

# Climate Change Part B: the Great Distraction

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 January 2008

Preacher: Dr. Olav Slaymaker

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     So thank you. Again, we'll open with a word of prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. O come, let us sing unto the Lord. Let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and show ourselves glad in him with praise. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are all the corners of the earth, and the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it, and his hands prepared the dry land. O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker. God is the center of all things. And the topic of our concern is that phenomenon of climate change, which has become of such absorbing interest in the public conscience of the present time.
- [ 1 : 2 0 ]     Last time, for the few of you who were not here, I made two points. First one, that concern about climate change, though good and justified in itself, has become so extreme that the central question of Christian people as earth keepers has been lost sight of. And the second point, which I tried to make, was that we need to work more carefully and more comprehensively on our theology of nature, or particularly theology of the whole environment. And then showed a number of images, which illustrated how much climate change the earth can absorb, and how many examples there are of serious environmental degradation, which have nothing whatsoever to do with climate change. So I think that as Christians, we should be thinking and exchanging learnings in an open and free way.
- [ 2 : 3 5 ]     Have we read Job 38 to 41 recently? Have we read Genesis 1 recently? And here is a question which might come under the heading of silly questions in Jeopardy. Why is it placed at the beginning of the Bible? And you answer, because it is the beginning. But, much more than that, much more than that, the reason Genesis 1 is at the beginning of the Bible is it stresses our total dependence upon God, and the interdependence of ourselves and His created order. Have you read Genesis 6 to 9 recently? Exodus 20, yes, well, this morning it's required reading, so either you had it at 7.30 or you'll have it later on in the day. Psalm 104, Leviticus 25, Luke 4, 2 Peter 3, all sorts of places in the Bible where we can learn and exchange insights about our relationship with the created order. So I'm wondering, where is the Christian voice in ecological ethics? And what kinds of persons ought we then to be? So I'm planning to try to do today two things.
- [ 4 : 0 1 ]     First, try to express a Christian position for a satisfactory ethical system, including a list of some of the central Christian virtues.

And secondly, ask what kind of people we ought to be in the light of such a Christian ecological ethics. If you come expecting a list of specific things that you should do, I don't know if some of you have, you will be disappointed.

My main reason for not giving a list of things to do is that I think each person will have a distinctive emphasis. Some of us are most concerned about the air, some about water, some about land, some about animals, some about vegetation, and each of these requires different actions to promote their sustainability.

Or I would suggest, more practically, to oppose attempts to make them unsustainable. Nobody knows exactly what sustainability means. But we do know that lots of things are unsustainable.

And in a Christian context, I think we can list some of those rather directly. On the other hand, I do think we can generalize about what kinds of persons we should be in relation to attitudes to God's created order.

[ 5 : 25 ] So if you are desperately concerned to have a list, there are lots of books. Here, for example, there are 365 ways to save the earth.

And every morning, every evening, you can find little hints of how to live more lightly on the planet. And that is surely an important part of our stewardship.

But it's not the purpose of the discussion this morning, because I think we still have a long way to go as a community of Christians to establish the context in which we are addressing the environment.

So for my first point, in trying to develop a perspective on Christian ecological ethics, before I say what the point will be, let me say there are tremendous dangers in ecological theology.

Some of us in this room have seen the implications of becoming so absorbed with ecological theology that God is lost in the equation. So I don't wish to come here as a missionary for an ecological ethics that is unrelated to our Orthodox Christian faith.

[ 6 : 50 ] But can we honestly say that we have put much time into the following activities? And this is a quote from a book which appears on the hymn sheet that some of you will have.

A book by St. Meyer called Nature Reborn. In which he says to cooperate with nature religiously, to care for nature sensitively, to wonder at nature blessedly, and to anticipate the reign of God joyfully.

