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The Christian and the Environment: Prophet, Priest and King

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I. Introduction

It is obvious that problems of the environment will become increasingly urgent over the next few decades, and indeed are already pressing. We have become aware of the effects of pollution in the atmosphere with the rapid escalation of skin cancer. The current decade has been the hottest on record, possibly the start of large scale global warming with disastrous consequences foretold of icecaps melting, a rise in sea levels and so on. More visible is the growing problem of waste both industrial and domestic, with the difficulty of disposal of material that is often very dangerous.

The other side of the problem is the depletion of many of the resources essential for a modern Western lifestyle, with the threat of exhaustion or at least severe scarcity with greatly escalating prices. The visible side of this has been a more extensive search for and exploitation of the required raw materials, with consequent damage to the environment due to such practices as strip mining and forest burning. Such practices of course also add to the pollution problem and the decline of the environment, with the threat of a diminished quality of life and even famine, disease and death.

Such problems are exacerbated by a further result of technological progress in the rapid growth of population in the third world. The technology that has enabled such a growth is essential to provide for it, but has the side effects of ever increasing resource depletion and pollution. It is hardly surprising that some predict disaster. The well-

known study 'Limits to growth'[1] is already very dated, but despite some opinions that the analysis was flawed[2] the essential findings must be taken seriously. It hardly needs elaborate computer analyses to point out that the current situation cannot continue, and that unless there is action, and soon, the current deterioration of the environment and the loss of innumerable species of plants and animals, each with their contribution to the ecosystem, will become a disaster.

Frequent concern is indeed expressed; action is being taken such as commitment to ban the ozone-deadly CFCs over the next few years. The recent 'Earth summit' in Rio de Janiero contributed to awareness of the problems of the environment and hopefully to a solution. Organizations such as 'Greenpeace', and 'green' political parties are active, and win growing support.

Any proposed action must however be motivated, especially when its effect is clearly going to affect, probably adversely, the lifestyle of the people who have to implement it. The people in the street have got to change their lifestyle; if they feel that it is not in their interest, they will naturally resist doing so. The problem is the perception that even if the deteriorating environment is a real problem, it will probably not affect them severely, and is unlikely to seriously affect their immediate families. Questions of motivation must then involve an appeal on a higher basis than self-interest. Usually ecological concern will rest on such ideas as the unity of humanity, even with these as yet unborn, or even that of the unity of both the human and non-human, even the inanimate.

Such ideas relate very easily to the Eastern religions which tend to be pantheistic, and to the Western derivatives of them such as the New Age Movement. Thus, for example, Meadows in his reply to the criticism made to 'Limits to Growth'[3] readily confessed a sympathy with what he referred to as the Eastern religions of harmony rather than with the Western ones of dominance. Similarly the Indian religions are renowned for their reverence for all forms of life.[4]

In contrast, Christianity, far from positively supporting a concern for the environment, is often perceived as a force which is opposed to

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[1] D. H. Meadows, *et al.*, *The limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind* (London, 1972).

[2] E.g. H. S. I. Cole, *et al.*, *Models of doom: a critique of the limits to growth* (New York, 1973).

[3] 'A response to Sussex', in Cole, *op. cit.*, 216–40.

[4] Cf. also L. White Jr., ('The historical roots of our ecologic crisis', *Science* 155 (3767), 1967 1206) who refers to Buddhism 'as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view'.

ecological conservation.[5] White, in his justifiably famous and influential article[6] traces the Western attitude to the environment to Christian monotheism. Without a belief in the spirits in the world that need to be placated, the environment may be attacked without fear. Thus it is essential that the will of God as regards the environment be mediated clearly to humanity, and that God, while clearly maintaining his transcendence, is appreciated to be involved in the environment. On the other hand, the Biblical view of humanity as in the image of God and so in a way transcendent, drives a wedge between humanity and the world with the same results. Again there is a need to see a clear relationship between humanity and environment, and one which is more than the obvious biological interdependence. In both cases, transcendence needs to be balanced by immanence.

