

as this. The religio-cultural war between the Croats and Serbs, no less than current tensions between Greeks and Turks, Jews and Palestinians, Azerbaijanis and Armenians, Slovaks and Czechs—all manifest the danger. All suggest, for Pfaff, the irresponsibility of immigration policies that promise new confrontations between peoples of deep cultural differences and expectations.

The Monastic Ethic and the Spirit of Greenery

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Lucio: Why, how now Claudio! whence comes this restraint?

Claudio: From too much liberty my Lucio; liberty,
As surfeit, is the father of much fast;
So every scope by the immoderate use
Turns to restraint...

(Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* Act 1 Scene 2)

What we can call 'greenery' is all about ordering one's life. It is about how to live in our common home; to be green it is not necessary to be a Christian. An eclectic mix of cosmology and apocalyptic speculation, politics and sheer commonsense, make up what Germaine Greer has called the 'Tyranny of the Green Religion'. This embodies both criticism and hope and, more immediately, a call to change the minutiae of one's life in the face of a perceived threat to that life. In the face of massive pollution outside the private sphere of influence we are trying, rather desperately perhaps, to rediscover personal ways of becoming clean. Ironically, this might be achieved by romantically rediscovering the organic, the soil, dirt, clay itself, the natural, the given in the face of the man made; an attempt to place the moral and political orders once more in the context of the natural order.

Two recently published books attempt to green the Churches and stimulate dialogue between those ecologically minded people who are not Christian and those Christian people who are not particularly ecologically minded. Some education is necessary for both groups, and

Sean McDonagh's *Greening of the Church* together with Tim Cooper's *Green Christianity*¹ try, in a serious but popular and accessible way, to fill the gap for the Christian, who can talk of creation rather than the environment. The first is written from a Third World perspective by an Irish Columban missionary who has worked in the Philippines for the past twenty years, and has seen much danger and destruction. The second is by an active Green Party member an Anglican and economist who lives in Cambridge, England.

If the dominant world view is 'neither Christian nor ecological' (Cooper p.6) both books recognise, in McDonagh's words, that we live in 'a finite world with a limited carrying capacity', or acknowledge in Cooper's words 'the earth's limits to supply raw materials for production processes and that all wealth ultimately derives from the finite resources of the planet'. Ironically, the very comforts of our cosmopolitan and cosy world are bought at a price which may prove to be too high and are at the very least ambivalent in their benefits. What we did to the American Indians under the legitimisation of property theory we might now be doing to ourselves.

Fr McDonagh tries to go straight to the heart of the economic problem in his opening chapter on international debt. His book is in some ways curiously titled for along with the debt question it deals with population, and this before a chapter on the rainforest destruction in the Philippines; there is very little on the issues of scientific interest. Finally Part Two looks at creation in scripture and tradition to cope with the essentially moral issues posed in Part One. McDonagh is in fact dealing with issues of perennial interest to Catholic moral theologians since they pertain to those fundamental aspects of human life, money, sex and power. The former have often been treated under the headings of usury and contraception.

Moreover the pattern of McDonagh's book dimly reflects the vows of a religious: poverty, chastity and obedience are surely related to debt, population, and scripture and tradition. Perhaps this is why the issue of rainforest destruction is put in almost as an afterthought. This last of course relates to the question of injustice as well as to that of environmental destruction. However, McDonagh is probably right to concentrate on the less dramatic, but more telling and obviously human problems that lead to the destruction of the forests. This is where issues become complicated.

It is we who are destroying eco systems. It is how we live in our story of meanings that will affect the natural world. Since we find that meaning in our relationship with God and other people it is not surprising that when these are seriously disrupted then the rest of the

living world suffers. It seems that we cannot dispense with an adequate anthropology and a philosophy of human action.

Moral philosophy, says Aquinas in his commentary on Aristotle's Ethics, considers human actions in as much as they are ordered to one another and to an end. He then divides this into three parts: 'The first considers the activities of one human being as they are directed (ordered) to an end, which is called monastic. The second considers the activities of the domestic group (*multitudo*) which is called economic. The third considers the activities of the civil group which is called political'. The word monastic comes from the Greek *monos* which means solitary, alone. A monk is a solitary religious, and the earliest and perhaps most enduring form of monastic life is that of the hermit. The monk orders his life by taking vows as a discipline to reorientate his life and educate his affections. His life has traditionally been regarded as a single minded pursuit of friendship with God which has often entailed a stripping away of all normal supports, for they have proved to be a snare to him. The vows of poverty chastity and obedience are essentially monastic in Aquinas's sense. They are designed to aid a life of friendship with God and each other. They provide order.

