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Trinity Musings #24: Rev Brian Goodings (perplexed@Trinity United Church: Collingwood)

Last week “The Red Rooster” aka “The Lone Danger” stood amidst the wild fires raging in California and said nothing serious or alarming was happening.

Reminded me of that scene with Robert Duvall from the movie “Apocalypse Now”. Duvall is wandering, shirtless, around the battle field like there is nothing horrible going on. After taking a big breath through his nose he says “I love the smell of Napalm in the morning...”`

He was the only one, like The Donald, who doesn't seem the least bit perturbed with the world burning around him.

The Donald said that the ferocity of the fires had nothing to do with a warming planet and blamed poor forest management practices.

Although the link to the severity of the fires has been made by literally thousands of climate change scientists, he said... “Science doesn't really know. It's going to get colder. Just wait and see...”

And the Trump nation of hypnotized sycophants, in unison said, “AMEN... HE has spoken...thus sayeth The Donald.” Must be true. Even though they are literally dying of heat, they put sweaters on.

Arguably, we have reached the end of the Age of Reason. The enlightenment is finally really over.

We are in the age when Governments, the world over, are now filing for divorce from Science.

It's been a long marriage that started a few hundred years ago right after the State kicked the Church out of the House.

They were bickering too much and the State wanted to have other partners who were younger, less serious and a lot more fun. And the beauty is that science always has debatable, not set in stone, conclusions. (“For every PhD there is an opposite and equal PhD.”)

Separation of Church and State actually is a pretty old concept. It is generally a very good idea that governments should not be overly influenced by religious beliefs. I wouldn't want to live under Sharia Law any more than I would want to live under the rule of Christian Fundamentalists.

Reason over belief was the promise of scientific-secularism. Laws and decisions should be made on cold hard facts instead of fuzzy and biased religious beliefs.

Governments started to depend heavily and frequently on what was believed to be objective and unbiased information provided by Natural Philosophers, later known as, Scientists. (It is ironic that many of the first Scientists were Clergymen, many of whom seemed to have a lot of free time to look at flowers and bugs. Somethings never change eh?)

Although it's been a good long dance, Science and Governments are now stepping on each other's toes. There are long stony silences between them and they just aren't communicating well anymore.

Our own recent (not current) Prime Minister was sick and tired of listening to the negative voice of Science and put a muzzle on them. They weren't towing the party line and kept interrupting the Government's narrative (propaganda?) with contrary facts.

All over the world, the neighbours can hear them fighting and yelling about what is true and what isn't...Government is accusing Science of lying (fake news) and Science says that Government never hears or cares about what they are saying. They aren't seen together in public very often.

I don't want to use my hockey language here but unless we can salvage the relationship between good Government and good Science that will lead to good policies...we're...well you know...we're... "in trouble".

And so are the rest of our neighbours in the world.

Yesterday as I rode home, my thoughts about this Musing were interrupted by the sound of guns. At first I thought it must be bird-bangers in the vineyards to scare the birds away, but then I realized it really was gunfire.

People in a pond near the trail were shooting cormorants on the first day of the planned slaughter. They aren't hunting, because they are just killing the birds and have no intention of eating or using them in any way.

As far as I know there is not much if any enforcement or accountability either. Who is going to know if you've shot 15 or 30 birds on any given day since all you have to do is throw them away or bury them.

In my opinion, this is not good Science or good Government policy. It's tragic to kill birds in a world where the overall avian population has fallen by around 85% since the 1960's.

The decision to allow people with a small game licence to kill 15 cormorants a day is based almost entirely on the feelings and arguments of landowners and sport fishers.

The argument for killing the birds is to protect habitat (their guano is toxic and kills vegetation) and to protect the fish stocks (inventory) that rightfully belong to...us? It really boils down to "Well they stink, and we just don't like them." (This, from the most destructive species on the planet!)

I expect to get a lot of kickback on this Musing but I haven't seen much good fisheries or avian science to support this killing. I predict that there are going to be a lot of mergansers, herons, bitterns, coots, gallinules and even some loons shot by mistake.

Although you might think this is a stretch...the fires in California and the slaughter of cormorants are, in my opinion, the result of Governments making decisions so they will be re-elected.

Seems to be working alarmingly well as the populist tide and the oceans rise. My daughter lives in Vancouver and the air there is the most polluted in the world because of the smoke from the fires in the States. Even though Trump says otherwise, Science says it's going to get a lot worse and may never get better.

I believe that neither this debate nor the climate is going to get cooler anytime soon but that shouldn't keep us from talking to each other. It really is time all of us speak up. I smell smoke.