It seem to be specific activities that should cause us to develop a more rigorous approach approach to ecological ethics. I think that we need to pause from our distracted lives and not just look at the distraction of climate change but there are so many other distractions and we need to consider the lilies of the field.

there are many kinds of ecological ethics which we bump into all the time and they range from issues deriving from the conservation movement, concerns about the rights of future generations, animal rights, the wilderness movement, the land ethic, the land ethic states that the thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.

A very respectful perspective but essentially it claims that ecology is the purpose and is the apex of our concerns.

[ 8 : 41 ] It does not tell us what happens when human interests conflict with non-human interests. And this is the reason why we have to think about Christian values and Christian virtues in a few moments.

But let me suggest that a Christian perspective on this whole issue and climate change is a small part of this whole issue we start with the doctrine of the Trinity which describes three distinct but inseparable persons indwelling each other in a perfect community of love.

This three-person God as Genesis affirms and Job reminds us creates and sustains all things and enters into covenant relationship with the world including specifically all its creatures.

creatures. And this doctrine affirms that interconnections and interrelatedness are the essence of creation. we are in our modern society divided up into specialists that have very few connections with each other.

We're experts at digging deeper into very narrow topics and in a sense we have become a broken society as a result of the exclusive attention to digging deeper into less and less.

[10:18] we need to think about the relatedness of ourselves with the created order and we need to think about the fact that God established himself in relationship through his covenant with his people and that relatedness and the loss of relatedness is the essence of the Christian gospel that is to say we started off in close relationship with God walking in the Garden of Eden and we made a pretty rapid disastrous decision to break that connection and in so doing we have also participated in the brokenness of the creation which is also lost and we've also lost our sense of the interrelatedness and dependence that we have upon this this is an important point because very often when people talk about doing good to the environment they say we should be doing something good for people rather than the environment but the fact is that the interrelationships between ourselves and the environment are so fundamental that doing good to the environment can indeed be seen as a form of doing good to people

I don't know whether you've ever looked at maps sorry this is a professional digression but maps which show the distribution of environmental degradation around the world and if you look at a map of the distribution of violent conflict around the world you'll see a very high correlation if you look at maps of the distribution of poverty around the world there's also a very high correlation if you look at the maps of distribution of contagious disease around the world there's a very strong relationship between these and so rather than saying one causes the other there is an interdependence amongst all these phenomena which we need to look at and that's the heart of the critical issue with relation to climate change the climate is just one part of the picture it's serious it's important of course but it's just one part and in that respect is a destruction well if we start with the doctrine of the trinity and the question of relatedness and interconnections between ourselves and the environment and the purpose of the relatedness to God then it seems to me we can start to think in relation to a

Christian ethical perspective on the environment by looking first and I agree in this case with our good friend Boomer Prediger I'm going to recommend highly this book it's called For the Beauty of the Earth and I'll say some things about the reading list at the end of the talk but if you are anxious to do some reading this I think is the most useful and helpful Christian perspective on the topic if we start with the land ethic which man called Aldo Leopold developed in the 1930s and published in 1949 we have there I think the secular ethics that is closest to a Christian perspective that is to say the statement a thing is right when it attempts to preserve the integrity stability and beauty of the biotic community that's a that's a respectful view but it lacks certain things the eco centered nature of that perspective has to be converted into a theocentred perspective water on the planet has to be included

Bill will correct me I'm sure with statistics but 70% of the earth's surface contains ocean water the pollution of the ocean waters is a matter of severe concern so the the land ethic simply confines its attention to the terrestrial surface and we need to emphasize that water needs to be included but in addition to that certain basic human rights and duties that protect those rights must be incorporated otherwise in this concern to preserve the water and the land and so on individuals may be trampled on and you may have felt this in your discussion with certain keen environmentalists at various times that they're so concerned with nature that they're not concerned about persons who might be trampled on and then fourthly in addition to the land ethic some hierarchy of values is required so I'll just list a list of virtues that we need to look at as deriving directly from scriptural authority starting with respect pardon me respect for

