



SAFER

WORLD

FOR

ALL.



THEOLOGY PAPER, BY REV. TIM COSTELLO

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In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

GENESIS 1:1, 3-4

***Safer World for All* is an advocacy campaign created by Micah Australia to focus our nation on our generosity levels for the world's most vulnerable, the urgent need to protect our environment, and the power of creating fairer systems that include the world's poorest nations.**

It is an advocacy campaign to separate the light from the darkness—and to celebrate the light.

THE BIBLICAL ROOTS OF ADVOCACY

Many Christians are nervous about advocacy, thinking it is divisive and has nothing to do with faith, worship and evangelism. Yet evangelism itself is simply advocating for the reign of God and inviting people to surrender to the rule of Jesus and to worship God.

More generally, advocacy is speaking up and out in the name of the God of Jesus.

You can see advocacy throughout the Bible. It is there in the beginning: *God speaks and...* The world comes into being through the advocacy of God. In the creation, according to Genesis chapter 1, God speaks eight times and things come into existence. Time and space and all of life comes into existence through advocacy.

You and I are not God, but we are called to speak out and create space for something new and something different. You see, advocacy is creative. It opens up space that was not there before. From Moses through the Hebrew prophets to John the Baptist and Paul, we see the worshippers of God speaking out and creating something new.

(PREVIOUS) FIDELIA SOARES & HER DAUGHTER DOMINGAS ARE INVOLVED IN CARE'S YOUNG WOMEN YOUNG NATION EDUCATION PROJECT IN LIQUICA, TIMOR-LESTE. PHOTO: JOSH ESTEY/CARE

STUDENTS OF MALA LIA GIRLS SCHOOL
AT THE WELL, TARIN KOWT,
URUZGAN PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN.
PHOTO: LORRIE GRAHAM



JESUS ADVOCATED FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus announces in his first Nazareth sermon in Luke 4 that the rule and kingdom of God has begun and that it is particularly good news for the poor. The kingdom of God, as Jesus spoke of it, is a radically alternative space.

It is not the rule of a monarch or a president with a powerful military, border control of sovereign territory, and defence of its self-interest against threats from neighbours. No! It is a global rule of service, of suffering and of love—something completely transformative that transcends nationalism and political sovereignty and which is good news for all.

It is a new rule and a new ruler that delivers a safer world for all, so that *all* may flourish and know that they are loved. It is especially good news for the most vulnerable—for the lame, the blind, the poor and those in the chains of oppression.

The advent of the kingdom comes at the cost of Jesus' own life. God was, in Messiah Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself. The cross teaches us that at the heart of Christian faith is God coming in Jesus and, after announcing this new rule, suffering as a vulnerable victim.

Christian faith always begins as an ethical vision from the point of view of the suffering of a vulnerable victim—that is what the cross of Christ means! And in the resurrection of Jesus there is a new creation launched. A reconciliation of the world with the creator God has been initiated.

Your advocacy and mine, therefore, is simply inviting people to be reconciled to the God of Jesus and to his rule. To live in the power of his spirit in this present age.

This is good news for the poor, and good news for you and me, and good news for all of God's creation.

CREATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD TO YOU AND ME

“In the beginning, God...” is a cornerstone of this campaign for another reason.

To the dominant secular mind searching for scientific causes and iron clad consequences in this world, we offer the seismic belief that creation was God’s gift and an act of love.

There was a beginning (whether we refer to it as the ‘big bang’ or not) and the galaxies and the earth were formed. They were not eternal, always there and therefore equal to God. In acknowledging that there was a beginning, we confess that God did not need to create.

You and I—and the entire world—were not necessary. God was self-sufficient and did not need us. But out of freedom and his love he spoke, and creation came into being.

This is important. God loves us and honours us and even made humans in his own image, but we were not necessary. Our disposition to God therefore is not self-importance and necessity but gratitude and praise.

