

## Environmental Justice

By Matthew Seaman

“I dare you to name something that doesn’t matter to God.” *Emily JoAnn Haynes*<sup>i</sup>

“It’s a false distinction to separate caring for the poor from caring for the planet. God has made a world that is interdependent, where we as humans cannot survive without healthy ecosystems to give us food, water, shelter, clothing, fuel, and even the air we breathe.” *David Bookless*<sup>ii</sup>

As followers of Christ, as Salvationists, one of our basic aims is to partner with God in the process of restoration and healing. We should also then be aware of the conditions of life and death, of health and disease that surround us. For instance, as ministry assistant and ecological ethicist, Byron Smith states:

“Caring for our neighbours always requires an understanding of the threats and opportunities facing them. The Bible doesn't say anything specifically about how to treat someone experiencing cardiac arrest or chronic fatigue; it doesn't say how to care for someone who has lost their house through bank foreclosure; it doesn't say how to help an heroin addict or how to counsel a couple pondering IVF.

And so if our neighbour has chronic respiratory illness due to coal smoke, if they are facing more frequent drought, unseasonal flooding or salt water intrusion into their aquifer from rising seas, if they are displaced by conflict triggered by food price spikes resulting from crop failures due to heat waves, then perhaps we need to read our Bibles, pay close attention to our neighbours and the actual threats they face (based on the best science, as well as an understanding of economics, politics, psychology, etc.), and then ensure that we are not doing harm to our neighbours (Romans 13.10).<sup>iii</sup>

As Byron and others have argued, in addition to the environmental impacts of various destructive human practices, there are also significant social and physical impacts on humanity itself. These negative effects are most acutely felt by the poorest and most vulnerable in society.<sup>iv</sup> The inequalities that exist in the current economic, political and social systems are seen clearly in the living conditions of those who are poverty-stricken. Impoverished communities and individuals have been, and will be likely to be the most severely affected by continued environmental degradation and climate variability.<sup>v</sup> Poorer people are, for the most part, faced with the greatest struggle for food and clean water, increases in pollution and waste, and other resource scarcity issues. The poorest people also lack financial and other material resources to engage with wider societal conversations, have their voices heard by governments and corporations, or to even prevent or reduce the damaging impacts of environmental issues. Environmental concerns that are occurring in impoverished and less developed areas can cause severe harm which includes increased mortality rates.<sup>vi</sup> The relationships between social inequality and environmental degradation resonate strongly with areas that have been a major part of Salvation Army mission: working towards a better world in the name of Jesus Christ.

Within the publication *“Pathways to Justice”* from The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission, there is a section exploring the idea of “Surrendering privileges for the greater benefit of the common good.” The section mentions that:

“Pursuing social justice means thinking of what’s good for the group, not what’s good for the individual. Sometimes the two clash, and when they do, doing the just thing requires individuals to make some “sacrifice.”<sup>vii</sup>

Vasilos Makrides takes the conversation further to consider the place of repentance for the injustices we may have inadvertently contributed to. Vasilos argues:

“What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves ... and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation”<sup>viii</sup>

Are there things that God might be calling for us to sacrifice or put aside in order to pursue healthy, whole communities and the ecosystems that our communities rely on?

### Some Practical Responses

In *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, Nick Spencer and Robert White offer a number of principles for sustainable living from a Christian perspective in their chapter 'A vision of sustainable living today'. These principles include:

- Valuing and protecting creation, seeing this as a joy rather than a burden;
- Reflecting on the close bond between society and environment in our decisions;
- Pursuing justice for the vulnerable and marginalised;
- Not confusing wealth and value: our goal should be relational health (social, spiritual and ecological) rather than just having more money or more personal freedom;
- Participating in the local community and environment and favouring local solutions;
- Responding to God's call to partner to heal social and ecological issues with determination and hope.

As every situation is different in some way, not every option may be easily available for everyone or every corps. Some choices or situations are simple; some are complex. Some situations require more research to work out the best and most caring option.

A good question to ask in all situations is: Which option best cares and shows Christlike love toward people and the planet?

