



The Christian Inquirer

Seeking wisdom in an Age of Information

"... with Christ Jesus himself as the chief
cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20)
"Test everything ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

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The toy, the tree and the Rabbi

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Some time ago a Rabbi was executed on a tree. The Rabbi is usually thought of as the Saviour, but there is much else to Jesus. He did not retire from teaching when he died; he was teaching while he died. His death is very largely *how* he taught.

We have to backtrack. The Father has a problem. His subject is a very difficult one because his subject is himself. And God is unfathomable, inscrutable. How does he get his students to fathom the unfathomable; scrutinize the inscrutable? On top of that, his students are dim-witted, reluctant learners. As Scripture says, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."¹ People find it hard to take in the Supreme Being. How easily they are swayed by isolated verses or experiences. How easily they grab hold of one attribute of God at the expense of others. So, love takes precedence over justice (or the other way around). Or power takes precedence over wisdom. And they either cannot or will not see that their lives are no private, local affair. They reach even further than our globe. They move heaven. How can he possibly teach the limited that their decisions can affect the infinite? How can he teach things that are too big for them to grasp easily? God has to be a remedial teacher.

God did it, as good teachers do, by resizing the matter. He reached down to the level of his pupils. For a while, postpone thinking about the grand themes of Yahweh in heaven's relationship to earth or God's sovereignty in relation to human responsibility. Think one man, a tree on a hill and some soldiers. God went the way of the cross surely in condescension to those who are so easily swayed by the concrete and

the local. As they nailed the Rabbi to the cross, God taught us many things. In one fell swoop he taught us that he is loving and just, wise and powerful, great and humble. And he taught us that mere creatures, including very religious ones, are wicked and capable enough to do something of enormous consequence. They can even kill The Truth and The Light himself. When Jesus died, the darkness was not just global, the gloom reached far into heaven and into the heart of the Grieving Father. The Rabbi forever demonstrated that even finite actions can have big – even eternal consequences and that this is true even though God is sovereign.

Some have difficulty seeing this. For instance, Congressman John Shimkus of Illinois testified before a special committee on climate change that "The earth will end only when God declares it's time to be over" recalling God's promise to Noah.² He implied that we need not concern ourselves over global warming. He has failed to learn from the Rabbi on the tree. Could Jesus have given a more poignant lesson than his sacrificial death? The bible teaches that Christ's time was also up when God said so, yet this does not stop wicked men from being accountable for his death. As Scripture says, "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."³ The Congressman's time is also up when God says so. Presumably this does not stop him from looking after himself. God's sovereignty in no way relinquishes humans from responsibility. This applies to the Cross and it applies to the globe. Thinking through the Cross is the antidote to half-baked theology.

In another instance, the so-called "Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming" says, "We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God's intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth's climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history... We "deny that carbon dioxide—essential to all plant growth—is a pollutant."⁴

The scientific community differs with them regarding the global warming being *merely* natural.⁵ But even if it was, so are asteroids colliding with the earth. It would still be perfectly sensible to try to prevent it. Scientists agree with them that carbon dioxide is not a

pollutant. Neither is water, but global flooding would still be a problem. They claim to know the truth about global climate, yet have failed to obtain the truth from the Rabbi on the tree. You cannot get a more robust, better provision for human flourishing than God himself. This did not stop the wicked from putting The Truth to death. What God provides can still be destroyed - even if only temporarily.

If our actions can have consequences for heaven, how about for the earth? Is it really possible that our lifestyle could impact the entire planet? Again, this is something many, including the very religious, have difficulty seeing.

We cannot or will not see that our appetite for stuff means carbon dioxide gets pumped into the atmosphere with enormous global consequences. We struggle to join the dots. Gallup reports that "48% of Americans now believe that the seriousness of global warming is generally exaggerated, up from 41% in 2009 and 31% in 1997."⁶ Part of the problem is that global warming and our moral response to it is a difficult, complex subject. It is very easy to be swayed by the local and concrete over the global and statistical. I don't feel the 0.3 to 0.6°C increase in mean global surface temperature since the late 19th century.⁷ So it seems less real than the unusually colder winter I felt last year. And I'm ridiculously too limited to sense that the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached its highest concentration in nearly a million years⁸ or to experience the full impact of the economist Nicholas Stern's prediction of a potential 20 percent decline in the world economy due to of global warming.⁹

Inspired by the Rabbi

Jesus is not just a Rabbi; he is the Rabbi of rabbis. He teaches us how to teach. When the subject is big and inaccessible - resize it and make it accessible. Sometime ago I wrote a simulation called *Toys and Trees* for this purpose that is available here.¹⁰ However, I have written a new simulation for the *Creatures* artificial life system with its endearing teddy-bear-like creatures called Norns because it provides a far more emotionally impactful environment.



The user can play with Norns and watch them make decisions - decisions that have big consequences for them. There is a factory that produces toys and releases a greenhouse gas - carbon dioxide. This is not a problem because I also made a tree that converts the carbon dioxide to oxygen. However, if a Norn gets greedy and makes toys too quickly, the tree cannot keep up. The temperature will continue to rise and rise and the tree will die. The Norn is also capable of chopping down the tree. Either way, the Norn will eventually give a whimper and die too. Game over. No more Norns and no more toys. The idea, of course, is that death of the Norn will instruct; that it will help the user appreciate the inter-connectedness of toys, trees and Norns. A video clip of the simulation is available [here](#).¹¹



And the idea is that the user will make the connection between human acquisition and global warming. Our lust to have, display and control is changing the world. The gloom of pollution fills city skies, chimneys replace trees and global warming threatens devastation.

How much of our technology is functional and how much of it is a monument to human glory? This is where people need to look up at The Rabbi on the tree. When Jesus prays, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you,"¹² he is talking about his crucifixion. While the wicked were cutting down a tree to display Roman glory, the Father was revealing himself. Jesus showed that one can achieve glory without carbon-producing trappings. Instead, he used sacrifice. The God revealed through the cross is the One who made himself nothing. Jesus leaves an enormous spiritual footprint with a tiny carbon one. This is how to impact the planet! How the world needs to worship The Rabbi on the tree for the world's sake!

If you found this article helpful please give it to someone else.

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Notes

¹ Romans 3:11.

² Genesis 8:21-22.

³ Acts 2:23.

⁴ <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/articles/read/an-evangelical-declaration-on-global-warming/>

⁵ Perhaps the clearest evidence comes from ice core studies which show that, "At no time during the last eight interglacial warm periods had CO₂ concentrations topped 280–300 ppm. At the time these scientists were conducting their analyses, the air they were breathing contained CO₂ concentrations of 345–382 ppm—truly unprecedented elevations of CO₂." Goldstein, N. (2009) *Global Warming*. Facts On File, Inc., New York, p. 22.

⁶ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/126560/americans-global-warming-concerns-continue-drop.aspx>.

⁷ Maslin, M. (2004) *Global Warming: A Very Short Introduction* Distinguish between weather and climate). Oxford University Press, p. 52.

⁸ Goldstein, N. (2009) *Global Warming*. Facts On File, Inc., New York, p. 23.

⁹ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm

¹⁰ http://www.mikelanderson.co.za/sgg/m2m8_1.htm

¹¹

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQoqkqoef08&feature=plcp&context=C43f5cdeVDvjVOa1PpcFMAV6bcC3aABiMwA5DLdw0SisoYNCmmezE=>

¹² John 17:1.