

Along the track

We Are Guardians of the Future

Do you ever look at little children and wonder what sort of world they will see, what changes they will experience, what sort of life they will have? If we look back over our own lives, change has been constant and ever increasing. That's not new – every generation has experienced the complexity of change. Some thousands of years ago, the psalmist wrote:

Whereas I am often frightened when I think about the future,
and confused and disturbed by the rapidly changing events about me,
my heart is secured and made glad, when I remember how God has cared for me throughout the past. (Psalm 105)

There are times when change or the circumstances we find ourselves in can cause us to be disturbed, to be confused, even frightened. But if we take the time to retrace our steps, to look back over our lives, we can see God's guiding hand. We can look to the future with hearts 'made glad' by this discovery.

So where do we begin to build the future we want to see? We can begin by taking on board that the earth is not just a stage upon which human beings get to love, work and play, something that has value only in relationship to us, something solely for our own use. If we take scripture seriously, we can see that like us, it too is God's work of art. Ultimately we are only part of God's creation. The world does not exist simply for our benefit. Physical creation has value in itself, independent of us. It's very existence reveals something of God to each of us by its beauty, its vastness, the incredible ways it can move us to wonder and awe and yet make us stunned by what appears as its destructive power.

We are guardians of that creation – the environment in which we and future generations will live. What we do today, what we neglect to do, can have a profound effect on creation and thus the future generations who come to live with it. Scripture asks us to recognise the intrinsic value of the earth itself – as God said on each day of creation, "it is good". Scripture challenges us to recognise that the world has value in itself, apart from us, not just so that we can insure ourselves a continued supply of air, water, and food by better safe-guarding the integrity of creation. What we hand over to future generations is within our own grasp, that will be as good or as depleted as we decide, it will be made up of the decisions you and I make each day.

Thinking about our desired future means deciding what we value in our present way of doing things. What in our current system of beliefs and values do we want to hand on? We belong to a different world than twenty or thirty or forty or more years ago – simply hanging on to the past doesn't serve anyone well. Whether we like it or not, a new world is being born which does not necessarily accept our values, our beliefs, our way of doing things. If we

want others to respect and perhaps even embrace our beliefs and values, we must place honestly and sincerely our trust in them again – we must begin by living up to the things we say we believe in.

Surely respect for life, for example, is the cornerstone of our culture, especially life in its most fragile forms. Without such a belief, it is the strong who decide the fate of the weak, and human beings therefore become instruments of other human beings. Sorting out what that means for us is becoming more critical by the day – medical technology and advances give us greater control over life, even extend it where that was not possible a few short years ago. Despite the financial cost, we have come to take such technology for granted but how will we make it available to all of us, not just those who have the resources to purchase it? Deciding what we can do for those very vulnerable, those who are poor, must be an important priority and that includes those desperate people who arrive on our shores almost daily.

If we wish our hearts and those of future generations 'to be secure and made glad', a commitment to peace and justice would seem essential. Next generations will surely ask us how we treated the most vulnerable, the most disadvantaged in our communities. They will ask us how we built understanding, tolerance and co-operation in our neighbourhoods. They will ask us how we resisted violence as a means to solve disagreements. The entertainment industry's glorification of violence, which plays games with the emotions of fear and aggression, makes us less able to confront serious issues we face today, less able to seek peaceful and constructive solutions.

Seeking deep and lasting peace is a challenge. Does our example encourage the next generation to pursue compassion and fairness, does our example encourage them to build a world that promotes understanding, equality of gender as well as race, co-operation and appreciation of other cultures?

We belong to a world characterised by the greatest movement of peoples in history. If we wish for a world of peace and harmony, we Christians in the West must not only value the precious freedom of our own culture, but also work to understand cultures with distinctly different values, different worldviews. Sooner or later, we will have to learn to communicate and dialogue effectively with peoples of other such cultures and beliefs. Sadly, an enormous chasm of mutual ignorance and mutual distrust lies between the Islamic and our world. How we deal with that today will very much condition the world of the future.

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