

How to See Green

*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.
(Gen. 2:15)*

It would be safe to say that the nature of the times force the Church to define its position with respect to the issues of the day, primarily because our views diverge ever more dramatically from those that are actively promoted by the chief influencers of our times. It is not only others that we need to convince, but ourselves, as well, because playing this role of a besieged minority is a relatively new one for the Western Church. Our weaponry in this spiritual battle that is being pushed upon us is still very much in the developmental phase, and it has barely been tried and tested. Because the conflict grows hotter all the time, we are tempted to drag into the arena our means of defense and offense before we have been thoroughly trained in their use. And the results have often been unfortunate: we have easily played into the hands of those who oppose Christian values, who are all too ready to amplify our failures, and have been less than successful at clearly conveying the truth in times when it is desperately needed.

Today being Rogation Sunday, when the theme of stewardship of the earth's harvest is so prominent, we are invited to look at this touchy matter of environmentalism. We are all aware that this topic has been raised in the eyes of many to that of a Gospel tenet, and is waved around in full view everywhere. It has become almost a test of purity and holiness: standing for the environment unequivocally and without exception is deemed righteous, whereas urging the need to allow business and industry to have the freedom to function is a moral evil. This places the believer in a very awkward spot. We affirm that this magnificent world is the handiwork of God, and reflects His glory, and is to be treated with respect and dignity. We also recognize that multiplied billions of men cannot live off of dreams and ideas alone. They must utilize the environment to survive, and therefore must make decisions that will impact it.

I admit that I am uncomfortable with a certain spirit that seems to be consuming the world today: it is expediency gone wild. There is an almost criminal mindset that throws off all restraint for the sake of making money and gaining power. I see it described in these fateful words from Psalm 12:1-4:

Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?

Meanwhile there is plenty of lip-service given to preserving the environment, to reducing pollution, to multiplying the green and stamping out the black, when all the while there is the tacit un-

derstanding that in a world afire with consumerism, any efforts to blunt its effects on the planet are cosmetic at best, and more than likely too late. This is a sad state of affairs, indeed.

How, then, can the Christian prime his own heart and mind on this issue? First of all, as among those who love the One who *made the earth and the heavens* (Gen. 2:4), we are not ashamed to proclaim as we do every day in the *Venite* (Book of Common Prayer, p.9):

“In his hand are all the corners of the earth; and the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands prepared the dry land.”

In the *Benedicite, omnia opera Domini* (BCP pp. 12-13) we also shout aloud:

“O let the Earth bless the Lord: yea, let it praise him, and magnify him for ever.”

Every evening we bow our heads in thanksgiving to the God who has given us that which the earth has supplied. We are aghast that the world should charge greedily and thanklessly into the natural resources that God in kindness has provided. It is ingratitude that causes men to mistreat the earth and approach it as if they deserved it. We cannot under any circumstances side with such an attitude.

On the other hand, we oppose those who wield power and influence, based upon the presumption that they are gatekeepers of the environment, to curtail the liberties of those who seek to both enjoy and make conscientious use of that bounty which is a gift from God. We recognize that behind this facade of self-righteousness is a hunger for control, for keeping people bound by rule and regulation, on the part of those who fancy they are in a position to run the Earth in the place of God.

As Christians, we recognize that Nature is subservient to Man, not the other way around, which is gross idolatry. This attitude is the fruit of long generations of the rise of science and the repudiation of religion which would make man nothing but another animal, shorn of the dignity of his unique creation *in the image of God* (Gen. 1:27).

Do you see how critical our stance is here? We cannot condone environmental irresponsibility, and the arrogance that dismisses every sort of concern for the earth as stupid and irrelevant. This just isn't so. There are real dangers afoot to worldwide natural resources, and those considerations that are legitimate we must actively affirm and support. Nor, on the opposite end, can we back this iron-fisted mentality that would deprive the world of liberty in the name of saving it.

Finally, and most significantly, *we according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness* (2 Peter 3:13). It's not as if we are callous and indifferent to this present world, but our destinies are linked to another which will endure forever. In that place, there will be no exploitation of resources, nor any effort permissible to raise the resource over those who would make use of it. Because this is our viewpoint, we really are liberated from the conflicts which rage around us here. We can instead concentrate on showing Christ-

ian charity and grace to those who oppose us, offer constructive and helpful criticism where necessary, defend those as best we can who are subject to unjust and arbitrary power, and go on preaching the Gospel.

And, in the meantime, we can love and appreciate the beauty of that which surrounds us, while breathing in the Maine air, planting our gardens, delighting in the season, and viewing all with a proper perspective.

For, quoting the prophet, *This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.* (Is. 54:17)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.