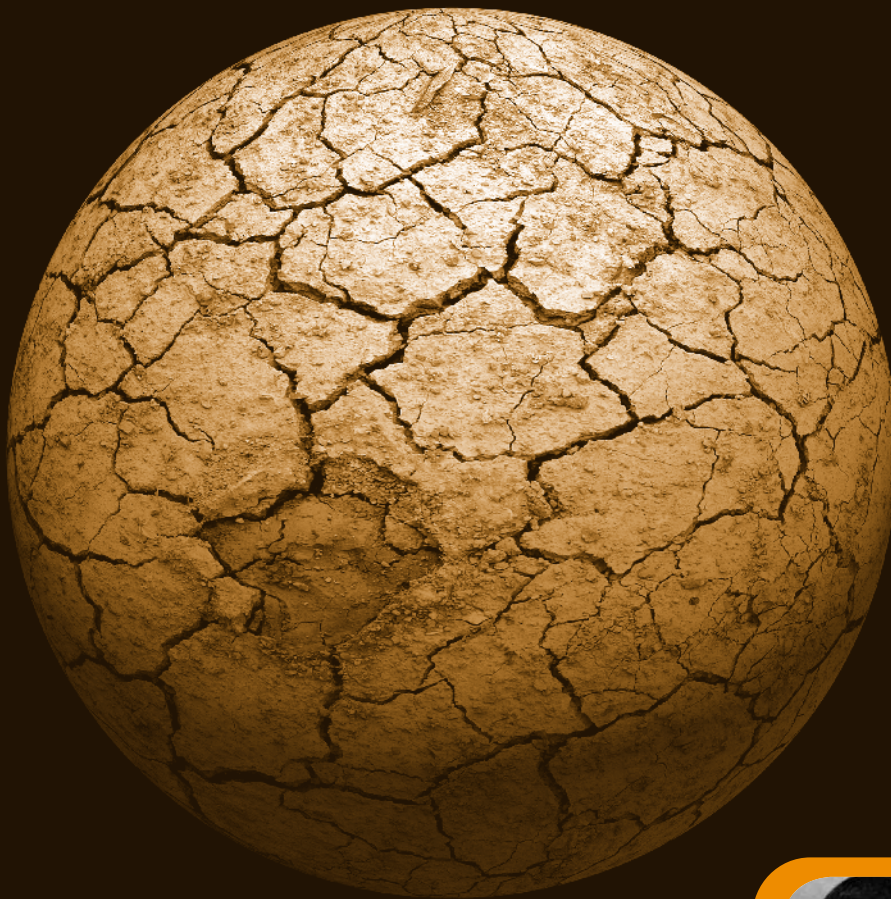


Why should Christians teach sustainability?

Does the answer lie in the cross?



By Chris Parker

How will the world end? A faithful Christian teacher teaching their students to live, and to live themselves, guided by a biblical worldview, may at times feel a tension when it comes to environmental sustainability. How will the world end according to the scriptures? What will be the fate of the earth? It could be said that the bible guarantees us that the condition of the earth will get worse. The earth is broken due to the fall and is groaning as it awaits the end of things. Will it end in environmental destruction or the return of Jesus or are they related in some way? Humans, who have been given the responsibility of tending to and stewarding the creation, are sinful and their selfishness pervades all they approach, including their use of the earth's resources. So why bother as a Christian getting too passionate about environmentalism and sustainability? We become confused. Why would a Christian teacher be excitedly 'green' and want to pass this passion on to their students?

One argument might be that we teach sustainability because our governments' syllabuses mandate that we do. So we faithfully program aspects of sustainable thinking into our science, technology and geography lessons. Students then learn definitions of sustainability and about the unequal distribution of resource consumption temporally and spatially. They may learn that humans have polluted the planet in the most horrible of ways and that something must be done about it. And they learn that as young people, they are in the prime position to be the agents of change. They may even be guided into a hands on response like running a paper recycling program or similar. The sustainability aspects of the syllabus get faithfully unfolded and the culturally expected due credit is given to teaching our kids about being green.

However, if the Christian teacher teaching sustainability is not passionate about our global need for restraint and passionate about humans needing to urgently take a more sustainable approach to resource consumption, pollution control and ecosystem destruction, then the next generation, their students, will simply not catch the passion. If the Christian teacher does not see clearly the dire predicament that we are rocketing towards such that it seems imperative to them that they examine and change their own lifestyle, their students will see the hypocrisy and subconsciously model it. They will learn with their head the issues associated with sustainability and they may even respond with their hands in helping with school programs, but have they been given the modelling and motivation to take it to heart? The faithful, biblically well read students in their classes may well be unknowingly experiencing a biblical tension about how we understand the end times, adding to their de-motivating confusion.

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If we combine this eschatological tension from scripture with 'lip service' modelling from teachers, it may help to understand why, after teaching sustainability for a couple of decades, our Christian schools are not really producing a generation of graduates who are truly ready to green the world. The core of this issue is motivation. What motivation do we have as Christians to put the recycling out, lobby our local member, drive a small car, walk more often and buy locally grown produce? I suggest that a fundamental motivation for being passionate about living sustainably, and being passionate about teaching sustainability, is Jesus' death on the cross.

