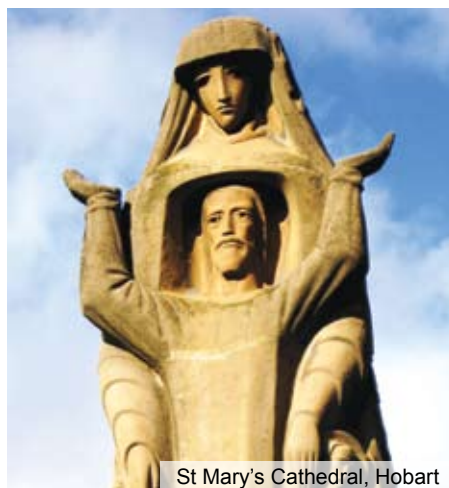
Scripture presents the language of prophecy as the voice of God. In our times, Earth has shown itself as loudly prophetic. In devastating New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina was prophetic in showing the consequences of human arrogance – local arrogance in clearing the mangroves and cutting canals, which opened the city to disaster; global arrogance in increasing greenhouse

gases that heat shallow waters like the Gulf of Mexico and increase the intensity of hurricanes. Other voices of prophet Earth are the melting of heat-reflecting ice in the Arctic waters; the rapid decline of glaciers in the Himalayas and Andes, which feed rivers that support billions of people; the melting of land-based ice sheets in the Antarctic; and droughts in Australia. *Earth's prophetic messages are a constant source of prayerful reflection.*

Even to continue speaking of nature as separate from humanity in some way fails to appreciate a basic insight of ecology – connectedness. Humans are a part of nature, a part of creation. In the context of rapid climate change, a new respect for nature gives deeper meaning to Scripture's stricture that Earth belongs to God and humans are accountable for its use – and abuse.

This new understanding of Scriptural truths about the human-earth relationship impels Catholics not only to turn away from wasteful personal and institutional economic plans and exploitative life-styles, but to negotiate a new relationship with the sciences. A prayer asking forgiveness of God, scientists and much-maligned environmentalists would not be out of place.

Columban missionary Father Sean McDonagh writes



St Mary's Cathedral, Hobart



Norman Habel







Gavin Andrews and Francis Bodkin



Peter Woodruff

that climate change is not just one environmental problem among others; it is foundational.<sup>29</sup> A past weakness in Catholic social teaching has been its near-exclusive focus on the human condition – a focus that can limit analysis and channel the solutions offered.<sup>30</sup> McDonagh identifies climate change as a priority mission issue for the Church because it threatens all life on this planet – human, animal and plant alike. Life is a seamless garment. His book details the major climate change challenges for believers, but he is sad that the responses by the Christian churches so far have been ‘a little late and a little breathless’.<sup>31</sup> McDonagh says that these churches are now called to make a credible response to the science of climate change. Neglect would be a sin.<sup>32</sup>

In previous books on Catholic faith and the environment, Father McDonagh has detailed the spiritual insights about the land that he gained from working over several decades as a missionary among the T’boli tribal people of the southern Philippines. Such spirituality resonates with tribal peoples around the world and with the biblical

tradition, argues Columban Peter Woodruff.<sup>33</sup>

These insights can help Australians become more receptive to the spirituality and ethics of Australian Indigenous peoples. Their respect for the land from which they spring, and which is their mother, is the basis for their attitudes of living lightly on the land where they have survived for at least 60,000 years. Aboriginal spirituality has been explored by Norman Habel (it has helped him in creating his *Season of Creation*) and Father Eugene Stockton writing on spirituality.<sup>34</sup>



Sculpture by the Sea

27. John Paul II Audience 30 Jan 2002: ‘For those who have attentive ears and unveiled eyes, creation is like a first revelation, which has its own eloquent language: It is almost like another sacred book whose letters are represented by the multitude of creatures present in the universe.’

28. Norman C Habel, [www.seasonofcreation.com](http://www.seasonofcreation.com).

29. See *Climate Change: the challenge to us all* (see note 2 above).

30. Charles Rue, *Catholics and Nature*, Catholic Social Justice Series No. 57, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2006.

31. A phrase attributed to Bernard Lonergan SJ.

32. Michael S Northcott, *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming*, Orbis Books, New York, 2007, argues that ‘Global warming is the earth’s judgment on the global market empire, and on the heedless consumption it fosters’.

33. Peter Woodruff, ‘A Communal Sense of Life: a key cultural value of the rural Andes and its impact on life in the district of Independencia, Lima’, thesis, LaTrobe University 2007.

34. Eugene Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a nation*, Millennium Books, Sydney, 1995.



## Some Catholic principles for facing environmental issues

- the right of all people to a safe environment
- consideration of the common good
- dismantling the social structures of sin
- the concept of authentic development as avoiding super development<sup>38</sup>
- the precautionary principle<sup>39</sup>
- the preferential option for the poor
- the rights of future generations
- fair distribution of the costs of abating the effects of climate change
- solidarity with developing countries by sharing modern technology<sup>40</sup>
- welcome for environmental refugees<sup>41</sup>
- respect for the wider earth community by preserving biodiversity.<sup>42</sup>



Franciscans, Campbelltown

## Catholic environmental ethical principals



Columban Centre Bangor

People and governments, when facing climate change, need to go beyond pragmatic knee-jerk reactions to create a vision, make plans and adopt strategies based on principles.<sup>35</sup> Creating such a vision does not just happen: it must be cultivated in an organic way, based upon what we value and what is at stake. Such a values-based vision can be systematically explained by ethical reasoning and expressed as principles. These principles help clarify the values that Catholics hold, and form a basis for cultivating moral integrity.

The 1990 World Day of Peace Message of Pope John Paul II was foundational in establishing a list of principles for facing environmental issues (see box). This list has since been amplified and systematised in the *Catechism* and the *Compendium of Social Teaching*, and formed the basis for the Australian bishops' 2005 Position Paper, which specifically presented a set of principles for judging climate change both locally and globally.<sup>36</sup>

Economic constraints and poverty mean that more and more people are forced to move, either internally or across national borders, just to survive. One symptom of this growing trend is trafficking of people as foreign labour and sex workers.<sup>37</sup> The movement of peoples will increase as the impact of climate change grows unless poorer countries can sustain themselves. A

35. Daniel Cowdin, 'Environmental Ethics', *Theological Studies* Mar 2008, pp. 165–84. He compares the approaches to environmental ethics of Hollenback (ecologically enlightened humanism), John Hart (ecological common good), Jame Schaefer (ecological beauty) and other writers. He evaluates their respective spiritualities and bases for action in the public forum, including the place of principles.

36. Australian Catholic Bishops' *Climate Change Conference* Nov 2005 [www.catholicearthcareoz.net](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2422–23, 1981, 2403, 2415; *Compendium* Nos. 26, 170, 454.

37. See [www.catalyst.org.au](http://www.catalyst.org.au); [www.antislavery.org.au](http://www.antislavery.org.au).

38. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991) No 35–40; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) Nos 28–34; *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) No 8, 55, 90, 92.

