

The Trust Test

I remember a little anecdote by Rev vanderJagt in one of his sermons. Some of you may have heard it. He referred to a famous tight-rope walker who, before a huge crowd, prepared to walk across Niagara Falls. Before he stepped onto the tight-rope, he asked the crowd whether they thought he could do it. The crowd all yelled Yes! And, indeed, before the spellbound crowds, he walked the immense distance, with death yawning below him. As he stepped off the rope the crowds cheered ecstatically. He then asked whether they thought he could walk across once more, this time wheeling a wheelbarrow. The crowds again expressed their utmost confidence in him by yelling, YES! Again he walked the long rope, pushing a wheelbarrow. And again, when he'd completed his act, there was ecstatic applause. He then asked the crowds whether they thought he could do it with someone in the wheelbarrow. The enthusiastic crowd yelled, YES! He asked, Are you sure? The crowd roared louder, YES!! He then asked for a volunteer. Stunned silence. The crowds looked at one

another, and waited. But there was no response. No one dared!

It's one thing to say that we trust, but, when it comes to the crunch, when our faith is put to the test, will our actions match our words?

God is no tight-rope walker. He is almighty and never makes mistakes. We all confess this. But I was recently reminded of how fickle our trust can be when I heard of two Bible figures who had their trust put to the test, and failed. Sticky situations can so easily lead to human reasoning governing our actions.

The first was King Saul, whom Rev deBoer referred to in a sermon a couple of weeks ago. Saul was going to do battle with the Philistines but was told to wait seven days till Samuel had come and offered sacrifices to the Lord. It was a long seven days. The Philistines had gathered a massive army, extremely strong with many horses and

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chariots. Saul had gathered his army, but he and his son were the only ones with swords. His men were scared stiff and each day more and more slipped away or hid. Where on earth was Samuel? Why hadn't he come? The situation was desperate. Finally, on the seventh day Saul could wait no longer. The situation was already ridiculous – a small, poorly equipped army of jittery men over against a massive, highly efficient, well-equipped Philistine army. Saul felt he simply had to act now, had to take the initiative, before the remainder of his men slipped away. After all, wasn't he king? To be sure, going to battle without first sacrificing would be wrong. So therefore under these circumstances surely the Lord would understand that he, Saul, would have to sacrifice instead of Samuel. So he went ahead. No sooner had he offered sacrifices when Samuel appeared on the scene. Saul had failed the test. He had not trusted that Almighty God could give victory where human reasoning said otherwise.

Last week, as we were studying Genesis 21 at Bible Study Club, I was reminded that even Abraham, the "father of all believers", succumbed to human reasoning. The Lord had promised him a son. But year after

year went by, and still there was no son. Meanwhile Sarah had become too old to bear children. And it probably wouldn't be long before Abraham was physically too weak to engage in the act of procreation. Therefore, Sarah reasoned, he'd better lie with Hagar, her bondswoman, and hopefully they'd have a son by her. Abraham agreed. And it worked! But it was a lack of trust in God. They had resorted to human reasoning and had seemed to forget that with God nothing is impossible. The consequences were that the descendants of Ishmael, the son born of this relationship, became a thorn in the side of Israel for generations.

How often do we tend to resort to human reasoning? ... saying to ourselves – "surely God will understand?"

How often do we tend to resort to human reasoning? How often do we look at various situations we find ourselves in – relating to money, relationships, work, our lives – and, rather than doing God's will and simply trusting and obeying Him, we 'push' the limits and disobey Him by saying to ourselves – "surely God will understand"?

God is Almighty. We all believe this. So, will we pass the trust test?