I want to argue that the green movement, Christianised, can be something of monasticism that is at long last beginning to make its way in the world, a world in which economic life has outstripped polity and disregards ecology.²

I propose then to make explicit what I think is implicit in Sean McDonagh's book and to look at some of the issues raised under the headings of poverty, chastity and obedience, in the broadest and most inclusive sense, a sense that does justice to the value of living in the world.³

Poverty

Since greenery questions certain shibboleths of economic growth, cost-benefit accounting and progress, it is not surprising that ecologists and economists tend to differ dramatically over issues of development. There have been at least three major industrial revolutions employing new technologies in the West. Indeed the allied powers went to war in the Gulf partly to preserve the lifestyle of the third of these, based on oil. Apologists for economic and population growth such as Julian Simon⁴, point to human ingenuity overcoming obstacles and difficulties as a source for hope: they are right to do so. Human ingenuity can however be applied in all kinds of ways to all sorts of different enterprises. It should be employed to help create a viable and habitable

environment, a home. One might have thought, for example, that human ingenuity would be better employed finding alternatives to oil than making arms. And yet, whatever the apologists of capitalism and population growth might say, we cannot in the end replace dynamic ecosystems with technology, in spite of all our ingenuity. We run the risk of becoming displaced in a world which our hands have made. In that event we will have created a sterilised and uncertain place. There is only so much of our poisons that our soils, water and air can absorb. Most people are rightly reluctant to live on a space station. The sheer givenness of creation is part of our worship, of our life, and of our gratitude to God. It is part of our need for beauty, for order, for diversity. A view of the material world which holds that we are here to live as luxuriously as possible, for as long as possible, and which prompts us to use the rest of the animate and inanimate world as a means to that end is not Christian. The song of creation is not just for our benefit: we are the ones singing out of tune.⁵

Sean McDonagh is acutely aware of the misery of the poor and of the impoverishment of the land in which they live. The human face of debt is revealed in the story of Dodong a Filipino farmer. Dodong's story reminds us that half a million children died in 1988 as a result of adjustment policies imposed on debtor nations. The bishops of the Philippines say that 'The debt crisis is the paramount example of a man-made disaster. An enormous debt was created at least in part by wrong calculations, wrong investments, wrong decisions of individuals and organisations, and most likely by their wrong moral values as well' They declare that 'We need the understanding and partnership of men and women of good will from the creditor countries. Our destinies are as intimately bound as are the lives of survivors sharing a single lifeboat.'⁶ This recalls the interdependence of the ecological vision rather than the ever-increasing improvements of Julian Simon. Sean McDonagh makes the link explicit: the ecological consequences are really the most serious and enduring. These two developments raise the question of financial morality which could be related to the question of usury, a question which, in the medieval world, occupied many of the best minds of the Church. In today's world the figure of Dodong is matched by that of S.C. Gwynne who set off at the age of 25 with a suitcase stuffed full of \$150 million in credits peddling his wares round the Third World.

Is the teaching on usury of any help to us in the current situation? McDonagh alerts us to the possibility that Church teachings in many moral matters are reformable not infallible, (*Humanae Vitae* being the document in question) and states that the condemnation of usury is often quoted as an example of one such change. It is true that economic

circumstances changed and elaborate commercial circumventions and exceptions grew up. However, his analysis of international debt might send us back to medieval theory on this matter. The basis of Aristotle's objection to profit on a loan, an objection that was later taken up by Aquinas, was that there is no natural limit to the desire for money. They recognised, as indeed does modern economics, that man's desires are unlimited. But they were concerned to direct these desires, to their proper and (for Aquinas) unlimited end. Lending money was like lending someone a bottle of wine, it was consumed in use. But money is a measure not a thing; it is not a commodity and it is not real capital. We tend to consider it not only in terms of the things it can buy; for us it is productive and it has itself become a commodity. Money, so it was thought at that time, could not be lent without being consumed. Because money by its nature could not bear fruit the usurer was in effect appropriating the industry of the borrower which alone could increase wealth. A true commercial partnership, the investment contract of *societas*, had to accept the incidence of risk, loss or harm to distinguish it from a usurious loan; we might be excused on the grounds of a changing economy.⁷

Whatever one's view of the usury theory, it seems generally to have encouraged a limited sort of investment related to risk and a consistent prevention of oppression of the poor. On both accounts it seems that the humanly created mechanisms of the financial system which have given rise to the debt crisis are usurious and unjust. Careless creditors, still demanding their pound of flesh, and corrupt borrowers who squandered the loans exacerbate the strains on the poor and the land.

