

On this day of extreme high winds you will not be comforted to know that one climatologist recently declared that there is now ‘no natural weather left’, that everything we now experience in terms of weather is the result of human decision or, better, *action*, for if we’d known the consequences of our actions we would have acted otherwise. But another commentator on climate change is not too sure and identifies a certain ‘cognitive dissonance’ inherent in our response; in other words it doesn’t matter how bad it gets we can still rationalise the enormity of what’s happening away; it’s a nice mild day in January so let’s enjoy it; we’ve survived this storm, we’ll survive the next – and so on. Or, to quote Mark O’Connell directly:

It’s not the melting of the ice-caps or the burning of the forests that seem to me to be the real apocalyptic scenario, but rather the slow atrophying of our moral imaginations; not the inferno itself, but the indifference of those of us who are not yet on fire.

(Guardian 3 Jan 2020)

This problem of ‘cognitive dissonance’ is not, however, new. It seems to have been with us from the beginning and characterised by the story of the Fall: the hiding in the garden from the truth of God, that is, from things as they are, from reality. Salt and light are Christ’s metaphorical means of restoring us to clear sight; of enabling us to overcome our moral insipidness and lack of vision. If we see them only as a moral burden though – we *must* be salt, we *must* be light – we’ll only make the problem worse as Paul so clearly realises:

Far from relying on any power of my own, I came among you in great ‘fear and trembling’ and in my speeches and sermons that I gave, there were none of the arguments that belong to philosophy; only a demonstration of the power of the Spirit.

If the current worsening of the climate has anything to teach us, it’s the hubris of human nature in relying on its own power to save us from ourselves. We become salt and light for others only by taking in the salt and light of God; that is, by taking on God’s light and savour. *Taste and see that the Lord is good* is the beginning of this wisdom: its end is to be so full of God’s light that others see God in us. A tall order – but only if we don’t let God in; if we don’t let God do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Indeed, since it’s always a reflected glory, we won’t even be aware of it ourselves – but others will see it in the good works we do and the joy with which we do them. Heaven knows, this change of heart might even enable us to reverse the damage of climate change.

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