Rosanne Numan

Calvin the Critic

In the last article on the Reformation leader Martin Luther I raised the question about how Christians should behave towards a government which is hostile to Christianity. It was argued that Martin Luther began teaching passive resistance, which means that a Christian must disobey laws in conflict with God's word and accept punishment for this without any thought of violent revolution. But when it seemed likely that the Emperor's forces would march into Germany to quell

the Protestant Reformation, Luther changed his position and allowed for active violent resistance. In this article I would like to contrast Luther's teachings with Calvin's. Calvin was also not naïve about the corrupt behaviour of many earthly governments but still consistently upheld the Biblical teaching on how Christians are to behave toward them.

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Calvin the Critic (continued)

Sometimes we can be quite critical of our government. We see wastefulness in our economy, increasing accommodation/promotion of ungodly lifestyles and a growing tide of intolerance in public life towards those who would speak against this. John Calvin at times was also very critical of the government of his day. In his Commentaries on the book of Daniel he takes king Darius as an example of the way most kings behave. Says Calvin, their minds are "inclined to fallacies" and they "neglect" their duty because of "flattery."¹ Kings are more concerned for their own glory than God's honour and welfare of the people. In fact according to John Calvin, it is very rare that a king does not "despise everything divine."²

However, despite voicing this kind of criticism Calvin still recognised the proper place of authority in our lives. He confessed that Christians must be subject to the governing authorities "because of God's ordination." The monarchy, he said is "a noble institution damaged by man."³

All this is quite familiar to us. Although at times critical we still respect our politicians and obey the laws that they enact. But what if they should behave in an overtly unjust manner? What if they accepted bribes, made laws to favour the rich and further impoverish the poor? Says Calvin, according to scriptures unjust governments also "equally possess that sacred majesty with which He [God] has invested in legitimate

authority."⁴ He goes even further to say that the Bible presents wicked rulers (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar) as being used as "God's punishment or scourge on the wickedness of the people."⁵

Can unjust rulers then be disobeyed at all? Says Calvin, only when they command something that is contrary to God's law. To demonstrate this he takes the case of Daniel's disobedience to King Darius' command that no one should worship any god except the king himself.⁶ To disobey in this instance was not sinful. Calvin quotes 1 Peter 2:17, which says "fear God and honour the King". Fearing God therefore comes before honouring the king. Since the basis of the

We must be subject to the governing authorities "because of God's ordination"

King's authority is God's authority, if a subject does not recognise the authority of God, than neither would the king, who is God's vice-regent, receive due honour. It is impossible for an

unbeliever to truly honour the government. For them the concept of a divine mandate is meaningless. From what I've observed your average Australian finds it laughable to hear American politicians refer to their office in these terms.

Now perhaps you might think this is a depressing doctrine that Calvin is teaching. It's quite all right for us to accept this doctrine; at the moment we live in relative peace and freedom. But what hope does this give those living under tyranny in China, North Korea,

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¹ Calvin, J. Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Daniel, in *On God and Political Duty*, ed. J.T. McNeill, Indianapolis, 1974, p.95

² *Ibid.* p.95

³ Calvin, J. Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, in *On God and Political Duty*, ed. J.T. McNeill, Indianapolis, 1974, p.85

⁴ Calvin, J. On Civil Government, in *On God and Political Duty*, ed. J.T. McNeill, Indianapolis, 1974, p. 74

⁵ Calvin, J. Commentaries on Romans, p.86

⁶ Calvin, J. Commentaries on Daniel, p.101

Calvin the Critic (*continued*)

and many third world countries on the African continent? What hope could we have if, and may God graciously prevent it, in the future our circumstances change and our freedom of religion be lost.

Calvin, in an essay entitled *On Civil Government*, teaches that the Bible gives hope for people living under the yoke of unjust governments. He does not only speak of the life to come either but also the here and now. According to Calvin God sometimes appoints "avengers" to restrain unjust rulers.⁷ This doctrine of Calvin's is perhaps one of the most controversial and least understood. It immediately raises the question of who are these avengers and how did they receive their appointment? The examples Calvin gives from scripture are Othniel, Assyria and Moses. Both Othniel and Moses were just private individuals. We would say they had no legal or constitutional authority to act. They received their mandate through direct revelation and their mission (particularly in the case of Moses) was achieved by miraculous intervention by the Lord. These two examples have lead many people to assume that Calvin finds it permissible for private individuals to act against unjust rulers. Perhaps to assassinate a tyrant or join a paramilitary group.