39. *The Top Ten World Rivers at Risk* C M Wong et al, WWF, Mar 2007; Inland Rivers Network NSW [www.inrnsw.org.au](http://www.inrnsw.org.au)

40. Pope John Paul II: 'Respect for nature by everyone, a policy of openness to immigrants, the cancellation or significant reduction of the debt of poorer nations, the promotion of peace through dialogue and negotiation, the primacy of the rule of law; these are the priorities which the leaders of the developed nations cannot disregard.' Speech to President George Bush, 23 Jul 2001, No 3.

41. See for example *Human Tide: the real migration crisis*, Christian Aid, May 2007: [www.christianaid.org.au](http://www.christianaid.org.au). See also [www.iied.org/pubs](http://www.iied.org/pubs); [www.earthprint.com](http://www.earthprint.com); Sea Levels in Developing Countries WWF Policy Paper, Feb 2007. Some islands, for example in Australia's Torres Strait and PNG's Carteret islands, have started to become submerged: [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au).

42. Richard Macey, *SMH* 4 Aug 2007. 30 kms of sea-weed forest off Sydney has been lost; Sean McDonagh *Death of Life: The horror of extinction*, The Columba Press, 2004.

strong Catholic moral position linking climate change and holistic sustainable development was presented in 2007 by Archbishop Migliore, speaking at the UN as the Vatican's official representative:

*While the duty to protect the environment should not be considered in opposition to development, it must not be sacrificed on the altar of economic development. My delegation believes that, at its core, the environmental crisis is a moral challenge ... It is not hard to see how issues of environmental protection, models of development, social equity and each one's share of the responsibility to care for the environment are inextricably intertwined.*<sup>43</sup>

An emerging topic when considering climate change is human population and the human ecological footprint. This contentious issue is often an 'elephant in the room' that Catholics try to ignore – not only because of the Church's stance on abortion and family planning, but also because many pastors in developed countries fear to confront their parishioners with questions about their high levels of consumption.

Debate on limiting population numbers also focuses the debate on levels of individual consumption and super development and demonstrates the relevance of Catholic principles. Pressure on Earth's living systems arises from a combination of population numbers and standards of living. Measuring a nation's ecological footprint (hectares needed to support a person)

produces some surprising figures. In absolute terms of impact on Earth, Australia's population requires about eight hectares per person; India's population requires about 0.8 hectares. The Australian lifestyle has 10 times the ecological impact per person.<sup>44</sup> Pope John Paul II argued:

*A more responsible approach to population issues is the promotion of 'authentic development', which represents a balanced view of human progress and includes respect for nature and social well-being.*<sup>45</sup>

A major principle in Catholic teaching is that *peace issues are integrally connected with justice*. Climate change poses a challenge for world peace and must be a part of Church prayer for peace and peace building. Conflict is likely to arise as environmental refugees increasingly cross borders. Pacific island refugees are already entering Australia, but their numbers are tiny when compared with populations living on threatened Asian river delta lands – as the recent cyclone in Burma demonstrated with terrible clarity. Sir Jock Stirrup, UK Chief of the Defence Staff, said in December 2006:

*Climate change and growing competition for scarce resources are together likely to increase the incidence of humanitarian crisis. The spread of desert regions, a scarcity of water, coastal erosion, declining arable land, damage to infrastructure from extreme weather: all could undermine security.*<sup>46</sup>



Catholic Earthcare Climate Change Conference

43. Archbishop Celestino Migliore, address at the 15th session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, 10 May 2007.

44. See [www.livingplanet.org](http://www.livingplanet.org).

45. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern) No. 8

46. Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, speech to Royal United Service Institute, 4 Dec 2006, available at <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/ChiefStaff/20061204RusiChristmasLecture.htm>.



# Morally questionable 'solutions' to climate change

In the search for solutions to climate change, a number of proposals have been made that have themselves been the subject of debate. These include issues such as nuclear energy and bio-fuels. At first such debates seem to concern practical issues on which Catholic teaching has nothing to say. However, elements within them

raise moral questions and demand at least some partial judgments using Catholic values and social principles.

All too often, unfortunately, urgent questions are met with head-in-the-sand attitudes while misleading arguments promoted by PR companies have undermined progress.

## *Argument*

***A strong economy is the best protection against the climate change and will be threatened by the like of carbon taxes. We will be able to afford mitigation measures, if needed, when new technologies are developed.***

## *Response*

If ecological systems are compromised, water and food production will be undermined so that even the richest nations will eventually lose the ecological basis of their prosperity while poor nations will become radically poor.<sup>47</sup> Sir Nicholas Stern and the Garnaut Reviews have shown that it would be cheaper to act now on climate change than to wait.<sup>48</sup> To delay action for economic reasons is not only erroneous economic thinking; it would also put an unjust burden on future generations and further compromise Earth's ecology, the basis for all life.



Canowindra Museum





### *Argument*

***Technologies connected with 'clean-coal' technology, including carbon capture and storage, must be given priority because coal will be the major source of energy into the future.***

### *Response*

This argument is based on technologies that have yet to be scaled up, an unfair assessment of existing alternatives and unfair allocation of subsidies or research and development grants. The relevant IPCC report states that, in itself, carbon capture from coal burning holds many as yet unresolved risks.<sup>49</sup> While 'clean coal' technologies may have a place in future energy supplies, they are not to be confused with implementing greater efficiency in existing plants. Neither must clean coal become a distraction from a more comprehensive solution, including development of better agricultural systems that will capture carbon. European economies such as Germany have shown that there is a long-term prospect of job creation as part of 'green development'.<sup>50</sup>

### *Argument*

***Bio-fuels will fill the gap left by fossil fuels and preserve our way of life.***

### *Response*

While bio-fuels will have a place in a mix of new fuel sources, especially in the subsistence farming of poorer countries, they raise many moral questions. Bio-fuel production diverts land away from food production, as evidenced by the world-wide food shortage and rising grain prices.<sup>51</sup> It will cause greater ecological destruction as rainforests are cleared and biodiversity is lost. However, there are two arguments for the use of bio-fuel at the local level:

- It can be produced on-farm, thus avoiding the use of fuel in transporting fuel.
- The technology can help poor farmers become more self sufficient.

A disturbing element in the bio-fuel debate is the proposed use of genetic manipulation (GM) technologies in bio-crops to increase productivity. Columban Mission has campaigned on GM issues for a decade because of dangers inherent in the application of GM technology.<sup>52</sup>

There is no simple answer to the question of how bio-fuel should fit into a projected mix of alternative technologies and what type of fuel it should be. Prudence is needed.

47. Proceedings of the Columban Society General Assembly 1988.

48. [www.garnautreview.org.au](http://www.garnautreview.org.au).

49. IPCC *Special Report on Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage (CCS)* 2005.

50. *World Watch Report: Green Jobs* 2008, New York: [www.worldwatch.org](http://www.worldwatch.org).

51. Eric Holtz-Gimenez 'Peasants, Higher Food Prices – and a Crutch for the Petrol Economy' *Le Monde Diplomatique* 03 Jul 2007; *Seedling* Jul 2007, [www.grain.org](http://www.grain.org); Biodiesel Association of Australia.

52. See Charles Rue, *Unjust Genes* (DVD), Columban Mission Centre, Melbourne, 2006; [www.madge.org/digests.php](http://www.madge.org/digests.php).