God's created order praise the Lord from the heavens Psalm 148 we read that last time simplicity of lifestyle give us today our daily bread in Exodus chapter 16 we learn that God provided bread and meat but only enough for one day at a time this is simplicity of lifestyle humility and honesty and honesty we read from Job then Job answered the Lord I am unworthy how can I reply to you in recognizing the God centered God originated the universe around him and the way he was being enlightened by God's servant to him in chapters 38 and 39 wisdom of hope in 1st

[ 17 : 41 ] Corinthians chapter 13 patience and serenity from Exodus chapter 14 when Moses answered the people do not be afraid stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the Lord you remember this marvelous event of the parting of the Red Sea and the children of Israel were in a state of collapse don't do anything stop doing things sit back and watch what God can do we're doing society everybody has to be doing so much all the time we don't have time to smell the lilies or look at the lilies Moses answered the people do not be afraid some are afraid in the context of climate change do not be afraid stand firm and you will see the deliverance of the Lord the virtues of benevolence and love

Matthew chapter 5 I tell you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you justice and courage from Amos chapter 5 hate evil and love good maintain justice in the courts tricky thing international governance is very limited in its effectiveness and yet maintaining justice in the international courts includes a consideration for justice in relation to treatment of people and the environment think of the way in which we ship all our poisonous chemicals from North America to West Africa and bury them in the ground so that people less fortunate than ourselves can get poisoned what sort of respect for the environment or for people does that represent what do we do with our own waste we ship it off to

Cache Creek because it's further away we can't quite see it unless we happen to be traveling to Canlors we don't like to look at the effects of our misbehavior in relation to the environment so that's a context I don't claim to have the answer to a complete systematic Christian ecological ethics and I'm sure that it's one of the things I'd love to see us discuss and exchange perspectives on as a community but these are elements that have to be there and so the whole way in which we respond to the issue of climate change is in a context of the caring for the earth and the waters of the earth and the whole environment which God has created so the second point that's my first point in case you wondered

I got to in the lecture the reason we've come together I guess is what kind of people ought we then to be that's the second point and I think as a result of those random thoughts we're in a better position to define what we ought to be in my estimation and again it's a personal perspective and I'm happy to be corrected by any one of you but the central problem seems to me to be a lack of appreciation of our interrelatedness with nature and the brokenness of our relationship to God actions taken in one place reverberate around the world we must respect our non-human neighbors and acknowledge our common dependence on God and this involves one of the things acknowledging that this dependence and interdependence have both been broken and this is God's household that we are concerned of we are part of it living things are part of it

God is the author on whom this household depends there is no break in the intended connection in God's plan of creation so it seems to me that a Christian ecology is a concern for God's household we must live within our means conserving and preserving our resources and living frugally now St.

[ 23 : 13 ] John's Shaughnessy is an interesting community from this point of view we have great affluence and we also have within our midst considerable poverty believe it or not and there is not it seems to me a great discussion about that what are the implications of that of course some would say that we are concerned about that by the Malawi connection and we are solving our consciences by sharing with the poor of the African continent and I don't disagree with that one I think it's an excellent initiative but to what extent are we here amongst ourselves sharing our resources and living frugally I mentioned last time that William Rees's quote that we are genetically flawed to over consume is I think one of the best secular perspectives on Paul's statement that all have sinned that we have in our nature and he is suggesting specifically in our genes this tendency to over consume and this acknowledges that we are guilty of over consumption of scarce resources

I say this to myself as I'm flying off in a large jet next week and polluting the atmosphere more than this whole roomful of cars is done so what is that a matter of concern that these jet setters are contributing to the pollution of the atmosphere it's part of the question of over consumption of resources in this case it seems to me directs attention to the need for alternate energy sources but it's suggesting that the sin of over consumption starts with profligate resource use greed and lack of respect for land animals vegetation and life not to mention our dependence upon