There are clearly no easy solutions to the debt crisis. A recognition of the moral dimensions of the problem might add a note of urgency to those in the Church tempted to become involved in the problem, and to those earnest recyclers and conservationists it might provide a wider political vision.

Chastity

Most issues relating to economics and sexuality are linked: 'ordinary life' revolves around them. An abuse of freedom and loss of dignity can afflict both these areas of human concern; I propose to look specifically at the issue of contraception as means of controlling population levels.

Population growth, and some form of limiting it, have always been part of the ecological agenda, in which the Catholic church is almost invariably seen as regressive. Sean McDonagh attempts to prove he is as progressive as the ecologists.

Most ecologically minded people worry about population growth because they believe the world's resources are finite and the number of people consuming them on a global scale is increasing exponentially. McDonagh uses the microcosm of his mission in Tablo as an example of the limits to self-sufficiency and a projection of the growth in population. He points to the destruction of the biosphere, the failure to implement NFP in one of the mission centres, the widespread dissent, the pluralism of Filipino society. Such a context, in his opinion, calls for a re-examination of the teaching relating to artificial forms of contraception. 'I think it is arguable that recent understanding about the role of human beings within the natural world coupled with our present knowledge of the extent of the damage to the biosphere should throw open again the whole question of what are acceptable methods of controlling human fertility.' (p.63) This view might be presented as analogous to that argument resulting in the legitimising of usury: changing circumstances necessitate adaptation of teaching.

The question here seems to be: Can one have ecologically responsible sex and how does this differ from what we have understood as the meaning of sex and responsible parenthood until now? McDonagh leaves us in the dark here. The argument must be something like this: the ecological crisis adds another element of responsibility to the notion of responsible parenthood: this is the sort of world of scarce resources into which children are being introduced. Some would say further: no one should really have children at all, or only one or two. Therefore contraceptive measures must be taken to prevent the birth of children. According to this view, not having children is more important, given the overall context, than using contraception. Artificial forms of birth control are rendered necessary by the insufficiency of Natural Family Planning. It is proposed that whatever we make of the arguments against contraception, here is a good argument for its use, namely that the earth is to be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.

Suppose we accept, as does *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, that populations are rising steeply in some parts of the world. Suppose there are land-hungry peasants with no means of redress. It could be held that we would then have to examine the arguments against using contraception, whilst recognising the current and constant teaching of the Church. On the other hand, we could ask do we need to look at this at all? There is evidence that NFP is in fact both natural (ie. ecological—a combination of biology and responsibility) and effective.⁸ It requires male cooperation too, thus bringing together the issues of ecology and feminism. I suspect that the whole issue may be a distraction from the more important question of social justice. 'We are

many because we are poor' is a far more significant cry from the poor to the rich than the response of the West which is 'You are poor because you are many'. A response which usually means 'You are many and will make us poor'.

We might however also question McDonagh's data and assumptions. Modern agriculture, as McDonagh himself admits, has brought down the amount of land necessary to feed a family in the Philippines to 0.45 hectares. The mean rise in production has continued even though McDonagh would have us believe output has fallen. It then becomes a point of contention as to how sustainable this is; world grain stocks have fallen in recent years due to American drought, and agriculture, as industry, seems to be both cruel to animals and, in the long run, to destroy the fertility of the land. Here surely the ecologists are right: we cannot all become urban consumers without a potentially disastrous agribusiness. We cannot rely on limitless amounts of food for limitless mouths, even with limitless ingenuity: there is surely a logical limit in terms of sheer land space. However, talk of population growth needs further clarification; it can mean total population growth or rise in the birthrate. Our own population in the United Kingdom has risen steadily since the war, despite a drop in the birthrate which is below replacement level. We are an ageing population with many more people living longer; a feature of most Western populations. This leads into two very good reasons why we should be a little sceptical of solemn calls by ecologists for population control, contraception for the Third World.

First, in the developed world there is a way of life that relies directly on destruction of the environment. Industrialised nations set the pace. They appear like an ageing grandmother, with pots of accumulated and borrowed money, spending it before she dies on the military equivalent of the pit bull terrier. Most of the major pollution problems can be laid at the door of industrial nations. They have stable populations and food surpluses. There is not at present a world food shortage. The fathers of fast food have banished their progeny across the sea. The second reason for scepticism with regard to claims for the necessity for population control is that for *density* of population, places such as the Philippines come a long way behind other Asian countries such as Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore and even Japan, all of which have far higher GNP. America consumes 35% of natural resources with 6% of the world's population. Without justice, without aspirations on our part for an economic growth that shares wealth, there is little weight behind the attempts to limit Third World populations.