### Argument

*The introduction of carbon credits and carbon trading will let the markets solve the problem of climate change.*<sup>53</sup>

### Response

*The energy problem and other environmental problems exemplify gross market failure.* Environmental degradation caused by 'economic externalities' have had serious economic, social, and emotional effects and terrible impacts on Earth's biodiversity.

While the mechanisms of carbon trading are complex, the essential first step is to put a cap on emissions and a real price on carbon.<sup>54</sup> The risks of profiteering in carbon trading may lead to a credibility gap for its promoters. Water trading in Australia offers salutary lessons.

In July 2008 the Federal Government released its Green Paper for discussion on the rules for cap-and-trade. It was presented as a 'carbon pollution reduction' measure, but is a cost distribution element that conceals the need for legislating real caps.<sup>55</sup> A community survey indicates that the Green Paper and subsequent White Paper are not radical enough for voters and, significantly, Australia should be prepared to 'go it alone' without waiting for the USA, China and the rest of the world.<sup>56</sup> Trading needs to be accompanied by immediate carbon reduction measures, such as more public transport and refits for houses. These will help poorer people actually reduce their carbon use, and hence their energy bills.<sup>57</sup>

### Argument

*Nuclear energy will be a clean technological solution to energy needs.*

### Response

In Australia, nuclear power generation is technologically at least fifteen years away. It also carries with it many risks, especially for Australia. A few of these risks are:

- health issues for workers
- the possibility of contribution to nuclear arms proliferation and terrorism
- high economic costs of production and decommissioning
- high research costs.

The nuclear power option has been explored by Catholic and other groups.<sup>58</sup> The debate about the nuclear option for Australia may be no more than a distraction to delay alternative action. Since high-grade uranium ore stocks worldwide may be depleted within 40 years, perhaps Australia should lead the way now in promoting proven renewable alternatives to the nuclear option.





# Some initiatives

by the Church

In 2002, the Australian Catholic bishops established Catholic Earthcare Australia (CEA) as their agency on environmental matters. The environment was also the theme of *A New Earth* – their Social Justice Sunday Statement that year.<sup>59</sup> In November 2005, CEA organised a three-day Conference on Climate Change and presented a position paper for discussion.<sup>60</sup> More than 300 delegates – lay and clerical, secular and ecumenical – came together, including international and local scientists, theologians and activists. The topics of papers ranged from cosmology to the effects of climate change on human health.<sup>61</sup>

The 2005 climate conference must be set in the context of the work of two national Catholic agencies of the Catholic Bishops Conference: Caritas Australia (formerly Australian Catholic Relief) and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC). They have fostered eco-awareness since the 1990s as a background to their overseas relief and social justice work, and sought to address causes and not just symptoms. Prayer resources on the environment have been an important part of the materials they have made available to parishes and schools.

One significant move towards education for the environment

has been *On Holy Ground*, co-authored by Catholic Education Offices and Catholic Earthcare Australia in 2006. This document presents a faith-based program for reflection on environmental issues, including climate change. This program has been localised in some states.<sup>62</sup> It is also backed up by school sustainability audits and development programs (developed in cooperation with government agencies) and by dedicated Catholic environmental centres such as those in the Townsville and Bendigo dioceses.

Catholic school children are already receiving positive education for the environment, but it needs to be more vigorously pursued in adult Catholic education programs, centres and universities. The appropriate formation of teachers in Catholic schools to connect environment and faith is a pressing issue – though some eco-theology courses have been offered by the Broken Bay Institute, Catholic Institute of Sydney, Adelaide College of Divinity and Australian Catholic University.

Some religious orders in Australia, like others worldwide, have taken a lead in implementing energy restraint within their institutional houses.<sup>63</sup> They have also initiated Church structural responses such as



53. [www.carbontradewatch.org](http://www.carbontradewatch.org)

54. Clive Hamilton of The Australia Institute writes of 7 tests for effective carbon trading including putting a real price on carbon *SMH* 31 May 2007.

55. Stephanie Peatling, Ben Cubby, *SMH* 17 Jul 2008

56. *SMH* 21 Jul 08. Cf. The reaction of Prof. Garnaut *SMH* 19-21 Dec 2008 and *The Australian* 20-21 Dec 2008

57. Michael Raper, interviewed on ABC Radio National AM, 17 Jul 2008.

58. These groups include school students at Lewisham Catholic High. Other resources include Luke Vaughan for Catholic Social Services Victoria and the Melbourne Catholic Commission for JDP in collaboration with the Victorian Council of Churches, *Nuclear Power: Cure or Curse? A Discussion Paper*, Nov. 2007 [www.css.org.au](http://www.css.org.au); Medical Association for Prevention of War; [www.mapw.org.au](http://www.mapw.org.au); *Nuclear Power: no solution to climate change*, 2006, sponsored by several environmental groups and updated; *Australia and the Nuclear Option*, May 2007 [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au); [www.nuclearspin.org](http://www.nuclearspin.org).

59. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *A New Earth: The environmental challenge*, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Sydney 2002. Available at <http://catholicearthcareoz.net/socialjustice.html>.

60. [http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net/POSITION\\_PAPER.html](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net/POSITION_PAPER.html). Charles Rue was the principal drafter of the position paper.

61. The topic of cosmology excited much interest at the Canberra conference. The Templeton Prize, awarded to scientists who help bridge the gap between science and religion, was won in 2008 by a Polish Catholic priest, Father Michal Heller, specifically for his work on cosmology.

62. [www.onholyyground.edu.au](http://www.onholyyground.edu.au); [www.catholicearthcareoz.net](http://www.catholicearthcareoz.net).

63. Religious Leaders, Rome, *Global Warming 2002* [www.ofm-ipc.org/globalwarming](http://www.ofm-ipc.org/globalwarming).

64. Brigidine Sisters, Good Samaritan Sisters, Christian Brothers, Presentation Sisters, Mercy Sisters, Good Shepherd Sisters, Franciscans and other Religious in Australia.

## ‘Every encounter with another person or culture is capable of revealing potentialities of the Gospel ...’



ecological education centres and retreat houses, and involved lay people in the process.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, their work often focuses on personal commitment in line with Pope John Paul’s call for ecological conversion and ecological vocation.

Some Catholic groups have initiated faith-sharing and social activism on climate change by bringing together believers from many faiths. Since 1993, ecumenical reflection and calls for action on climate change have been coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC).<sup>65</sup> ‘Climate Change and the Church’s Social Teaching’ was addressed ecumenically in the UK Operation Noah project in 2008.<sup>66</sup> In Sydney, the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice started an inter-faith group, Faith and Ecology Network (FEN), in 2003; in June 2007, it issued a Statement on Climate Change. Aboriginal story-teller Frances Bodkin has been an active member of the group from the beginning. (Notably, the federal government has a

dedicated website that brings together Aboriginal stories on climate events and natural signs that predate white history. Much localised Indigenous weather knowledge has been collected, dating back more than ten thousand years.)