Indeed, because Christianity advocates love and concern for others, it should bring concern for environment for the sake of the living and those yet to be. However, it lacks a specific theology undergirding care for the environment. Christian care is often founded on non-Christian ideas, however worthy they are. In particular, the Christian view of the distinctiveness of humanity from the rest of creation which is clear from the Genesis account and elsewhere in the Scriptures (e.g. Ps. 8:5), is often replaced by a view which sees humanity as just another species of animal, so that all animals, and even plants and inanimate objects, would have an essential equality.[7]

In addition to the Christian view of the distinction of God from the creation, and of humanity from the world, the traditionally negative Christian approach to the world has been controlled by three basic ideas. Firstly, Genesis 1:28 records the divine mandate to be fruitful and have dominion. This is often taken as divine permission, even encouragement, to use and abuse the non-human world, to exploit at whim. It is such an attitude to which Meadows reacted in favouring a religion of harmony. Secondly, Christianity is perceived as concentrating on the afterlife, upon a spiritual heaven or perhaps a

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[5] This is not to say that all ecological damage is due to Christianity. On the one hand it occurs in non-Christian cultures (A. R. Peacocke, *Creation and the world of Science: the Bampton lectures 1978* (Oxford, 1978), 277), and on the other, Christian societies have not even all produced technology. J. Barr ('Man and Nature: the ecological controversy and the Old Testament'. *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* 55 1972, 11) thus denies that Christianity can be specifically connected with exploitation.

[6] *op. cit.*, 1206.

[7] A view which White (*op. cit.*, 1207) sees as originally in keeping with the views of Francis of Assisi.

recreated earth. In this case the present environment does not really matter, as it is only temporary. Thirdly, and connected to that, Christianity is seen as emphasizing a soul or spirit to the neglect of the body. The extreme of this dualism was seen in the asceticism practised in the early centuries of the Church.

These ideas are valid and Biblically based, but have been carried to an extreme which has been destructive. Nevertheless, even all heresy is only a truth carried to an extreme, and is valuable as it enables a more balanced presentation of truth to be developed. Thus the idea of dominion, of kingship over the non-human in the world is valid, but the idea of kingship must be correct, not distorted into a despotic tyranny. An emphasis on eschatology is a correct part of Christianity, especially of prophecy, but must be seen in conjunction with a prophetic concern with the present. A concentration on the spiritual must follow from a relationship to God, and is the particular duty of a priesthood, but priests are also concerned with the material; indeed their essential function is to link the spiritual with the material.

These roles of prophet priest and king are all means of enabling a relationship between God and humanity. They overcome what would otherwise be the problems of the transcendence of God and the distinctiveness of humanity, indeed they rather depend upon, and complement them. Such are then essential to enable a correct view of the environment. Without such roles, Christianity indeed will naturally lead to harm to the environment.

For a Christian, the role model must be Christ, who both fulfills the Old Testament patterns, and also provides the basis for the activity of his people, the actual details of human imitation being modified by the specific individual circumstances. In his earthly ministry he was recognized as filling the roles of prophet and king, and in his death and subsequent activity was recognized as a great High Priest. In this he follows and fulfils the activities of earlier figures such as Moses and Samuel, who also united the three aspects of the office in one person.

However, Jesus was also involved in the threefold office in a relationship not only to humanity, but also to the wider creation. As a prophet he spoke to creation, and it was (Col. 1:16); in this he can be seen as fulfilling the fundamental function of a prophet in that he spoke for God. As a priest he offered a sacrifice of himself not only for humanity but to deal with the way in which the sin of humanity affected the entire creation, which then needed to be redeemed (Rom. 8:21f). As king he is naturally the ruler of the entire creation, and moreover provides for it from day to day.

