CHRISTIANITY AND NATURE

INTRODUCTION

Christianity, despite claims to the contrary, upholds the independent value of natural creatures, and is committed to an ethic of responsible care and stewardship of the natural world. These values were enshrined in the Old Testament, presupposed by Jesus Christ and assumed throughout the New Testament. They were sometimes forgotten or distorted, particularly in medieval and early modern times, but were never abandoned, and have continually been rediscovered.

Controversies surround the teaching, inherited from the Old Testament, that humanity has dominion or mastery over the creatures, and attach also to the desacralisation of nature implicit in the adoption of belief in nature as a creature of God, and not as itself God. Yet dominion facilitates responsible stewardship and need not involve domination, recklessness or ruthlessness; and belief in creation implies that the world is God's world, full of God's glory, and need not involve objectionable varieties of metaphysical dualism such as otherworldliness or contempt of nature or nonhuman species. Central Christian teachings turn out to encourage ecological sensitivity, despite episodes (and whole periods) in history which seem to suggest the contrary.

Controversies, however, surround not only what Christianity can or should say in the present, but also what was said or implied

in the Bible, the patristic (age of the church fathers) and medieval periods, and in subsequent periods. These periods, and their leading figures, will be considered in historical order in this chapter, which culminates in a brief discussion of modern debates.

ATTITUDES OF JESUS AND THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

To understand Jesus' teaching about nature, we have to bear in mind the Old Testament beliefs about creation and also the Jewish ethical and legal tradition which he and his hearers shared. The assumptions of Jesus and the New Testament about creation and thus about nature have been characterised as including the following beliefs: that the one true God made everything in the universe; that the world was created for God's glory, and not for the exclusive benefit or convenience of any one species; that God orders everything with divine wisdom and providence; that the world is God's world and shares, as creation, in the good gifts of its creator, including the gift of freedom; and that God bestows a little of the divine creativity upon human beings, who are made in God's image, and calls them to cooperate with the Creator's purposes as the responsible holders of dominion over nature (1). These are largely unspoken beliefs, surfacing just occasionally, but implicit throughout the New Testament, including the teaching of Jesus (although sometimes recessive in subsequent Christian history).

The related belief is also present that God has established a

covenant with humanity, and (in some versions) with the animals too (Genesis 9:8-11). Old Testament ethics and law express the human part in this covenant. Thus when Jesus appealed to recognised exceptions to the prohibition of work on the sabbath, exceptions concerning acts of compassion to relieve the suffering of domestic animals (Matthew 12:11-12, Luke 14:5 and Luke 13:15-16), he assumed a responsibility for compassion towards domestic animals, and common practices embodying it. Such responsibility is commended in passages such as Proverbs 12:10 ('A right-minded person cares for his beast') and implicitly in several more detailed passages of law in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy (2), passages which Jesus' near-contemporary, Philo of Alexandria, expressly interpreted as motivated by compassion for animals (3). Far from focussing on animals, Jesus was arguing that relieving the suffering of human beings on the sabbath (such as his own healings) must all the more be lawful; but shared beliefs about considerate treatment of animals comprised the indispensable background of this argument.

These passing references of Jesus to animals already show that, like the Old Testament, the New Testament cannot be interpreted as authorising a despotic attitude according to which humans may treat nature as we please. This despotic interpretation is ascribed to the Bible as a whole by Lynn White, and allowed as a possible interpretation of at least the New Testament by John Passmore (4); but neither the teaching of Jesus nor the Old Testament beliefs which it presupposes can be interpreted in this way without distortion. Despotic interpretations have time

and again been read into the Jewish and Christian scriptures, and have often suited those who find them there; but this does not make them any more deserving of credibility.

When Jesus' teaching explicitly focussed on birds and plants, it again presupposed Old Testament teaching. Your heavenly father feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, he reminds his hearers, echoing the creation theology of the Psalms; are you not of greater value than they? (Matthew 6:29; Luke 12:24). Jesus' point here is God's provision for humans; but his conclusion depends, as Richard Bauckham shows, on shared beliefs in birds being fellow-creatures, and in God's providential care for the birds (5). It also presupposes God's bestowal on humanity of dominion over nature; but not an authorisation of despotic or tyrannical rule.

Further sayings of Jesus stress God's concern for individual sparrows, despite their cheapness in the human valuation of his day (Matthew 6:26; 10;29-31; Luke 12:6-7; 12:24), and for individual sheep (Matthew 12:12). These passages, which also allude to Old Testament precedents, all argue that, because humans are of greater value, God is also concerned with each and every human. At the same time, they presuppose that individual animals too have intrinsic value in the eyes of God, albeit less than Jesus' individual human hearers; indeed the saying about lilies implies the presence of such value in plant life as well (Matthew 6:28-30).

Thus the New Testament (like the Old) is irreconcilable both

with an anthropocentric ontology and with anthropocentric accounts of value, in which nothing but humans and their interests have independent value. Also the presupposition about the intrinsic value of individual animals conflicts with the view of some medieval Jewish and Christian writers that God's providence extends not to individual animals, but only to species (6). This later, species-related, view coheres with belief in the Great Chain of Being, often adopted by Christians influenced by Plato and Aristotle, but not with the New Testament. Yet it would be an artificial exercise to attempt to classify the Bible as biocentric, any more than anthropocentric or ecocentric, however much its value-theory may indicate such a label for its attitudes to creatures. For the Bible, all creatures derive their existence from God, and therewith the very possibility of having value in the actual world. If any centrism is found in the Bible, it is theocentrism, the belief that the world exists for God's glory.