In many other religions, there is often a trading mindset or an equation of barter. The thinking goes “if we make sacrifices to the gods, then in times of trouble, like sickness, food shortages, or war, the gods might owe us their support”. Humanity has something to trade with the gods. Everything becomes a contract or a deal struck for personal benefit.

Yet the Christian understanding is different because of this conviction—that everything we have is a gift, given by grace.

NATURAL WETLANDS SUCH AS THIS
AREA IN NORTHERN VIETNAM
SUPPORT MILLIONS OF LIVELIHOODS.
PHOTO: BRUCE BAILEY



HOW CAN WE AS CHRISTIANS ADDRESS THESE ISSUES EFFECTIVELY?

So, how can we effectively care for the most vulnerable among us, care for God’s creation, and bring the debtors out of bondage?

In Australia and much of the developed world, we are mindful of trying to find the right balance between the bookends of government and the market. More government is not always the answer and can lead to unnecessary red tape inhibiting the market, but government does offer one pathway through which God’s work can be furthered.

When it comes to large-scale issues such as protecting the environment and combating disadvantage, an effective way Christians can act is through our governments, regardless of our politics.

Markets may be more efficient than governments at allocating preferences and distributing scarce resources, but inevitably some people are left behind and the vulnerable are forgotten. So there is an important role for government in a Christian vision of freedom, opportunity and flourishing for all God’s children.

In the secular capitalist world view, the market paradigm sees us compete for finite resources. Usually, the wealthy “win” over the poor, who have nothing to exchange. Everything has a price and everything can be exchanged. But if you lack resources you have little to exchange and therefore you get left behind.

This is true even of the environment. But remember that nature’s whole existence is simply in fulfilling and unfolding itself purely for its own sake and without any thought of a goal. It resists the instrumental logic of the market paradigm.

As Christians, we believe that other species and all of nature also carry the stamp of the Creator and exist for their own sake, not just

ours. There is beauty and a sense of awe: “How majestic oh Lord are the heavens and the earth... what is man, that you are mindful of him?” as King David puts it in Psalm 8.

We believe that there is no deal we can make with God when he gives us everything we have and when he doesn’t need us. We are simply his joyful, grateful children who thank him that he wants a relationship with us and so we honour him. But this understanding of God’s self-sufficiency has a deeper implication. If it means we who are strong have nothing to trade, then it is especially good news for those who are poor, weak, aged and vulnerable.

The plight of the vulnerable is that they have absolutely nothing and that penalizes them in a global market. But God does not cast them—or us!—aside because we have nothing to trade, as the market would. Instead, he freely gives to those who cannot stand on their own two feet and have no bargaining power. “Blessed are the poor,” said Jesus (Luke 6:20).

The primacy of this gift—given because we are not necessary but still are loved—is the foundation for a caring and compassionate world. It is the foundation for a safer world for all.

Put simply, for Christians, caring for our environment and for the vulnerable need not be political. It’s a natural and indispensable part of Christian discipleship.

Safer World for All is simply about actualising God’s call to help those who need it most. We are for the flourishing of all.

AS GOD’S IMAGE BEARERS, WE CAN MAKE A SAFER WORLD

And there is another thing in the creation account which is a foundation for *Safer World for All*.



So, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them.

GENESIS 1:27, MY EMPHASIS ADDED

Though we are not necessary, God nevertheless created us all in his own image. This means two things for a safer world.

Firstly, it safeguards the dignity of *all* people, even those who drew the last ticket in the lottery of latitude and were not born in safe, prosperous Australia. All people—including those in Gaza, South Sudan, the Congo or any other of the world’s hellish war-torn regions—are loved by God and made in God’s image, despite having nothing to trade.

The second thing is that we are only made in the *image* of God. We are not God. We must remember humbly our frame is but dust, as the Psalmist puts it, or as Isaiah points out, that the grass withers and the flower fades, and so, in our turn, will we.