If Christians are to be seen as adopted children of God (Rom. 8:15,

Gal. 4:5), then they too should follow in the same threefold role of prophet priest and king. The immediately gives a partial solution to the apparent lack of emphasis on ecological concerns, as the three aspects of the office must be seen as forming a unity as they do in Christ. Thus whereas the idea of dominion over the creation must naturally have an emphasis on the present and material, it is balanced on the one hand by an eschatology which is concerned with the future rather than the present, and in the other hand by an interest in the spiritual which balances a concern with the material. Thus taking the three together already leads to a more balanced theology. In itself this would not lead to a concern for the environment,[8] but a closer look at the individual aspects of the office does in fact do this.

II. King over environment?

Genesis 1:28 records that immediately after the creation of humanity, so to be seen as an integral part of its nature, God said 'be fruitful, and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea . . .'. This famous verse has been used to justify many things, notably population growth, or more usually the avoidance of measures to limit births. I have elsewhere suggested[9] that this is a superficial understanding of this verse, and that taken in its context it must mean not command or even permission to multiply without limit, but rather to grow by a reasonable amount.[10] At the very least, it is becoming clearer today that an unrestrained population growth is in fact preventing the fulfilment of the other part of the verse, the dominion over the earth.

This second part has also been used to justify practices which, like procreation, are naturally very attractive to humanity. The ideas of dominion have been taken to justify a superiority of humanity over the rest of the creation.[11] Von Rad may be taken as having an opinion which has been quite common. He wrote, speaking of Genesis 1:28, '. . . the text speaks less of the nature of God's image than of its

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[8] Thus, for example, liberation theology, despite its concern with the present and the material, and its resistance to economic domination, does not carry this through to environmental concern, seeing its priority in the human poor.

[9] D. T. Williams, ' "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gn. 1:28): Dominion to exploit and pollute?' *Scriptura* 44, 1993, 51–65.

[10] R. Moss (*The earth in our hands* (Leicester, 1982) 38) sees this as the meaning of the word 'fill' in Genesis 1:28. It is clear that the command was given in a state both of harmony and of depopulation.

[11] E.g. D. Chilton, *Productive Christians in an age of guilt manipulators: a response to Ronald J Sider* 3rd ed. (Tyler, 1985) 115, 382, Barr, *op. cit.*, 17.

purpose . . . . This is then sketched most explicitly; domination in the world, especially over the animals.'[12]

Today's world, in contrast to earlier centuries and based on its view that the resources of the world are to be used for the benefit of the user, has been able to develop a technology which itself has provided the means of a more complete subjugation of both the animate and inanimate creation. Whereas in past centuries very existence was often tenuous for a large proportion of modern humanity, the concern of today is often not of keeping under the forces of nature which would so easily overwhelm a tenuous existence, but of seeking a greater and greater standard of living, thereby using more and more of the resources of a rapidly shrinking world and at the same time poisoning what is left in the noxious waste products of industry.

A hint of a better approach may be seen in that the same fundamental idea has been used as the basis for something else. In the medieval world view it was believed that kings and nobles owed their position to divine right. Rebellion against their authority was therefore not so much against them, but against the God who gave them their position. Thus even in the Old Testament, David restrained himself from a direct attack on King Saul, despite several opportunities. Even in today's world, a text such as Romans 13 has been used by many governments to justify their position and to appeal for obedience from their people.[13]

Nevertheless a view of the divine right of kings and governments cannot be unquestionably supported Biblically. In the Old Testament, particularly in the northern kingdom of Israel, the not infrequent coups against the established monarch were more often then not justified by prophetic, and so divine authority. The simple occupation of a throne was clearly not a guarantee of divine support. Then in the New Testament, the same Peter who is recorded as supporting established government in terms perhaps even more forceful than those of Paul (1 Pet. 2:13f), is also recorded as defying established authority in the famous words, 'we must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). Clearly in these and other instances there is a reminder that God himself is the absolute king, and that earthly

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[12] G. Von Rad, *Genesis: a commentary* (London, 1961) 57.

