TRINITARIAN ECOLOGY

DAVID T. WILLIAMS, UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE, SOUTH AFRICA

One of the major issues confronting the world in the twenty-first century is that of the environment. Human activity has been such that world ecology has been seriously affected, and all indications are that without determined action, concern will move to crisis. Questions of pollution, whether of land, sea or the atmosphere, of the depletion of resources, of the changing patterns of life and the extinction of many species, of erosion, of population growth and of poverty are each of major concern, and more so because they impinge upon each other. Although the disaster foretold by the study led by Meadows in the early 1970s[1] has not yet materialised, the problems addressed by the study have not gone away. Even if the crisis warned against has not yet come, it must be inevitable sooner or later unless there is concerted human action. There may of course be a major catastrophe, such as a meteorite impact or a nuclear war, or God may directly intervene in a dramatic way, but without these, which cannot be presumed upon, action must be taken.

THE NEED FOR MOTIVATION

The major problem here, however, is how such action is to be motivated. The average person is unaware of the wider picture,[2] is unaware of how personal lifestyle is impacting on the environment, and even if aware, is likely to need further convincing that action must be taken. When, as in the first world, life is comfortable, or, as in the third world, questions of immediate survival are pressing, it is hard to motivate action for the environment if this is seen to worsen the situation of the individual. It is the usual case that concern for self takes precedence over concern for others or for the world, and that immediate benefit outweighs benefit in the future. It takes a powerful motivation to overcome these.

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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 J. Porritt, *Where on Earth are we going?* (London, 1990), p. 21.

Even when the problem of the environment is appreciated, not everyone is convinced that action for it should be taken. It has, for example, been suggested that evolution[3] has proceeded as a result of environmental changes,[4] and so that a stable environment would result in a stopping of the development of the species. Such a feeling must however be treated with caution; there are echoes here of Nietzsche and the Nazi attempt to promote the race by means of the Holocaust. In any case, it must be noted that even if the race were to develop, it would still need a liveable environment, and presumably would want a more pleasant one than would seem to be developing as a result of current human activity. It must also be stressed that the problem of environment is an immediate concern, while any process of evolution would be lengthy.

Furthermore, encouraging an interest in environmentalism is because the ecological crisis is a result of technical progress.[5] It is because humanity has been successful in the scientific enterprise that the environment has suffered. Continued human progress has become an assumption, despite its cost to the planet and indeed to the quality of peoples' lives, which suffer due to the demands made on them. Industrialism can be dehumanising;[6] Moltmann can even call progress a fate rather than a hope.[7] However, the frequent hope is that continued scientific progress will solve the ecological problem without a detrimental effect on lifestyle. There is some substance in this, such as by radio and fibre optics reducing the dependence on copper, and the replacement of CFCs by less destructive alternatives. Nevertheless even this may cause its own problems, such as in regard to the moral propriety of the genetic manipulation of plants and animals for human benefit.[8]

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3 This is not to accept the theory of evolution as proven, but to note the influence of a widely accepted theory. In fact, in addition to the problem of relating the theory to the Bible, which is however not insuperable, there are several other problems with it such as its relation to the idea of entropy, its possibility in the available timescale, and even the initiation of life and matter.

4 M. Nicholson, *The New Environmental Age* (Cambridge, 1987), p. xii.

5 S. McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: the Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London, 1994), p. 159.

6 T. Cooper, *Green Christianity: Caring for the Whole Creation* (London, 1990), p. 77.

7 J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London, 1985), p. 28.

8 McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, p. 24.

CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION

Many Christians are aware of the problems and are convinced that there must be changes in the way human life is managed. There has accordingly been a flood of books and articles addressing questions of ecology. Such are commendable, but what must be asked is how far such material is really Christian, but could, with minor modifications, belong to any religious tradition, or even to none. Is there such a thing as a distinctively Christian approach to ecology, based upon ideas unique to the Christian faith?

It would even seem to be the case that there are fewer Christians than people as a whole who are convinced that they need to act for the environment. Granberg-Michaelson cites a social study by Kellert of Yale which indicates that increasing commitment to Christianity is accompanied by a decreasing concern for the environment.[9] There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, it could well be felt to be an usurping of what is God's responsibility. He, after all, cares for the sparrows. Closely allied to this is the feeling that Christian concern should be relating to God, not the world, which would be paganism. Again, with a similar dualistic undertone, God is seen to give heaven to his people, so that this world does not matter. This is closely allied to the Protestant emphasis that God works primarily in the individual.