The narcissism and self-centred exaltation of celebrities and influencers and the rich is the stuff of glossy magazines and countless profiles. They become the yardstick but look closer and you see how confused and unhappy so many of these culture bearers actually are.

Soren Kierkegaard said, “the door to happiness turns outwards.” So many successful people think they are gods—they have made it, and they are successful. But, in reality, worldly success is a door that turns *inwards*, and it is little surprise that so many are deeply unhappy.

Instead, with humility and a proper perspective of our own limitations, you and I are called to turn outward, to extend a helping hand as an expression of the love that God has for us.

STUDENTS STUDY AT SHREE SAHARA BAL
PRIMARY SCHOOL, POKHARA, NEPAL.
PHOTO: JIM HOLMES



ENCOURAGING PEOPLE OF ALL POLITICS TO LIFT OUR AID LEVELS

Christians in Australia give nearly two thirds of all the donations received by Australian Aid agencies seeking to help the world’s poorest. Even secular agencies have appointed staff to relate to Christians and churches. Christians steward their money and usually donate 10% of their income. They understand that charity is just the old English word for love and their generosity expresses God’s love for the poor—and who can really be against that?

The waters can be quickly muddied when politics are involved, but *Safer World for All* aims to engage people of all politics (and none) in the effort to address these major issues.

We will seek to remind those on the progressive side of politics about charity and stewardship.

Progressives sometimes deprecate charity as not good enough because the poor need justice. And they do! But progressives sometimes are too quick to demand things of government when they have not emphasized the importance of personal charity and stewardship.

Safer World for All is not just directed at government but at how our own lifestyles can “remember the poor”. That phrase comes from the settlement of a dispute over Gentile believers at the first Jerusalem Council and is recounted by the Apostle Paul and he concludes his description of that council in Galatians 2:17, “Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” This pledge is at the heart of the gospel and the authorized pronouncement by the first ever gathered Church Council. This is why I am so proud that most churches today have partnerships in the developing world and regularly support appeals for those in greatest need, both at home and overseas.

But *Safer World for All* will also address the level of Government Aid. Under recent conservative governments, Australia’s aid has been cut to its lowest levels in our history. It is down to 0.19% of GNI and we are near the bottom of the OECD table of 28 nations when it comes to generosity. Yet we are in the top 10 nations when it comes to wealth. This is not the Australian way! So, *Safer World for All* will ask for something very modest. Could we not aim to just be at least in the middle of the OECD pack?

Conservatives often are strong on security and defence spending and that is right. I am grateful, for example, that we can support Ukraine with military hardware as we are fighting there for

civilizational values not just self-interest. We want smaller nations to determine their own future and not to be bullied and assaulted by bigger neighbours. Because we believe in intrinsic dignity, we believe in self-determination for nations.

But defence spending must be harnessed to the soft power of development to protect civilizational values. When our aid levels are so shamefully low, our soft power is undermined. We need AUKUS submarines but we also need generous levels of aid. We do not set one off against the other—we need both. Keep sending Bushmasters to Ukraine, yes. But why are we not sending our fair share of dollars for food to sub-Saharan Africa, where famine stalks millions because of the blockade of Ukrainian wheat?

The crisis of modern liberalism is watching the roll back of democracy and the advent of ethno- authoritarian, populist leaders. That should worry us.

The fruit of the gospel has been the flowering of institutions that protect the equality of all people, property rights, free speech and religious freedoms. But those gains are like cut flowers disconnected from the soil and vine.

Around the world, institutions are in crisis and being replaced by populist leaders mouthing nationalist slogans that cannot solve our complex global problems.

The UN Secretary General spoke at the General Assembly in September 2023 saying the “world has become unhinged”. The distrust of global institutions means our fragmentation and movement away from an international rules-based system leads to a world where only the strong will rule.

We believers need to tend the soil and reconnect the cut flowers to the vine if basic rights are to be protected.