[13] In South Africa the 'Kairos' document attacks this view as 'state theology', declaring a belief that it must be balanced by a text such as Revelation 13 which shows that a government might become corrupt and under the condemnation of God.

rulers, once they deviate from the will of God, lose his authority.[14] They are not so much absolute despots, but stewards.

Indeed it is clear from Romans 13 that the purpose of human government is not to benefit the government, but the people, and specifically to give quietness and harmony so that all may do the will of God. It may be seen indeed from the record of the institution of the Israelite monarchy that it was not the ideal will of God, but that government is a concession made by God due to the sinfulness of humanity.

It follows from this that the dominion of humanity over the rest of creation should not be seen as for the benefit of humanity, but for the creation itself, specifically to enable a quietness and harmony. This is a real contrast with the ideas of capitalists and others who see the world as just for exploitation.[15] Humanity should not be seen as owning the material, but having a form of stewardship over it, a view which balances authority with dominion.[16] It must also be pointed out that in the second account of creation in Genesis 2, which must be seen as a complement to Genesis 1, Adam is definitely seen as part of creation, made from the ground, so in essential harmony with it, and also in its service.[17]

This should in any case be clear from God himself. His rule and authority over the whole universe is clear, but he is also seen as providing for its needs day by day and season by season. He did not create the world to benefit from it, but to bless it and to have fellowship and thereby harmony with it. This is seen in other references to creation such as Psalm 104.[18]

More specifically, a Christological perspective must recognise the dominion of Christ as king. This is especially clear not only from his appointment as Messiah and recognition as such at various times, but from the resurrection, which showed his kingly authority over the forces of sin and death. It was that event that Paul uses to demonstrate that Jesus was in fact son of God, significantly coupling thus with a reference to his descent from David, so his right to kingship (Rom. 1:4).

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[14] B. C. Birch and L. L. Rasmussen (*The predicament of the prosperous* (Philadelphia, 1978) 113) comment 'Except for Genesis 1 this theme of human domination is found in the Old Testament only in Psalm 8. In both instances exercise of dominion is accountable to God; it is not license for human indulgence.'

[15] Thus B. W. Anderson ('Creation and Ecology', in B. W. Anderson (Ed.), *Creation in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1984) 153) notes the opinion of Borowitz that an emphasis on dominion is due not to Christianity, but to its secularization.

[16] B. J. Walsh and J. R. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: shaping a Christian worldview* (Downers Grove, 1984) 59.

[17] G. S. Hendry, Theology of nature, (Philadelphia: 1980) 172.

[18] Anderson *op. cit.*, 12.

However the kingship of Jesus must be understood not simply as an authority, but in the context of the incarnation. This was of course necessary for him to be recognized as in the line of David, but also shows his identification on the one hand with humanity, but in the other hand with the material. It is because of this union with humanity that 'newness of life' can be given. Believers unite in the victory of Christ over death in his resurrection (Rom. 6:5) and so receive eternal life. This aspect of salvation is of course well known, such figures as Irenaeus and Athanasius seeing it as foundational to their understanding. Jesus had to become human so that we might in a sense become partakers in the divine.

Thus the idea of kingship, far from simply being a dominion over the world, a permission to arbitrarily exploit, use and abuse, is rather to be seen as a union or cooperation with the created order. There is a symbiosis, a harmony between the king, in this case humanity, and the rest of creation, the human environment. Humans, as in the image of God, represent God on earth as ambassadors. 'Either we image God in our loving rule of the earth or we forget that task in disobedience.'[19] Specifically the means of human kingship, technical ability, which is a God-given gift for the benefit of humanity, must then be seen not as something which will dominate[20] and so also benefit just humanity at the expense of the environment, but should benefit and develop the environment as well.[21] It should also follow that technology should not benefit just a small affluent sector of humanity, but all of it. If there is a union between Christ and humanity, it accentuates the unity within that humanity and so the need for a more equable distribution of assets.