Again, the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura* must shoulder some of the blame. Where a reliance on the Bible as final authority just involves a demand for specific chapter and verse on every issue, some concerns, such as the ecological, and even doctrines such as belief in the Trinity, are difficult to justify. Indeed, it is noticeable that ecological concern has been more evident within the Catholic tradition. Here, on the one hand, it is true that the Bible indeed says little on the problem directly. There are a few exceptions, such as the action of Noah, Job 38f. and Psalm 104, but these are rare. Even Jesus says almost nothing; despite a rural setting and the use of nature in many parables, he says little about its care. On the other hand, the Bible is often accused of contributing to the problem in its record of the giving of dominion over nature to humanity (Gen.1:28), interpreted as permission to use and to exploit. This may be connected to a dualistic belief in that possession of the image of God, which gives that dominion, is often identified with the spiritual nature of humanity, which it is often felt only humans possess, and which alone is really important.

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[9] W. Granberg-Michaelson (ed.), *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 3.

Each of these points has been challenged. Humanity was commanded to work in the garden, indicating the value of the physical, and also of ecological care. Moreover, dualism is frequently attacked as a vestige of a Greek worldview, the belief being that the Hebrew notion was more integrated. In keeping with this, it has been suggested that the idea of the resurrection indicates the survival and importance of the body, and that at the same time this world will be re-created, maintaining a measure of continuity, so that its present state is important. Such points naturally deserve more detail than is possible here.

Perhaps more important for motivation are direct biblical statements, and here it is crucial to point out that the Bible speaks in a world very different from the modern, where environmentalism was not a concern. In particular, the 'dominion text' has its own context, one of human impotence and under-population. At the same time, 'dominion' need not imply authority to use and abuse, but as that of a king, authority to be able to serve.[10]

Important though these are, it is hardly sufficient to answer critiques of a concern for the environment, but it is necessary to go a step further and to ask if there are positive reasons for Christians to act. Is environmentalism a necessary implication of the Christian faith, even if it may not be found explicitly in the Bible?

This again has several aspects, but of great importance is that common concern for the environment is felt to follow from the understanding of God as creator and sustainer.[11] God's love and care for the world should then be imitated by people. Thus McDonagh[12] stresses the significance of the first line of the creed, and Durrell[13] wonders how Christianity, with such a belief, could have been so ecologically insensitive in the past. This can be developed further, as with Moltmann,[14] who feels that the institution of the Sabbath, resting on creation, implies a command to care for the world. But valid though this is, is it really distinctively Christian?

There are several possible approaches to a really Christian ecology, which cannot be developed here. I have elsewhere tried to take the central

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[10] For a fuller explanation, and exegesis of the Genesis text, see my 'Fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28): Dominion to Exploit and Pollute?' *Scriptura* 44 (1993), pp. 51-65.

[11] *E.g.* F. van Dyke *et al.*, *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996).

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[13] L. Durrell, *State of the Ark* (London, 1986), p. 12.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 277f.

affirmation of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and to suggest that such identification with humanity in incarnation must have ecological implications.[15] As God incarnate, Jesus played a unique part in reconciling people to God; this can be related to ecological concerns. More than this however, the purpose of the incarnation was for salvation. This, as with the Greek word *sozo*, must include the nuance of preservation as well as of re-creation. The world, as well as people, will experience a transformation in continuity.

This can then be taken a stage further, because flowing from an affirmation of the deity of Jesus came the doctrine of the Trinity. Such does have some parallel in other religious traditions, but essentially it is a unique Christian teaching. Now this has been neglected for various reasons, but if God is indeed Trinitarian, this should impinge upon every aspect of belief, and affect every human activity, which will include attitudes to, and action connected with, the environment. It is striking that a major work on ecology from a Christian perspective, such as that of Santmire,[16] contains almost no reference to the Trinity.

THE TRINITY AS GOD'S MODEL

It is perhaps significant that while Christianity has been accused of ignoring environmental concerns, even of causing ecological damage, this has usually been connected to a simple monotheism such as by Moltmann,[17] who however suggests that a more accurate understanding of God as Trinity would not do this.

