

Do Justice!!

“Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God” Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the June edition of Do Justice for 2019 as we discuss issues of Social Justice from a Christian perspective.

Climate Change.

During the election campaign in 2017 the Prime Minister described Climate Change as “our Nuclear Free” moment. Since the 2017 election the importance of Climate Change and its very real threat to the continuation of humanity on our planet has become more and more apparent.

One of the Agreements between the parties in the Coalition Government was to introduce a Zero Carbon Bill to Parliament that would include targets for the reduction of greenhouse gases and the establishment of a Climate Change Commission. The intention was that this should be a non-partisan measure that would have the support of all the parties in parliament.

After some 18 months of consultations and submissions James Shaw the Climate Change Minister, finally introduced a Zero Carbon Bill into parliament in early May 19. The bill establishes a Climate Change Commission as promised and sets targets for net carbon emissions by 2050 and for a steady reduction in methane emissions, initially by 10% by 2030 and with further reductions in the ensuing years to 2050.

It appears that the attempts to reach a consensus were only partially successful with the methane gases targets being a problem for the National Party if the first reading debate on 21 May is anything to go by. Also, the reaction by Federated Farmers leadership to the methane targets was very negative. The reaction to the methane targets is regrettable as methane is a very significant greenhouse gas as far as New Zealand is concerned. We have some 20 million cows all breathing out methane every minute of the day.

Wikipedia’s describes methane as follows:

Methane in the Earth's atmosphere is a strong greenhouse gas with a global warming potential (GWP) 104 times greater than CO₂ in a 20-year time frame; methane is not as persistent a gas as CO₂ and tails off to about GWP of 28 for a 100-year time frame. This means that a methane emission will have 28 times the impact on temperature of a carbon dioxide emission of the same mass over the following 100 years. Methane has a large effect but for a relatively brief period, having an estimated lifetime of 9.1 years in the atmosphere, whereas carbon dioxide has a small effect for a long period, having an estimated lifetime of over 100 years.¹

As far as New Zealand is concerned methane contributes more than any of the other greenhouse gases amounting to some 40% of all emissions.² We cannot continue to ignore the agricultural sector when responding to global warming and climate change.

James Shaw’s desire to build cross party support for the Zero Carbon Bill is understandable. There is a real concern that a future government, not committed to dealing with Climate Change, could ignore the Law.

The protest marches by thousands of secondary school students in New Zealand and around the world about Climate Change on 15 March and 24 May are a strong message to governments that they must stop listening to the wealthy interest groups and immediately start taking concrete action to address these issues.

As far as our Church is concerned the Anglican Consultative Council at its meeting in late April in Hong Kong passed the following resolution:

1. recognises that there is a global climate emergency

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atmospheric_methane

² <https://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/science/greenhouse-gases/agricultural-greenhouse-gases/methane-emissions>

2. affirms that the Fifth Mark of Mission is clear, 'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth', but that it only becomes a living testament to our faith when it is pursued in an integrated way across all five Marks of Mission

3. calls the Member Churches of the Anglican Communion to use a day during the Season of Creation, for a day of public repentance

4. requests every Member Church to develop an action plan, and resources, for sustainable living at individual, parish, diocesan and provincial level; including, but not limited to, policies and procedures to minimise waste, increase use of renewable energies, and incorporate creation care into liturgical practice

5. requests each Member Church to prepare a Lenten Fast for Creation

6. encourages the Lambeth Conference 2020 to set aside a time of repentance for the climate and environmental crisis

7. encourages Lambeth Conference 2020 participants to utilise carbon offset arrangements in their travel plans

8. encourages each Member Church to hold a strategic planning conference on the Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change, ensuring the involvement of Indigenous, young, and women's voices, and to report back to ACC18

9. asks Member Churches to identify environmental and climate-related threats in their context and to develop or adapt existing tools on disaster preparedness and mitigation.³

The resolution says that the time for debate and discussion is over, it is now the time for action. Climate change is a challenge to our whole way of living including the continual striving for economic growth. Our diocese will have an opportunity to respond to the ACC resolution at Synod in September. This is an intergenerational justice issue that must be taken seriously.

Our government is promising the first "wellbeing budget", it will be interesting to see if there is a move from continuous economic growth to sustainable economic policies. And we cannot ignore the whole question of inequality in our society and start to seriously address this issue. The super-rich 1% contribute much much more than 1% of the greenhouse gases that are causing climate change and global warming.

As Christians we find clear teaching in the Bible about looking after the earth. In Genesis 1:26 humanity has overall responsibility for the health of our planet. "God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, And, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth" The Message. Similarly, Islamic beliefs, traditions and values highlight the importance of environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources. According to the Quran "Allah commands human beings to avoid doing mischief and wasting resources."⁴ Hindu scripture also makes it clear that humanity has a responsibility for the environment as Dr Jankaj Jain explains.⁵ Buddhist teachers and masters constantly remind us of the importance of living in tune with nature and respecting life.⁶

Yet the political leaders of so many countries around the world appear to be reluctant to act for fear it may hurt their countries economies. It appears that the belief in "growth" overrules any concern about the future of our planet and of humanity in general. Yet the absolute belief in economic growth is something quite new. It was only in the 1930s that the concept of Gross Domestic Product was articulated by the economist Simon Kuznets who warned that it should not be used as a measure of an economy's success or failure. It will be interesting to see how our Government's move towards a "wellness" budget works out in practice.

Those of us who grew up in the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s were always aware of the ultimate danger of nuclear war and the, at times, very real prospect of wiping out all living beings. It was a real and present danger and our political leaders, for all their faults, understood this. Climate Change and Global Warming have the same potential to wipe out all living beings, but the time frame is a bit longer but not much longer.

It is only humanity that can stop and reverse the steady warming of our planet or else. Jacinda Ardern was only partially right in saying this is "our nuclear free" moment. It is not just New Zealand's moment but the whole world's moment. The students were right in protesting on 15 March 2019, may their protests be remembered rather than the actions of one bitter man on that day.

³<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%E2%80%AA%23%E2%80%8EA>

[CC17%E2%80%AC&epa=SEARCH_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%E2%80%AA%23%E2%80%8EA)

⁴<https://www.ecomena.org/tag/environment-protection-in-quran/>

⁵https://www.academia.edu/292036/Ten_Key_Hindu_Environmental_Teachings

⁶<http://www.religioustolerance.org/tomek20.htm>