

Care of Creation – October 2019

Last month I found so many conflicting views being expressed, especially from those concerned about the burning of Amazonian trees, that I left my usual stories about what some groups in the Auckland Diocese do to comment on the great new thing that some Amazonian tribes have shown us – the use of biochar. I am presently working with gardeners in West Auckland, challenging them to crush some of my charcoal and mix it into their compost.

The people of Brazil who are burning trees, hoping to have a good farm for cattle, show that they do not understand that the soil under the trees is poor. Their ancestors happened upon a way to improve it and we should learn from them.

Ruminants, especially dairy cows, also attract a great deal of scientific study. Some people in Scotland and Switzerland are keen to have us learn from them, but New Zealand has people who have done a great deal of work on the matter of methane emissions. It's all to do with the way part of the digestive system works. Some breed animals which produce less methane, some feed them different plants in the pastures or different foods like seaweed or mix in charcoal or other substances to counter what is happening in the rumen. Then there are people who argue that to feed animals to produce milk and meat is wasteful when a milk-like drink can be produced without the cow and meat can be grown in the lab from living cells. We are not told online where they get the materials to feed the cells and make the milk.

Action on climate change is difficult for governments who must get themselves elected by people who hold very different views. In Auckland, making biochar is difficult when clean air regulations prohibit smoke, yet charcoal is sold everywhere for people to use in barbecues. Air travel is important for many people, yet aircraft fuels are, so far, mostly petroleum based. Simply growing more trees can do something towards absorbing carbon but it's also important to think about which kind of trees, how they will be managed and how long they will live. Some trees and grasses are now being used to make fuels.

We are being shown many things that we can do to clean up the planet and counteract climate change but often the early steps are more costly than continuing to use fossil fuels. Christians and Jews may see this as offering a sacrifice to God and an example of how one cannot serve both God and mammon. Muslims could look at it as a real jihad. Buddhists might add it to their aim for right understanding. Just how the Hindu who sees the cow as holy can come to help the cow's digestion without a feeling of blasphemy I do not know, but we all are involved and "developed countries", being the worst offenders, need to lead the way.

Our Auckland groups continue: A Rocha arranges planting and weeding days with occasional special teaching events; ACAN has plans to meet with climate champions from parishes and discuss how to teach and how to manage the process of change without a lot of wasted energy; NZCIS provides a background of scientific discovery and study of what the Bible teaches us. My other blogs tell of people involved. For myself, I still look for some person or persons who can help provide information on what is happening in the diocese in this area. At 93, I cannot go on reporting on all these groups, which often meet at night.

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