White[18] is quite correct to suggest that monotheism drives a wedge between a transcendent God and nature, and so devalues the latter. However the basis of a Trinitarian view is that while transcendent, God involved himself fully in creation by sending his Son. This immediately gives a value to the world. It is also by God's immanence that we know that the Trinity exists, and then by our immanence to the world that care for it comes.

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[15] D. T. Williams, 'The Christian and the environment: prophet, priest and king', *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1970), pp. 143-58.

[16] H. P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, 1985).

[17] J. Moltmann, 'The ecological crisis: peace with nature?' *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9 (1988), pp. 8,9.

[18] L. White Jr, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), p. 1205.

Some strands of Christian thought do relate God's action to the world in a Trinitarian way. Based upon texts such as Colossians 1:15f. or 1 Corinthians 8:6, it is possible to see God the Father as the ultimate source of all that is, and God the Son as the agent by which creation was enacted. Then to complete the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit may be viewed as the fount of life. Differences are found as to whether such belief is a real reflection of a division of labour in the Godhead, or whether, emphasising the unity of God, such are really just 'appropriated' to the three persons, and that all activity of God in the world is an undivided action of the entire Trinity.

What is clear is that the action of the Trinity, specifically in the incarnation, gives evidence for God's love and care of the world. God acts by participation as well as by command. 1 John 4:10 asserts that love for humanity is demonstrated by the sending of God's Son and by his death; the inference is that otherwise we could not be sure that God does in fact care for us. We could be dealing with a capricious God, delighting in the suffering and pain of humanity, even at the same time protesting his love. We could be dealing with an impotent God, really loving, but making empty promises that he is unable to fulfil. We could be dealing with a deistic God, happy to create and to do nothing more at all. It is the incarnation, so the Trinity, which gives evidence that this is not the case, and even that this love is not just to humanity, but is for the whole world (Rom. 8:22). Not that this latter can really be disputed; humanity is so much a part of the world that love for one cannot be expressed while ignoring the other. Such then gives a stronger motivation for love and care for the world by humanity than just an affirmation of creation.

Christian theology traditionally sees the purpose of the incarnation in reconciling people to God. If this is the case, it follows that it also enables reconciliation between human beings, harmony as God intended, and presumably then also with the rest of creation. If the biblical explanation for the environmental problem is human disobedience (as Genesis 3),[19] dividing not just humanity from God, but humanity from humanity, and also from nature,[20] then the ultimate solution is by reconciliation with God.

This latter point is strengthened by the sending of the third Person, the Spirit, for it is by this power that peace and harmony is in fact

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[19] L. Osborn, *Guardians of Creation: Nature in Theology and the Christian Life* (Leicester, 1993), p. 88.

[20] F. A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton & London, 1970), p. 67.

achieved. The life-giving Spirit of God gives relationship in created things.[21] A good example of this is in Christian healing, where the Spirit's action restores health and harmony to a diseased body. Likewise the action of the Spirit may be seen as giving life to a diseased creation. Such action is again evidence of God's desire for harmony within the wider creation, and again a motive for Christians, led by the Spirit, to do what they can to that end.

The doctrine of the Trinity however provides far more than evidence of God's care for the world, and a motivation of human care for it, however much this would otherwise be little more than empty hope. If the world is a creation of the triune God, what may be expected is that this triunity would be reflected in the way things are. Not only does God's action as the economic Trinity provide an example for human action, but God's very being as the immanent Trinity also has ecological implications. Such is not an unreasonable idea; if two people do one job, it will inevitably be done differently, and the difference can be related to the nature of those individuals. Who they are affects the nature of the work that they do. There is thus an ancient idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis*, a belief that vestiges or marks of Trinity should be visible in the world. Thus Bonaventure (1221-74), for example, sees a Trinitarian unity in the whole created order; creation reflects God throughout.[22] Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) sees creation as a replica of the Trinity.[23] Several suggestions have been made in this regard, such as a tree being roots, trunk and branches, or water in a spring, river and lake, or the inherent threeness of dimensions or of the states of matter. The classic is of course the attempt of Augustine of Hippo in his *de Trinitate* to see the Trinity reflected in the human mind. This may be taken to imply that the actions of the Trinity in the world are like the workings of the mind, not visible; this is in keeping with the famous *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* (external works of the Trinity are undivided). This would make the Trinity irrelevant to the world outside the mind.[24] The whole idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis* has quite naturally been severely criticised. For example, very often an artificial threeness has been forced, and if a desire

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[21] J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 225.

