

## Thought for the Day, Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2021



Arid. Image by [PublicDomainPictures](#) from [Pixabay](#)

This week I have been considering the contradiction between the consumerism which dominates our society, and the urgent calls for ecological change.

One might think, looking at recent media coverage, that all this is new, overlooking the fact that warnings have been out in the open for generations, a seminal moment being Rachel Carson's book, 'Silent Spring' back in 1962.

We had Vice-President Al Gore in the 1980s, we had the Rio Convention in 1992, and our very own David Attenborough has been predicting the extinction of habitats and many species for years.

Yet against this we have suffered much folly from various reactionary lunatic leaders who have denied climate change, and in their narcissism added to the world's difficulties instead of mitigating them.

But we should not blame them alone. I am not urging a guilt trip when I say that all of us are complicit, to a greater or lesser degree. I now see that my complicity was born out of my complacency. I knew, but chose to do little and say less.

I wrote this poem circa 1984.

### O-ZONE

THE SHARPNESS OF THE SUN CUTS LIKE A KNIFE  
AND EVERY BREATH DEMANDS ITS ENERGY.  
BAKED TO AN UNGLAZED CLAY,  
THE EARTH, UNFRIENDLY, SPEAKS STERILITY.

WHAT LITTLE GRASS IS LEFT IS BROWN AND SERE,  
LOOKS MORE LIKE RUSTED GIRDERS AND  
DISCARDED LEAD, THAN LIFE AND HARVEST.

AT NIGHT, ONE MOON, PALE AND WAN,  
SHOWS UP ANOTHER DEADLY LUNAR LANDSCAPE.

AND WILL THIS BE THE END OF ALL WE KNOW,  
TERRAIN AND LAUGHTER, LAND AND LOVE,  
A DEARTH OF RIPENING, DEATH OF GRASS,  
DYING OF RILLS AND DWINDLING OF STOCKS?

SWEAT BEADS ON CHILDRENS' SKIN WHO CANNOT PLAY  
OUTSIDE, AND LOCKED WITHIN THE PEOPLE HIDE,  
KNOWING IN TRUTH NO REFUGE CAN BE FOUND.

AND HOPELESS EYES GAZE INTO OTHERS FACES  
IN FUTILE SEARCH FOR STRENGTH AND FIRM FOUNDATION.

AND LIPS WILL TWIST WITH FIERCE AND FOULEST CURSES,  
TIREDLY REPEATING FORMULAE OF HATE  
FOR EVERY ANCESTOR OF ALL THE RACES,  
WHOSE ACTIONS LEFT THEIR CHILDREN TO THIS FATE.

Here in the UK, our own leaders urged us to get out and spend so as to boost economic statistics and 'consume' our way of the economic crisis of 2007-2008.

And our institutions also let us down.

In the same way that the tobacco industry ensured that the harmful effects of its product was not let loose in the public consciousness for decades, so too, large swathes of industry and finance have ignored and minimised the risks and consequences of our actions, in their obsession with profit. Even now, oil and gas and mining push for profit over planetary wellbeing.

Suddenly, because of floods and fires, people are sitting up and taking notice.<sup>1</sup> But even now, what should be the primary and principal focus of national and international policy is subordinated to other issues.

What can we do?

One answer is to embrace frugality in place of consumerism. Consumerism is the heedless pursuit of personal pleasure and amoral profiteering. Frugality is its opposite, and appears to be a forgotten virtue.

Wisdom literature, both in the Bible and elsewhere, praises moderation and warns about the risks of excess. It speaks of this in terms of personal content and satisfaction, and scripture also speaks of divine judgement - condemnation - for those who take more and in so doing, condemn others to live with less.

Sobering thoughts!

*He will always be a slave who does not know how to live upon a little ~ Horace*

*To go beyond the bounds of moderation is to outrage humanity ~ Blaise Pascal*

*Moderate profits fill the purse ~ Italian Proverb*

*Better is a little with righteousness than a large income with injustice ~ Proverbs 16:8*

What can we do about this? There is little point in offering prayers unless our life-styles accord with our petitions.

It seems to me that the woman who prays for peace but inflicts violence is unlikely to see a positive answer to her intercession!

How does the Divine react to a mumbled 'Amen' from an avaricious man in response to public intercessions that pray for relief for the poor and hungry?

Just as the pandemic has imposed change and given us an opportunity for reflection and a chance to re-order aspects of our society, the climate crisis demands an urgent re-assessment of our priorities and life-styles, both individual and corporate.

Many of these necessary- and belated -changes are quite small, and can be accomplished by individuals.

Eat less meat! Reduce private mileage! Buy local produce! Check for fair trade provenance! Consume less alcohol. Give locally,<sup>2</sup> and give generously!

Boycott companies whose products ruin environments or exploit slave labour. Prefer good ethics above convenience. Abhor plastic, especially particulates!

More, and many practical suggestions of what we can do can be found in Ruth Valerio's books, *L is for Lifestyle* and *Saying Yes to Life, the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book for 2020*.<sup>3</sup>

And for a theological framework and a global context, for suggestions and more information look here: - <https://ruthvalerio.net/>

Ruth Valerio is local, and I first met her when she was 12. She is a director of Tearfund and sometimes described as an environmental activist.



If we find that description off-putting then I suggest we check ourselves for unconscious bias.

Speakers of Words of Warning and Change are ever unpopular. Consider the fate of many prophets in Scripture! <sup>4</sup> Consider how Jeremiah's words were read out to the King, then cut up and fed to the fire so no one else could be influenced by warnings that ran counter to his public policy and royal privilege. <sup>5</sup>

Many of our leaders mistake their stewardship for Empire and their influence for Entitlement. And an unholy alliance between unbridled Commerce and Politics has brought us to catastrophe.

It is not just our biosphere that has been ignored and maltreated; it's also our spiritual environment, whence springs energy and matter, for we do not live by bread alone. <sup>6</sup>

*Less* is more in our material consumption, but we need *more* in our spiritual lives.

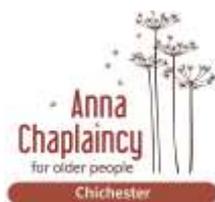
Christ Jesus is our Bread of Life <sup>7</sup> and our urgent need is for more of Him in us and given through us, to a heedless world. We have been, and are being, and will be, pricelessly and continuously fed, and in the same way that Jesus' disciples were His hands and agents in feeding the thousands, <sup>8</sup> so too are we.

And in our prudent lifestyles, in our visiting and leading services, in our kindness and care, in our listening and befriending and in our praying, that is who and what we are.

Anna Friends, I salute you!

Love and blessings, David

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<sup>1</sup> Or is this -pun intended- merely a flash in the pan?

<sup>2</sup> Our local Food Bank usage has massively increased in recent months and there is nothing to suggest that need will decline in the near future, sadly the opposite is more likely

<sup>3</sup> These and her other materials can be easily found on the web

<sup>4</sup> Consider Jesus' words in Luke 13:34

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 36:23

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 8:2-3 & Matthew 4:4

<sup>7</sup> John 6:30-66

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 15:32-39, the Four thousand & John 6:1-14, the Five thousand