It is an unfortunate fact that in history Reformed people have been associated with this kind of thinking. In the 17th Century there was a rebellion by Protestants in Scotland.⁸ Many historians have seen the actions of these private individuals as the bitter fruits of Calvin's doctrine of divine avengers. Were this the case we would have to conclude that John Calvin's political theory is in reality not much different than Luther's.

But taking a closer look at what he writes makes it quite clear that Calvin could not possibly have meant this. In the Reformed tradition we confess the Bible as being God's complete revelation to mankind. Upon its completion direct revelation ceased as it was no longer necessary. So can you or I then pretend to be commissioned in the same way as Othniel and Moses were? Of course not. Says Calvin, "we are not to conclude that this [being a heavenly avenger] is committed to us...this applies to all private persons."⁹ So Calvin could not be blamed for the actions of the Reformed Scottish rebels.

What's more there is a much more obvious culprit for the actions of the Scottish rebels: John Knox. Himself a reformer on the British Isles he wrote in 1558 an essay entitled the *Appellation*, in which he contradicted Calvin's teaching on the doctrine of submission to authority. Knox claimed that Christians had a duty to set up a system that was governed along Christian principles. This government was to be set up "with force is necessary".¹⁰ The Calvinists in Scotland were following Knox's not Calvin's political theory.

So who then are Calvin's divine avengers who can restrain the government when it acts unjustly? Calvin gives more examples of what he means not only from the Bible but also from ancient history. He says the Ephori of Sparta, the Popular tribunes of the Roman council and the Demarchi on the Athenian Senate all fulfilled this role.¹¹ These three bodies all worked under different political systems, yet from what we know about them, they have one thing in

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⁷ Calvin, J. *On Civil Government*, p.80

⁸ Allen, J. *A History of the Political Thought of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1957, p. 106

⁹ Calvin, J. *On Civil Government*, p.81

¹⁰ Allen, J. *A History of the Political Thought of the Sixteenth Century*, p. 106

¹¹ Calvin, J. *On Civil Government*, p.81

Calvin the Critic (*continued*)

common. They all wielded their authority through legal, constitutional means. Perhaps one equivalent in modern Australia would be our judicial system. The Supreme Court is able to rule government actions as unconstitutional. At an international level we could perhaps think of multinational groups like the United Nations and larger nations that act unilaterally. Through military intervention and economic sanctions they do work to restrain the activities of cruel despots.

The biblical example of divine avengers like Othniel and Moses for the New Testament Church is therefore not a call to revolution. It is rather a mandate for every one, in his own place and station, to use whatever legal means available, be that through petition, the legal system or what have you, to call the attention of

our earthly to their responsibilities as God's vice-regents.

In countries governed by rulers that do not acknowledge God's authority the extent with which change can be expected through legal means may not seem very great. Nothing would be gained by Christians in China lodging a legal challenge against the lack of religious freedom. But examining the differences between the teaching of Luther and Calvin on obedience to authority has perhaps made it clearer that to engage in active, violent resistance also would also mean abandoning the commands of the Bible. A hopeless situation? It is then that the words of Hymn 56 must also become our confession. "Our suffering here is soon endured; the harvest it for us prepares by far out-weighs our woes and cares."

Arend Witten

The Practical Christian

"MIRACULOUS!" ... "Revolutionary!" ... "Greatest Ever!" We are inundated by a flood of extravagant claims as we flick through the television stations or flip the magazine pages. The messages leap out at us. The products assure us they are 'new', 'improved', 'incredible', and 'capable of changing our lives'. For only a few dollars, we can have "cleaner clothes", "whiter teeth", "glamorous hair," and "tastier food." Cars, cologne, diet drinks and clothes with the latest brands are guaranteed to bring happiness, friends and the good life. These things make life worth living for, do they not? They put you in "the group" don't they?