[22] Santmire, *The Travail of Nature.*, p. 100.

[23] E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 289.

[24] C. E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 106.

had been to see a duality or a quaternity, such could equally well have been put forward. Certainly, as Barth stresses, it would seem to be illegitimate to use evidence of threeness in the world as evidence for belief in the Trinity. The doctrine has to have a different basis.

Yet even if it is not valid to deduce the doctrine from the world, it is acceptable to use the nature of the world to illustrate it. By all accounts, the Trinity is hard to understand, and illustrations from nature are of great value in aiding comprehensibility. More than with any other doctrine, except perhaps Christology, parallels and analogy are of great value, and are legitimate if God is the creator.

Now in this case, it is also valid to work in the opposite direction as well. If it is valid to see the way in which the world works as illustrative of the Trinity, then the idea of the Trinity may be used to deduce what the correct operation of the world should be. Thus as humanity is a part of the created order, it is likely to relate to that order in a way parallel to the relationships within the Trinity.[25] 'One has not to understand God from what he has done, but the things he has done, from God.'[26] Although humanity, more than the created world, is in the image of God, the world should still reflect the nature of the Trinity to some extent.

It is probably too much to expect to see every facet of Trinitarian belief as reflected in ecology. Nevertheless, the essential nature of the Trinity is to be found, and is indeed then valuable in understanding how the world should interrelate. The classic belief is that there is one God, who exists as three coequal persons; this essentially means that within the Godhead there is distinctiveness, but at the same time there is harmony, even unity. These are indeed to be found in the created world. Although, as is common in the West, emphasis has been placed on substantial pictures of the Trinity, the vestigia idea can also be applied dynamically or relationally. On the one hand the world is replete with the distinctions between what is living and what is not, between material and spirit, between different species, and so on. On the other these interrelate in a variety of ways. Life-forms depend on others, and on the inanimate world for their survival, and indeed there is a majestic unity to the whole of creation. As with the Trinity, both distinctiveness and oneness are essential, and neither may be affirmed at the expense of the other. It is this which lies at the heart of correct ecology.

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[25] *Cf.* R. Elsdon, *Greenhouse Theology: Biblical Perspectives on Caring for Creation* (Tunbridge Wells, 1992), p. 45.

[26] E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Edinburgh & London, 1976), p. 6.

This essential point may well be stressed by reference to the great Trinitarian heresies. Heresy may be seen as good and valuable when it prompts the development of correct belief. This happened in the case of belief in God, and can be paralleled in the development of correct attitudes to the created order.

At the very crudest level, Trinitarian belief is then the affirmation of both distinctiveness and oneness. It is thus a rejection on the one hand of an excessive distinctiveness without oneness which manifests itself as tritheism, and on the other hand of an excessive oneness without distinctiveness, manifesting as belief in a simple monad. Both of those beliefs are present in the world and are rejected by Christians, and at the same time, the ecological parallels are present, and should then also be questioned from a Christian perspective.

TRINITARIAN INTER-RELATEDNESS

Tritheism is a lack of appreciation of inter-relatedness. The core reason for belief in the Trinity is the New Testament affirmation of the divinity of Jesus (and then of the Holy Spirit), but held in relation to his own affirmation of the Fatherhood of God. This however immediately gives a relationship between the divinity of Jesus and that of his Father, but the Old Testament insistence on monotheism means that there is a deep unity between the persons. If this is put into ecological terms, it means that the value of each living species is to be respected, and even that there is value in the inanimate creation as well. This is because the various forms of life and of the material environment have a deep interrelationship. Such relating may be seen as perhaps even more fundamental than being itself.[27] In fact this can be put even more strongly; the three persons of the Trinity do not just interrelate, but interpenetrate (*perichoresis*), a feature which may be understood as fundamental to correct Trinitarianism.[28] This is a participation in each other paralleled in the world.

This means that there must be extreme caution in human activity lest the very delicate interrelationships are damaged. When industry results in acid rain, or when the Amazon rainforest is felled indiscriminately, the effect on the atmosphere presents a danger ultimately to humanity itself.[29] A further example of this problem is the use of DDT to control

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[27] Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 11.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[29] See B. McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London, 1990).

insect pests, resulting in the build-up of the chemicals in other forms of life to their detriment, and ultimately to that of humanity.

