



CREATIVE MINISTRIES NETWORK CONGREGATION

To whom is the Prime Minister accountable for his hypocrisy? A statement from the Creative Ministries Network Congregation.

Introduction

The Prime Minister has recently been accused of hypocrisy. This accusation has been discussed by political commentators and levelled at him by both his opponents and members of his own government. Generally, their accusations are consistent with a dictionary definition of hypocrisy, that is, the PM's behaviour contradicts what he claims to have said, or promised, or believes. Barnaby Joyce linked hypocrisy with lying, that is, hypocrisy is not being truthful.

Yet the biblical understanding of hypocrisy has a far deeper and more perilous message for Scott Morrison, a meaning for which he is not being held to account in the public debate. For the current debate is captured by western culture's unbridled individualism; that is, hypocrisy is all about an individual's personal failings. Thus, Scott Morrison is judged to be 'hollow', a 'psycho', a 'spin doctor', and 'deceitful', to name some recent judgements of the PM.

But the Bible places hypocritical behaviour at the centre of the Christian faith's understanding of sin and evil. The sin of hypocrisy is an action that causes harm to both God and neighbour (the Australian people), and this act is particularly infused with evil when the hypocrite claims to be doing God's will. This statement argues that such hypocrisy as Scott Morrison has demonstrated as Prime Minister will result in him being made accountable to God for the harm he has done to God and neighbour (the Australian people).

The 2019 election 'miracle'

From the night Scott Morrison claimed election victory in 2019 and declared, 'I believe in miracles', his hypocrisy was on display to many Christians. The Creative Ministries Network Congregation is a Uniting Church congregation concerned for national reconciliation, justice at work, and international peace, so we are not offended by the presence of religion in politics. The integration of our faith in every sphere of life including matters of public life is central to our being.

It is our understanding that there is no basis in the scriptural teachings of Christ that could justify the PM's claim his election victory was a miracle. Any serious reading of the gospel stories about Jesus Christ would quickly conclude an election win that kept the most powerful politician in the nation in power was not a miracle. Accounts of Jesus' life and ministry are replete with examples of how Jesus lifted up the poor and humbled the powerful. Subsequent events have convinced us that his claim about the place of his faith in his political life usually comes second to his personal political interest, and simply put, that is the sin of idolatry. Internationally renowned theologian and ecumenist Bishop Newbigin said idolatry is 'the putting of something that is not God in the place belonging to God'. Scott Morrison's devotion to his own political power appears to come before all else, even God.

How could a person of Christian faith believe God's intention for justice and peace on earth would manifest itself by rewarding the very person with supreme political power in Australian politics with further political power? Jesus speaks candidly to such faith about the folly of such self-justifying belief: 'What does it profit a man to win the whole world and lose his

soul?' (Mark 8:36). The judgement of Scott Morrison's sin comes from a scriptural account of our Lord's words.

Discerning the meaning of a 'sign'

The journey by Scott Morrison to publicly justify his claim of an election 'miracle' appears to begin in 2021 at a national Christian Churches Conference, where the PM said he had sought a sign from God on the 2019 election trail while visiting an art gallery. He asked for an assurance that the Lord was with him, and reported, 'And there right in front of me was the biggest picture of a soaring eagle that I could imagine and of course the verse hit me. The message I got that day was "Scott, *you've* got to run to not grow weary, *you've* got to walk to not grow faint, *you've* got to spread your wings like an eagle to soar like an eagle."

We believe Scott Morrison has grossly misquoted the prophet Isaiah 40:31, an ancient text for people who have been held captive in exile to a foreign power for seventy years: 'but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.' The text is intended to encourage powerless people with *what God will do* to liberate them from their captivity. But Scott Morrison's 'sign' tells him *what he needed to do* to win the election: he must keep working hard. The PM has reduced belief in God to fostering belief in his personal importance: specifically, belief in his efforts. In biblical terms this is the sin of idolatry. Again, it is putting something that is not God in the place belonging to God. This is not listening to God but is a strategy for persuading people to follow his political ideology of individual hard work deserving of its own reward. When the PM put *himself and his efforts* at the centre of his world like that, he was not 'waiting for the Lord' as the prophet Isaiah instructed those in desperate need.

Jesus offers a crushing criticism of those who seek signs for their own benefit rather than paying attention to what God is doing in their midst (Luke 11:29), because this reveals their preoccupation with their own identity and security. Scott Morrison has put himself in moral danger by his idolatry. For Jesus, this self-preoccupation is met with harsh condemnation: it is 'wicked' or 'evil', revealing a body full of darkness (Luke 11:34).

Ironically, Scott Morrison's account of the sign that manifested to him as he entered the art gallery revealed he would do everything in his power to win. His sign was the embodiment of hypocrisy. Invoking the blessing of God for his win has become a sign of his real interest, to win at any cost while cloaking his sin with a divine imprimatur. This is the evil dimension of the PMs hypocrisy.