But are they the right crowd? Are you living a life to God's glory or for earthly friends and impressions? These worldly treasures are a great desire for many of us.

However Paul warns Christians who are tempted to adopt the world's standards rather than God's standards (Rom 12:1,2).

The book of James actually gives a detailed, practical instruction for all aspects of Christian behaviour, especially to those who are inclined to talk their way into heaven instead of walking the way in faith. James deals with: facing trials, blaming God for misfortunes, snobbery, sharp tongues, faith and works, squabbling in churches, worldliness, use of money and so on; there is a word for all of us to store in our hearts and put into practice for our lives. In this article, I will deal with just a few of these that are pointed out in James Chapter 5.

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James firstly admonishes the rich (ch 5:1) for their ill-gained wealth and also for oppressing the poor (vs4&6) via fraudulent means and unjustly using their wealth to control the courts through bribery (ch 5:6). Secondly he encourages those who feel the demands and pressure from the wealthy. He tells them to be patient with the reminder that the coming of Christ is near; and gives three examples of patience: the farmer, the prophets and Job (ch 5:7-11).

The Farmer

The farmer must wait patiently for his crops to grow; he cannot hurry the process, yet he does not take the summer off and hope all goes well in the fields, for there is much work to be done to ensure a good harvest. In the same way, we must wait patiently for Christ's return, but while we wait, there is much work that we can do to advance Christ's kingdom. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith, looking forward to the future reward of their labours.

The Prophets

Prophets were sent and approved by God to deliver His message to the people, and in this task they often suffered and were persecuted by men. Yet they continued to steadfastly preach the Word and to pull the people back onto the straight and narrow. We too will be ridiculed and hassled for standing up for our belief – yet even without persecution for “preaching” we will have the same trials and tribulations as non-Christians. The difference will be what we make of them in faith by God's grace: “*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes*” (Psalm 119:71).

Job

And yet no one matches Job's endurance and patience. He was put to a severe test;

he lost his whole ‘life’ so to speak, his family, friends, and all his possessions. Yet his heart was in the right place, he was focused and dependent on the Lord for he says, “*the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken, blessed be the Name of the Lord*”. We too can learn from Job, even in small things such as refraining from cursing when things don't go the way we want them to go.

James puts the swearing of oaths above all errors of the tongue, e.g. boasting, grumbling and backbiting. Going through the ordinary, insignificant routine of a day's life and lacing it liberally with oaths and blasphemous expletives is irreverent and offensive to God. Human speech is *often* punctuated with oaths that range from thoughtless ‘fillers’, to loud-mouthed expletives to outright blasphemies. I don't think I need to give any examples here because we are all too familiar with the colourful language of today's world. And we all know it is

*If we truly
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wrong in God's eyes but are we quick to tell our workmates, colleagues or fellow students that their language is offensive to you because it offends God? Have we forgotten the holiness of God, as reflected by the words God gave to Moses in front of the burning bush: “*take off your sandals for the place you are standing is holy ground*” (Ex 3:5). That is the humble respectfulness we should be showing to our Almighty God.

How then are we to respond to the problems and difficulties of life? James answers in verse 13, “*let him pray*”, or keep on praying. Cry out for peace from Christ, take the promises of Scripture and do not rest until they are yours, cast your

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cares upon the Lord, and he will lift you up. *"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms"* giving praise to the Lord. This is the reaction James is telling us we should have; **turn to the Lord** in other words. I know, it's a stark contrast to the way the world expresses their joy – partying drunks on the streets Friday and Saturday nights, teenage joy-riders roaring through the streets, yelling and screaming filthy words and disturbing the peace in the neighbourhood – but James tells us if we are happy we should sing praises to God, for it is His blessings and goodness that give us reason to be cheerful. The world finds this reaction incomprehensible, but they are the ones missing out on everlasting joy.