The cross is the most wonderful and powerful act of self sacrifice. The creator of the earth became 'earthly'. He entered the creation. He became human and died for his people while they were enemies. This is almost beyond comprehension. That Jesus would take the wrath of the father onto himself and swap places with us, his people, is the ultimate model of self sacrifice. What should be our response to this? A genuine response will include a desire to model this self sacrificial love. We have been united with Christ. We are in him and he is in us. As a new unified team he calls us to take up our own cross. In his strength we are called to deny ourselves and model his love. We must love others! Who are these 'others'? To answer this question I believe that we must now think globally. Equally, we must think future. We must think of those who will follow us as stewards of this planet. To show self sacrificial love to others, we must not consume more than our fair share of the earth's finite resources.

The ecological footprint¹ to support the average Australian's lifestyle² is 7.7ha. The average ecological footprint for people living on the planet is 2.2ha. If we believed that it is every human on the planet's right to have the same lifestyle as the average Australian, then the earth's current population (a population that is growing exponentially) would require there to be 4.5 earths. Clearly, we don't have 4.5 earths. Many people on the earth are sharing very little of its resources while a few live highly consumptively destructive lifestyles. A highly consumptive lifestyle above what is sustainable for everyone on the planet is not particularly loving towards others. A life of self sacrificial love requires those

with highly consumptive lifestyles to practise restraint. This is Christ like self sacrificial love on a profound scale.

The current rate of consumption of resources and subsequent environmental destruction is simply not sustainable. If it continues unchecked, there will be less resources available for future generations. How loving is it to live the 'high life' without restraint knowing that your children's children will be forced to live on an earth that is characterised by contamination and depletion, including ecosystem destruction, reduced biodiversity, damage to natural replenishing cycles, lack of resources and a severely reduced quality of life.

The creation is precious and full of wonder and beauty. We are stewards of God's handiwork and we will be held to account for how we have fulfilled this role. However, we must also be motivated to be 'green' by the death and

resurrection of our Lord Jesus and our unity with him. On the cross we see the greatest act of self sacrifice and love. When we realise that we entered into the story of the cross by Jesus having our names written on his heart as he hung there suffering, we must respond by desiring God to have all the glory he deserves. Glory goes to him when we model this same self sacrificial love towards others. Living sustainably is living lovingly. Living sustainably is living self sacrificially. Living sustainably is living to glorify our Lord God. Why would a Christian teach sustainability passionately? because of the cross of Christ.

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Chris is currently teaching at Nepean Christian School in Western Sydney. His initial training was in maths and science education but his focus is now technology education. He has been known to say things like "I love my job; I get to paid to make things with kids and talk to them about serving Jesus". Chris has two children, Bronte and Brae aged 2 and 4. He is a member of the editorial committee of this journal.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Ecological footprint = "The ecological footprint of an individual, a city, a country, or humanity is a measure of how much productive land and water they require to produce all the resources they consume and to absorb all the waste they generate, using prevailing technology. This land could be anywhere in the world. The ecological footprint is measured in global hectares. This is one hectare of biologically productive space with world average productivity." <http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/sustainability/footprint.htm>
- 2 Bigfoot ecological footprint calculator - Powerhouse Museum. www.powerhouse-museum.com/education/ecologic/bigfoot/mid

RESOURCES

The notion of our ecological footprint is a helpful concept to guide students to appreciate the importance of sustainability. Here are 3 of the many online footprint calculators that are suitable for children:

- www.powerhousemuseum.com/education/ecologic/bigfoot/mid
- www.kidsfootprint.org
- www.myfootprint.org

HEATHDALE CHRISTIAN COLLEGE

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL – HEAD OF SENIOR SCHOOL (Yrs 9 - 12)



Heathdale Christian College is a K to Year 12 College with 1,100 students located south west of Melbourne in the Hoppers Crossing/Werribee area.

After 14 years of service our present Head of School has accepted a Principal's position at another College and we are therefore seeking a person who can fill this significant leadership position.

The successful applicant will be able to identify with and contribute toward the Christian foundations, Christian ethos and Christian practice of the College.

The Head of Senior School will be responsible to the Principal for:

- Exercising spiritual leadership within the College;
- Exercising educational leadership within the College;
- Encouraging and nurturing academic excellence;
- Exercising administrative leadership and organization of the Senior School;
- Working with and contributing toward a dedicated and vibrant leadership team

An attractive remuneration package is offered and ideally the successful applicant will take up duties from the beginning of Term 3 or as soon as is practicable.

For an application package, including application form please email Mrs Jill Scherman jscherman@heathdale.vic.edu.au or telephone 03 9974 4808.

Christian Schools Tasmania
operates five schools in
Kingston, Margate, Rokeby
and Bridgewater, caring for students
from Kindergarten to Year 12.



With the retirement of Mr Peter van der Schoor from Channel Christian School at the end of 2007, the Board of Christian Schools Tasmania invites expressions of interest from suitably qualified practising Christian leaders for the following position:

HEAD OF SCHOOL CHANNEL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Channel Christian School is located in Margate, Tasmania, 15 minutes to the south of Hobart. The school has an enrolment of approximately 150 children from kindergarten to Year six. It is currently in its 20th year and has been blessed with a wonderful staff and a very supportive local community. Channel Christian School is part of Christian Schools Tasmania and enjoys the benefits of an infrastructure not normally available to schools of its size.

For all enquiries and an application package please contact Trisha Lowe at Christian Schools Tasmania on (03) 6224 8300.

Closing date for applications: Friday 25th May 2007

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