



Do Justice

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the December edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective. Much of this edition was written in mid-October.

COP26 cop-in or cop-out?

Rod Oram began his final column from COP26 in Glasgow with the comment: *"The final deal at the UN climate summit shows politicians are still incapable of the profound changes needed to address climate change."*¹ This comment must leave the reader with a real sense of dread for the future of our planet and the future for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

COP stands for the Conference of Parties who came together in Kyoto Japan in 1997 and agreed to the Kyoto Protocols on global warming. This conference extended the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that had been agreed to in 1992. UNFCCC committed the parties to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, based on the scientific consensus that global warming is occurring and that human-made CO₂ emissions are driving it.² The follow up meetings are known as COP, the Paris Agreement on climate change is known as COP15 when 192 countries agreed to take every action necessary to limit global warming to less than 2°C and make every effort to keep the amount of warming to 1.5°C.

It seems amazing and alarming, that after some 29 years of talking about global warming and climate change, the world's politicians are still incapable of making the necessary profound changes.

There were, however, some positive outcomes from Glasgow COP26. The recognition that fossil fuels, including coal, are the major contributor to CO₂ emissions and that they must be phased out, is possibly the most significant. However, as Rob Oram commented: *"The language came in a new but vague pledge to 'phase-down' fossil fuel use. While muted, it is a signal to countries to accelerate the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Stronger language in the first draft was overturned by fossil fuel-producing nations led by Australia, Russia and Saudi Arabia."*³

However, the influence of fossil-fuel companies in meetings such as COP26 cannot be underestimated. Again, as Rob

Oram reported: *"The largest single 'delegation' of officially registered attendees at COP26 is the 503 people with links to fossil fuel interests, Global Witness, an NGO reported today."*⁴ In contrast New Zealand had 10 official delegates and the USA 135.

The Paris Agreement included the provision for five-yearly reviews of progress (that should have been last year but for COVID-19). One of the key contributions that each country's delegation had to bring to COP26 was an update of their nationally determined contributions (NDC) to achieving the 2030 targets agreed in Paris, so that the world can achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and keep temperature rise to less than 1.5°C. If you take into account all the NDC commitments, analysis shows that temperature rise could be kept to around 1.8°C or 1.9°C. But some major emitters' 2030 targets are so weak (particularly those from Australia, China, Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Russia) that they do not offer credible pathways to achieve their net-zero target. This indicates a major 'credibility gap' between the 1.5°C aligned 2030 targets and nations' net-zero targets. To fix this problem, these countries must strengthen their 2030 emissions reduction targets to at least align with their net-zero commitments.

The USA is an example of just how precarious the situation is. The Biden Administration cannot get the necessary legislation through Congress because of opposition from all the Republican senators plus a Democratic senator from West Virginia, a major coal producing state, who has investments in coal mines.

This is where the COP26 agreement comes in. The Glasgow decision calls on countries to 'revisit and strengthen' their 2030 targets by the end of 2022 to align them with the Paris Agreement's temperature goals. It also asks all countries that have not yet done so to submit long-term strategies to 2050, aiming for a just transition to net-zero emissions around mid-century. Together, stronger NDCs and long-term strategies should help align the net-zero and 2030 targets, as well as ramp up ambition. Elsewhere, the COP26 decision says that countries "resolve to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C" which gives this lower temperature threshold even greater emphasis than in the Paris Agreement.⁵

¹ Rod Oram: COP26's inadequate package could still lead to progress (newsroom.co.nz)

² Kyoto Protocol - Wikipedia

³ Rod Oram: COP26's inadequate package could still lead to progress (newsroom.co.nz)

⁴ NZ's Shaw Given Key Task at COP26 | Newsroom

⁵ Paraphrased from COP26: Key Outcomes From the UN Climate Talks in Glasgow | TheCityFix

New Zealand's NDC, although technically within the range to achieve both the 2030 and 2050 targets, includes purchasing about two thirds of the emission reductions via the Emission Trading Scheme. In other words, paying another country or countries to remove CO₂ on our behalf. It seems that the Government, yet again, does not want to upset dairy farmers or push transport changes including penalising vehicles with high emissions. We can and must do better.

