

Contextual perspectives

- It could be worth referencing the Synod's Vision and Mission Principle of *seeking community, compassion and justice for all creation* (my emphasis). This sets the framework for a Creation-centric, rather than anthropocentric, plan of action.
- This outlook is reinforced by the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'* that describes the earth as *among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor* and later refers to *the fundamental rights of the poor and underprivileged*.
- With regard to the proposal on coal mining, reference could be made to the fact that Dr Deidre Palmer was the first on a list of 153 faith leaders who signed a letter to the Prime Minister, *No Faith in Coal*, organised by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change.
- With regard to the discussion on carbon emissions and declaring a climate emergency, mention could be made of the decision taken by the General Synod of the Anglican Church in the UK to invite its churches to adopt a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2030, noting its supporting statement that *The global climate emergency is a crisis for God's creation, and a fundamental injustice*.

Theological perspectives

- It would be helpful to clarify the use of the term *neighbour*. This, again, relates to how anthropocentric or creation-centric the proposal that is put to Synod will be. Including the earth as our neighbour is theologically consistent with advocacy of the Rights of Nature, that the UCA Assembly endorsed back in 1991, and sets action on climate change within the context of loving our neighbour as we love ourselves.
- Supporting this is the naming of environmental exploitation as a sin by the Catholic and Anglican churches - a sin against God's Creation, not just a sin because it threatens human survival.
- As noted by many theologians (such as David Tacey, Jurgen Moltman, Les Sponsel and Sallie McFague), the eco-crisis is a spiritual crisis and economic, scientific and moral considerations need to be addressed within a theological framework. For instance, finding the right "balance" between economic development (eg. jobs, export earnings, cheap energy) and environmental protection (eg. stopping coal mining) reflects the values of the analysts; so these values need to be understood and discussed before any decisions are made about where the balance is to be found.

Justice perspectives

- Australia, with 0.3% of the world's population, will contribute several times more than the publicly announced estimate of 1.3% of global carbon emissions if the calculation takes into account carbon emissions from fossil fuel exports, future carbon emissions from Galilee Basin coal, carbon emissions from the recent bushfires, Australia's reduced capacity to sequester carbon and discontinuation of the internationally unsupported practice of reliance on Kyoto carry-over credits.

- It could thus be worth drawing on a 'Tragedy of the Commons' argument, that the atmosphere is a shared-resource system where individual users, acting independently according to their own self-interest, behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting or spoiling the shared resource through their collective action. The question could then be asked whether Australia is acting primarily in its own economic self-interest with regard to the coal industry, and not giving sufficient attention to the (international) common good.
- Further, are the Synod and its agencies "doing enough", ie acting justly, with regard to climate change? If we call on the Australian Government to act justly then we must act justly ourselves.
- Should the Synod proposal also mention and take into account the unjust impact of climate change on our South Pacific Island neighbours?

Synod perspectives

- The Paper lists many resolutions made at Synod and Assembly levels on environmental matters, but there is no discussion or evaluation of what these resolutions have achieved within the Synod, and whether the Synod itself is doing enough with regard to the urgency of the action needed on climate change. The Paper only explains why it currently has no reference to setting targets or actions for the Synod to take. This undermines any sense of urgency.
- This is particularly relevant with regard to the proposals (d) a. and (d) b. that relate to actions to control carbon emissions. Unlike proposals (d) c. and (d) d. that are outside the control of the Synod (as they relate to coal mining), the Synod does have the capacity to encourage its bodies to reduce their carbon emissions. If the Synod calls on the Government to set a net zero carbon emission target by 2050, it is only reasonable that, as a minimum, it invites its own congregations and agencies to adopt a similar target. Otherwise the Synod could be accused of calling on the Government to make a commitment it is not prepared to make itself.
- Maybe the proposal needs to include the development of a 'climate action plan' that will assist congregations to reduce their carbon emissions.
- It would be worth emphasising that a commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 already has broad support within international and Australian communities. It has been adopted by over 70 nations (including Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK), all States in Australia, the Federal Labor Party, 73 Australian companies, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change. In other words, the Synod would be aligning with a very significant cross section of the Australian community.
- It could be worth having explicit inputs from indigenous, youth, and South Pacific Island groups within the Synod.

Precautionary Principle

- There is a huge amount of relevant and informative scientific data presented in the Paper, but there may be some who still claim that it does not prove 100% that (a) carbon emissions are the major contributor to climate change and (b) Australia is not "*taking sufficient action ... to contribute its fair share towards limiting global average temperature rise from human activity to 1.5 C*" (Proposal (d) a.).
- To address this, reference could be made to the Precautionary Principle, which is a part of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment signed by the Heads of Government of all Commonwealth, States and Territories of Australia and by the Local Government Association in 1992. This Principle provides that where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.
- The great majority of scientists agree that carbon emissions are a major contributor to climate change. Further, the Consultation Paper presents a very strong case that Australia is contributing excessively to global carbon emissions. These facts establish a sound, defensible case for the application of the Precautionary Principle on both issues.

One final point. From what I hear from the scientific community (eg. Professor Lesley Hughes, Pro Vice-Chancellor Macquarie University, member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists and former federal Climate Commissioner), we have already missed the boat on limiting the temperature rise to 1.5 degrees centigrade. The challenge is now to limit the rise to 2 degrees centigrade.

Kind regards

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