The increasing number of contacts between secular and faith-based groups witness to mutual respect and cooperation as a significant development in dialogue. Through dialogue, secular and religious people are learning from each other in pursuit of ecological goals that go beyond the dreams and abilities of either side.<sup>67</sup> In 2006, the Climate Institute, a secular Sydney NGO, published a collection of Climate Change Statements from sixteen religious traditions.<sup>68</sup> A recent Vatican note on dialogue states:

*Every encounter with another person or culture is capable of revealing potentialities of the Gospel which hitherto may not have been fully explicit and which will enrich the life of Christians and the Church.*<sup>69</sup>

The Holy See has set an example by implementing a program to put the Vatican City on a more carbon-friendly basis.<sup>70</sup> The churches, including the Catholic Church, control significant resources in the non-government sector. If they immediately audit their enterprises with the aim of reducing global warming gas emissions, and act to implement changes such as water saving, solar hot water or generating photo-voltaic power, they can offer a credible example of addressing ecological issues.<sup>71</sup>



65. WCC, *Time of Peril: Test of Faith* 1993 and updated. Canadian Rev David Hallman presented a paper at CEA’s *Climate Change Conference* in Canberra 2005.

66. [www.operationnoah.org/resources/study-guides](http://www.operationnoah.org/resources/study-guides).

67. John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer*, Nos. 56–58.

68. [www.climateinstitute.org.au](http://www.climateinstitute.org.au).

69. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, ‘The Missionary Mandate belongs to the very nature of the Church’, 14 Dec 2007, No. 7.

70. Francis Rocca *The Holy See is Going Green: Solar and Offsets* [www.religiousnews.com](http://www.religiousnews.com).

71. Michael Kelly of Church Resources at the Jesuit Lenten Series 2008, North Sydney. Church Resources sells green power and conducts energy audits. <http://www.churchresources.com.au>

72. Australian State of the Environment Committee, *Australia: State of the environment 2001*, Commonwealth of Australia (2001): <http://www.environment.gov.au/soe/2001/publications/report/pubs/soe2001.pdf>.

73. <http://www.phaa.net.au/documents/August07.pdf> [www.ssfa.org.au](http://www.ssfa.org.au).

74. Lisa Murray, ‘Bali’s business bonanza’ *SMH* 15 Dec 2007.

75. Dr Chris Riedy of the Institute of Sustainable Futures, UNSW, has written extensively on transport options, as has Dr Paul Mees, formerly of Melbourne University.

76. Ethical Travel: [www.newint.org](http://www.newint.org).

77. Australian Ethical Investment, [www.austethical.com.au](http://www.austethical.com.au); Corporate Watch, [www.corporatewatch.org.uk](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk); UK Report to the Prime Minister 2006 on the Economic effects of Climate Change.

78. <http://architecture.com.au/> <http://gbcaus.org/> <http://abgr.com.au/rating>.



# Identifying key sectors

## for individual and community action

People often find it easier to focus on one area of action and band together with others for mutual encouragement. If we believe in a common human family, we must believe that God is inspiring people in all walks of life and at every level to do what they can for the common good in addressing climate change. An independent report to the Minister for the Environment, *State of the Environment Australia 2001*, stated:

*The key to Australia's sustainable future lies in ourselves, our attitudes towards the environment, our heritage and each other. Positive change can be achieved when people see options for improvement in their quality of life and opportunities for their children and grandchildren. This change is accelerated when public awareness is translated into political action that influences the activities of our society to care for our country.*<sup>72</sup>

While action on climate change in one's personal life is not enough by itself, individual action can influence the community. Each of us can assess what we can do within our own circumstances. Individual action in our workplace and in our sector of life is difficult and excuses are easy to find: 'It's not my decision'; 'I don't have to pay'; and so forth. However, personal commitment to individual witness and to lobbying within one's sphere of influence will have a major effect on the shape and scope of action on climate change. Catholics in Australia have a proud history of taking the initiative in addressing social problems. This involvement has formed them well to take on the climate challenge if they have the vision and the will. Prayers for the courage to act on a new vision are needed.

Some areas in which we can take action are listed in the table below.

### Areas in which we can take ecological action:

Consumers	Australians can send powerful signals to the market by their <i>climate-friendly choice of goods and services</i> .
Food sector	<i>Many aspects of food production affect greenhouse gas emissions.</i> A new consciousness is emerging about the amount of food eaten or wasted, its packaging and source, the distance it is transported, and whether it is meat-based or vegetarian, industrial or home-grown. <sup>73</sup>
Home owners	As housing is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, the <i>choice of home size and energy efficiency</i> is influencing the choices some builders are offering.
Business people	Ethical investment has increased over a decade and business now appreciates that there is money to be made by investing in alternative energy. <sup>74</sup>
Voters	All three levels of government are being influenced as citizens participate in civic and social structures.
Land transport	More people are using public transport while car owners and transport companies are choosing more efficient cars, buses and trucks to reduce carbon emissions. <sup>75</sup>
Aviation	The <i>high-altitude impact of greenhouse gases is 2.7 times that at ground level.</i> Fast trains, city centre to city centre, offer alternatives to air travel in many countries. <sup>76</sup>
Economic planning	Managers of businesses, government bodies, schools and other institutions are beginning to bring into their accounting <i>the short and long term economic costs of the effects of climate change.</i> <sup>77</sup>
Architects and builders	Some owners, managers and employees have begun to ask for and implement building and infrastructure designs that produce less greenhouse gases. <sup>78</sup>
Electricity use and supply	Some industries have begun both to <i>promote energy saving</i> and <i>seek alternative energy sources</i> which create new jobs.
Legal profession	New <i>local</i> and <i>cross-border</i> legal frameworks are being drawn up and environmental disputes solved with speed and equity.
The Arts	Artists stun us with the beauty they depict, shock us and move us to action through the power of pictures and music, even cartoons.

# Agriculture and forestry

The agricultural and forestry sectors are both major sources and major sinks for carbon. For decades the CSIRO, largely government-financed, has introduced Australian farmers and foresters to environmentally sustainable practices.<sup>79</sup> Financial support for new agricultural research was considerably reduced under the Howard Government, and sadly, the new Labor Federal Government has reduced it further.<sup>80</sup>

Some wasteful and destructive practices have not stopped. They include profligate irrigation practices, large-scale land clearing, including clear-felling old growth forests, and forms of farming and forestry that 'mine the land'. One proposal to address this is that Australian farmers be paid to preserve existing ground cover so that its carbon is not released into the atmosphere and the land itself improves its capacity as



a carbon sink. (Good ecological farming would seem to demand this practice in any case.) A major paper by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) argues that organic agriculture is the best farming option in addressing climate change: it offers sustainable yields, healthy soils as carbon sinks, increased employment and other benefits and requires less fossil fuel input.<sup>81</sup> Some farmers are trying it, but widespread organic farming would be nothing short of a revolution for Australian agriculture. Changing ways would not be easy for small farmers, especially as their already low profit margins are decreasing as more extreme weather bites and supermarkets cut their margins. Many timber companies rely on all-but-free state and old-growth forests, to the disadvantage of farmed forestry. Imported timber adds to the complexity.

79. 'Edible Earth', *New Internationalist* Jul 2007, looks at ecologically sustainable agriculture not only for food but also as a ready sink for carbon: [www.newint.org](http://www.newint.org).