It may also be noted that ecological damage may be traced to excessive human consumption. This has a variety of causes, but one major factor is excessive purchases beyond those required by need, often to impress others, so ultimately caused by a lack of correct relationships with others. Similarly pollution may occur due to a lack of concern for others. Although older societies sought equilibrium, those which strive for growth cannot avoid ecological damage, leading ultimately to their own destruction, a point applicable to modern socialism as much as to capitalism.[30]

TRINITARIAN ONENESS

The opposite extreme to tritheism is so to affirm the unity of God that there is no distinction between the Persons. This is not an affirmation of God's oneness as in Judaism or Islam which then demands that Jesus is not divine, but is such a unity as is consistent with that divinity. It could well follow that all people, indeed all animals, plants and other material also manifest divinity to some extent. After all, even Jesus, quoting the Old Testament (Ps. 82:6), said that his hearers could be called gods (John 10:34). Is it possible that all are divine, and in this all is united? Such ideas are common, for example appearing in the modern New Age movement, a form of pantheistic monism, in which people seek to realise their inherent divinity to a greater extent.[31] In this case there is no fundamental distinction between Christ and anyone, even anything else. Ecologically, this means that all is valuable, all is sacred, a short step to the veneration of sacred cows and, albeit a bit inconsistently, to vegetarianism. Concern for the environment, the protection and enhancement of life follows naturally from this view; each creature is of value.[32] It is hardly surprising that much ecological concern comes from a pantheistic worldview;[33] sometimes the whole world is seen as an integrated, living organism, the *Gaia* hypothesis.[34] But if all are divine, or all are just material, the differences between individuals tend to be lost, especially where the stress falls on overall unity and harmony.

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30 Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, pp. 24, 28.

31 D. R. Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986), pp. 18, 22.

32 Osborn, *Guardians of Creation*, p. 58.

33 Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 23.

34 Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, p. 115.

However, Trinitarianism, while affirming the full divinity of all three persons, also distinguishes clearly between them. Jesus, while himself divine, could still refer to his Father as 'my God' (John 20:17). The Persons are each God, but they are not the same. Likewise a human being and other animals, even plants, all share life, and human beings, with all creation, share a material nature, even being made of the same essential elements, yet there is a distinction which must be made. People are not just animals, not just material, but in the very diversity is something of value. If all are divine to some extent, the implication may well be, not that each is valuable, but on the contrary, that specific individuals, even species, are expendable, as deity is also manifested elsewhere. As Schaeffer[35] points out, in pantheism the whole has meaning, but individuals lose value. But if diversity in itself is of value, people cannot be content to witness the extinction of species, currently running at about one per day,[36] or even worse, at another estimate, one hundred per day.[37] This means that whereas, to cite one example, it is hard to appreciate that rhinos have a great contribution to make to ecological relationships, it is still a tragedy when they are hunted to the brink of extinction for their horns. The rhino has value not just because it exists as part of an expression of a pantheistic 'one', not even because it was created and was good, but from the value of diversity. This point is well appreciated in the secular world: the 1982 UN World Charter for nature says that 'every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth for man'.[38]

INTER-TRINITARIAN RELATIONSHIP

Tritheism or pantheism, while they may be viewed as consistent with an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus, have hardly been a threat to Trinitarian doctrine, indeed they can hardly be viewed as Trinitarian heresy at all. Despite this, their ecological equivalents are present and need to be rebutted, although it may well be suggested that as with any 'Christian' tritheism or pantheism, adherence to them is not so much from a deliberate choice, but from a lack of a real consideration of the issues. Trinitarianism has however been threatened by two more significant

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[35] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[36] R. Ambler, *Global Theology: The Meaning of Faith in the Present World Crisis* (London & Philadelphia, 1990), p. 44.

[37] Osborn, *Guardians of Creation*, p. 17.

[38] J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London, 1981) p. 77.

heresies, and it would seem that these two also have ecological parallels that have had a much wider acceptance and thus need a more definite rebuttal. In the case of the Trinity, history witnessed a long battle against them, a battle which is by no means over, insofar as both constantly reoccur in various guises. The same is true with ecology.

