

A Christian Response to Climate Change



It can be very peaceful to sit down and gaze out to sea from the beach at Yamba, but hidden from sight, insidious changes caused by global warming are beginning to take place. More frequent extreme weather events, longer bushfire seasons, melting ice at the poles and subsequent rising sea levels affecting our coastlines and low-lying atolls in the Pacific ocean are realities our world is facing today.

Although most scientists now agree that human activity during the past century has contributed to changes in our climate, for many people in Australia, a focus on Climate Change, tends to fluctuate with the weather currently being experienced. It is tempting to consider the problems arising from our climate as too large and complex for us to address, and better left to scientists to solve and politicians to make the necessary decisions on our behalf. Unfortunately, such decisions seem to keep changing as scientists and politicians weigh up the rights of nature and its future, against people's jobs and economic prosperity. In this situation nature can end up as a political tool, an object that is used rather than a valued subject to be respected. As Christians, believing in a God who out of love created our world and all in it,

including ourselves, how are we to respond?

Our lives are closely connected with nature physically, mentally and spiritually. It is nature that provides humans with daily food, water, shelter and even the air we breathe that keeps us alive. On another level, how often have we been comforted by animals or sought to be alone with God and nature to restore our mental and spiritual life? Jesus also chose to spend time alone with nature in prayer to God, especially when grieving, making important decisions and before he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Many farmers and gardeners, who have noticed changes in the climate, have realised that a different relationship with our environment is required. Instead of trying to control or dominate nature, we need to understand it better, and appreciate its importance and mystery. We are to work *with* nature instead of against it. Mark G. Brett suggests that, "Rather than subduing the earth, we need to cultivate new habits of *making space* for the natural order" (Brett, 2008, p.183). Making space for nature means we must share our space, and question things we want that might be harmful to our environment. Each new permit granted for mining exploration, and unnecessary use of electricity by us, can threaten nature's place.

Basic to Christianity is the command to love God and neighbour. The story in Luke 10:29-36, told by Jesus to illustrate loving our neighbour, describes the Good Samaritan, an outsider, being a 'neighbour' to a suffering victim who has been robbed and left to die. This victim can be recognised as an abused nature. The success of the action of the Good Samaritan depended on oil, wine, a cooperative donkey and a willing inn-keeper. Humans and nature worked together for healing.

Recent studies of the Great Barrier Reef have shown that by curtailing over-fishing, and water pollution, some reef species have been enabled to recover. Since then much of the northern part of the reef has been damaged by a cyclone and rising temperatures. Can we work with Earth, a co-creator with God (Genesis 1:24-26), as a co-redeemer, and a cosmic Christ embodied in all creation, to bring healing?

In Matthew 25:35-36, Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, strangers and prisoners, in fact all who suffer. This means that all suffering

must be of concern to Christians. If we think of nature as weak and in trouble, Christ becomes recognised in polluted water, and animals becoming extinct from the destruction of their habitats by rising temperatures. When we identify ourselves as belonging to Christ and incarnating Christ in our lives, then we are wounding and crucifying our own bodies whenever our actions damage others, human or non-human.

What we are able to do to reduce harmful carbon emissions, can seem so little as to be futile. Even if Australia as a whole reduced emissions markedly, the emissions from countries with larger populations would make our efforts insignificant. Yet as Christians and part of God's loved creation, we cannot ignore the needs of nature, our kin, which is so closely bound to our lives. In Christ we are to love nature, and work with it for its well-being and our own.

(Brett, Mark G. (2008). *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the tides of the Empire*. Sheffield, Sheffield Phoenix Press.)

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