- Consider how you can minimise harmful impacts on ecosystems, both locally and globally.
- Plan and spend a day specifically with the idea of Sabbath in mind. Resting and restoring as God did on the seventh day of the creation story in Genesis 1. This quote may be helpful:

"Sabbath time can be a revolutionary challenge to the violence of overwork, mindless accumulation, and the endless multiplication of desires, responsibilities, and accomplishments. Sabbath is a way of being in time where we remember who we are, remember what we know, and taste the gifts of spirit and eternity"<sup>ix</sup>

- Spending quality and mindful time in God's creation:
  - Spend time with God in a garden, forest, nature reserve, on the bank of a creek or river.
  - Get to know your local patch of God's creation. What trees, birds, and plants are native to your area? What are the current threats to your local ecosystems?
  - Go for a walk or hike with members of your church or faith community.
  - Prayer-walk your neighbourhood and ask God to reveal any factors contributing to environmental degradation or pollution that are taking place in your community.
- Energy:
  - Minimise the amount of energy used. Turn electrical items off if they are not being used. Another benefit of not wasting electricity is that your electricity bill will be cheaper!
  - The most power-hungry electrical items are generally those that heat or cool (such as heaters, ovens, fridges, air conditioners). So, at home, work and church, aim to reduce the amount heating and cooling that goes on. For example, if it's cold, put on extra layers of clothing rather than using air conditioners or heaters.
  - Switch to electricity that comes from renewable sources (solar, wind, biomass). It does cost more per kilowatt, yet, the overall pollution output from wind or solar is much less than coal or gas.

- Consumption and Waste:
  - o Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.
    - See if you can fix or mend items, or be creative and use things again for a different purpose. Why throw something out if it may still be useful?
    - Maybe someone else could reuse your things? Donate clothes, or other items to your local Salvation Army thrift store, or another local donation point. Buying second hand generally costs less than buying new. Salvos Stores are our very own recycling experts! Buying from Salvos Stores provides funds for Salvation Army work and also reduces waste.
    - Commit to recycling plastics, paper and other materials through your local rubbish collection - there are many ways to reduce, reuse and recycle!
  - o Water is a precious, life-giving gift. Fix leaking taps and be careful with usage.
  - o Buy less 'stuff' (see the 'Story of Stuff' video at <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>)
  - o Have a 'Sabbath' day, week, month (or even year!) from buying new 'things' like clothes, etc.
  - o Support and purchase local produce, food and goods.
  - o If possible, aim to purchase products that are labelled 'fair trade', 'organic' or 'sustainably harvested'. This generally means that people are paid fairly, and/or there are less negative impacts on the local ecosystems in which the products are grown.
  - o Purchase and use recycled paper products (cups, envelopes, printer paper, tissues, and even toilet paper!) For one great example of products that aim to care for people and the planet, check out the company 'Who Gives a Crap': <http://au.whogivesacrap.org/>
  - o Use durable items rather than disposable or one-use items (cups, plates, etc)
- Be part of or start a community garden. Link in with other people and groups to share caring for a patch of God's creation, which then can in turn sustain and provide nutrition!
- Join or start a network to share information, ideas and resources on these issues. There are already a couple of Salvo groups on Facebook: SAFGEN (Salvation Army Farming, Gardening and Ecology Network): <http://www.facebook.com/tsafgen>, and "Red, Yellow, Blue and Green": <http://www.facebook.com/RedYellowBlueGreen2015>. What about a network between churches? Something similar has been running a few years within Queensland: The Queensland Churches Environmental Network: <https://www.facebook.com/QCEnvNet>
- Continue to educate yourself and challenge any preconceived notions you may hold.
  - o Consider supporting or volunteering with a local environmental or gardening group, such as A Rocha Australia (<http://www.creationcaretahlee.com/>)
- If you invest money or have superannuation, spend some time researching how your money is being invested. If you can, aim for ethical, sustainable companies. Even if the short-term personal return is less, the long-term global return on ethical investment for people and the planet is invaluable.