III. Prophet of the future?

In a difficult world, the activity of a prophet can give much needed hope. Suffering and difficulty can be more readily endured, even seen as beneficial, if there is a hope of something better in the future. Prophetic ministry has often given that hope, indeed confidence, as the function of the prophet is to speak the message given by God, which then has the authority of God behind it.

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[19] Walsh and Middleton, *op. cit.*, 65.

[20] Cf. J. Moltmann, 'The ecologic crisis: peace with nature.' *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9, 7.

[21] A. König (*New and greater things: re-evaluating the Biblical message on creation* (Pretoria, 1988) 159) notes that God's creation was 'incomplete', requiring human effort for habitation, and S. McDonagh (*To care for the earth: a call for a new theology* (Santa Fe, 1987) 121) notes that the Near Eastern environment is particularly harsh.

Thus in the situation of oppression so characteristic of the later Israelite monarchy, a prophet such as Amos could give a message of hope. ' "Behold the days are coming" says the Lord . . .', "I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel . . ." (Am. 9:13f). Likewise John the Baptist, again in a situation of difficulty for the Jews, could announce a future hope, this time in the imminent arrival of the promised Messiah. Then that same Messiah could himself be acclaimed as a prophet and could also give hope for a better future to those who suffer. He spoke of 'Abraham's bosom' as a reward for the beggar who had lived a poverty stricken and ignored life (Lk. 16:22), and could hold up the confidence of heaven. This hope carried on. John, in the midst of a Roman persecution, suffering on the isle of Patmos, could give encouragement to his fellow sufferers in the vision of heaven, and specifically of a new heaven and a new earth. So wonderful was this that he had to exclaim, 'come Lord Jesus!' (Rev. 22:20).

The hope that prophets give is thus in the future, usually in an eschatological heaven. Such a hope has indeed been the means of strengthening people, but it has also been the cause of writing off this world. Why should Christians seek to care for this world or to preserve it, if hope lies in the next? Environmental concern is therefore often felt to be irrelevant, in which case Christians should concentrate on making sure that souls are saved so they will inherit a future bliss.

Nevertheless, although predicting the future and giving hope in this way is a valid aspect of the role of a prophet, it must not be seen as its totality, or even its main function. Rather a prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of another, so that Aaron could be termed the prophet of Moses (Ex. 7:1). Of course the person who is spoken for is usually God, and so the prophet can speak with divine authority.

In addition, the function of a prophet is not just to inform, even if that will benefit the heavens, but rather to demand change. This is clear in the Old Testament prophets, such as Amos, for whom the aspect of comfort is a very small part of his message. Rather he confronted those who were causing the situation of oppression and demanded change, backing it up with a promise of judgement. John likewise demanded change; his baptism was associated with repentance, a change from sin and adoption of a lifestyle more pleasing to God.

It is even the case that the prophetic words sometimes enable change directly in bodies that have no choice or ability to refuse to obey the demands of God made through the prophet. Thus Elisha was instrumental in the multiplication of the widow's oil (2 Ki. 4:1f) and Ezekiel in the resurrection of the slain host in the valley of dry

bones (Ezk. 37). This can also be seen in one method of spiritual healing.[22]

Thus it is clear that the prophets are concerned not only with an expectation of the future, but even more with the situation of the present, and with action in it which is pleasing to God. If this is the burden of the prophets, it is also the desire of God, and so should be the concern of every Christian seeking to obey his Lord. It is also clear that the prophets have a role of speaking out for those who were not able to speak for themselves, such as the poor in the days of the monarchy. It should then follow that the environment, with its animals and plants, has need of a prophetic voice to counter the destruction that is such a feature of today.

A further aspect of the role of the prophets was that they did not only speak audibly to present their message and demand change, but that their communication was also by means of actions. The acted parable of Jeremiah and the waistcloth is an example of this (Je. 13:1f) and the ministry of Ezekiel was full of similar messages, enhanced of course by the dumbness of the prophet. John the Baptist also used action, in particular the symbolism of baptism to put over his point. Indeed his whole lifestyle was a message for those who had to hear.

