

2009 Rerum Novarum Lecture  
**Let the Son Shine**  
An Australian Catholic Response to Climate Change  
Fr Charles Rue SSC  
Thursday 24 September 2009 at Cardinal Knox Centre

“The natural environment is given by God to everyone, our use of it entails a personal responsibility towards humanity as a whole, particularly towards the poor and towards future generations.”  
(Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009)



Around 80 people attended this lecture. Due to flooding of the Lecture theatre the event was held in the Cathedral/Lansdowne room. Mark Clarke opened with acknowledging the traditional landowners and all recited a prayer. Charles Rue spoke for twenty minutes on how we as Catholics can best respond to climate change. Charles points out that systems matter and so our Catholic response needs to be systematic as well when addressing the causes of climate change. He suggests following the formula of See – Judge – Act.<sup>1</sup>

**Seeing** relates to collecting facts relating to climate change. The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) reports are a good resource. The following books were recommended: Tim Flannery, *The Weather Makers: The History and future impact of climate change* (2005); Mark Diesendorf, *Greenhouse Solutions with Sustainable Energy* (2007); Guy Pearse, *High & Dry: John Howard, climate change an the selling of Australia’s future* (2007).

Prayer plays an integral part when **judging** situations. By praying we do not distance ourselves from reality; on the contrary, people can change through prayer and it is up to people to bring about change. We cannot deny our connectedness to the earth and along with this connection comes with the responsibility to care for the earth. This universe in which we live is an expression of God’s love. If we do not take responsibility to learn as much as we can about this gift and take measures to nurture this gift, we would in fact, be turning away from God’s love.

All proposals placed on the table as solutions to climate change need to be carefully approached. As such, much debate is taking place in relation to nuclear energy and bio-fuels. Often large companies, as major economic stakeholders, promote misleading arguments in their effort to undermine any progress.



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<sup>1</sup> This method was created in the early 1900s by Father (later Cardinal) Joseph Cardijn for the Young Christian Workers (YCW). It brought the light of faith to workers’ industrial situations: workers were to become conscious of being responsible within their own situation. In 2007, Caritas International adopted the Cardijn way as a model for a Catholic response to the United Nations Millennium Goals.

Having a specific aim in greenhouse gas reductions is the first step to exploring options and taking **action**. Scientists at IPCC Bali 2007 and those cited in the Garnaut Review suggest that developed countries reduce carbon emissions by 20 to 40 percent by the year 2020 and more than 60 percent by 2050, based on 1990 levels. There are many ways in which individual can make a change. However, governments have a role to play in setting up laws and policies that address climate change and foster community cooperation and individual action.

At question-time we witnessed first-hand how well prepared climate sceptics are. Three of them took turns in trying to convince those present that climate change is a myth and we have nothing to worry about. Needless to say, they were eventually silenced as many others put questions forward in relation to what individuals can do to better the situation. Some teachers were also interested in putting together curriculum on climate change. They will get together with Mark Clarke in relation to this. All in all, it was an insightful evening and most who attended would have left with greater knowledge and hopefully a greater sense of commitment to making a change where possible.

Fr Rue brought copies of his book 'Let the Sun Shine' with him which was published this year by the Columban JPIC Office. These can be ordered by phoning (02) 9352 8000 or email [cmi@columban.org.au](mailto:cmi@columban.org.au).



Following the Lecture **Fr Tony Kerin**, Episcopal Vicar for Justice & Social Services **launched the 2009 Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Sunday Statement**. There is a separate report available on this.

*Emmy Silvius*