Could it be proposed that contraception provides some sort of

immediate practical help given that injustice is not easily eradicated? Here argument begins to turn on the respective roles of church and state, and to raise questions relating to the legitimate limits of government intervention, and the possible curtailment of certain freedoms in the interests of development. What should be the role of government in business and in family life? Particularly in a pluralist society?

Clearly a corrupt government such as that of President Marcos did not help the cause of social justice or wise investment. Governments are not necessarily a benign force, something Sean McDonagh does not quite seem to follow through and something businessmen, such as George Winternitz (Families for Family), understands only too well. They are moreover tied to an iniquitous international system a feature of which may be the imposition of another form of Western technology: contraception. The economists in favour of a world of producers and consumers do not want government intervention in anything. This is why they find common cause with Catholics concerned about morality in the private sphere. Those who want intervention in markets which are responsible in part for the debt crisis and pollution are also keen on government (which means foreign) intervention in population matters. Neither seem to achieve the necessary balance. It is not clear why it is not possible to be in favour of a vision that speaks to both the causes of debt and poverty while preserving a consistent teaching on responsible parenthood.

There is money to be made from artificial contraception. Like all gadgets it is easier to use unnatural rather than natural means in an unnatural world; but to my mind contraception for the Third World is surely a techno-fix that may well prevent the underlying causes of poverty from being tackled and may well be stimulated by an understandable but not entirely healthy fear of poverty in the West.

Obedience

At its best, obedience means something like a willing subordination of the individual to the common good, a listening to the word and will of God in scripture and tradition for the good of the whole; we begin to understand something of the common good by listening to scripture and tradition. This final section is a brief discussion of the role of scripture and tradition and the nature of the common good in the light of the spirit of greenery.

For a green Christian this listening to the Word of God must overflow into the rest of life, however ordinary. For a non-Christian Green it is the imperatives of the self-imposed cultural taboos which

provide the framework of a life, or, in our society, law. As I have hinted earlier, the notion of purification through cultural taboo is an ancient and powerful attempt to contain violence and desire and provide order. It is a more or, often, less effective means of restraint. It will not take away sin, pollution, self aggrandisement and hubris, nor the clouded misunderstandings that have led our technological culture to overstep natural limits. In fact, I would argue our culture is unique in its ability to affect the organic; so far from excluding the organic from the cultural, we have tarnished the organic with the cultural. This is what environmental pollution means. It is man's smudge and man's smell out of place. We do not respect the order of creation, not as in Leviticus by limiting the organic and its influence in the culture, but by not limiting the cultural and the way it impinges on the organic. If you cut down rainforests to satisfy your desire for hamburgers you are letting a bad cultural practice destroy the organic given. Pollution is waste out of place, it is oil slicks being sucked out of the Gulf into huge tankers to be dumped in the desert, it is Kurds dying of diseases through lack of sanitation, it is leukaemia in babies. If then greenery is an attempt to change one's life, without Christ, without grace and forgiveness, can it hope to succeed?

Scripture and Tradition

What scriptural basis is there for a green Christianity? There is by now a fairly well established collection of texts employed by those interested in creation. Sean McDonagh in Part Two of his book provides a good summary of these. Tim Cooper's book is littered with scriptural references one of its greatest strengths. However I myself would think that greater concentration on certain themes—an explication of dominion perhaps; the notions of order found in the Old Testament (Genesis and Leviticus) and the cosmic Christ and Church of Ephesians would be more substantial and fruitful. There is also too little of the classical theology exemplified by Aquinas with its notions of human freedom in which God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, and the sound Aristotelian notion of the soul. (Trees are alive, they have souls).

On the liturgical and practical levels there is more to green Christianity than covert tree hugging. Sean McDonagh worked through the sacraments magnificently in his first book, relating them to contemporary concerns; in the current book he relates action to the covenant tradition and has apparently produced a 'way of the cross' related to the rainforest. Tim Cooper has a final chapter on green living in the church with practical suggestions, and looks specifically at the

issues of nuclear and bio-technology and factory farming.