Once again, Jesus is the paradigm of the ideal prophet, confronting his hearers with a demand for change, and in his case especially, his sinless life was an eloquent message in itself of the lifestyle that God desires in his followers.

Here, whereas John limited himself as part of his prophetic role, and so was instantly recognizable as a prophet by what he wore and ate, the self-limitation of Jesus was not only because he favoured that form of lifestyle as more correct than a more affluent one (his presence at feasts would indicate that he was far from being a rigorous ascetic), not only because it was necessary as part of an itinerant ministry, but was inherent in the very fact that he was in earth. Paul could explain that Jesus emptied himself (Phil. 2:7) and use that as an example for the Philippian Christians. Indeed the very existence of the prophetic role is due to the fact that God limits himself. He is not willing to speak directly to humanity, preferring rather to use an intermediary than to force response by sheer grandeur.

Thus the role of a Christian, seeking to follow God in obedience

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[22] I have elsewhere (D. T. Williams, 'Salvation and healing: towards a unified theology'. *Theologia Evangelica* 23(2) 1990) used the paradigm of prophet, priest and king to see how the different forms of Christian healing relate to make one whole.

must be to be concerned for the present as well as having hope for the future. In any case, it would seem more likely that instead of a sharp discontinuity between present and future as is sometimes believed, there is rather a form of continuity. The resurrection of Jesus, and Paul's illustration of the seed and the plant (1 Cor. 15:35f) would support this. Then preserving the present would be valuable, as the future will be affected by it.

In addition, the Christian, in imitation of the prophetic role of Christ, should speak out for the environment which has no voice of its own to counter those who exploit and destroy. He has a duty to inform concerning God's view of the nature of the world and its interactions,[23] and then to demand a change in his hearers in accordance with that view. His message should not be verbal only, but in deed, in a self-limitation of lifestyle which should provide an example which could be followed. There is here an awareness that self-indulgence and greed is the major cause of the exploitation and pollution of the environment. At the same time of course, a personal self-limitation will give weight to the verbal message. It is hardly valid to call for self-restraint from others when continuing to live extravagantly oneself.

IV. Priest of the spiritual?

It goes without saying that Christianity must be concerned with the spiritual aspect of life; it involves relating to God, and God is spirit (Jn. 4:24). However spiritual activities are always difficult because people are constantly in contact with the material and have material needs and urges, while the spiritual, by its very nature, does not readily impinge on life. Despite its obvious importance, it can easily be neglected, and it is naturally hard for an ordinary person to communicate with spirit.

For this reason, nearly every religion has its priests, people who seek to develop a special relationship with the divine, who spend their lives in such a way that they can help others in their communication with the divine.

In distinction to this very common idea, Christianity, at least in its Protestant wing, teaches that every believer has come into a direct relationship with God and so can communicate directly with Him. Although there is still employment of spiritual professionals, these are not priests in a way distinct from the ordinary Christian. All have access to God.

Nevertheless relating to God still does not come naturally to most

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[23] as Peacocke (*op. cit.*, 301) suggests.

people, and so they need to be constantly reminded of the importance of the spiritual, and to be encouraged to participate in spiritual exercises such as prayer and worship, and to foster spiritual values such as the fruit of the spirit (Gal. 5:22). The importance of the spiritual is therefore constantly emphasized. At the extreme of this, the material has often been portrayed as the cause of temptation such as to greed, robbery or to sexual sin.

Such ideas took root very readily in the Greek world view of the early centuries of Christianity, which saw the spiritual as superior to the material as permanent is superior to temporary, good rather than evil. It is hardly surprising that the desire for the spiritual led to a rejection of the material as a hinderance to it. The result was asceticism and a rejection of the society of this world.