God it follows from this need to simplify our lives that we also need to take care of the waste that is produced by our over consuming society there is remarkable progress in our local community with respect to the way in which we deal with waste nevertheless the common amount of disposing of it the end product is a serious issue so we now carry out much more careful waste conservation from our own homes and from individual places but what ends up at the end of the pipe is a stark and dangerous problem another aspect of what we ought to be is that we must be cautious when making decisions about the future of the earth and its inhabitants this involves application of the precautionary principle that is to say when we are not certain but nevertheless see certain trends occurring that we need to act and the issue becomes how do we act at what scale do we act and in what form do we act but it's not good enough to see trends that are looking very negative and looking extremely dangerous for our environment and for our society to ignore them this comes directly into the area of conflict between the issues that reflect carbon emissions and the whole question of how important carbon emissions may be in relation to this whole question of climate change the bulk of opinion at least of the scientists who informed the secrecy in developing the IPCC report the bulk of their perspective in fact their unanimous recommendation is that carbon dioxide is the villain and that we produce this carbon dioxide it's important to remember that in a sense we depend on the presence of greenhouse gases in order to stay alive you all know the temperature of the earth's surface if we didn't have any greenhouse gases anybody would guess well it's minus 18 so we would be quite cold so the argument becomes is carbon dioxide a poison or is it a benefit well a limited amount of it is obviously a benefit otherwise we have to invest in some strong thermal underwear but the issue is what kind of levels of carbon dioxide constitute a health and what levels constitute a lethal dose the evidence for it being a lethal dose not very strong one of the interesting things in the graphics that Algo

produced in his film is the attempt to show that there's a direct correlation between the concentrations of carbon dioxide and temperature there's a very close correlation in many respects but in several of those examples temperature leaves carbon dioxide that is to say as soon as temperature increases there's a tendency for increased evaporation there's a tendency for the increased movement of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere such that there is an ambiguous relationship here which is still an object of research an object of considerable controversy I'm not trying to get around the point that I'm going to be doing all this carbon emissions as I hop onto the plane next week it's a matter of serious concern because we don't know what is the threshold beyond which it becomes dangerous so there's a serious issue here but all the time

I'm suggesting that there's a whole range of other ways in which we can show respect for and plan for and develop policies for which have nothing to do with the climate change picture and which in my estimation are more serious than the climate change issue why do I say that well the climate change issue is something that has not yet become firm science many would say it's solid some would say it's shaky what we do know is that we have as a society in our brokenness and in our lack of relationship to creation we have destroyed 15% of the earth's soil productive capacity we know that we have destroyed very many animal species we are losing a considerable amount of rare vegetation species one looks at this in the context of a country like Ethiopia for example the source of the best and original

[ 32 : 15 ] Arabian coffee something might interest people as time in the morning especially those who are at 7.30 we are about to lose that original taxon which contain the Arabian coffee there's whole lot of evidences a whole variety of things of this kind that are an expression of our lack of relatedness and our lack of understanding of connections with the environment which are causing immediate response and which don't even have to wait for the hundred years or so that we are told will be the deadline for excess carbon concentration so we have to think about why is use of all created beings under our care placed thereby are so as to provide for future generations we should resist the endless drive to exploit and allow for times of rejuvenation we must be willing to promote the well being of all those who live in the garden in God's household we are obligated to treat homeless people fragile land and rare species with special care and when we have done all this we should never succumb to the false belief that caring for the earth is our task alone or that the fate of the world rests on our shoulders

I hope you can see how great is the destruction of the exclusive attention to climate change or the hubris of thinking that everything depends on us the weakness of concentrating exclusively on the climate the deliberate ignoring of injustices done to the land and sea and vegetation and soils and animals of all kinds and nevertheless in spite of all this we should acknowledge the step forward in our public consciousness which our goal has succeeded in arousing and which has at least in part turned our attention from exclusive emphasis on exploitation towards a focus on sustainability and a considered judgment of our role as stewards of one very important part of God's household so what I'm anxious to stress here is not to undercut the momentum which has been generated by Algo's moving and extremely interesting presentation but to build on that to provide us with a stronger sense of our interrelatedness with the environment and our dependence as a broken people and as a broken creation upon God himself so these are the kinds of virtues which I think we need to emphasize and which we need to share as a