In addition to addressing the methane emissions from the farming sector in New Zealand, one of the other major areas that has to be addressed is transport. This will need, in the long term, all internal combustion engines that use fossil fuels to be converted to electric motors and the achievement of 100% renewable electricity generation. We made the point in the August 2021 edition of Do Justice that, *"The major impediment to achieving 100% renewable electricity generation appears to be the privatised generators and retailers, hence the Government needs to carefully look at returning the whole sector to government ownership."* So, it was very interesting to read Dr Kevin Trenberth's article *"Climate change: NZ should cut emissions, not buy overseas offsets."* Dr Trenberth starts his article with the statement *"Centralised control of New Zealand's hydro, solar and wind power and storage is the only way to reduce energy emissions."*⁶

Dr Trenberth goes on to say: *"This problem is exacerbated by a plethora of small electric companies but would be greatly reduced if they were all to share in some way. The best way to deal with this issue is to couple wind and solar power to hydro power, and simply save the water from flowing over the dam and driving turbines. The bigger the system, the more likely there is to be compensation available. The challenge then is how to best integrate these sources of power into a national system."*

Dr Kevin Trenberth is an internationally recognised expert on climate change and honorary academic at the Faculty of Science, University of Auckland. Our Government has prided itself on 'following the science' as it has grappled with COVID-19; it now needs to follow the science as it deals with the far bigger climate crisis.

We started this section of Do Justice with a quote from Rod Oram as he was leaving Glasgow at the end of COP26. We finish with a further quote from Rod as he arrived back in New Zealand on 19 November 21. He begins with: *"Countries haven't offered enough cuts to emissions to stop humanity destroying its life support system, and until they do that little else matters."*⁷ This is perhaps one of the bluntest comments on COP26 and the climate crisis. Global warming and climate change is nothing new. Scientists have known about the impact on our atmosphere of greenhouse gases for over 100 years and politicians around the world have recognised that something had to be done since, at least, the Kyoto Agreement but why do they still prevaricate? Rod has one very interesting answer to this question: *"Nature's in charge: Its forces are determining our climate future. Politicians still believe, though, they're running the show. For example, our*

Government tells us after decades of failing to stop emissions rising, another six months to come up with a broad Emissions Reduction Plan won't matter. It's best practice to align with the annual budget round, it said. But the truth is our Government can't bring itself – or doesn't have the political and civil service capacity – to make the myriad, complex, politically difficult decisions it has to for plausible, inter-connected climate policies."

The challenge is how do we strengthen our Government's resolve? We know they can make hard decisions and follow the science; they have demonstrated this clearly over the last 20 months with the pandemic. Now is the time to follow the climate science.

The challenge of the Covid vaccination passport

In our November 2021 edition we explored the issues around community responsibility and individual freedoms and particularly the tension between health and safety laws and human rights legislation. Churches are now having to work through this as we move to the so-called traffic light system. If we stick to our traditional stance of welcoming anyone into our churches and services then, at least in Auckland, we are going to restrict congregations to no more than 25 people. If we require a vaccination certificate then we can have 100 under Red, no limit under Orange as long as one metre distancing is maintained, and no limits under Green.

Probably the vast majority of church members will be vaccinated except for those under 12 years old. And there will be some who will refuse to attend unless all the other people in the congregation are vaccinated. Dr Ashley Bloomfield, the Director General of Health, came up with a possible solution during a webinar hosted by New Zealand Christians in Science when he suggested that services could be held outdoors, although the COVID-19 website indicates that vaccine certificates will be required for all events under Red. The full video, ['Faith and Anxiety in an Age of Pandemic'](#) is on YouTube and is well worth the 90 minutes of viewing.

The concept of holding worship services outdoors on a regular basis is probably strange to most of us. We are so used to our church buildings, our comfortable chairs and our modern sound systems. How can we really worship without them? However, if we go back to the New Testament, we find that Jesus very rarely spoke or taught in a building; his teaching in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16ff) is the only clear example. So why must we worship in a building particularly when doing so will either exclude some people or possibly endanger others? Maybe the time has come when we need to have another look at not just what Jesus taught but how and where he spoke.

⁶ [Climate Change: NZ Should Cut Its Own Emissions, Not Buy Overseas Offsets | Newsroom](#)

⁷ [The success of COP26 - and how to fix its failure | Newsroom](#)