Have you heard of the term SMART goals? SMART goals are: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. What are some SMART plans you can put in place to help further you on the journey towards living a life that cares for all of God's creation?

- In the next 24 hours ...
- In the next week ...
- In the next month ...
- In the next year ...

## Some Online Resources and Further Information

There are many great websites that contain many helpful tips, theological reflections, calls to action and other helpful information on how caring for people and caring for the planet are both integral aspects of showing Christlike love to all of God's creation. Here's a small selection of some online resources:

- The Salvation Army Southern Territory has a positional statement on the environment. It can be read [here](#).
- The Salvation Army internationally also has a positional statement on caring for the environment. It can be read [here](#).
- The Canada and Bermuda Territory has a number of wonderful resources
  - The Territory has a wonderful statement on responsibility for the earth. It can be read [here](#).
  - <http://www.wegogreen.ca/>
- An increasing number of Salvationists are writing about environmental issues, and how caring for all of God's creation is actually an integral part of Christian living. For example, Matthew Seaman from the Australia Eastern Territory has shared most of his writing on these subjects [here](#).
- Two useful documents from the Salvation Army's International Social Justice Commission: One on climate justice ([https://issuu.com/isjc/docs/climate\\_justice\\_full.docx](https://issuu.com/isjc/docs/climate_justice_full.docx)) and one on consumerism (<https://issuu.com/isjc/docs/consumerism>)
- This website has a wide range of other individuals and church-based actions that can be taken to care for people and the planet: <http://arocha.us/eco-congregation/eco-congregation-modules>
- "The Art of Simple Living": [http://www.simpleliving.org/The\\_Art\\_of\\_Simple\\_Living.html](http://www.simpleliving.org/The_Art_of_Simple_Living.html)

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<sup>i</sup> Haynes, E. 2015. 'Holiness: The Most Hipster Doctrine', in *Renovating Holiness* (Broward and Oord, eds), Nampa, ID: SacraSage, p84.

<sup>ii</sup> Bookless, D. 2008. *Planet Wise: Dare to Care for God's World*. Nottingham, UK: IVP, p147.

<sup>iii</sup> Byron Smith. 2015. "Christian climate FAQs #23". Post on "Australian Christian Environmental Group" Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178566048829117/>

<sup>iv</sup> Hood Washington, S. 2008. 'Editorial', *Environmental Justice* 1(1):1-3.; Mastaler, J.S. 2011. 'A Case Study on Climate Change and its Effects on the Global Poor', *Worldviews* 15:65-87.; The Salvation Army. 2011b. *A Call for Climate Justice*. International Social Justice Commission. Accessed at: [http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www\\_ihq\\_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/A9B5D2FCF8FBDD03802578F70060CEC5?openDocument](http://www1.salvationarmy.org/IHQ/www_ihq_isjc.nsf/vw-dynamic-index/A9B5D2FCF8FBDD03802578F70060CEC5?openDocument).

<sup>v</sup> Binns, C., and W.Y. Low. 2011. 'Climate Change: The Greatest Equity Issue in Public Health', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Public Health* (23):5S.; Dominelli, L. 2012. *Green Social Work: From Environmental Crises to Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.; Hughes, L., and T. McMichael. 2011. *The Critical Decade: Climate Change and Health*. Canberra, ACT: Climate Commission; Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency.

<sup>vi</sup> Donohoe, M. 2003. 'Causes and Health Consequences of Environmental Degradation and Social Injustice', *Social Science & Medicine* 56:573-587.

<sup>vii</sup> *Pathways to Justice*, The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission. p3.

<sup>viii</sup> Makrides, V. 2005. "Christianity – Greek Orthodox" in the Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature: 339-40.

<sup>ix</sup> Muller, W. Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives.

## Meeting Resources

Below are some resources that you may find helpful to include in a church service or small group.