Here the parallels between the Trinity and the workings of the world need to be expanded. It is really inadequate to speak of the Trinity just in terms of distinction and inter-relatedness without defining a little more closely how the relationships occur. Here Trinitarianism speaks of the generation of the Son from the Father and of the procession of the Holy Spirit. This means that the activity of both the Son and of the Holy Spirit is derived from the Father. The parallel to this is a common feature of the world, where every living being exists in a derived form, and even much inanimate material comes from other sources, deriving from them by chemical or nuclear processes. This dependence has other facets as well, such as dependence due to eating, of physical support such as in roots of trees, and then when the continued existence of an animal or plant depends absolutely upon the choice of another.

A further very significant factor is that the inter-Trinitarian relationships are stable and eternal. The world likewise should ideally be stable, with sustainable use of resources, and production of waste only at a level able to be absorbed by the ecosystem.

Inter-Trinitarian relationships are a process, and likewise ecological relationships. God is life, and in the world life depends on the constant cycling of resources. These are held in balance, with no Trinitarian Person being dominant; ecological problems arise due to lack of balance, resulting in lack, as when species become endangered, or excess, requiring culling or weed control.

ECOLOGICAL ARIANISM

Perhaps the major threat to orthodox Trinitarianism arose in the fourth century with Arianism, and lingers today in groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Although this affirms the divinity of Jesus, its stress falls on the absolute monotheism so clear particularly in the Old Testament. The solution presented is that only the Father is God in the full sense. The divinity of the Son is not eternal, but is created and so derived from the Father, which means that the Son is inherently subordinate to the Father, so that his divinity is of a lesser degree. As is well known, the result of this was a protracted theological debate, intertwined with problems of language and of politics, until the Nicene affirmation that Father and Son

(and Holy Spirit) are of the same substance, so coequal and co-eternal, could be affirmed without denying a difference between them.

Ecologically, the Arian subordination of the Son to the Father is paralleled in the dominion of humanity over the rest of the created order. Just as the Son is always obedient to the Father (John 6:38), so humanity has authority over the rest of the created order. Warrant for this is usually seen in the 'creation mandate' of Genesis 1:28. This is often taken as divine sanction for human use of the environment, so permission to use and exploit, and even to abuse. The verse has also been taken as a divine command to breed as much as possible. Both aspects have had an obvious and enormous effect upon the environment.

Apart from the underlying philosophical ideas which prompted the emergence of Arianism, part of the justification for its system was the clear references to subordination in the New Testament. The classic text is John 14:28: 'the Father is greater than I', and there are several other texts commonly adduced. Not the least bit of evidence is the fact that the Son is called a 'Son', so logically less than the Father.

Ecologically also, the subordination of the rest of creation to humanity can also be justified by reference to humanity being in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Other animals, and the rest of creation, not being in the image, are therefore subordinate.

Now the biblical references to the subordination of the Son can well be seen as consistent with equality of essence between Father and Son. In the incarnation, the Son assumed a state of humiliation in order to relate fully to the world (Phil. 2:7), but this need not be seen as an inherent subordination. As for the fact of his being a Son, this also is not inherent subordination; in the human case, a father and son are absolutely equal as regards their essence of humanity.

In the same way, humanity and the rest of creation indeed share an equality of essence. All are made of the same material elements, and all living things share life. This latter is particularly clear in that human beings, as other animals, must feed on life in order to survive. They cannot eat the inanimate, or even things that have been dead for too long a period of time. The only distinction here is that the Genesis account distinguishes the life of people from that of other animals and plants; whereas the account speaks simply of their creation in Genesis 1, which includes humanity, the account in Genesis 2 distinguishes between the material creation of the first man and the breathing into him of life (Gen. 2:7). This latter could however simply be an elaboration of

the general process, or could be interpreted as the giving of a spiritual capacity.[39]

If there is this equality of essence, humanity should not be seen as enjoying fundamental superiority over the rest of creation but should again be conscious of interdependence. Schaeffer[40] thus distinguishes between sovereignty and dominion. It is perhaps significant that the dominion of Genesis 1:28 comes immediately after the implication of divine plurality, so interdependence, of Genesis 1:26. Dominion is to be seen, not in the sense of the rule of a superior over an inferior, but that of a state of service. This may indeed be seen when the first man exercised dominion; this was expressed in the naming of the animals (Gen. 2:19).[41] A further example of this may be seen later in Israelite history. In contrast to the hegemony exercised by Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings, the Israelite king was appointed as a servant. It was not a case of the people existing to benefit the king, but the king to serve the people.