GENEXPERT CARTRIDGES SUPPLIED TO VANUATU BY WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION WESTERN PACIFIC AND DFAT DURING COVID-19 RESPONSE. PHOTO: DFAT AND WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

IT'S IMPORTANT TO ALL OF US TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

There has been unnecessary fragmentation and culture wars around our environment.

It does not matter whether you believe in human induced climate change or believe it is a natural cycle. We are all now affected by more floods, storms and bushfires. It does not matter whether your politics are left or right, as we all want a clean, safe and healthy environment.

We all want our grandchildren to inherit a safer world. And whether our position is human-induced change or natural cycles, the only common path forward is a transition to cleaner energy, as more fossil fuel can only speed up the environmental challenges and changes ahead of us. Let's sidestep the foolish polarisation and focus on our kids.

Safer World for All acknowledges that Australia does not hold all the cards to solve the problem. We cannot save the world even if we stopped all our fossil fuels tomorrow. We just want to do our fair share and call on other nations to do their fair share. I might live on a street where all the nature strips are overgrown and messy. Best I not lecture others—much better I get out and mow my nature strip and set an example for the street. It is not virtue signalling to humbly take responsibility and, if asked, to explain why.

Aussies are the world's best travellers, with more outgoing tourists per head of population than any other nation. We make great ambassadors, as other cultures instinctively like us and even are envious of our achievements. Imagine being able to share that we are proud that our nation is doing its fair share to address our global environmental challenges!

Other nations notice what we do. Asian students want to study here, and India, China and other nations in our region want our exports and our respect. They will notice if we have mown our lawn.



AN AUSAID MANGROVE REHABILITATION PROJECT IN TIEN LANG DISTRICT, HAI PHONG CITY, VIETNAM. PHOTO: DFAT

WORKING FOR A SAFER WORLD IS OUR DEEP CHRISTIAN WITNESS

Safer World for All is built on the deep Christian conviction that God became flesh.

So, in Jesus we see what it means to be fully human. Following him, we are called to be the image of God—like a slanted mirror, reflecting his love into the world and reflecting the world's praise and worship back to him.

Humans will always worship something, as we are wired for worship. Sadly the objects of worship are most commonly sex, power, celebrity, money—all of which, as idols, distort our true humanity.

To worship the living God is to be truly human. Isn't that what all people yearn to know and want to embrace? Isn't that a definition of salvation?

In the New Testament, the marks of being a Christian were joy and suffering.

Joy because the power of the age to come (eternal life) has begun in the resurrection of Jesus. Suffering because we are still living in the present age with its greed, violence and anxiety. But in the overlapping of these ages we are called to live in the power of the Holy Spirit and the age that is to come.

We are to witness that this age that has begun and live with joy because of our new hope grounded in Christ.

This means that we are to live eschatologically (out of the power of the new age) rather than reducing our faith to simply moralizing. It is sad that our Church image in Australia is as moralizers imposing a moral code.

The Church was never meant to be God's police or divine law enforcement agents. Why would secular Australians listen to us lecturing them that they should not sleep together before marriage when they do not know the true God or experience the power of the Holy Spirit?

Why does everyone know what we *against* rather than what we are *for*? It makes no sense.

The good news is that this modern world needs witnesses to the age that has begun.

Together, we can show them a new world that is so different to this present age because it is committed to remember the poor and most vulnerable among us. And it remembers God's creation that is groaning and awaiting the liberation (Romans 8).

My friend, God will bring it all home. He will dwell with us on a renewed earth. Note that the final scene in Revelation is not that we will dwell with God in some place called heaven. But rather that he who made this world will dwell with us here when, finally, a safer world for all will be totally revealed.

Until then, we are to prepare for that day by our witness in this present fallen age. Our witness must be that God wants us to flourish and we work now for a safer world for all his children.

Safer World For All provides a platform for Australians to collectively raise their voices and inspire our nation's leaders to take action. It's vital that you and I—as believers, as God's people—raise our voices to join the chorus as we cry out for the sake of *all* God's children.

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