This attitude is encouraged by the example of Jesus, who although he clearly had the power to do a great amount of material good in healing or feeding yet spent much time in spiritual teaching and even willingly went to the cross, cutting short opportunity for material work. This concern for the spiritual is indeed the work of a priest, for Jesus died, offering himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for the remission of sins. Moreover his activity as a priest continued after death, the book of Hebrews in particular seeing him as a great High Priest continuing a work of intercession, having direct access to God.

With this background, it is understandable that Christianity has always tended to see the spiritual as more important than the material, and so has tended even to neglect the latter. Thus concern for the environment has been seen even as tending to be wrong, and even if not wrong, a waste of time.

However, this is a distortion. Jesus, seen as the paradigm of the ideal priest, was clearly involved in the material. He did spend time dealing with material problems. Moreover his very nature indicates that the material is important; God did not send an angel or some spiritual being, but his son who became fully man, so identified both with the material and with humanity. Even his post-resurrection existence is concerned with the material; he still has a material body as the resurrection appearances show, and his activity as intercessor shows continued concern with this life. Likewise his work on the cross did not have purely spiritual results, but his followers stay in this world, even if no longer fully identified with it, and are encouraged to work for other people, to improve this world as far as possible. Even the afterlife should probably not be seen, as it often was in the past, as a purely spiritual existence, but in a material resurrection body, and in a recreated heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1).

It is also significant that the most extreme emphasis on the spiritual, manifested in asceticism, although it initially rejected

anything material, developed into an affirmation of its value, for example in the Franciscan ideal of harmony with nature. Indeed the essence of the priest is not so much to concentrate on the spiritual to the exclusion of the material, but to link the two. Here Jesus provides a bridge to God by his incarnation, uniting God and humanity, and also by a very material death. This would be true of the activity of any priest, who offers very material sacrifices for spiritual benefit. Although this is not done in Protestant Christianity, the activities of baptism and the communion are both very material even if with spiritual content.

Thus if Christians are indeed all to be seen as priests, this by no means implies a neglect of the material, but even its affirmation in a proper relation to the spiritual. Therefore the material should not be neglected, but human activity should be to bring it into full harmony with the spiritual.[24] The correct attitude to, and use of the material is even an act of worship. Thus Luther and other Reformation theologians affirmed that a Christian calling need not be simply to the ministry, but to an essentially secular job, and should then be done to God's glory.

It also follows that as the major role of priests is to sacrifice for the benefit of the worshipper, a Christian has the role of sacrificing for the rest of humanity and for the non-material world. This again is self-limitation, but also a positive redirection of time and resources for the benefit of others.

V. The primal environment

Care for the environment has been seen to follow from an understanding of the role of a Christian as prophet priest and king following the paradigm of Christ himself. That this is correct can be seen from a glance at the ideal picture of the relationship between humanity and the environment, seen in the account of the Garden of Eden. Here again the role of Adam and Eve falls into the same three categories of prophet, priest and king.

As king, the primal couple ruled the garden as vice-regents of God. This was not just an autocratic rule but they cared for it on his behalf (Gn. 2:15).

As prophet, they had the role of speaking to the garden with the authority of God. This can be seen in the naming of the animals; significantly the naming was done in the content of seeking a helper for Adam. As naming and nature belong together, the purpose of naming implied an appointment to a specific role. This can be seen

[24] See Peacocke, *op. cit.*, 295–7.

in the context of later prophetic activity in Israel, where kings were appointed at the command and in the authority of God through the prophet.

Thirdly, the role of a priest is to link the worshipper with God. This is not immediately obvious in the Genesis account, but it can be suggested that the later sacrifice of Abel gives some clues that the role of the first men included priestly activity on behalf of the garden and its inhabitants.

VI. The salvation of the environment

We live in a very different situation from Adam and Eve, but the environment still requires the same sort of ministry, perhaps even more, as the need is now not just care, but positive salvation from destruction.