For today's money and possessions will be worthless when Christ returns, so we should spend our time accumulating the kind of treasures that will be worthwhile in God's eternal kingdom. *"Do not build up*

for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:19).

The book of James emphasises Christians living their faith by their works. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God's commands and love one another. The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. If we truly believe God's Word, we will *live* it day by day. *"You have faith, and I have works, show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"* (James 2:18).

Rita vanderWal

TRUE LOVE

We all know the beautifully written and famous 'love text' in 1 Corinthians 13 that is often used as a wedding text.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own; is not provoked; thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things".

And verse 13 states:

"Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

So what's the deal with love? Why is it considered the 'greatest'? And believe me, this text is only a small start. There are many more texts in the Bible

that emphasize how important love is. 1 John 4:8 states:

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love".

Wow. It looks like we can't live without love.

So we know that love is important, but what is love? Love is often thought of as a feeling. We may experience falling in love, or we may 'love' doing something. But is this really love? What about all the qualities of love that we read about in 1 Corinthians 13? I admit that I've always thought this text was saying: "If you are able to suffer long, be kind, not envy or parade yourself etc than you definitely have true love."

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TRUE LOVE (CONTINUED)

Much to my surprise, the reality is much different than this. 1 Corinthians 13 tell us that love is a *conscious choice* and an *action*. In other words, true love requires effort. In order to show true love we must *try* to be patient, we must *try* to be kind, *try* to be humble and not envious. Just to give a more practical example, I'd like to share this quote with you from "Passion and Purity" by Elisabeth Elliot:

"Love must be patient when tempted to be impatient. Love must not be selfish, even if other people are. Love does not take offence, though people are offensive sometimes. We all make mistakes, but love does not keep score. There are things to be faced, but nothing love can't face, things to try love's faith, discourage its hope, and call for its endurance; but it keeps right on trusting hoping and enduring. Love never ends."

So this is true love!

Love is something that has to be worked on, something that requires thought, something we have to learn to exercise and something that is a big responsibility! This applies to both romantic love and brotherly love. In both cases, we must *work* on showing love, using the words in 1 Corinthians 13 and our knowledge of God's love as our example and guide.

But what exactly is God's love? 1 John 4:8 gives us a balanced view of what this love really is. It does not say "Love is god", but rather "God is love". If we rephrased the text to: "Love is god" we would have the view that love is anything that makes us feel good and we can do anything we want to get this love, and this kind of love rules our lives. But true love mirrors the love of God, Who is holy, just and perfect. If we have real love for God, this will reflect into real love for our neighbour and real love for our romantic partner, husband or wife. God's kind of love is directed outward to others and is not directed at doing what feels good for ourselves. And it is through His strength and

through the power of the Holy Spirit within us that we are able to become more like Him and show real love to others in all our relationships.

So where's the romance in all this? The warm and fuzzy kind of love? I'm sure it's around somewhere, after all, God created us with natural desires also. But I have to tell you, that if our only focus is on feelings of physical attraction, we are missing out on something far greater. Sure, warm-fuzzy love feels great, but does it satisfy every corner and aspect of our lives? Paul tells us in Ephesians 3:17-19 that God's love is the only love that is wide enough and deep enough to satisfy. God's love is total, and it reaches every corner of our experience. The text speaks about the width of God's love, which covers the breadth of our own experiences and is wide enough to reach out across the whole world. It speaks about the length of God's love, in that it continues with us for the length of our lives. It speaks about the depth of God's love, in that it reaches to the depths of discouragement, despair and even death. And finally it speaks about the height of God's love, describing that God's love rises even to the heights of our celebration and elation. What a wonderful comfort and joy! What's more, we know that we cannot be separated from the love of God.

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38, 39).

Wow. I'd have that kind of love any day. What an example for us! It is my prayer that we can reflect God's love in all our relationships. And may it bring you much happiness, joy and peace.