There is also an ecological tradition in our own English Catholic heritage, particularly that of the Distributists, Vincent McNabb and E.F.Schumacher. This is well worth recovering.⁹

Common Good

What can we say here about the common good? The self-sufficient polity of virtue it seems, is fast receding as anything but a dream, whether it be that of Aristotle, Aquinas or Rousseau. There are no obvious alternatives to the international market anywhere in sight; it is as though Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith and David Hume had won this particular battle in the world of ends and means.

There is virtually no analysis of the market in Catholic social teaching. This is a serious lacuna. The market is supposed to be a mechanism whereby the preferences of consumers are satisfied. There is clearly then a need to understand the desires of those consumers and how these connect with production. We are all both producers and consumers and, under a regime of economic efficiency, would try to maximise production with relatively scarce resources. Maximisation of productivity must be put in its context and it is not difficult to see that this context is one of esteem, emulation and fashion. There is always a kind of scarcity in this world we have created. Yet we still have a myth that this scarcity of things produces conflict and misery. There may well be choice between resources; there is certainly finitude of life and resources. But we are of course simply caught up in violence, misuse and irreverence. No amount of liberal economic plenitude is going to take this away. Only grace and forgiveness can. This is why we need an education of desire, for our needs are cultural and our desires infinite. Our society thrives on the cultivation of our imitative desires. Advertising, production of more, envy and rivalry. The more things that are produced, the more there is to fight over. We cope with our rivalry by multiplying the number of objects; these at the same time fuel our desires and give us the belief that this is the sort of being we are, a person of wants who exercises free choice and personal preference. This is why the single minded pursuit of wealth creation is so threatening to the wealth of creation.

The religious life is still a good community, a form of commitment for educating one's appetites and wilfulness, uncovering one's illusions and turning them to service of God and each other. The spiritual life of poverty chastity and obedience the rhythm of life according to the Church's year, mediaeval modern and perennial, must have something

to do with the correct perspective on things, the correct use of things. Poverty then is a certain frugality, not multiplying our wants unnecessarily. Chastity is perhaps like the wilderness, a necessary place in which we can let God be God and out of which, like the desert of the Exodus, liberation from compulsion, and fidelity can be found. Obedience is primarily about being attentive to God speaking to us in the world he has made and the gifts he gives. A Catholic sense of celebration of feasts and fasts might purge much of the puritanism and stoicism from greenery and a sense of sin might give a proper perspective to cultural practices. Is this possible in the world of competition rivalry and warring desires? It is the hope that it can be so that a Christian spirituality enlightened by ecology can foster.

The other-worldly 'asceticism' of Max Weber's monks was in fact a supremely communal way of living in this world. The message of greenery is: don't think that our temporary plenitude has satisfied our wants or abolished our finitude; we are bodily interconnected beings and we live in an organic world awash with meaning, not a babble of neon signs. We must share our home with many other existents. All this is salutary and necessary. But don't be fooled: the virtue of community or solidarity, with its rare freedoms and justice, costs. It cannot be done without the charity which is the love of God. The world has grown warm because this has grown cold.

- 1 Published by Geoffrey Chapman and Hodder and Stoughton respectively.
- 2 see Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It is an interesting historical question why it was that England had the first industrial revolution, an England which had destroyed its monastic life by 1540. For the subsequent history see Charles Taylor's magnificent book *Sources of the Self*, especially the chapter entitled 'God loveth Adverbs'. It is of course the most successful industrialisers and historically puritan nations which have become ecologically aware.
- 3 For Luther's vitriolic views on religious life see especially François Biot O.P. *The Rise of Protestant Monasticism* (Helicon, 1963). Luther's main criticism is that it is elitist. It is certainly true that in Aristotelian and Thomist ethics the life of production and the family has been of only secondary importance. But there is surely no hierarchy of nearness to the sacred.
- 4 See Environment *Guardian* 8th December 1990, *The Tablet*, 27th April 1991.
- 5 See Henry Mayr Harting ed., *St Hugh of Lincoln*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford) p.16.
- 6 Philippine Bishops, Pastoral on Debt.
- 7 John T. Noonan *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury* (Cambridge, Mass.1957) p.396: 'What the scholastics mean by maintaining the sterility of money is that money should be considered by itself without identifying it with the capital or consumer goods with which it may be exchanged. What the scholastics' critics mean by asserting 'the fertility of money' is that they have identified money with real capital'.
- 8 See for example the remarkable articles in *The Guardian*, July 6th and July 31st 1990.
- 9 See Hugh Walters, 'Pro Foco non pro Foro', *Allen Review*, Michaelmas, 1991.