80. ABARE briefings and government responses, Mar 2008.

81. UN FAO International Conference on Organic Agriculture and Food Security 2–3 May 2007; Ed Hamer and Mark Anslow, 1 Mar 2008: [www.theecologist.org](http://www.theecologist.org)

82. <http://www.earthhour.org>





*‘How can  
one prevent  
disasters that  
destroy the  
environment  
and threaten  
all forms of  
life?’*

Pope John Paul II, 1996



# Act

Just as knowing where you want to go is the first step in choosing the right road, having a specific aim in greenhouse gas reductions is the first step to exploring options and taking action. Scientists at IPCC Bali 2007 and those cited in the Garnaut Review suggest that developed countries reduce carbon emissions by 20 to 40 per cent by the year 2020 and more than 60 per cent by 2050, based on 1990 levels. Given the rapid warming at the poles, some scientists have since increased the recommended 2050 target to a reduction by 90 per cent or more.

Energy efficiency is the easiest and quickest way to reduce carbon emissions. For example, when factories, homes, councils and the like use less electricity through efficiency gains, it means that less energy has to be produced at Australia’s predominantly coal-fired power stations. Energy efficiency is like picking the low-hanging fruit and it is an area where ordinary people have some control over their personal carbon footprint. As individuals, we can promote car pooling and demand fast, frequent and comfortable public transport. In 2007, Sydney pioneered Earth Hour, in which businesses and private homes

turned off their lights for an hour to demonstrate what savings could be made. Many cities around the world joined in this symbolic action in 2008.<sup>82</sup> Others plan to organise car-free days.

A major issue in power supply is the supply of ‘base load’ power – that is, power all day every day. One of the arguments put forward in the promotion of nuclear energy is that it can handle base load demand. Mark Deisendorf has written specifically on how networked renewable energy sources can do these things just as well. Such a scheme would not derive energy from a single source, as with a coal-powered power station, but from a bundle of renewable energy sources that would be networked. Some planners find this a messy solution, but the technology to create this networked energy grid is available today; nuclear power or large-scale carbon storage solutions are decades away. Importantly, action can begin on these renewable energy networks now.

Other likely renewable sources of base power in Australia are geothermal steam turbines and tidal power. While the science is quite clear, these technologies need more investment to scale up the processes.

# *Learning the language* of climate change



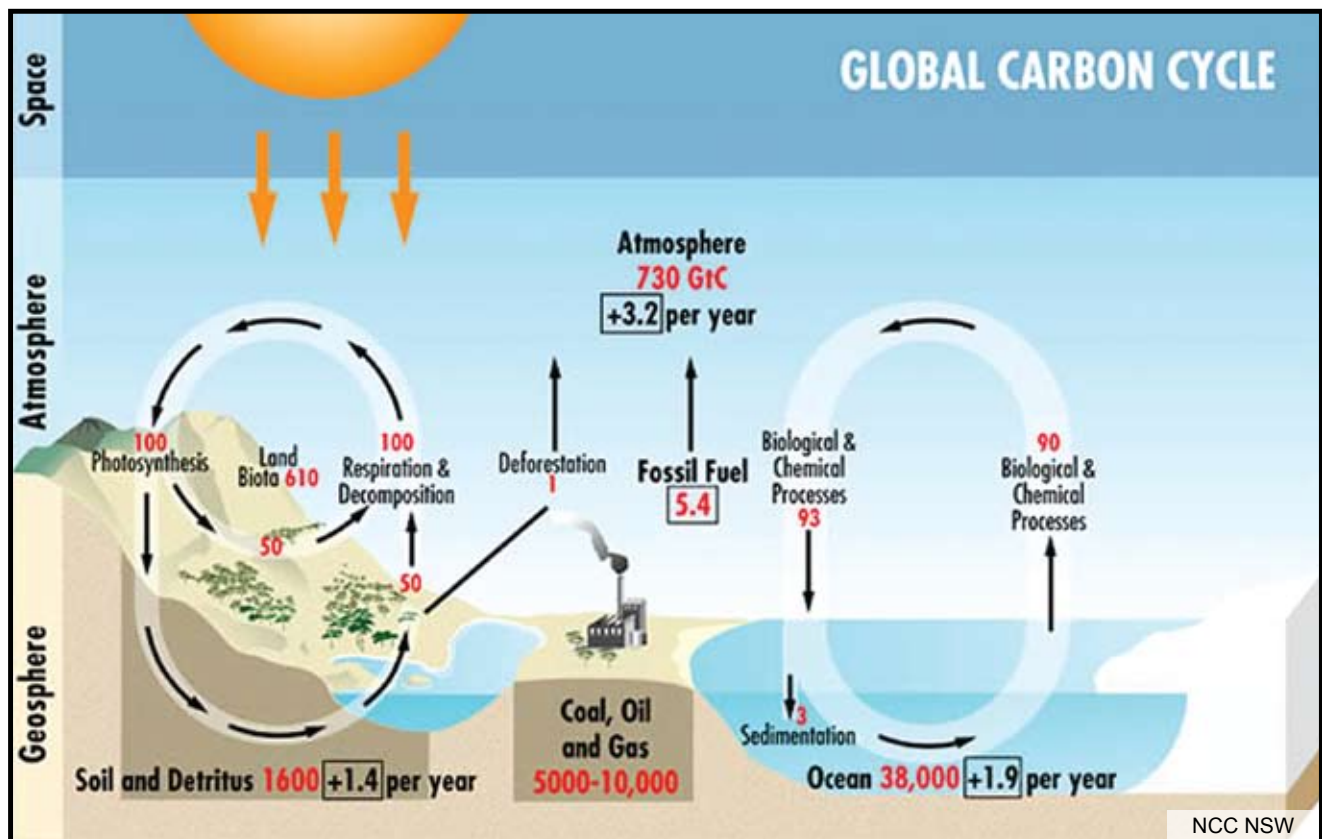
NCC NSW

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The greatest mark of respect for climate scientists, climate change economists and political decision makers, and for the development of the Catholic faith itself, is to learn the language of climate change and the ways of scientific argument.

The language of ecology resonates easily with Catholics: it includes words like *community*, *mutuality*, *inter-connectedness*, *regeneration*, *transformation*. Using words such as 'rainforest' instead of 'jungle', or

'wetlands' instead of 'swamps', has helped many people become environmentally aware. Likewise, learning about the basic mechanisms which alter the pace of climate change – *thresholds*, *tipping points*, *positive feedbacks*, *albedo effect*, *runaway climate change* – helps us to weigh up arguments and prompt us into urgent action. Knowledge of these deepens our wisdom and courage to act.





# Being fearless truth-tellers

One of the strongest condemnations Jesus uttered in the Gospels is of Satan as *the father of all lies* (Jn 8:44). In our times, Jesus would have been in full prophetic flight as he confronted deniers of climate science. They variously deny the science, impute base motives to those who speak out and then offer spurious solutions. Confusion and inaction is their desired outcome.

In some sections of the Church, a cancer-like ‘culture war’ has broken out: some Catholics see themselves as defending ‘true religion’ against rationalist secularism and seem to hanker after an Arcadian religious and social period that they imagine existed last century; this ideal is transferred into a fight about the reality of climate change.

