

Republican Perspective

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by John Littig

Trees Have Rights Too

Friends of mine have a cabin in the Tahoe basin. On their property there was a tree encroaching on the cabin's foundation. They wanted to remove it, so they contacted a tree service but were told a permit was required. You don't just go cutting down a tree without a permit, even on your own property. The controlling agency was the U.S. Forest Service.

My friends contacted the Forest Service, made an appointment, and a forester came out. He tagged the problem tree along with some others, and my friends got the required permit. So the tree problem was resolved to their satisfaction. However, their initial contact with the Forest Service had not gone smoothly; a clerk had become adversarial, telling them that "trees have rights too."

At that time, at least two or maybe three decades ago, my friends and I took this response as preposterous and laughable. But since then we have evolved. We have learned to be tolerant, accepting, even defenders of the rights of other life forms.

After all, why should we defend only human life? Why not *all* cute, cuddly, furry, warm blooded animals? Well, come to think of it, why not *all animals*? Who is to say, for example, that mammals or even primates are more deserving of our empathy, love, and protection than alligators, snakes, spiders, wasps, termites, or tapeworms?

As if in response to the "God bless America" and "God bless our troops" bumper stickers there are also the more inclusive bumper stickers "God bless everyone" and "God bless us all---no exceptions." Aren't the latter sentiments an affirmation of *all* humans? So why not, by extension, *all God's creatures*?

Which brings me back to my Tahoe friends and their encroaching tree. At the time, we scoffed at the ludicrous notion that "trees have rights too." But haven't we, as a society, progressed, become more inclusive? Why do we, members of the animal kingdom, consider ourselves to be superior, more deserving, than members of the plant kingdom?

Why do we believe that we hold dominion over the plant kingdom? We mow, prune, pot, and otherwise maim our plants. We alone decide on the timing and amount of their

hydration and feeding. With Roundup and other poisons, we even mass-murder those we deem undesirable.

But I should not say “our” plants. Are they not entitled to be their own masters? There’s a school of thought in San Francisco that pets are now animal companions---no pets, no masters. Why not plant companions? Why do we feel entitled to enslave them?

Well, I submit that we are not entitled. If animals have rights, so should plants. They should not be exterminated, harvested, maimed, or forced to exist only at the pleasure of humans.

Praise God that we are morally evolving every day. Eventually, perhaps during your lifetime or mine, plants will be afforded the dignity and protection they deserve.

You may scoff at this. But within the next few decades or hopefully sooner humanity will evolve to an understanding of its one-ness with the plant kingdom. In the meantime, cultivate your relationships with your plant companions, lest they judge you harshly in the enlightened future.

Ooops! Hold the phone. There could be a problem. Once we reject the exploitation and murder of plants and animals, we may be a doomed species. Unless we turn to cannibalism, where will we find food?