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Carbon concern is not moral

by The Australian Financial Review

Should churches be saving souls or saving the planet? Perhaps Australia's churches would argue they're doing both. Unfortunately, those pushing fossil fuel divestment campaigns are doing neither.

Last week it emerged that Sydney's Anglican Church's investment arm, the \$262 million Glebe Administration Board, was considering how it might reduce exposure of fossil fuels. Although its strategy has yet to be decided on or approved it does beg the question: what has got into the churches? The Anglicans are not alone, of course. Pope Francis' new encyclical *Laudato Si'* had a stern word or two to say about fossil fuels and also climate change. The Uniting church never seems to miss a good climate change rally.

Churches used to be a bedrock institution of Australian society, providing succour, sacraments and the word to its flocks. Churches stood up for issues important to their congregants and their teachings. In fact, it is easy to get the feeling that some churches have given up on Christ altogether, eschewing the difficult and sometimes unpopular business of morality for politically correct inclusiveness and Q&A-style leftism.

This tendency undermines their standing as serious institutions in Australian society.

At the root of the problem is a fundamental ignorance of economics among much of the clergy. Many bishops and church leaders are all too ready to engage in "lapel-pin political slogans", crying "neo-liberalism", or "fossil fuels", but without considering that without them all people, particularly the poor and downtrodden for whom the church claims particular concern, would be worse off.

Real concern for the poor would result in an embrace of cheap energy, including fossil fuels, which, along with market capitalism and the rule of law, has been responsible for dragging more people out of the poverty and democratising luxury than any number of sympathetic prayers.

Australia's various church leaders should consider this fact before jumping aboard fashionable and so-called "ethical" campaigns, and seeing more people slide out of the pews.



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