



Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the July edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Responses to the climate crisis

On 10 June, it was interesting to watch the responses in Parliament of the various party leaders to the recommendations from the Climate Change Commission which had just been released.

James Shaw, co-leader of the Greens and Minister of Climate Change, was generally supportive of the recommendations, but one got the impression that maybe they did not go far enough for his party. The Labour Government said they supported most of the recommendations, but one was left wondering if this would be a repeat of the WEAG (Welfare Expert Advisory Group) situation where the vast majority of the recommendations have yet to be acted on three years later. National's response was predictable as it welcomed the Commission's report but was concerned that many of the recommendations would hurt farming or business. And then there was ACT. David Seymour may possibly have given one of the best speeches in response to the report and its recommendations but also one of the most dangerous. David Seymour's response to the climate crisis is simple – **Let the market sort it out** – without any understanding that it has been the 'market' that has caused the crisis in the first place. And this very simplicity is dangerous.

Because this response is so straightforward and simple, it is important to look at it carefully. The attraction for many people is that by letting the market sort out the climate crisis they do not have to do anything – the market will do it. And when the cost of the petrol for their car goes up significantly because the oil companies are having to buy emission credits they need to 'pay' for all the CO₂ their products emit into the atmosphere they will complain but pay. And so on and so on.

If we can take David Seymour's market solution seriously then the Emissions Trading Scheme must be applied to everything including agriculture. This raises the question of the availability of sufficient credits to 'pay' for all the greenhouse gases emitted by agriculture. Cows are not the only source of methane emissions; rice-growing is also a major contributor to methane in the atmosphere.¹ And then there are all the other activities that emit greenhouse gases that the emitters cannot be bothered to mitigate.

Forests are the main source of emission credits, but it is only when the trees are growing that they absorb CO₂ and when the trees are cut down the CO₂ is released back into the atmosphere. This raises the question of the long-term sustainability of any Emissions Trading Scheme that is essential to a **Let the market sort it out** solution to the climate crisis.

Another interesting issue is the 'market' dependency on the concept of the limited liability company. It is such companies that were a key part of the Industrial Revolution. The fact that investors' liability was limited to the amount of their investment in a company or corporation and, in the event of failure of the company, the investor could walk away without further responsibility, was essential to the establishment of the organisations that drove the Industrial Revolution. It is still essential today so that when a corporation goes bankrupt because it cannot acquire the emission credits it needs to mitigate the emissions its products give out, the investors have no more liability than the amount they paid for their shares. And this is how the 'free' market works that David Seymour is relying on to solve the climate crisis!

The Industrial Revolution which initiated the rapid rise in the use of energy in everyday life, initially by burning coal in boilers, has been an important driver of the way we live today, at least in the wealthy countries. Our use of energy from all sources continues to increase rapidly. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) forecast that worldwide energy usage would go up 50% between 2018 and 2050.² Renewable energy (wind, solar and water) that comprised 15% of world energy production in 2018 would increase to 28% in 2050 but even with this increase in renewables, the non-renewable total would be more than the total energy produced in 2018. Hence greenhouse gases, particularly CO₂, will increase, causing further increase in global temperature by 5°C or more. This is the sort of thing that will happen if we **let the market sort it out**. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren may not have a world to live in if this happens.

Following the science

The New Zealand Government has been rightly praised for 'following the science' in its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, 'following the science' has almost become a policy in its own right. This would be a mistake as there are many examples down the ages of science being followed, with highly adverse

¹ [Rice Growing Emits More Methane as Climate Warms \(treehugger.com\)](https://www.treehugger.com/rice-growing-emits-more-methane-as-climate-warms.html)

² [EIA projects nearly 50% increase in world energy usage by 2050, led by growth in Asia - Today in Energy - U.S. Energy Information Administration \(EIA\)](https://www.eia.gov/pressroom/2018/06/2018-06-20-01.php)

impacts on our planet and our lives. Most scientific discoveries have both good and bad results.

Even such a basic discovery as the wheel has had a very positive impact on human development but can also cause great damage if used improperly. Both gunpower and nuclear power have enormous impact for good as well as for evil.

So, what exactly was our Prime Minister saying when she talked about 'following the science'? What she was actually saying was that she and the Government would follow the advice of the experts in medicine, viruses and the spread of disease in how they would respond to the threat of COVID-19. But even then, there were differing opinions amongst the experts. Some experts said that the pandemic should be allowed to run its course and let herd immunity develop with no shutdowns or other restrictions on business or other activities. This was a policy that had worked well in other occasions in the past; but other experts feared that our health system would be overloaded to breaking point and that thousands of people would die as a result.

