



## **The Green Bible:**

### ***A Version for Christian Environmentalists***

Having just entered the year of our Lord 2010, we are naturally asking ourselves what we may expect to happen during this new time frame. No doubt there will be many events that no one can foresee and that will take us by surprise. But there will also be developments that we can count on to take place. We can be sure that our economy will continue to be sluggish for most of this year. The war in Afghanistan is not going to end any time soon. The secularization of our society will go on unabated. The United States will have their congressional elections in November while Canadians will likely go to the polls this spring or summer.

### **The Ongoing Debate on Climate Change**

Another thing that will dominate the news this year is the global warming debate. Copenhagen may be behind us, but its failure to produce anything of substance should not be interpreted to mean that the discussions regarding climate change have come to an end. If anything, they will intensify. Despite the shocking revelations of the Climate-gate scandal, which should have resulted in a thorough review of the scientific data on which the theory of global warming is based, the proponents of this theory are as determined as ever to force their ideas upon an increasingly confused and skeptical public. Although there are many eminent scientists who dispute the claims of the climate change elite, it is still the politically correct thing to do to take the dire warnings of Gore and his ilk seriously. The US government, and to a lesser degree the Canadian government, and almost all of the media, are in the pocket of the environmentalists.

### **Why the Colour Green is in**

Evidence of the success of the climate change agenda is the ubiquitous displays of the colour green. Wherever one looks this colour dominates the landscape. Green has become the symbol of environmentalists' determination to clean up the pollution allegedly caused by years of reckless spewing of CO<sub>2</sub> gas emissions into the earth's atmosphere. The culprits are the rich industrial nations of the West, which are under tremendous pressure to spend billions of dollars to drastically reduce gas emissions in their own countries and to dish out additional billions to help poor developing nations do the same. It's all about redistribution of wealth, taking it away from the rich and giving it to the poor, by force if necessary. The enforcers of this new edict are the United Nations, which is increasingly taking on the role of a world government. Its members include many left-wing nations such as Zimbabwe and Venezuela, ruled by dictators like Mugabe and Chavez respectively. These gentlemen vented out their hatred of capitalists at Copenhagen, calling them evil and immoral, salivating at the prospect of robbing them so they can ostensibly finance their clean air projects, while in reality they intend to line their own pockets with Western free enterprise gains. These scoundrels received standing ovations from the audience. This tells us a lot about the political and ideological leanings of these delegates, many of whom hailed from Canada and the United States.

### **An Environmental-Friendly Bible**

But while one can expect such environmental frenzy from secular humanists who despise religion, especially Christianity, the sad thing is that increasingly one finds professing Christians, even evangelicals, embracing the environmentalist agenda as well. Proof of this is the recent publication

of the so-called Green Bible. This Bible, based on the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), includes the following distinctive features.

**Green-letter edition:** Verses and passages referring to God's care for creation highlighted in green. Contributions by Brian McLaren, N.T. Wright, Desmond Tutu, the late Pope John Paul and many others. A green Bible index and personal study guide. Recycled paper, using soy-based ink with a cotton/linen cover. An anthology of "Teachings on Creation Through the Ages" from Clement of Rome to Rick Warren, author of the bestseller, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

A quick look at some of these contributors immediately raises one's suspicion as to the tendency of this new edition. Brian McLaren is the guru of the emerging church movement. N.T. Wright is one of the founders of the New Perspective on Paul theory. Desmond Tutu is an Anglican bishop known for his activist role in the anti Apartheid movement in South Africa.

It is not my intention to evaluate the NRSV as such, but the Green letter edition based on it. Our readers will know that today we are not only offered a plethora of new Bible versions, but many of them are marketed towards specific customers as well. Go to any Christian or even secular bookstore such as Chapters or Barnes and Noble and you will see Bibles aimed at almost any demographic constituency imaginable. There are Bibles for everyone from toddlers to teenagers, young married, seniors and recovering addicts. But in addition to these we now have a Bible aimed at environmentalists as well.

### **Why a Green Bible?**

Supporters of the Green Bible, which highlights passages related to the creation or nature and man's responsibility to preserve and protect it, hope that this version will encourage more Christians, particularly evangelicals, to support the efforts of environmentalist to preserve Planet Earth. One of them, Rusty Pritchard, editor of *Creation Care Magazine*, an eco-friendly publication for evangelicals, writes "*When you look at it through that lens, it really jumps out at you that God is calling us to care for the world around us*" (Quoted from a review of the Green Bible by Ginger D. Richardson, Dec. 29, 2008 in *The Arizona Republic* – down loaded from internet.).

There is some merit in what Pritchard writes. The Bible does address the issue of stewardship regarding the creation in more passages than we may be aware of. We all know of verses like Genesis 1:26-28 and 9:1, 2, 7, which deal with man's dominion over the lower creation. But there are many more references in Scripture to man's obligation to take care of God's creation and to treat it with respect. The Green Bible highlights these verses and passages in a powerful and "right in your face" way.