### Videos:

- Watch the story of Keya as she struggles to live in a village that frequently suffers the consequences of climate change. Available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY0ROQyIIVU>
- This short video explains why it is important for Christians to care about the environment. Watch here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb\\_Eslss1W4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vb_Eslss1W4)

### Prayers:

Congregational prayers focusing on environmental sustainability and justice available for download here:

<http://www.sarmy.org.au/en/Social/JustSalvos/Resources/Prayer-Resources/>

### Sermon outline:

A sermon outline on environmental justice has been prepared by Catherine Spiller. It is available on the next page.

## Sermon on the Environment

By Catherine Spiller

**Scripture:** Colossians 1: 15 – 23

**Aim:** To encourage the congregation to care for creation because of Christ.

### Introduction:

2015 was declared the hottest year on record, and that wasn't just in Australia, that was right around the world. Freak weather events are occurring far more frequently with devastating and often fatal impacts. Our earth is being mined and logged, our waterways polluted. The residents of Flint in Michigan in the USA know this as realty as their water supply turns brown and unusable due to the presence of lead. Our environment is being used and abused often for the sake of profit. Land is being stolen from subsistence farmers in India, South America and in Africa and mined or turned into factories or highways. Our planet is in chaos. But is this what our world should look like? Is this what Christ would want? Is this a picture of God's kingdom here on earth?

Today we are going to be exploring Christ and his relationship with creation and look at what this means for those of us who call ourselves Christ followers.

### 1. We care for creation because all things were created by Christ.

- a. Vs. 16 "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him" (NIV).
- b. Christ didn't just appear on the scene at his birth. He was intimately involved in the process of creation. Creation involved Father, Son and Spirit. (Gen 1: 26 "Let us make humankind in our image").
- c. If our world was made by Christ then he would have an interest in it. Have you ever had a child make something precious at school and then proudly present it to you? This is their creation. They have laboured over this and are proud of their achievements. This creation is something that they want you to treasure and care for because it is special. It is a beautiful creation.

### 2. We care for creation because creation is for Christ.

- a. Vs. 16b "all things were created by him and *for* him" (NIV).
- b. Creation does not belong to us – it belongs to Christ. We are to care for creation just as a steward would care for their master's estate: Running the estate in the absence of the king. But a steward didn't just run the estate they were accountable for how they managed the estate on the return of the king.
- c. When we understand that creation is for Christ we don't want to use and abuse for our own gain. We want to make sure it is cared for and that all can benefit from the earth and its resources. Particularly those who are poor and vulnerable in our world.

**3. We care for creation because creation is reconciled by Christ.**

- a. Vs. 19 – 20 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross” (NIV).
- b. We may look around and see that creation is falling apart. As God’s people in this world we have not done a good job of caring for creation. But the Good News is that Christ came to also reconcile creation to himself. ALL things are reconciled because of Christ’s death: Humankind to God, people with people, we can be our true selves and be reconciled with our self, and we can be reconciled with creation. We don’t need to use and abuse it any more.
- c. We don’t need to continue to live in a way that is destructive to creation. Following Jesus means bringing the kingdom and the message of reconciliation. We can leave behind destructive ways and embrace the care of this beautiful creation entrusted to us.
- d. Practically what does this look like? It means that as we live out our faith we consider the environment when we make decisions. It might mean buying organic and locally produced food. Eating less meat. Walking to work or the shops rather than driving. Installing solar panels. Recycling or not buying anything new for a month or even a year! Advocating on environmental issues such as climate change.

**Reflection/Appeal**

Creation exists because of Jesus and for Jesus. It’s not ours. It is our role to steward creation as part of our Christian walk. We look after the environment because Jesus created it, is reconciling it to himself and he is doing this for his pleasure. It is not about us, it is about Jesus.

(Prepare a tree trunk at the front of the hall with leaves cut of our paper to stick on. It might be good to have one of the scripture verses about creation being by and for Christ on the poster.)

You might like to come and take a leaf and prayerfully consider one way that you could make a change in your life that would benefit the environment. Write down what you are going to do and commit to doing that thing for at least the next month. Bring it forward and stick it on the tree.

(Place the tree somewhere in the hall where it can be seen for the next month. As you see what you are going to do and what others are going to do you can hold each other accountable).