When it comes to the salvation of the individual, there are three aspects to this, corresponding to the threefold office of Christ. A person must have his sins forgiven by the priestly sacrifice of Christ, there must be the receipt of new life, by union with Christ in his kingly victory in the resurrection, there must be repentance, a response to the prophetic demand of Christ. All three are necessary, corresponding to the life, death and resurrection of Christ.[25]

Christians are not called to act in that way, as it has already been done, but are called to act in a similar way for humanity and the environment. There is not a sharing in the nature or divinity of Christ, but there is a sharing in the office. Thus there is a call to live in the correct way, to die in a sense by refusing to live selfishly, and to work for a resurrection or renewal of the environment.

Action for the world should be prophetic. On the one hand this is to publicize the needs of the environment, and to make as many as possible aware of the situation and the consequences if there is not a fundamental change in the way people live. This demand for change would be strengthened by example, so on the other hand there is an need for a personal limitation of consumption and of waste as far as is possible.

Action for the world should be priestly. This complements the idea of self-limitation by seeing it as a sacrifice to God, while of course the sacrifice of one person is barely effective without similar action by others who are made aware by prophetic action. Sacrifice in the priestly sense does however have a positive side in that it is intended

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[25] This is dealt with in more detail in my article 'Salvation and Healing' (Williams, *op. cit.*).

to do real good. Thus to give a single example, trees can be bought and planted, in addition to refraining from chopping others down.

Priestly action has another aspect as well. A priest is an intercessor, and it is valid to ask God to act as creator and re-creator. This is an aspect of ministering on behalf of the environment to God. It incidently follows that such priestly work should rest on personal harmony with the animals and inanimate creation. It is no accident that Francis of Assisi had such rapport with the animals and birds (and maybe Daniel as well?).

Action for the world should be kingly. This again reflects the priestly in that a king should have harmony with what is ruled. This means that unnecessary exploitation should be curbed. The world should not be a slave, but a servant. On the other hand, kingly action should include the development of a world-affirming technology as hinted in Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful'.[26] Technology need not be bad; it is God-given and can have wonderful results benefitting both humanity and the rest of the world.

Seeing Christians, and therefore, ideally, all humanity having a specific role to play, mediating between God and the world as prophet priest and king, gives a role to humanity which will result in the care for the environment. At the same time, however, such care is not at the cost of reducing the Christian view of the special place of humanity in the created order as is the case in other religious views. On the contrary, it in fact gives humanity an even greater dignity, indeed 'little less that God' (Ps. 8:5).

VII. Conclusion

It is hardly surprising if the practical steps advocated here are essentially the same as arrived at from other presuppositions from those of the Christian. After all the problem is a human one, and God reveals his will in some way to all. Hopefully however, Christians should be able to see why such a course of action is right, and so with better motivation there should be better action.

It is incidently right that Christians should be at the forefront of action for the environment despite their supposed bias against it. It is, after all, the West, which has been at least nominally Christian, which has done most of the damage, and whose culture is greatly influencing the rest of the world.[27] It may be objected here that the

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[26] E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: a study of economics as if people mattered* (London, 1973).

[27] North-South—a programme for survival: report of the independent commission on international development under the chairmanship of Willy Brandt. (London, 1980) 162.

West has a post-Christian culture, and that Christian action is ridiculous, impracticable and ineffective. The same could have been said of Christ in his prophetic, priestly and kingly roles, but He changed the world.

Abstract

While the deterioration of the environment is a growing concern, people need to be motivated to take action. While Christianity has been accused of causing ecological damage, Christians rather need a theology of ecological action; this is found in the traditional 'office' of Christ. In imitation of their Lord, Christians should act as prophets, making the need known and demanding action, and providing an example of a correct lifestyle. They should act as priests, in sacrifice for the environment, and even ministering to its needs. They should act as kings, seeking harmony between humanity and the world. Such actions are prefigured in the primal environment of peace and harmony.