This point should be clear in reference to humanity being in the image of God. This does not mean a dominant position of superiority, but of service. The New Testament makes it plain that the image of God in the full sense is Christ; and certainly he did not come to dominate from a position of superiority, but on the contrary 'the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'(Mark 10:45).

Perhaps part of the reason for the striking omission of the idea of the image of God after the three initial references in Genesis (1:26; 5:1; 9:6), was that the ancient near East in general applied it to the king,[42] and that it was then interpreted as rule rather than service.

Thus far from a state of superiority, paralleled to the Arian heresy, the relationship of humanity to the rest of creation is that of orthodox Trinitarianism. Particularly if the plural 'let us make' in the context of the 'dominion mandate' (Gen. 1:26) is accepted as referring to the Trinity, then the exercise of dominion must be Trinitarian. Here there is an absolute equality in essence, but a distinction in role. Just as the Son was sent to do the will of the Father, and so serves the Trinity, and indeed the three Persons serve each other, so humanity and the rest of creation also

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[39] H. Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester & Downers Grove, Illinois, 1984), p. 77.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

[42] D. J. A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), p. 83.

have an equality in essence, but a relationship of mutual service. Dominion is never arbitrary rule, but is given for the benefit of those 'dominated'.

ECOLOGICAL SABELLIANISM

Historically, whereas the fear of the Western church was always of Arianism, the Eastern church tended to be prone to this because of the fear of Sabellianism. Despite their fears, this latter was never such a challenge to Trinitarianism as was Arianism. The heresy of Sabellius was an attempt to safeguard the unity of God, and it did this by suggesting that the one God manifested himself in different modes at different times. God then effectively changes between modes, the Father becoming the Son and then becoming the Holy Spirit. The extreme implication of this is of patripassianism, which means that the Father himself suffered and died. Because of such difficulties, and because there are several clear biblical references, such as the baptism of Jesus, where the three persons occur together, Sabellianism only ever enjoyed limited support. It was never a real alternative to Trinitarianism.

The essential idea is one of single entity operating in various ways depending on the circumstances. This is quite attractive in an ecological context, where the occurrence of particular life forms is seen as dependent upon their suitability for a particular set of circumstances such as climate and availability of food. Less clearly the case, it has been suggested[43] that the very emergence of life was due to the occurrence of a favourable set of circumstances. Then the modern diversity is due to the changes due to changing environments. Obviously evolution is very consistent with this idea.

Quite naturally, the complementary idea is to change the nature of reality by changing the circumstances. Now this is what human activity does to a large extent. We plant seeds, irrigate and remove unwanted vegetation; we selectively breed animals to encourage desirable traits; even building houses can be viewed as local climatic modification. All these, and others, are done in response to the circumstances.

Now it would seem that God as Trinity has done something similar, acting in a way different from the Old Testament by the incarnation of the Son and in the sending of the Spirit.(Gal. 4:4).

Human activity has always to be relevant to circumstances. Technology, for example, has to be such as is appropriate to the setting;

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[43] D. Bridge, *God of Science, God of Faith* (London, 1988), p. 49.

much modern equipment cannot work in the third world due to lack of the required infrastructure, such as the provision of trained personnel, availability of spares or even a stable power supply. A second very pertinent example is that the 'dominion mandate' of Genesis 1:26 is sometimes taken as a command to multiply. This may have been appropriate when the earth was empty, but surely not today. Moss[44] comments that the earth is now full, the command has been fulfilled.

Activity as relevant to circumstance does not mean that it is legitimate to take advantage of a situation for personal gain. Examples of this are legion, such as unloading banned or expired drugs onto a third world situation because they cannot be used in the first, or similarly of disposal of toxic waste in the third world. Most pertinently, Liberation theology has drawn attention to the exploitation of the poor, possible because of their circumstance, the lack of choice of alternatives. God's action, on the contrary, as in the incarnation, was of positive help even at great cost to himself. This change in God's activity, as others, was a response to circumstance.