In April 2007, for example, there were conflicting opinions at a Seminar on Climate Change and Development in Rome.<sup>83</sup> Prominent church leaders, scientists and political leaders outlined the facts and appealed to the churches to offer moral leadership. Other participants repeated the deniers’ litany: ‘climate change is merely the result of natural cycles’; ‘the IPCC uses models that are not real science’. Bishop Chris Toohey from Australia said bluntly, though smilingly: ‘We know what we must do. Let’s have the guts to do it’.<sup>84</sup>

Sadly, the PR employed by deniers of climate change can play on people’s good will and Christian charity and can lead to confusion by appearing to show compassion: ‘carbon taxes will rob the poor’; ‘don’t deny developing nations scientific agriculture such as genetically modified crops and bio-fuel production’. Even people of good will committed to social justice can be deceived by such ideas. The obvious plight of the poor can blind them to the ecological realities of climate change. It is attractive to endorse mechanisms

such as carbon trading because such measures may seem to address social inequity.<sup>85</sup>

Some prominent Australian Catholic journalists have supported the contrarians and written disparagingly of environmentalists, as have certain church leaders uttering warnings about ‘religious zealots from the church of climate change’. Cardinal George Pell has been a consistent opponent of the idea that climate change

is human-induced. He displayed a poor grasp of climate science in his 2008 New Year column in the *Catholic Weekly*, for example, and failed to distinguish between short-term weather prediction and the long-term calculation of climate trends.<sup>86</sup> In truth, two decades of Catholic

environmental teaching must be respected. Cardinal Pell’s attitude contrasts with the Pope Benedict’s warning in his 2008 World Day of Peace Message:

*The family needs a home ... For the human family, this home is the earth, the environment that God the Creator has given us to inhabit with creativity and responsibility ... humanity today is rightly concerned about the ecological balance of tomorrow.*<sup>87</sup>

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for neglecting the weightier matters of the Law. The modern church must address matters of substance, and climate change is the paramount issue that the human family must act on now to secure its future in God’s creation. While understandably some people may be traumatised into denial when faced with climate change, it looms as a true moral challenge to action and reason for prayer. The existing degree of certainty about climate change does not support a ‘wait and see’ moral response.



Father Rue, Archbishop Kelly, Cardinal Martino

83. *Hong Kong Examiner* 27 May 2007; *The Tablet* 5 May 2007; [www.cathnews.com.au](http://www.cathnews.com.au). Father Charles Rue participated in the Seminar for the Columban Mission Society.

84. Cf. *Hong Kong Examiner*, report by C. Rue.

85. For example, Michael Raper, President of Welfare Rights Centre, responding to a question at the 2008 Jesuit Lenten Seminar Series ‘Climate Change: Who pays the price’.

86. Cardinal George Pell, ‘That was the year that was’, *The Catholic Weekly* 6 Jan 2008.

87. Nos 8–9.

## Some practical aims

- The three levels of government can set an example by choosing procurements, buildings and energy options that reduce greenhouse gas.
- Misleading advertising that exploits consumers' ecological concerns must be tightly legislated against.<sup>90</sup>
- Australia must continue to support international structures that help reduce global warming, such as the IPCC and the UN Treaties on Biodiversity and World Heritage. These take precedence over trade agreements.<sup>91</sup>
- The government can redirect investment within Australia by such measures as putting a cap on carbon emissions and setting renewable energy targets. Business will do what it knows best if it has some investment certainty.
- Tax reform will be part of the mix of government measures to finance new ways. The whole of Australia needs to benefit from the mineral-boom windfall. Money available for investment needs to be redirected into national projects addressing climate change – education, grants for energy efficient housing refits and so on. Tax law could even encourage superannuation funds to invest in such projects.
- Governments have a critical role as catalysts for research and development of alternative energy sources to address the peak oil crisis and lessen greenhouse gas emissions. Australia's former head scientist has suggested that government financial support for research and science in the universities needs to increase 40 times over.
- One major part of an Australian response to climate change, especially in the south-western Pacific, is foreign aid that willingly shares ecologically sustainable technologies without patents.<sup>92</sup> We should not export our energy-hungry style of development; aid is not mere investment.<sup>93</sup>
- The increasingly large Australian defence budget can well be directed towards foreign aid, genuine security and addressing oil shortages and climate change. The nation cannot limit its work for peace to governance issues and border security. Creating a just world is the only real way to grow lasting peace, protect the environment, supply alternative energy and manage the effects of climate change.
- Mega-cities perpetuate inefficient infrastructure design and are vulnerable to large-scale damage from extreme climate events, such as the Sydney hailstorm of 1999. We urgently need to discuss proposals to build new regional cities, linked by fast rail and supported by industries and research centres focused on alternative technologies.

## Fostering government leadership on climate change

Governments have a vital role in framing laws and policies that address climate change and foster community cooperation and individual action. Individual citizens, business and labour organisations and independent groups need processes that allow participation in setting these benchmarks. Entering into the political process is a vocation to achieve the common good.<sup>88</sup> There is, for example, a long tradition of union support for environmental and conservationist causes, most famously the 'green bans' that were inspired by Jack Mundey's leadership. Many major unions argue that green jobs will secure long-term employment. Other unions have stood in the way of environmental reform – for example, over the logging of old growth forests.

Similarly, there are some business organisations that argue strongly for environmental reform: more than 100 senior business executives have shown their support for the National Business Leaders Forum on Sustainable Development.<sup>89</sup> Other business leaders, however, oppose reform as contrary to their financial interests.





# *Responding to climate change:* deepening faith

Response to climate change is opening a new chapter in the evolving Catholic story. In the 19th century Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote *Development of Dogma*, which broadened ideas on the way Catholic faith grows. Such growth is a work of the Holy Spirit, who guides the *sensus fidelium* of the whole believing Church community. Catholics, both laity and clergy, discern Spirit-given truth in a process of dialogue with the events and people of each age, and such discernment is a communal Catholic calling that is guided by Church leaders as servants of the people of God.<sup>94</sup> This theme was often taken up by the Second Vatican Council as part of Church renewal in a new reading of the signs of the times. The Council made very clear that the Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the Church's mission and recognised that the history of humanity has known many major turning points that have encouraged new missionary outreach. The Church, guided by the Spirit, responded to them and grew in its understanding and expression of faith in the process.<sup>95</sup> Pope Benedict invites us to let our hearts 'be stretched'.<sup>96</sup>

The temptation to do nothing is powerful: leave it to others to take the lead in choosing an energy efficient house or car, or to do the sums about energy use or food consumption. And there is always the temptation to despair that nothing can be done, or to give way to various forms of the selfish 'me' culture: 'I'm all right Jack' or 'not in my back yard'. The number of empty rooms in modern homes might be a test of our personal moral integrity.<sup>97</sup>

Knowledge about the causes of climate change and remedies might well lead to a revival of the Catholic tradition of voluntary self-restraint as an individual choice and communal discipline of penance. A modern and relevant form of the traditional Friday penance might be the virtue of deciding when we've consumed enough energy. Friday is the primary prayer day for Muslims, so such an initiative could be a contribution to inter-faith relations and help create solidarity in facing climate change.<sup>98</sup>

Theology and ethics connected with climate change have grown in the past decade and Catholic leaders have been endorsing the changes. In 1996, Pope John Paul II spoke to the European Bureau for the Environment saying:

*We face a fundamental question ... both ethical and ecological ... How can one prevent disasters that destroy the environment and threaten all forms of life?*

Pope Benedict XVI used these words in his 2007 World Day of Peace Message:

*humanity ... must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology.*

Cardinal Martino said in his closing address to the 2007 Roman Seminar on Climate Change and Development:

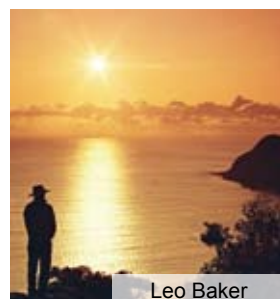
*This seminar deepens doctrinal reflection as Gospel meets life in society ... the Gospel is always new, adapting as historical conditions change.*



Sisters and Co-workers in Rural Ministry



NCC NSW



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88. Catechism of the Catholic Church nos. 2236, 2239.