There has been a gradual uncovering of the political factors behind Scott Morrison's hypocrisy, particularly the government's corruption of Australian political processes through its widespread program of rorts and pork-barrelling aimed at tipping the balance toward returning Coalition candidates. These revelations of systematic idolatry are congruent with Jesus' teaching about how God's desire for truth ensures idolatry is exposed by being brought into the light of God's justice. For those Australians spiritually blinded by the Morrison government's systemic hypocrisy, 'the truth will set you free' (John 8:32).

Since Scott Morrison's hypocritical claim of an election 'miracle', Australians have seen more of what his government really did to hold onto power. We believe it is God's Spirit of truth that is at work bringing truth to light and disclosing the abuse of power behind the scenes of the Morrison government's 'miracle'. In the words of Jesus, 'There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, and (nothing) hidden that will not be made known. Whatever you say in the darkness, therefore, will be heard in the light' (Luke 12:2-3a), as this faith-informed timeline reveals.

Jan. to March 2019 The time of concealment of government sin and evil.

11 April 2019	Parliament prorogued (i.e., discontinued until a new parliament is elected)
	In the period between the government going to caretaker mode, Scott Morrison visited the art gallery where he asked for a sign God was with him in his campaign for office.
18 May 2019	Election day and the return of the Coalition government
15 January 2020	The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) hands down its report into the sports grants program. It found the Coalition awarded the grants to marginal or targeted seats, ignoring Sport Australia assessments and recommendations, and it questioned the legal authority used to allow the minister to make the grant decisions.
30 June 2021	The ANAO reported the government's administration of a grants program to fund car parks near public transport heavily favoured coalition seats.

The ANAO reports the above two processes were carried out in the very short time frame before parliament was prorogued. However, while the truth about this perversion of the Australian political process was only confirmed by independent audits eight months (sports grants) and 24 months (car park grants) post-election, the pattern of deceit is similar. Other grant funds appear to have suffered similar abuse of just process. So, after three years, Scott Morrison's claim of a miracle win has been turned on its head. Rather than a result of divine blessing, his government's election win appears to have been the result of the self-centred exploitation of his Prime Ministerial political position and power.

Jesus' words expose the hypocrisy of this charade, 'You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts; for what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God' (Luke 16:14-15). What the PM paraded as a miracle of divine intervention on his behalf now must be seen through Jesus' words as an offence against God and the Australian community. Jesus' condemnation of those who spin the outside of a story to look good, while the inside and hidden story is totally self-absorbed and full of self-regard, is unequivocal (Luke 11:39).

The deconstruction of an idol

Because Scott Morrison has claimed that God has been complicit in what now appears to be immoral behaviour, the Spirit of truth is undermining the spiritual foundations of his political program. Jesus' graphic metaphor describes the depth of the Prime Minister's problem: 'But the one who hears, and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house' (Luke 6:49).

Sadly, the Prime Minister's lack of fidelity to the moral vision of justice and inclusion proclaimed in Jesus' teaching is now reaping bitter consequences through his government's failed vision, failed policies, and failed practice. This hypocritical Prime Minister has led Australia on a very dark path since his idolatrous cloaking of his election win with a divine imprimatur.

Hypocrisy revealed: a status and power strategy

The purpose of Scott Morrison's hypocrisy was revealed in his recent 'Sixty Minutes' television interview. The PM said, 'he had "worn out the carpet on the side of my bed ... on

my knees praying and praying” for Australians during the pandemic’ (The Age, 14/2/22, p.5). Jesus had strong words for those who publicly flaunt their prayers, telling this parable:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; *for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted*” (Luke 18:10-14).

In Luke’s account, the Pharisee’s public show of prayerful piety appears to be a device to reinforce his position of status and power in his society during a time of its occupation by a foreign power. Scott Morrison’s ploy of referencing his piety and concern for Australian’s wellbeing on national TV is judged and found wanting by Jesus’ tough words at the parable’s conclusion. The Word of God in this scripture is not concerned to address Scott Morrison’s personal failures of character. Rather, the Spirit of truth stirred up in the Australian community by God’s intention for justice and liberation is addressing Scott Morrison’s hypocritical abuse of his position of status and power as Prime Minister by setting in train an inexorable process of humbling him by dismantling and deconstructing his idolatry.

It is time to ask God for help, not Jen

The gospel speaks urgently about these matters, but also about the winsome qualities of God’s grace. We, the Creative Ministries Congregation of the Uniting Church in Australia, call on the Prime Minister Scott Morrison to offer an apology for his hypocrisy to God for his betrayal of God’s holy name for his own self-aggrandisement, and to the Australian people for the consequential harm he has visited upon our nation, to Indigenous Australians, to women victims of men’s violence, to those in aged care, to the LGBTQI community, and refugees. It is time for his repentance before God, and the Australian nation, its people and indeed our planet. The ministry of Jesus amongst those who also abused their position of power and status sets forth an example of apology, truth telling, and restorative justice, which we heartily commend:

‘(Zaccheus) stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.”’ (Luke 19:8)

*Authorised by John Bottomley for the Creative Ministries Network Congregation of the
Uniting Church in Australia, 2/10 Rigby Avenue, Carnegie, Victoria.*