Christian community to develop ways in which we can demonstrate that as a community we are concerned now I know that there are certain people and parishes in Vancouver which are not popular with the conservative evangelical community for very good reasons on the other hand some of them have shown remarkable leadership with respect to concern for not any climate change but also for biodiversity concerns for species collapse for the ways in which the First Nations community provides a model of a simpler lifestyle for ways in which there are other ways in which we can behave as a Christian community so I say that not in order to extol the theology of some of these unpopular places but in order to emphasize that there are good and important ways in which we can learn from other

Christians in their struggles with this whole question I don't think we've come to a balanced view but I think that this discussion and I may be over emphasizing this but the reason I'm emphasizing the value of this is that it starts with the biblical emphasis it develops the idea that we haven't thought enough about the interrelatedness of ourselves in German and it struggles with the whole idea of what we then should be like as a Christian community and so I recommend it for that reason and I come now having made the pitch to the list of references I want to spend a little bit of time on this as it's such a huge and virginal literature that we do need some assistance in seeing what on earth and indeed what on water is going on at the top of this list of references someone not have a copy apparently not okay are there spare copies books and please please remember to come on time next time at the top of the list of references are the source books

I don't recommend that you read these in their entirety over 7500 pages of dense text but they are sources of information and if you need to know what is the latest view of this select group of climate scientists that is the place that you can go for the original data so then I have a group of books which I have labeled recommended and they are recommended for two reasons they are basically Christian literature and they are more balanced in their treatment of the whole topic of environmental change there is one exception to that that's the statement by

[ 39 : 36 ] Sir John Horton which is also very narrow in terms of just talking about climate change but by contrast with other secular books he has one whole chapter in which he talks about the ethical implications of climate change and that chapter is I think very important for us to look at all of those though are written by Christian individuals and you'll see the reference to Al Gore's 1992 book and I mentioned last time it's a book that's been forgotten because it was so well balanced earth in the balance and because it was so well balanced the punch line was not as effective as the unbalanced book The Inconvenient Truth which came out last year so I recommend that also

I've got Boomer Predator as the first in that list the book called For the Beauty of the Earth which is this one which seems to me to go through all these various steps of considering the biblical basis the need for discussion of the ethical implications and asking what sorts of persons we then should be to Comble DeWitt is a very radical biblical response to environmental issues some of you will know his remarkable influence on setting up the whole community which now numbers 35 to 40,000 individuals in the Midwest which lives entirely in a green fashion and which is dedicated to living lightly on the Earth Calvin DeWitt is a frequent visitor here in

Vancouver to Regent College St. Meyer's book Nature Reborn The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology is another attempt to struggle with the Christian perspective on the environment and of course Lorne Wilkinson who many will know at region college has been talking about this for many years in fact an earlier version of this book came out in 1980 so he was well ahead of the game before most Christian thinkers had even thought about it.

Then I've got a group of references here called Balanced Secular Perspectives and there's an issue of The Economist from September the 9th 2006 which is a very interesting survey of the climate change debate with an interesting critique very similar to the one that I'm offering of its narrowness whereas the Scientific American special edition for September 2005 is a much broader treatment of the alternative ways of dealing with environmental issues not from a Christian point of view but from a balanced secular perspective and then this most recent volume you'll know Jeffrey Simpson as a political correspondent in the Globe and Mail Mark Jackard who is a professor at Simon Fraser you know on top of the hill back here somewhere

Mark Jackard is an expert on energy policy they've written this book called Hot Air meeting Canada's climate change challenge and the reason that it's so interesting is that it does try to work through the implications for us as a Canadian society of what this climate change challenge is all about now the most demanding of the items on the list is by Alastair McGrath three volumes that came out in 2001 2002 and 2003 it's a it's a magisterial work called scientific theology and volume one is exclusively about nature second one is about reality and the third is about theory you may think very often these things are discussed in reverse order but anyway it's embedded in this theology of nature which well you've heard me talk about before the need for a natural theology in our present times and