What the Government was faced with was the possibility of a pandemic causing many deaths across the country against the possibility of serious economic damage to the country. By taking the health first approach and at the same time putting in place ways to limit the negative economic impact of the shutdown we have been spared the damage that many other countries have suffered and are suffering from the pandemic.

The climate crisis has a similar set of options to the pandemic. The fear that actions to mitigate the impact of climate change will adversely affect our businesses and economy has to be set against the damage that lack of action will have on our planet and perhaps our very existence. To many people, the scientific evidence is clear that the global warming that is causing the climate crisis is the result of burning fossil fuels over 250 years since the Industrial Revolution. Other people cannot accept that conclusion. A choice must be made and the government we have elected has to make it.

Bishop John Osmers – a titan of the anti-apartheid struggle

Bishop John Osmers died on 16 June 2021 in Lusaka, Zambia at the age of 86 from complications following COVID-19.³ Bishop John, a New Zealander born in Ashburton, was most well-known for his support of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

In a recent email, John Minto commented on his life as follows: *John was a New Zealander who became an Anglican priest and in a priestly role joined the anti-apartheid struggle in Southern Africa. From 1970 he was exiled from South Africa by the regime for his anti-apartheid activities and was then based in Lusaka, Zambia where he worked closely with other African National Congress (ANC) exiles.*

In 1979 he was sent a parcel bomb by the South African Security Forces. The bomb was in a parcel of ANC magazines he was opening. He lost his right hand in the explosion but never lost his drive and enthusiasm for the struggle for justice in South Africa and internationally. He did a speaking tour of New Zealand in the leadup to the 1981 Springbok Tour and when the film PATU!

is shown at the international film festival later this year John can be seen addressing one of the huge rallies which preceded the tour.

More recently John has been working to support education and options for students, both locals and refugees, in Lusaka despite failing eyesight and declining health.

Haere ra e hoa – haere, haere, haere.

John Osmers was elected Bishop of the new Diocese of Eastern Zambia in 1996 and retired in 2002.

Electric vehicles

New Zealand has one of the highest per capita number of motor vehicles in the world. In 2019 we had 837 vehicles per 1,000 people, higher than the USA at 819 per 1,000 people and Australia at 789 per 1,000 people. The only countries with a higher per capita vehicle fleet were San Marino and Monaco.⁴ Very few of these vehicles are electric.

The Climate Change Commission recognised that we cannot continue to operate our vehicle fleet entirely on fossil fuels if we are to get anywhere near achieving the temperature rise limit of 1.5°C by 2050. Their recommendation was to ban the importation of fossil fuel vehicles in 2035. As a first step to achieving this the Government announced on 13 June 2021 the introduction of a surcharge on high carbon-emitting vehicles and a subsidy on electric powered vehicles and hybrid plug-in vehicles costing less than \$80,000.

This was seen by some commentators and politicians as a tax on the poor and a gift to the rich. It is difficult to follow the logic of these objections. It is assumed that the main users of the large fuel-hungry vehicles are the 'poor', but these vehicles are used, as we are told by the critics, by tradesman and farmers. The vehicles are vital to their businesses hence they can offset the cost of running these vehicles against income, something the 'poor' cannot do. In addition, these trucks are exempt from fringe benefit tax. Also, the value of the vehicles eligible to receive the subsidy is capped at \$80,000 which excludes the electric versions of most makes that the 'rich' purchase. Further information on this can be found in an article by Dr Kirsty Wild, a Senior Research Fellow in the field of Population Health at the University of Auckland, entitled 'The rise of the urban light truck: what to do about it?'⁵

If, every time the Government announces a policy designed to mitigate the climate crisis, we get this sort of reaction from the critics, we can only conclude that they believe that the increase in global temperature is not the result of increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. But temperature rise has been measured and recorded by scientists for about 100 years. Do the critics think that this rise is just due to nature and stopping greenhouse gases will not stop temperature rise? In Genesis 2:15 we read "*The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it.*" Is ignoring global temperature rise 'caring for and looking after' this planet?

³ [John Osmers - Wikipedia](#)

⁴ [List of countries by vehicles per capita - Wikipedia](#)

⁵ [The rise of the urban light truck: what to do about it? - Greater Auckland](#)