Clare Bergsma

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I'd like to commend brother Adrian Hordyk on his efforts in submitting an article titled 'A Christian Environmentalist'. I found this article interesting, informative and thought provoking. With your permission I'd like to add to Adrian's contribution and give further clarification to the Environmentalist movement's premise. Hopefully this will provoke some more thoughts for discussion!

Like any other Uni Student, I opted for an elective that would give me some easy credits: Environmental Education. I found this unit particularly interesting. I was challenged to pinpoint the Environmentalist's main premise and compare it with Scripture.

Environmental Sustainability is obviously the key word in question. I'd like, therefore, to provide some background information to unpack this term and provide further insight.

In early days environmental concerns and problems were left to the scientists. It was often considered that these concerns and problems were scientific problems and it was thought that science and technology could and would rectify and solve the emerging environmental crisis.¹² Man was driven by a 'user' worldview.

Progressively man became aware that earth's resources will diminish with this worldview and therefore at an International conference in Stockholm in 1972 world leaders adopted a reductionist approach to environmental sustainability. This effort proved fruitless and in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro it was officially recognised that

education was the fundamental tool in the quest for an environmentally sustainable future.

This summit recognised the fact that a paradigm shift in education had to occur in order to facilitate a sustainable future. So this summit set out to change the worldview, a worldview that would teach people to treat the earth like a god: hence the term Mother Earth! This paradigm shift in education is important to note because it was dovetailed with Darwin's theory of evolution: man is one with the earth because he evolved together with it. Man belongs to the animal kingdom and therefore must share the earth with all his counterparts. Wheeler and Martin state that 'man cannot be separated from his environment ... he is both creature and creator of the surroundings he inhabits'.¹³ A new worldview therefore was coined to promote environmental sustainability and it's this worldview that has permeated all of life.

The idea that man is one with the earth took hold of all education policies worldwide. This was the paradigm shift in education! God gave man dominion over the earth, to till it and to sustain it; however, because of sin man used the earth without any due regard to his mandate and so exploited his resources carelessly. Education's paradigm shifted from a so-called dominion oriented worldview to one that puts man on par with the creation. This worldview is particularly evident in the many wonderful tourist attractions that we visit from time to time: the zoo, Underwater World, national parks, etc.

Have you visited the zoo lately? Do you remember going to the zoo when all the

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¹² A. Gough, 1997. *Environmental Education in Australia: policy, trends and the problems of marginalisation*. The Australian Council for Education Research Ltd, Victoria, Australia. p.3.

¹³ K. Wheeler and G. Martin, 1975. *Insights to Environmental Education*. Oliver & Boyd, Great Britain. p. 2.

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animals were locked up in concrete cages? Have you noticed that you're now made to feel part of the habitat of the animals? Have you noticed that there's an effort to remove all environmental print educating the public about the animal on display or the view being observed in a national park? That's because environmental educationists want you to feel part of the surroundings, to drink it in and become one with it. Take Underwater World for example, you're made to feel part of the environment of the animals; you're encouraged to feel one with them. Have you ever been to a National Park where there's a sign that has a hole in it instead of print on it? The idea is that you look through the hole and feel part of the landscape, you must become one with the landscape! And when you feel one with the

earth, you will be incited to think about sustainability!

It's because of this reason that there's such a debate about killing a shark that attacked a surfer or diver. It's for this reason that Greenies hug trees in desperation to save the forests! It's because of this reason that people have become worshipers of the earth instead of worshipers of God.

Are you an environmentalist? Should you be environmentalist? Can you be environmentalist? What is your worldview?

Stephen Houweling

Editor Response

I would like to thank brother Stephen Houweling on his response and comments regarding my article. It is important that we realize that the recent environmentalist movement is, by and large, ungodly and humanistic. They appear to, at least in some cases, have the right ideas but for all the wrong reasons. It seems the word *environmentalist* or any related words are quickly and perhaps automatically identified with the unchristian and Darwinian worldview.