[ 44 : 46 ] I've put a summary of the content of these books but I've already had feedback to say that people don't understand my summary of the content so you can imagine how it would be demanding the original book is but for those of you who are up for a challenge it's one of the most interesting developments in Christian thinking about the environment and then there is a couple of books by Bjorn Lomborg which I referred to last time the skeptical environmentalist and then this year's edition Coolit skeptical environmentalist guide to global warming and as was pointed out last time in the discussion by Phil Hill there is a strong virtue in these two books in that Mr.

Lomborg who is an economist and his friends who are also economists he doesn't have any friends who are non-economists he has struggled with the question of priorities what is the most important global issue of our time and that's a wonderful thing to be engaged in and it does express something which very easily misses if one is totally caught up in the environmental movement the fact that there are people dying by the limit of contagious diseases of infant mortalities enormously high incidence of malaria counts for millions of deaths each year and these kinds of concerns are prominent in Mr.

Lomborg's thinking however in my view he completely misses the point of the interconnections between these phenomena and the environment and so that's my take on those books then there's a book that's very pessimistic but wonderfully written by Plannery the weather makers and there's even more pessimistic an apocalyptic book by Paul Brown called Global Warning that's not a misprime Global Warning The Last Chance for Change now there have been many books as you know written with the title The Last Chance for Civilization so it's a sort of book that tends to diffuse the urgency of the topic because people have seen books of this title and every decade has been the last chance so be careful and finally the main reason to my bringing this to you is because of the nature of this what I've called a distraction which has arisen because of the not of the book the inconvenient truth but much more importantly probably the film this is a very curious thing it seems to me to indicate that we are a society of watchers we don't read as a society

I mentioned it was a 1992 book which in my view is much more balanced but it's disappeared into history whereas everyone almost everyone as we're talking about the inconvenient truth whether positively or negatively it has taken up a huge amount of people's time and energy and as I mentioned there are some very positive effects of that but let us take it as a challenge that there is much more to it than the inconvenient truth there is an enormously convenient truth which is that God created us and dependent upon him and mutually dependent upon his creation and whatever happens key is in charge but we do need to fight those who are actively pursuing unsustainable policies and this unsustainability ranges from the way in which we deal with the upper slopes of Fort

Moody through to our policies on waste management through to what we're doing to the salmon through to the whole range of environmental issues which result from our genetically flawed tendency to over consumption so I offer this to you with humility and with recognition that my perception is as partial as many of these people that I'm criticizing but I do think that it's a basis for extended discussion and I hope that as a community we will set an example in sharing these learnings and looking to God's guidance and help in developing a community of thoughtful and faithful Christians thank you yes you think of a few things but

[ 50 : 31 ] I noticed myself when you go shopping now even just in a drug store you notice a lot of things are very highly packaged well thank you for asking that question I just happened to bring with me instead of the plastic yeah exactly I was going to say with them a lot of the goods like for Christmas they have perfume and all that the package is all of the styrofoam to make the package look it looks a bigger gift you know so they're saying you should mention it to the store manager if you find that the thing is this high you don't have that much product in the stock that they package in the styrofoam which is quite a great number at the moment so they said you should complain that there's over package and you don't want that and they did you know it's comment right just something small like that this is simple everyday shopping thing but over packaging this is unnecessary and if you multiply it by a few million people constitutes extraordinarily over consumption and I'm thinking too about all the technology as it keeps progressing to another level of reality and they keep inventing more gadgets and they're saying on the

TV how they're going to dispose of all these and they ship them to Japan and China or wherever they ship them and they and they can and they can and they can try to grow them well you're simply illustrating the tendency to over consume right yeah we're really just geared to that and it's it's quite an interesting thing because it's so basic and something that we assume and accept for granted but every time you multiply something by a million people it becomes rather serious a major factor yeah well there's a school of thought within this religious community that we didn't worry about issue at all because