89. See 'Business signs up to support short-term cuts' and Ian Dunlop, 'Prompt action required on sustainability and global inequity', ECOS #138, Aug-Sep 2007.

90. [www.choice.org.au](http://www.choice.org.au).

91. Wendy Frew wrote that the climate issue is 'inherently international' and wealthy nations have to help poorer countries (SMH 9 Aug 2002). Dr Raj Pachauri, director of Tata Energy Research and Chair of IPCC, said at ACU Narayanan Oration 'What is good for India is good for the world' (SMH 10 Aug 2007).

92. Sean McDonagh, *Life: Creation or Commodity? The Case Against Patents on Living Things* Catholic Social Justice Series no. 41, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2001; Sean McDonagh, *Patenting Life? Stop*, Dominican Publications, Dublin, 2003; Dave DeFusco, *Program to encourage 'green' industry in developing countries* <http://environment.yale.edu>.

93. Debra Jopson, 'Phantom aid never leaves our shores', SMH 28 May 2007. The report says that such 'aid' has often been handled by the Export Finance Insurance Corporation (EFIC).

94. Vatican II, *Constitution of the Church* Nos. 12, 25.

95. John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer* Nos. 21, 30.

96. Benedict XVI, *World Day of Peace Message 2008*, No. 33.

97. Sunanda Creagh, SMH 8 Aug 2007.

98. <http://alghazzali> The Alghazzali Centre is a community-based Islamic group that has been active in tree planting, the Faith and Ecology Network and other environmental activities.

# Continuing the spirit of World Youth Day

A major theme of World Youth Day 2008 (WYD2008) in Sydney was *evangelisation* and *mission*. Many people asked if the call for Catholics to cooperate in the light of faith in finding solutions to climate change was loud and clear at World Youth Day.

A local group of young people proposed that the event would speak to the world if World Youth Day were environmentally friendly in its use of materials and energy. More significant, however, was to make dialogue with environmentalists and cooperative commitment to action on climate change central to the World Youth Day message and evangelising outreach. Bishop Chris Toohey of Catholic Earthcare Australia did just that in *Caring for*



*God's Creation* – his address to WYD2008 participants at Darling Harbour on 18 July. He said faith links feelings and reason, and these two must be kept in balance for faith to be true faith. He concluded that Catholic youth are called to listen to the scientists and work with them.

But beyond that were the statements and actions of Pope Benedict himself. He mentioned environmental concerns no less than seven times in connection with World Youth Day.<sup>99</sup> Speaking on his arrival at Barangaroo, he said:

*Perhaps reluctantly we come to acknowledge that there are also scars which mark*

*the surface of our earth: erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world's mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption. Some of you come from island nations whose very existence is threatened by rising water levels; others from nations suffering the effects of devastating drought.*<sup>100</sup>

On his return to Italy he spoke at length on the disappearance from theology of the doctrine of Creation and the 'supreme importance' of 'a new understanding of Creation and Redemption (see box).





## Benedict XVI on the doctrine of Creation:

In recent decades the doctrine of Creation had almost disappeared from theology, it was almost imperceptible. We are now aware of the damage that this has caused. The Redeemer is the Creator and if we do not proclaim God in his full grandeur – as Creator and as Redeemer – we also diminish the value of the Redemption. Indeed, if God has no role in Creation, if he is relegated merely to a historical context, how can he truly understand the whole of our life? ... This is why, for me, the renewal of the doctrine of Creation and a new understanding of the inseparability of Creation and Redemption are of supreme importance. We must recognize anew: He is the *Creator Spiritus*, the Reason that exists in the beginning, from which all things are born and of which our own reason is but a spark. And it is he, the Creator himself, who did and can enter into history and operate in it precisely because he is the God of the whole and not only of a part ... Chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans also fits into this context. It says that the whole of creation has been groaning in travail because of the bondage to which it has been subjected, awaiting the revelation of God's sons: It will feel liberated when creatures, men and women who are children of God, treat it according to God's perspective ...



Thus, I believe we must strive with all the means we have to present faith in public, especially where a sensitivity for it already exists ... Yet, none of this will suffice unless we ourselves find a new way of living, a discipline of making sacrifices, a discipline of the recognition of others to whom creation belongs as much as it belongs to us who may more easily make use of it; a discipline of responsibility with regard to the future of others and to our own future, because it is a responsibility in the eyes of the One who is our Judge and as such is also Redeemer but, truly, also our Judge.

Consequently, I think in any case that the two dimensions – Creation and Redemption, earthly life and eternal life, responsibility for creation and responsibility for others and for the future – should be juxtaposed. I also think it is our task to intervene clearly and with determination on public opinion. To be heard, we must at the same time demonstrate by our own example, by our own way of life, that we are speaking of a message in which we ourselves believe and according to which it is possible to live. And let us ask the Lord to help us all to live out the faith and the responsibility of faith in such a way that our lifestyle becomes a testimony; and then to speak in such a way that our works may credibly convey faith as an orientation in our time.<sup>101</sup>

The Church's mission is to witness to what God is doing in each age, and now is the era for making a responsible and faith-filled response to climate change. At the practical level, as youth from around the globe disperse after World Youth Day, it will be seen as a truly catholic event if they take home a universal message about the human family's common home, Earth, and the climate challenge.

Archbishop Migliore, speaking in 2008 as the Holy See's permanent observer to the UN, said:

*The challenge of climate change is at once individual, local, national and global. Accordingly, it urges a multi-level coordinated response ... my delegation, therefore, commends the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for providing a global framework for concerted international action to mitigate climate change and to adapt to its impacts.*



99. See John L. Allen Jr at <http://www.ncrcafe.org/node/2023>.

100. <http://www.zenit.org/article-23238?l=english>.

101. Benedict XVI August 6, Bressanone; Reported 20 August 2008 by [www.zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org).

# Climate change, upheaval and renewal



Leo Baker



NCC NSW



Often, after major climate events, new religious eras have emerged: social upheaval is often followed by new spiritual stories and religious sensibilities.<sup>102</sup> The collapse of early civilisations is clearly connected with changes in vegetation following climate change. The flight of Abram from Ur, which led to the First Covenant, followed closely on from social disruption in the region after major 13th-century BC climate change. In the 4th century AD, atmospheric dimming led to crop failures and mass migrations, including the barbarian invasion of Europe that hastened the collapse of the Roman Empire.

Social collapse was followed by a renewal of Western Christianity including the 6th-century response of the Irish monastic missionaries like St Columban to re-civilise Europe.

