

Going green for God

To fix the problem, we all have to be part of the solution, says David Goodwin.

The Church has a long history of being at the forefront of radical movements dedicated to changing society, whether it was the Abolitionists speaking out against the commodification of human beings during the slave trade of the 18th century, or leaders like Martin Luther King Jr spearheading the US Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Ever since Christ became a thorn in the side of the status quo, those who seek to follow him have refused to sit down and shut up—even when the mainstream Church has been part of the establishment that needs calling to account.

Today that continues, with the Church on the frontlines of a number of causes, from fighting against human trafficking to advocating for the humane treatment of refugees. Religious leaders speak out on many of the pressing issues facing today's society, but if you made

a list of the hot-button issues that the Church is most vocal about, environmentalism probably wouldn't be the first that comes to mind.

Part of this may come down to something that is just as true for Christians as for anyone else. In a world so full of bad news we learn to tune things out, especially when they don't seem to be an immediate threat. Plus, there seems to be so much contradictory information regarding the environment out there, and it is hard to know what to think—especially when it has become a political football—and we see so-called experts going head to head on daytime television and contradicting each other every day.

Given all the hot air about the environment it's easier to ignore the headlines, and consider it a problem for another day.

There are so many other issues that seem more urgent and pressing, and we don't need to look too far to see examples of hardship and injustice in our face and

all around us. Many Australians have problems closer to home, too, and it is understandable that working out how you are going to pay your bills this week might be a higher priority than listening to a celebrity lecturing you about your carbon footprint from the stairs of their private jet.

But this issue is not something that is just going to go away, and every day things are getting worse. Already this year over 86,000 species of animals have become extinct. Only 70% of our coral reefs are left—and only 30% of our forests. At the rate we use it, we will run out of oil in less than 36 years, something not helped by how much we manage to pour into the ocean every year.

Regardless of your opinion as to the cause of climate change, there is no doubt that our environment is changing. We are seeing sea levels rise, and an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events—from hurricanes

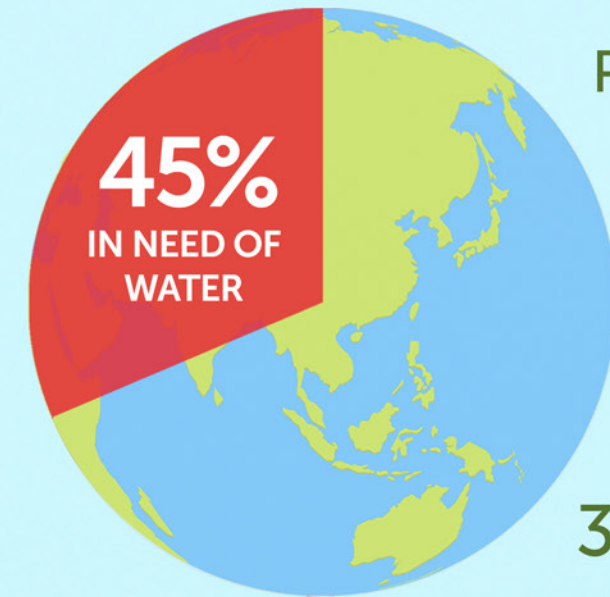
to droughts to floods. More affluent countries may be able insulate themselves from the worst effects of the changes our planet is going through, but for those already living on the margins—like the 3.4 billion without access to a regular supply of safe drinking water—there is no buffer.

The truth is, threats to the environment and climate change have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable among us, those who don't have a voice at the tables of the powerful—the ones who need the Church in their corner most of all. So, why is it that the Church seems to be spending less time speaking out on this than so many other topics?

Given that many prominent leaders in the environmental movement have a very different world view to that of the Church, and the way that the cause of climate change has become such a politicised issue, it might seem safer to distance ourselves from the green movement. But if we care about social justice, we need to be part of the conversation around the environment, because they are inextricably linked.

Sadly, a perception has developed that Christianity and environmentalism are at odds. However, much of the misunderstanding and suspicion on both sides comes down to some assumptions about what the Bible actually says about how we should be treating the planet.

In Genesis chapter 1, verse 28, we are told that God gave humanity dominion over ►►



WORLD
POPULATION
APPROX.
7.5 BILLION

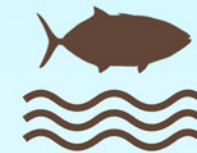


3.4 BILLION
PEOPLE IN
NEED OF WATER

LESS THAN 36 YEARS
UNTIL OIL RUNS OUT



70% CORAL
REEFS LEFT



86,572 SPECIES
BECAME EXTINCT
THIS YEAR

30%
FORESTS
LEFT



►► all the Earth and all that it contains. When you add the promise of “a new heaven and a new earth”, many—including some Christians—have taken this to mean that Christianity teaches we can do whatever we want with the planet, and use it up in the knowledge that our stay here is temporary.

However, to reject the idea that humanity holds any special place in the scheme of things brings its own problems. The belief that humans are just another animal means that our survival is no more important than that of any other creature. No matter what short-term damage we do, life will survive somewhere and in some form, and re-establish itself once humanity is extinct. The Earth isn’t ours to use, we are simply temporary guests—and unwelcome ones at that.

Neither of those views lends itself to a balanced form of environmentalism, or gives us a common ground to meet on and work together. The perception that Christians see the world as disposable sets them at odds with environmentalists, while Christians are unlikely to be comfortable with the idea that human and animal life are of equal value.

Perhaps, though, there is a middle ground where all those concerned with the Earth’s future can meet. Recognising that—for whatever reason you

The truth is, threats to the environment and climate change have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable among us, those who don’t have a voice at the tables of the powerful—the ones who need the Church in their corner most of all.

are willing to accept—humans have an ability beyond any other living thing to help or harm the planet brings an acknowledgement of our responsibility, and a common ground to work from together.

For Christians, there is plenty of biblical justification for the idea that we are called to be good stewards of the planet we have been given. The resources of the world are there to be used, but not wasted, and are to be shared amongst the whole world, not hoarded by a greedy minority.

So, then, if Christians believe that God has created all the beauty we see around us—from the splendour of the Great Barrier Reef to the vast rainforests of South America—doesn’t it create a duty to encourage the whole world to try to preserve these gifts for those who will come after us?

Regardless of our faith, we are all inhabiting the same planet and each one of us has a role to

play in preserving the home we have been blessed with. It might mean choosing to buy environmentally-friendly products even if they are a little more expensive, or resolving to cut down on how much electricity or water we use at home. It might be speaking out when we see examples of greedy corporations exploiting the environment in the name of profit.

The choices we make today don’t just affect us, they affect everyone we share the planet with—and those yet to be born. Whether you believe we will have to answer to future generations for our stewardship of the Earth, or to God, let’s make sure we can say that we were worthy of the trust placed in us.

For more information on environmental sustainability, visit <http://www.sarmy.org.au/en/Social/JustSalvos/Issues/Environmental-Sustainability>