God is in charge how would you deal with that well Rowena's very interesting point it says that there's a school in our Christian community that says because God is in charge we don't really need to worry about this at all so what's the answer to that well it says we're stewards of the earth so you know the agricultural nature will tend to the ground and you have to grow your crops to survive right hang on a minute it was a rhetorical question it seems to me that well I read out a passage which said we should not be afraid that's from Genesis 14 did not say that you should not care so that there seems to me to be a very significant difference because if we say that we just abandon this crazy world to those crazy non-Christians this looks like a pretty strange

Christian testament do we have responsibility to care for those who are weak those who are poor what is the teaching in the new testament and in the old testament about responsible caring for the earth and for the weak members of society so it seems to be that the sparrow and the lilies of the field are weak members of God's house point just in the same in a similar sense not the same sense but a similar sense to the poor and the disenfranchised people so it seems to me that there are many examples historically where Christian communities have cut themselves off and said really it's all in God's hands and we'll plunker down here and form a community which is pure and which is doing all the right things and very soon turns out that an individual member of those communities does something that's not very good and you know we're no better we're no better than the people outside the church and sometimes we're very much worse unfortunately so it seems to me that I would hope that we take a more responsible line but you're right that's that's a tendency to do that to do that to do that to do that merchandising has changed considerably in this generation that just to buy yogurt we have to buy it in plastic you know containers and on the radio this morning at five o'clock

I heard that in Australia there's a gentleman there that has formed a type of technology because plastic is very difficult to break down if you burn it it lets off toxic gases and the things of that nature but he has developed a technology whereby he can break it down to a point where it's turned into fencing so he has found a use for it but it's still difficult for us who have to shop for those sorts things because now everything is in plastic so somehow or other we've got to turn you know the producers around can everybody hear this it's difficult for us to act on things that we can't access we can act on things that we can access and we can work on finding out about new possibilities

[ 57:10 ] I mean the best example from my recent reading would be the improvement in technology for solar energy and in particular the development of a way of storing solar energy which means that we do not have to invest in 15 years of expenditure the upfront costs of investing in solar energy in your home at this point are prohibitive because you have to it takes 15 years to recoup the investment before you start benefiting from this but developments in Europe have recently made it possible to legislate extensive use of solar energy with very very cheap installation costs Phil you probably know more about this than any of us but it's now it's clear that solar energy in the long term is the most sustainable source of energy and if we can get a technological fix for solar energy that makes a huge difference change so I think you'll find it's well taken there are all sorts of confusing issues where we're caught sort of halfway along with technology change and we're stuck with some rather wasteful practices which over time can be improved however

I should say that I'm not a supporter of the idea of a technological fix as the absolute end point because it seems to me it misses the point about the fact that we are ultimately flawed and that therefore however hard we work at this in the technological sense there are ways in which we will continue to make something of a massive environment so ask a question should we be supporting the oil sands development in Alberta that's a very nice question some of you may have participated in a two-day seminar recently at Regent College in which this issue was debated very unsatisfactorily I think I say that but I wasn't there during the main thrust of the debate

I was there on the preliminary evening when it was told that it was going to be the main focus of the structure and that was a very fine evening but the reports came back suggesting that the issue wasn't terribly helpfully engaged but it is an issue that has to be engaged as you know the development of the tar sands in Alberta is already a blot a blot on the surface it's highly visible from space for example even at this time and the extent to which the exploitation of that land surface is causing all kinds of questions to arise not just with respect to the local indigenous population but with respect to the scale of the development and the speed of the development and the kinds of ways in which that is going to impact it's a very attractive proposition from the point of view of

