

Do Justice

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

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

The climate crisis: Are we prepared to act?

The Government has indicated, and there appears to be general agreement, that the three major issues facing Aotearoa New Zealand after COVID-19 is dealt with, are:

- housing
- child poverty
- climate crisis

Last month we looked at some length into the issue of housing, one of the most complex issues we are facing, and concluded that there are basic human rights to adequate housing called for in various United Nation Declarations and Conventions. Furthermore, we suggested some specific actions that the Government could take to address the issues.

As far as child poverty is concerned, Aotearoa New Zealand signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and ratified the Convention in 1993. Article 19.1 states:

States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Children living in poverty are protected by this clause and, as a country which has signed and ratified this convention, we have a duty to eliminate child poverty. But have we? Possibly, but far too slowly.

As far as the climate crisis is concerned, the United Nations has taken a very proactive stance on this subject. Probably the most important and authoritative international body on the climate crisis is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) established in 1988 by the UN. Its sixth assessment report was released on 20 August 2021¹ just as New Zealand was going into lockdown. As a result, its dramatic and alarming conclusions seem to have been lost in all the focus on COVID-19.

The IPCC Working Group I Co-Chair, Valérie Masson-Delmotte said: *“It has been clear for decades that the Earth’s climate is changing, and **the role of human influence on the climate system is undisputed**, yet the new report also reflects major advances in the science of attribution – understanding the role of climate change in intensifying specific weather and climate events.”*²

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, responding to the report, said, *“This report must sound a death knell for coal and fossil fuels, before they destroy our planet. There must be no new coal plants built after 2021. Countries should also end all new fossil fuel exploration and production, and shift fossil-fuel subsidies into renewable energy. By 2030, solar and wind capacity should quadruple and renewable energy investments should triple to maintain a net-zero trajectory by mid-century.”*³

The climate prevaricators regularly respond to such statements by world leaders by saying that New Zealand is so small that it won’t make any difference if we don’t do anything. After all, we only contribute 0.2 percent of emissions. However, as Jamie Moron comments in *Climate Aotearoa*: *“On a per capita basis, New Zealand has an embarrassingly large carbon footprint, emitting some 18 tonnes of greenhouse gases per person per year. By that measure we’re near the top 20 countries in the world and within the top five in the OECD.”*⁴

Climate Aotearoa: What’s happening and what can we do about it is a very useful book on the climate crisis from a Aotearoa perspective, published this year. The editor, Helen Clark, has brought together several New Zealand experts on the climate situation who cover a very wide range of issues.

One of the contributors, Rod Oram, says: *“The task of reducing greenhouse gases is split almost fifty-fifty between urban and rural sources. In total our gross emissions increased 20.4 per cent from 1990 to 2018 to 15.3 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalents (MtCO_{2e}). This increase was mostly due to methane from dairy cattle digestive systems and carbon dioxide from road transport.”*⁵

² IPCC report: ‘Code red’ for human driven global heating, warns UN chief | UN News

³ The IPCC’s latest climate report is dire. But it also included some prospects for hope | Rebecca Solnit | The Guardian

⁴ *Climate Aotearoa* edited by Helen Clark published by Allen and Unwin 2021, p 247.

⁵ Ibid, p 276

¹ Sixth Assessment Report — IPCC

He goes on to quote the New Zealand Greenhouse Gas Research Centre comment in July 2019 that, *“While small in absolute terms, New Zealand’s share in global warming to date is more than 4 times greater than its share of global population and about 1.5 times greater than its share of the global land area.”*⁶

So far, the Climate Change Commission appears to be focusing on the ‘urban’ part of the issue, with a very ‘gently, gently’ approach to the rural part. The Emission Trading Scheme was introduced 20 years ago but agriculture has, so far, been exempted and every time the Government proposes including agriculture in the scheme, there is an outcry.

The next big event in the climate crisis calendar is COP26 (Conference of Parties 26th meeting) to be held in Glasgow in November 2021. This is when all the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meet to review progress, in particular how nations are responding to their promises in Paris in 2015. This is probably the most important international meeting in 2021 and possibly the whole decade. It could well be the last chance the leaders of the world have to reverse climate change.

