

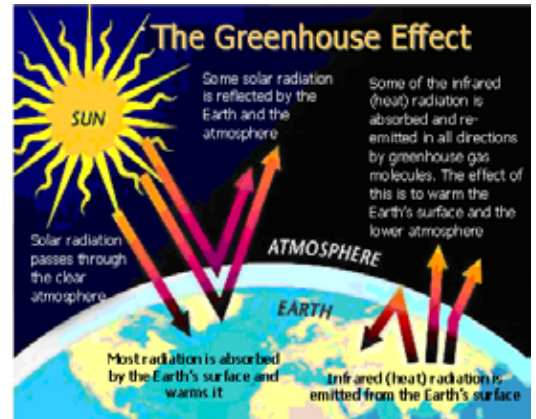
Living the Gospel: Responding to Challenge

CLIMATE CHANGE

What is the issue?

Carbon dioxide and other gases warm the surface of the planet naturally by trapping solar heat in the atmosphere. This is a good thing because it keeps our planet habitable. However by burning fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil, and by clearing forests, we have dramatically increased the amount of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere and temperatures are rising.

The reality of climate change is now well accepted within scientific circles. The 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] Report left little doubt that the impact of human produced climate change will be dramatic for planet Earth.



Why should Christians be concerned?

In 2001, the late Pope John Paul II called humankind to an 'ecological conversion'. In applying this call to the local context, the Australian Bishops have urged 'Catholics as a matter of conscience to cooperate in facing global warming as one of the major issues of our time and take roles of responsibility proper to them. We urge Catholics as an essential part of their faith commitment to respond with sound judgment and resolute action to the reality of climate change.'¹

Similarly, the Bishops of New Zealand state, 'Our world is facing an ecological crisis, which could equally be called an economic crisis, or a poverty crisis. Its public face is the suffering of the poor and the degradation of our environment, at a time when the accumulation of wealth and material goods has never occupied our attention more. That is why we see it primarily as a spiritual or moral crisis.'²

As people of faith, we must constantly assess the reality of our world in the light of the Gospel:

'What does the commandment "*Thou shalt not kill*" mean when 20% of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs poorer nations and future generations of what they need to survive? What does it mean to respect life when 30,000 people die each day from poverty? What does it mean to be stewards of the Earth when up to half of all living species are expected to become extinct in the next 200 years?'³

¹ *Our Responsibility to Sustain God's Earth*, Position paper on Climate Change, 2005.

² *Our World is Facing an Ecological Crisis*, Statement on the Environment, Sept 8, 2006 available at www.catholic.org.nz

³ *ibid.*

"Before it is too late, we need to make courageous choices that will recreate a strong alliance between people and the Earth.

We need a decisive yes to care for creation and a strong commitment to reverse those trends that risk making the situation of decay irreversible!"

Pope Benedict XVI, Loreto, Italy, Sept. 2007



What may be the effects?

- Millions of people in low lying areas such as Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Pacific Islands will be displaced. The question of environmental refugees will have a huge impact on many nations including our own.
- A rise of just 1-2°C will result in the bleaching of 60-80% of the Great Barrier Reef each year (ACF). The IPCC Report, using 6 possible scenarios, predicted a rise of at least 1.1 degree and possibly as much as 6.4 degrees by 2100. Australia has already experienced a rise of 0.7° over the last 100 years.
- More than a million species could be driven to extinction worldwide by 2050. Some species are already displaying signs of increased stress on habitat due to warming.
- Impacts on human health from the spread of diseases such as malaria are already apparent. For example malaria has now spread to higher altitudes in places like the Colombian Andes, 7,000 feet above sea-level (WHO).
- The economic impact of climate change was highlighted by Sir Nicholas Stern, former chief economist of the World Bank. Commenting on the Stern Report, Sir David King, Britain's chief scientist stated 'that if we don't take global action... we will be faced with the kind of downturn that has not been seen since the Great Depression and the two world wars' - [The Age, 2/10/06].

What can we do?

Protecting the environment involves moderating our desires to consume and own more. Consumerism, global environmental change and suffering in the developing world are inextricably linked. We face moral and ethical choices!

- Actually **DO** all the things we know we should: reduce energy use, avoid excess packaging, recycle, turn down the heating by one degree, turn appliances off at the switch, be water wise, install a rainwater tank, etc. **Be the change you want to see.**
- At a structural level, we need to urge the people in power to take drastic measures to curb our greenhouse gas emission through clean energy sources rather than fossil fuels. **Write to those in power asking that a comprehensive strategy for greenhouse gas reduction and the use of alternative energy sources be implemented.**
- Spread the message to your friends, family and neighbours. **Educate** others. Train young children to be very conscious environmental concerns. Be prepared to **challenge** people who squander Earth's precious resources. **Model** good ways of living lightly on the planet.



For more information and ideas:

The Climate Institute: www.climateinstitute.org.au
Bureau of Meteorology: www.bom.gov.au
CSIRO: www.dar.csiro.au
Climate Change Chronicles: www.climatechange.com.au
Catholic Earthcare Australia: www.catholicearthcareoz.net

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