However Sabellianism does not just say that God changes the way he acts in accordance with circumstances, but that he changes in himself. It hardly needs to be said that change is a major feature of the modern world. Particularly due to technological innovation, the modern world is very different from that of the last century and even of a few decades, even years ago. Now it is not this change that has generated the current spate of ecological problems, but the current state of the world which gobbles resources, generates pollution and erosion and stimulates growth in population; the modern, however, world effectively puts its faith in continued change which will then enable these problems to be overcome. There is some evidence for such a hope; towards the end of the last century a major ecological problem in large cities was the disposal of the droppings of horses used for transport. Then came the development of motorised transport, and with this change, the problem simply disappeared. It is then a hope that there will be continued change and problems such as the depletion of oil reserves, and the pollution of the atmosphere and of the oceans, will equally become irrelevant. The basic idea is that one situation can be changed to another. Ecological damage is then not serious. A similar hope as regards population growth is that the third world, where the great growth of population is being experienced, will also change its attitudes, and then experience the same demographic transition as has resulted in numerical stability in the developed world.

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[44] R. Moss, *The Earth in our Hands* (Leicester, 1982), p. 38.

More than the hope of the world being based on continued change, its very ethos is similarly based. Much modern technology is based on the principle of planned obsolescence so that a particular machine is built for a specific life expectancy, with the intention that it be replaced by a newer model. Such a philosophy naturally compounds the ecological problem of resource usage, as rather than repair components, the whole machine has to be replaced. Similarly the capitalist economic system depends on continual change, especially expansion.

If the hope of the world is pinned so firmly upon change, then human effort is expended in order to promote such change. It is here that problems occur. Firstly of course the development of new technology in itself is liable to exacerbate existing problems or cause new ones. Examples of this are legion, such as the development of hybrid grain, which gives high yields, but is prone to disease and requires extra feeding, requiring the use of expensive and polluting chemicals. Secondly the temptation is to work for change in ways such as genetic engineering or more crudely in the removal of unwanted elements such as in the extermination programmes of Nazism.

The other side of Sabellianism is that of the unity of the Godhead. There is no divinity other than that manifesting at a particular time. The parallel to this is that outside of the ecosystem there is then no other reality; this would indeed be the prevalent modern assumption. This means that change is the only solution. In contrast, Christianity sees divine intervention, from 'outside' the world, as the solution to human problems. Thus God sent his Son to die and to rise to give salvation, the Holy Spirit is given to enable a relationship with the transcendent God. More pertinently, when Christ died, that was not deity in total dying, so that the world would still be maintained, and that God could raise Christ from death.[45] Patripassianism has always been a major problem for Sabellians!

Thus the Christian solution to ecology is not that of change as such, but of divine intervention. There is no solution in the world as such without God's action for it.

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[45] Acts 2:24,32; Rom. 6:4,8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20. Although a few texts, notably John 2:19 and 10:17, would appear to indicate that the resurrection was Jesus' own act, these must be read in the context of the others, and also of John 2:22 and 10:18. The resurrection could perhaps be seen as a joint act, but this would also then imply a distinct Father.

As with Arianism, there is a sense in which Sabellianism is correct. The Father may not change into the Son but he does impart his being to the Son. Life is transferred, the life of the Father is received by the Son, and likewise the Holy Spirit receives by procession. This however involves no loss to the giver. Likewise in the world, life is transferred and changed continually, usually by the process of eating. In the world this is, however, as in the divine prototype, part of the overall process of equilibrium. Life participates in food chains, but all, as species, survive. What Sabellius proposed is something different; the generation of the Son was at the cost of the being of the Father, so there was total loss. Sabellian ecology is also at the cost of total loss, and in that way it is wrong.

CONCLUSION

Arianism and Sabellianism parallel the commonest attitudes to the environment. On the one hand the attitude of domination and on the other the process of change are both in a sense valid but when taken to extremes are detrimental to the environment and so ultimately to human beings themselves. Schaeffer[46] significantly points out that much ecological damage is caused by human greed and haste; willingness to spend more money or take more time would solve many of the problems. It could well be suggested here that Sabellianism results from an incorrect view of time, while Arianism is a distorted view of value. A correct view of the Trinity gives a correct perspective on each and so when paralleled in the environment would benefit rather than harm it. Indeed, a Trinitarian attitude, respecting the value of every part of the environment, its diversity and interdependence, will benefit each part, and so ultimately humanity.

The challenge of the Trinity is not only of understanding it, which is ultimately impossible, but of ordering life and worship in a way consistent with it. So often in practice, as a doctrine it is ignored with its implications. The challenge for Christians is rather to work out the practice on the grounds of a Trinitarian understanding and so develop a distinctive approach to life and its problems.

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[46] Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 83.