Canada's role as a source of oil and the more expensive barrels of oil become from the Middle East and elsewhere so the more practical it becomes for the exploitation of the Alberta tar sands but the practicality of it assumes the zero cost that they learn and so here's the delicate balance of how we assess the scar on the earth's surface against the provision of carbon emitting fuel so it's an ethical issue which as in most ethical issues is a decision between shades of grey and I think if I can make another generalisation as a community we're not very used to dealing with shades of grey we're very good at black and white

Jesus was very good at black and white he had a perception that was far better than ours and it would be good if we could see things in a more black and white way but most of our decisions it seems to me are made in terms of shades of grey and here is an example of a massive environmental issue which will engage us for the next decade at least and of course there are resources in the Alberta tar sands which will last for it's estimated 100 years or more at any reasonable regulation protection so it's a the fight is on with respect to how to provide some protection for the environment how the development can occur with due respect to the local people as well as to the local environment so that's my professorial answer

[ 62 : 57 ] I told you if you can't receive a list of do's and don'ts I will fail you but that seems to me to be the issue yes have you got any idea how we should even just try and govern ourselves when if we discover that our environmental footprint is greater than one should we just make up our minds that it's going to be one and we shouldn't shouldn't take trips on jet planes the question of whether it's created with one at the moment I guess if we take an average in this room with all due respect to the range of affluence we're looking at five planets required for the sort of consumption that most of us in this room are engaged in so to look for an ecological footprint of one earth equivalent would be impractical

I suggest however what we should be doing is plotting the trend in our ecological footprint I think we've got ourselves into a terrible mess by over consuming but it should be possible for us to improve and that's the issue that I think is practical and we can reduce one's ecological footprint in many ways as you know our vegetarian children have got very good advice for us and these are not things that are going to kill us like eating a smaller steak that sounds like a trivial thing but it's actually a major global impact which reverberates around the globe it reverberates to the point of the destruction of the Amazon rainforest to the production of McDonald's hamburgers to all kinds of implications that are the result of our overconsumption of beef specifically of the consumption of beef yeah but this in itself is not a climate change issue so there's another aspect of the more balanced view of the whole environment a couple of years ago you gave us a website where we could champion it our footprint on earth which ideally went home and did because I'm a very good student all the people in the front row get A's in this class and I was absolutely shattered to find out what my footprint is and I consider myself to be reasonably in tune with you're a good person basically

I'm a good person that's what you said this morning I asked Rowena Haruhoff Jesus said I'm good and I said to her that sounds theologically very suspect point but there's no doubt it's quite an interesting experience to just check on the ecological footprint website and calculate your own ecological footprint beware it's not an absolutely correct number but it does allow you to plot change so if you go from 5.5 to 5.1 for example you have in fact lived more likely on the planet you have shown more respect for God's creation I think this is a good thing and I think it's something we should encourage so when you look on the ecological footprint website you'll get shocked because you'll be told that you are essentially exploiting the earth's surface to the point that if everybody else did you'd need six planets to support your lifestyle and that number maybe six maybe three maybe something quite different depends on how many different factors you include in the equation which calculates the index but the point is that you can plot change and that's a practical in fact it's almost a non-professorial recommendation out of this part it's something to do what is that website but it's just called ecological footprint you just just google ecological footprint

I'm old enough to remember the horse and carp age good heavens did you hear that Bill is old enough to have seen horse and carp what a great pleasure that was you could eat the horse if you wanted to and it also delivered a great benefit to the countryside and you know we could invest in shovels to help a lot but what a great pleasure it was to move around the countryside in a awesome car so we'd all be nice to people and I've run out of ideas here but well I mean you're saying that we have in fact unconsciously increased our pressure on the earth during the course of our lifetimes not only have we added three billion people to the earth surface while we've been alive

I'm not suggesting that you and I are responsible for that but we've also intensified our pressure on the earth as individuals and you're pointing out the fact that there was a chance in those days to look at the lilies of the field and to think how great was this God who had created such wonderful things thank you very much for that and no answers I gather no answers it's all Margaret's fault it's all the shopping she does thank you I gather

[ 70 : 20 ] I gather