

Heat, by George Monbiot. Book Review for the Baptist Times, November, 2006

Not to be mistaken with the magazine, the book *Heat* is a life-changing experience for those who read it.

It is a timely publication in a world that is starting to wake up to the reality of man made climate change. An unfortunate consequence of this growing awareness however, is a growing desire amongst trendy individuals, market-sensitive businesses and voter-pleasing governments to be perceived as eco-friendly. The result is a rising tide of eco-lovely rhetoric that creates the false impression that the global crisis we face is being properly addressed by people who care.

Monbiot cuts through this morass of vagueness and empty gestures, with a disturbing, well argued and deeply practical clarity. Apart from his knack for exposing frauds – the chapter on the climate change ‘denial industry’ would be utterly unbelievable if it weren’t so well supported – he makes a compelling case for the necessity of a 90 percent cut in carbon emissions before the year 2030. But there are already plenty of such gloomy warnings around about the need to address climate change.

What is distinctive about this book is that it offers practical steps which show how this daunting goal is possible without major disruption to our economies or lifestyles. The sources of our energy, the way we use our homes, buy our shopping, travel to work and choose our holidays all need to be radically restructured. But this cannot take place without government regulation.

In order for the practical guidelines he offers to be implemented, pressure needs to be applied to the most powerful governments. Monbiot believes that our government knows very well how to produce stern reports and forthright warnings, and left to their own devices will probably still be doing so as the floodwaters engulf the houses of parliament. And so the book finishes by issuing a challenge to the reader.

But one is left not with a sense of dutiful responsibility or frustrated despair, but with an urgent moral compulsion and a hopeful desire to do something. (In fact, as I finished reading it, I gave a copy of the book to a fellow train passenger – at least I wasn’t driving – and made her promise to read it!) Again, the author provides us with practical steps to take, namely joining one of the organisations whose details he lists in an appendix. The purpose of the book is not merely to educate us, but to drive the reader to take decisive action.

George Monbiot is no Christian, and on more than one occasion has turned his guns upon soft Christian targets. But the ethical basis of his writing is deeply rooted in Scripture: ‘love thy neighbour as thyself.’ Scripturally of course, this ‘empathetic principle’ is integrally linked with the call to love God. For Monbiot, the constant appeal is not to save the earth for its own sake, but to consider the real people whose lives will be (and are already are being) wrecked by the oil-fired lifestyle of modern westerners. From a Christian perspective, this book does not urge us to save the planet; it shows us what it means to love God in the 21st century. It is relevance in the most meaningful sense.

However, those who assume that the stewardship of this world is a divine concern rather than a human responsibility should not read this book. It will only shake their faith and give them

nightmares. Best go back to sleep. But by the time they wake up, the nightmare will have become an irreversible reality, and no one will be sleeping through the apocalypse.