Perhaps it is time that we, as Christians, show to the world the true meaning of environmentalism, and the reason behind it; Glorifying God by admiring and caring for His Creation.

Adrian Hordyk

Christians and the Environment

SPYSC Discussion Evening – 16 September

Review of speech given by Ruth de Vos

There is something about the words 'Christians and the Environment' that often causes people to think, "Oh, come on - the state of the 'environment' is just the hobby-horse of tree-hugging, fanatical hippies who want to turn us all into greenies." Or, at best, provoke the reaction of, "Look, we know that there are problems in the world, but God's in control. And one day creation will be restored anyway."

If you admit to either of these responses – which you probably will – then read on.

It's obvious that if we look around there is a lot 'wrong' with the environment – problems of water shortages, landfills, toxic wastes and

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ozone-depletion, just to name a few. It's also clear that many people in the world too have concerns about the environment. Unfortunately, many of these are the tree-hugging, let's-chain-ourselves-to-bulldozers types. So how should *we*, as young Christians, view the environment and its growing list of problems? With panic, resignation, guilt, depression, apathy?

First of all, it may be of interest to know that Christians are actually *blamed* for the problems in the environment! Yes, Christianity, that man-centred, dominating, aggressive religion is apparently one of the biggest causes of environmental problems. In the South West of Australia, for example, many people will argue that the Christian work ethic was responsible for the destruction of acres of natural forest in the timber industry, and creation of acid pits because of mining. The church provided the moral justification for this destructive process in the name of 'progress.'

Well, in a way this is true, really. Yet people who argue this way should look past Genesis 1:28 to the account of the fall into sin. The fact that man is *sinful* is the real problem, not the fact that man was given dominion over creation. And so it follows that if people do not recognise sin as the cause of the environment's problems, they will not have the perspective that Christ is the ultimate cure. In Romans 8 we read, "*creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*" Yet this is not an excuse to sit back and rest smugly on the knowledge that Christ will redeem creation to its original perfection.

We should treat creation *now* with a view to how creation will be *then*. This involves loving creation for its God-given value. As Christians, we don't have an emotional attachment to nature because we are "one" with it. We do not refuse to cut down trees

because we might not be able to breathe without it or feel guilty for hurting it; this is a man-centred world view. We love creation because it contains fellow creatures of a glorious God, which – like ourselves – have a purpose. Simply put, in loving God the Creator we will have respect for His handiwork, and love creation simply because He made it.

We must also remember that as God-appointed stewards in creation we haven't been given things in creation for our economic gain. We must live in harmony with creation, working for the good of the Lord in an accountable and efficient manner – think of the parable of the steward. Above all, we mustn't forget that our Christian world view is God-centred. We live as pilgrims in this world, in the world but not of it. This means self-denial. Non-conformity. Avoiding a consumer mentality, being critical and sober about consumption. It may even mean – and dare it be mentioned? – not buying trendy, fuel-guzzling, shiny new four-wheel-drives for the sake of appearances.

Being a Christian steward also means not ignoring the measures that are available to us – even if this simply involves recycling and careful water usage. Don't be destroyers, or at best, simply lament the situation. And we must not forget the importance of prayer. Pray that God's creation be preserved, and pray that the government act responsibly in this area too. We may also be thankful that God bestows gifts on non-believers to be able to develop solutions to environmental problems.

So instead of thinking that the 'environment' is the realm of fanatical greenies, look at it this way: to be good Christians means loving God and His creation. On the other hand, don't be afraid to hug a tree – and see the work and beauty of your Creator!

Stefanie Koens

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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| Editorial Board: | Eric Dekker (EIC) |
| Colette Groenewold | Adrian Hordyk |
| Hugo Hordyk | Rosanne Numan |
| Rose Vermeulen | Arend Witten |

Editorial Address
3187 Albany Hwy, Armadale, 6112
eric.dekker@frsa.asn.au

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