Quite apart from the impacts of climate change on life as we know it, the rapid decline in fossil fuel supplies

is enough in itself to turn the world as we know it upside down. Oil production is already declining as reserves are pumped dry, with an obvious impact on road transport costs. In recent decades, Australia has expanded its road infrastructure to cater for private cars and road transport, but fossil fuel shortages will radically change the pattern of transport we have come to know and depend on.

A less-recognised factor is the extent to which western style food production and processing depend on fossil oil. This is serious. Oil drives most machines. Agricultural chemicals and fertilisers are largely fossil-based. The net result of oil shortages will be the rising price of food, and the poor will suffer first since they spend a greater proportion of their income on food – a fact that has already led to food riots in countries like Haiti and Indonesia. So, just as peak oil causes food prices to rise, food availability will decline because of unpredictable climate patterns. This will affect not only rainfall but pest regimes and even the budding pattern of plants.

Dominant religious formulations will be increasingly challenged to help their followers make sense of a world turned upside down. Religions will be confronted by apocalyptic thinking and will have to cope with dramatic fundamentalist solutions. In some ways, the current financial crisis is the opportunity for a trail-run. Can we gain the skills to 'read the signs of the times' and to be led by the Spirit into a new religious era, not escapist, but rooted in the realistic hope Pope Benedict XVI speaks of?



Kiribati



# Led by the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is leading the Catholic community to respond to the reality of climate change. How does the Catholic community respond to this reality? Will it preach wisdom, prudence, discernment and pre-emptive action, or will it just stay silent and wait around to help pick up the pieces after the crisis strikes? History has judged such religious approaches harshly: they become irrelevant, while new ones are embraced.

before teaching begins. Listening to the spiritual history of people who carry a sensitivity to environmental issues would not only respect their journey but challenge the individual RCIA sponsors and Catholic community to grow in appreciation of what the Holy Spirit is saying in the lives of environmentalists. In this process, witness to the Catholic tradition goes hand in hand with listening in a spirit of dialogue.

**Might a new spiritual era delight in humbly learning from Earth and living in harmony with God's gift?**



There is a need for research into the impacts of sudden climate change on religious thought throughout history, especially for Catholics in a post-Vatican II spirit.<sup>102</sup> With the emerging 21st-century climate change crisis, *what new social and resultant new spiritual order might evolve?* Might a new spirituality combine compassion both for Earth and People as foreshadowed in Pope John Paul II's succinct but seminal 1990 World Day of Peace Message? Might a new spiritual era delight in humbly learning from Earth and living in harmony with God's gift?

A great gift of the Second Vatican Council was the revival of the Adult Catechumenate (RCIA, or Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). It models how to be led by the Spirit. The RCIA ritual asks that the catechist respect the place from which the enquirer is coming



St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney



Lilyfield Farmers Market



Leo Baker



102. See Chris Turney, *Ice, Mud and Blood: Lessons from Climates Past*, Macmillan, Hampshire, 2008; [www.nede.noaa.gov/paleo](http://www.nede.noaa.gov/paleo).

103. John Paul II, *Missio Redemptoris* (Mission of the Redeemer) No. 30: 'The history of humanity has known many major turning points which have encouraged missionary outreach'.

# Conclusion

The vast majority of scientists and planners suggest that developed countries should urgently aim to reduce carbon emissions by 20–40 per cent by the year 2020 and more than 60 per cent by 2050 based in 1990 levels. Catholics are challenged to make a credible response in helping all peoples achieve these targets as an issue of morality, justice and spirituality, worthy of

sustained Christian prayer. Climate change challenges all people. It challenges Catholics in particular, as Pope Benedict says in his recent encyclical, to be people of hope rooted in the realities of history and not in escapist fantasies. As was said at the beginning of this paper, Catholics are being led by the Spirit into a new mission task for our times:

- **Be truth-tellers.** Welcome knowledge about Earth's systems and the consequence of human-induced climate change as advances in truth.
- **Be spiritual visionaries.** Accept changing patterns of climate as another chapter in cosmic revelation and a new historical turn in encountering God.
- **Be just and compassionate.** Commit to challenge economic structures that disrupt Earth's ecological systems. Care for the planet and continue to heal social disruption, especially among the world's poor.
- **Be active.** Lead the way in a commitment to new ways of living lightly on the earth.



Prayer for the guidance of God's Spirit to renew the face of the Earth is central to Catholics making individual and community responses to climate change – *Come Holy Spirit*.<sup>104</sup> We have the example of Mary, who responded to the Spirit and willingly agreed to act as God wanted, and who asked others to do what her Son asked. In praying her Magnificat and honouring her role as Mother, she can help lead Catholics to respect the planet that nurtures us all, and to rightly call it *mother Earth*.<sup>105</sup>

The *ecological conversion* spoken of by Pope John Paul II will require courage as believers choose to make sacrifices and change lifestyles to reconnect with nature's rhythms.<sup>106</sup> They will have to empty themselves as God chose to do in taking on flesh in Christ Jesus, but in doing so they will help bring the transformation that leads to the fullness of life God wishes for all peoples and the world in our Cosmic Lord.

104. John Paul II: 'The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission ... The history of humanity has known many major turning points which have encouraged missionary outreach, and the Church, guided by the Spirit, has always responded to them with generosity and farsightedness.' *Missio Redemptoris* (Mission of the Redeemer), No. 21.

105. John Paul II: 'Nature itself, from being 'mater' (mother), is now reduced to being 'matter', and is subjected to every kind of manipulation'.

106. John Paul II: 'The Jubilee is a further summons to conversion of heart through a change of life. It is a reminder to all that they should give absolute importance neither to the goods of the Earth, since these are not God, nor to man's domination or claim to domination, since the Earth belongs to God and to him alone (Leviticus 25:23)'. *Bull Proclaiming Great Jubilee* 1998, No. 12.



# *Prayer in the time of climate change*

*God, Creator and Sustainer,  
free us from ignorance about your gift of Earth.*

*Inspire us to act together in respect for your gift and change our ways  
as we relate to Earth's rhythms with humility.*

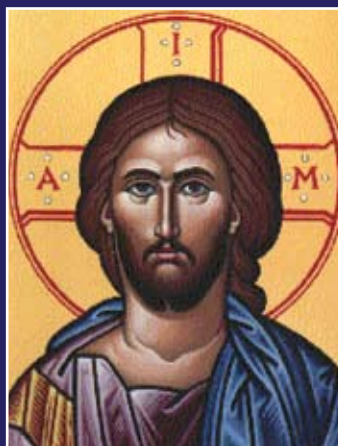
*May we welcome the truth when scientists speak of climate change,  
And reject false pathways designed to confuse.*

*Help us to urge our politicians to take moral decisions and urgent action  
in negotiating sustainable living.*

*Ground all our thoughts in your revealing Scriptures  
and the wisdom of holy women and men who have gone before us  
to help cultivate a new creation as followers of your Cosmic Son.*

*Give us a discerning spirit to work with the ecological and the human,  
the social and the economic realities of this world,  
and instil in us a spirit of respect and compassion  
able to imagine pathways of harmony.*

*Amen.*



## About the author

The Reverend Dr Charles Rue was ordained in 1968, worked in South Korea and Jamaica WI, and is now the Columban Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation Coordinator in Australia (JPICoz).

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