Speculation about the issues to be discussed at COP26 already abounds and one in particular is significant for Aotearoa New Zealand. This is that the USA and the European Union will make a joint pledge to reduce human-caused methane emissions by at least 30% by 2030, compared with 2020 levels.⁷ The US and the EU will be expecting to convince 20 other developed and developing countries, including New Zealand, to join the pledge.

The Climate Change Commission’s recommendations to the NZ Government earlier this year are for a reduction of 15% from 2019 levels by 2030.⁸ In 2018 the Biological Emissions Reference Group, which included nine key players in the agricultural sector including Federated Farmers plus the Ministries of Primary Industries and the Environment, stated that just by applying best practice, the farming sector could reduce methane emissions by 10% from 2017 levels by 2030.⁹ However when the Climate Change Commission recommended 15% in 2021, Federated Farmers responded with only 3% by 2030 and 10% by 2050.

Not all farmers agree with Federated Farmers. According to Rod Oram, *“There are a small but growing number of eager adopters of emission-reduction practices. They range from Owl Farm to Landcorp, the state-owned enterprise which is the largest farmer in the country. ... In 2015 Landcorp set itself the goal of being a carbon-neutral farmer by 2025.”*¹⁰

Regularly we hear that farmers are ‘fed up’ with townies always criticising them about climate change when townies have an equal responsibility. Also, we hear the argument that if New Zealand reduced its agricultural output, then

other less efficient farmers would provide the food, and the impact on climate change would be worse. This, of course, ignores the possibility that if New Zealand produced less red meat and milk then the world would eat less meat and dairy products, thus reducing greenhouse gases.

Even when the Government does move towards addressing some of the issues, it is criticised by the farming lobby. One example is the subsidies for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles selling for less than \$80,000 to be offset by a tax on vehicles that emit large amounts of CO₂. The farming lobby complained that this was unfair as they have no alternative to the large utility and other vehicles they claim they need to do their work. But the tax will not apply to vehicles already in the country, and there are a great number of such vehicles already here that have never seen the sight of a farm but are used by (generally rich) urbanites. In any case the importation of such vehicles should be banned to reduce our CO₂ emissions. Those vehicles now in urban ownership will become available sooner or later and could easily be acquired by farmers if they are so essential.

This year we have seen storms, floods, forest fires and droughts around the world including in New Zealand. The northern hemisphere has had the hottest summer ever and here we have experienced the warmest winter since records began. Our planet is getting warmer, and we can see it all around us.

NASA reported in its Global Climate Change report on 1 September 2021 that the average global temperature had increased by 1.02°C since 1960.¹¹ If you want to keep up to date on what is happening, it is worth subscribing to a website called *The World Counts*¹² which gives up-to-the-second information on how:

- The world average temperature is rising
- How CO₂ emissions are increasing
- When the world will run out of food
- When the world will run out of fresh water
- Time left before all the rain forests are destroyed

... unless we do something now.

The climate crisis is a big, if not bigger, threat to the whole planet than COVID-19 but it does not appear to be taken nearly as seriously as the pandemic, possibly because of the longer time scale. If we do not start to change our attitude towards the climate crisis very significantly and begin to take real action, it will be too late, and our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will suffer far more than from COVID-19.

Since March 2020, the New Zealand Government has shown that it can act decisively and quickly on scientific evidence in a crisis. It is now time for our Government and the ‘team of five million’ to act decisively and quickly on the latest scientific evidence on climate. God tells us to look after creation in Genesis 2. We must not delay any longer; too much is at stake.

⁶ Ibid, p 277

⁷ [“We are working very hard”: Ardern defends climate action after NZ’s emissions targeted in global reduction push \(msn.com\)](#)

⁸ [Recommendations-from-Inaia-tonu-nei-Advice-Report.pdf \(amazonaws.com\)](#)

⁹ Ibid, p 282

¹⁰ Ibid, p 283

¹¹ [Global Temperature | Vital Signs – Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet \(nasa.gov\)](#)

¹² [Average Global Temperature \(theworldcounts.com\)](#)