Already on its home page it draws attention to what it regards as the theme for the entire project by quoting Romans 8:19-21:

*"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God; for the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."*

### **The Basic Flaw of the Green Bible**

However, while the editors of the Green Bible are correct in pointing out that the creation is suffering, they do not explain, at least not sufficiently and biblically, the reason why it is in bondage to corruption. In fact, by highlighting in green all passages referring to the creation and man's care, or rather, lack of care for it, they have shifted the focus away from the essential message of Scripture, which is man's redemption from sin against the *Creator* rather than the Creation or the environment. As another reviewer, himself an ardent environmentalist, writes, "*subjecting the whole of Scripture to one agenda enfolding it in the single adjective green – is, I think, an ill-judged strategy for pursuing a worthwhile goal.*" (Alan Jacobs in *First Things*, May, 2009, down loaded from internet).

I wonder, though, whether even the goal is so worthwhile. Many of the essays that are included in *The Green Bible* deal with the effects of pollution on people living in underdeveloped areas. Bishop Tutu writes *“the poor and vulnerable are members of God’s family and are the most severely affected by environmental disturbances created by other human beings, especially the wealthy.”* This theme is repeated so often by other contributors that it seems that being “green” or an environmentalist is a good thing because it helps the poor, while it benefits the planet only in a secondary way, as a kind of bonus.

One wonders why they are calling this the *Green Bible* rather than the *Social Justice Bible*, because their real agenda is to redistribute wealth from the have to the have-not nations. In other words, their goal is the same as that of the secular environmentalists. No wonder that the *Green Bible* has won the support of such groups as the Sierra Club and the Humane Society. These secular institutions will never say anything positive about the “red” Bible and its message of salvation through the atoning blood of Christ.

That the main purpose of the *Green Bible* is indeed the promotion of social justice through proper environmental policies becomes very clear from what we read in the “*Green Bible Trail Guide*” at the back of the book, namely that *“this (the green underlined sections) is the stuff that really matters.”* That can only mean that the rest, the non-emphasized stuff, printed in black, doesn’t matter very much.

### **Comparison with the Red Letter Bible**

At this point you may ask whether I do not also have a problem with red-letter Bibles. Why be opposed to a green letter Bible and accept one that has the words of Jesus printed in red, implying thereby that these words have greater authority than the rest of Scripture? I am not fond of such red-letter Bibles either. Many fundamentalist Christians favour these bibles because to them the words of Christ seem holier than those by mere human authors. Some have even started a “red-letter Christian” movement, which claims that by highlighting Jesus’ words they can give greater emphasis to His (supposedly) neglected statements. But while they are misguided in this effort, they are correct in stating that *“you can only understand the rest of the Bible when you read it from the perspective provided by Christ”* (Alan Jacobs, *Ibid*).

Reading the Bible from the perspective provided by green-coloured passages does not result in such an understanding. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). He is also *“the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth”* (Rom.10:4). The *Green Bible* does not emphasize these truths. The green-letter sections don’t help us understand the essence of the Gospel because it focuses our attention on the creation rather than the recreation. It separates between Christ as Mediator of the creation and Christ as Mediator of redemption. These two aspects of the work of Christ cannot be separated (Col.1:16-20). It is not enough to be well versed in creation studies and what it takes to protect God’s green earth, useful as this may be. The one thing really needful is to know Christ as Creator *and* Redeemer *and* Saviour from sin.

### **The Centrality of Christ’ Priestly Office**

Ralph Erskine says somewhere that any theology that focuses on anything other than Christ’s priestly ministry at the cross will result in serious errors. Even those who emphasize his prophetic or kingly office at the expense of His priestly office run a great risk of destroying the very essence of Christ’s purpose for coming into the world, namely to save sinners from eternal perdition. Church history has proved the correctness of Erskine’s warning. In the 1970s there were some within the Reformed constituency who taught that the Great Commission is essentially nothing more than a republication or reaffirmation of the original cultural mandate given to man in paradise. This meant that the gospel call to faith and repentance was seen as less important than the call to redeem culture, which in today’s terms would include saving the planet from the effects of man-made CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

While many evangelicals welcome the Green Bible as a helpful tool to equip believers to become more active in the environmental movement, others are fearful that such activism will distract them from the church's true mission, which is to preach repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' Name among all nations (Luke 24:47).

I firmly believe that the latter are right. This earth lies under a curse due to man's sin and cannot be restored to its original "green" and pristine beauty by human efforts. This does not mean we should do nothing to stop or reduce pollution. As Christians we are stewards of the earth. But we don't need to go about this task frantically as if the survival of our planet depends on the energy we put forth or the amount of money we are prepared to put up, even to the point of ruining our economy. The earth will continue and so will the seasons, as God promised Noah and his descendents (Gen. 8:22).

Some years the climate will be colder than usual; other years will see the temperature rise higher than what we consider "normal." There have always been ice ages of shorter or longer duration, as well as brief or prolonged heat waves. I agree with those scientists who think that human activity has little or nothing to do with climate change over time. I may be wrong, of course, but one thing is sure: this earth and all that is in it will come to an end, but only when it is God's time. Unbelievers dread that day. But Christians do not, or at least should not fear the change that is coming. The apostle Peter writes in his second epistle that *"the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up ... Nevertheless, we according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2:10, 13).

What will that new earth look like? I don't know for sure, but based on the description given of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2, green will most likely be a very prominent colour again. Meanwhile, let us look to our Great and Good Shepherd to supply all our needs and to make us lie down in the green pastures of His Word, also in the year 2010 (Ps. 23:1, 2).

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