As Bauckham adds, none of Jesus' teachings accept that animals have been created only to serve humans, an idea subsequently adopted by Rabbi Simeon b. Eleazar, but absent from Genesis, and inconsistent with Job 39 (and Psalm 104 too). As such, it is unlikely to be an assumption of Jesus or the New Testament writers. Such notions sometimes entered later Jewish and Christian thought from Aristotelian and Stoic sources, where it was often held that all nonhuman creatures exist for the sake of their usefulness to humanity (7). Thus if the dominion over nature bestowed on humanity (according to Genesis 1 and Psalm 8) implies some kind of superiority for humans over animals,

the context remains that humans and nonhuman animals are alike fellow-creatures, that animals are not to be regarded as merely of instrumental value, and that humans have responsibilities towards the animals that serve them.

This also clearly excludes the view of Augustine that humans have no responsibilities towards animals. Augustine seems to have been influenced by the Stoic belief that humans are rational and animals irrational, and that therefore there can be no ties of justice in dealings with animals (8). But Jesus, who accepted human responsibilities towards domestic animals, would have rejected Augustine's view. Augustine was commenting on Jesus permitting the demons which he exorcised from the Gerasene demoniac to enter a herd of pigs, which then hurled themselves over a cliff. However, even if this narrative originated as an event (rather than as one of the parables which Jesus told), it does not show that he regarded pigs as valueless, unclean as they were held to be, but at most that he regarded a human as of greater value than the pigs (9).

Jesus' relation to animals and to nature figures more significantly in the prologue to Mark's gospel, which relates that after his baptism Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness "with the wild beasts" (Mark 1:13). The language used (in the wilderness Jesus is also tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels, and a heavenly voice had just proclaimed him "my beloved Son") presents him as the Messiah, inaugurating the kingdom of God. In the prophecy of Isaiah, an age is proclaimed of peace between wild animals and humans, in a context which

makes it the age of the coming of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1-9). Against this background, Mark's phrase "he was with the wild animals" conveys that the messianic age is dawning, in which relations of fear between humanity and wild nature will be overcome. However, the animals are not subdued or tamed (as in some contemporary Jewish portrayals of the restoration of paradise); Jesus' companionable presence with the animals affirmed their otherness and their independent value. As at other moments of his life and teaching, he thus enacted an anticipation of the forthcoming kingdom of God (a kingdom not confined to humanity), and of the relations which are to characterise it (10).

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT ATTITUDES

Paul, despite his emphasis on sin and corruption, retained the Old Testament belief that the world is God's world, holding that God's creation is to be clearly discerned from the material universe (Romans 1:20). Here he was echoing a Jewish work of the recent past, the Wisdom of Solomon, which asserts that "the greatness and beauty of created things give us a corresponding idea of their creator" (Wisdom 13:1-5); Paul's claim was to prove an important bulwark both against other-worldliness and against critics of natural theology in centuries to come. Terrestrial bodies of different kinds (humans, beasts, fishes, birds), he taught, have their own glory, comparable with but different from the glory of celestial bodies (sun, moon and stars) (I Corinthians 15:39-41). Indeed everything visible and invisible was created

by and for God's Son, and is to be reconciled through him to God (Colossians 1:15-20).

Certainly, when discussing the Old Testament prohibition of muzzling the ox which treads the corn, Paul seems to forget these themes, and asks "Does God care for oxen?" (I Corinthians 9:9f.), implying that the answer is "no", and claiming that this text is to be interpreted as concerning human labourers. But when concentrating on nonhuman nature he represents the whole creation as groaning in travail in expectation of release from corruption and of participation in the liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:19-22). For Paul, despite the effects of sin and of demonic influences, the entire created world forms part of God's redemptive plan and is destined to regain its proper glory (11).

The Johannine writings seek to counter tendencies (from within the Jewish and early Christian communities) to represent the world as a battle-ground between equal forces of good and evil, in which salvation requires rejection of the world of flesh (Gnosticism). John's prologue maintains that the bringer of salvation is also the Logos, God's agent in creation, who has also become flesh and dwelt amongst us (John 1:1-14). Among other themes present here, the value of the created world is reaffirmed (12). In another of the Johannine writings, the book of Revelation, John's vision symbolically concerns the restoration of Eden and the tree of life, the leaves of which "were for the healing of nations" (Revelation 22:2).

Thus the cosmic visions of Paul and John cannot be regarded as instrumentalist or anthropocentric. Like Mark, and like the author of Hebrews (Hebrews 1:2f) these writers appealed to Old Testament beliefs concerning creation, and represented salvation as not confined to humanity, but as a cosmic fulfilment of the creator's plan.

While the biblical writers do not use the metaphor of stewardship with regard to the role of humanity in relation to the natural world, and while their view of the roles of both humanity and nature extends far beyond stewardship, the model of humanity as God's steward is, arguably, as Glacken writes (13), an appropriate one. It fits the injunctions to till and to keep the garden (Genesis 2:15); the making of man and woman in the image of God (Genesis 1:27); Jesus' presuppositions about the value of nonhuman creatures (see above); the Old Testament teaching that the land belongs not to humans but to God (Leviticus 25:23), and is only held conditionally (Leviticus 25:2-13); Jesus' parables about stewardship and accountability for the use of resources (Matthew 21:33-41; 24:45-51; 25:14-30; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 12:36-38; 19:12-27; 20:9-16); and the teachings about responsibilities for compassion and consideration to nonhumans which (as has been seen) pervade the Old and New Testaments. While no anthropocentric interpretation is credible, and while stewardship has sometimes been charged with an anthropocentric tendency which treats nature as mere resources (14), an ethic of responsibility before God to work, cherish and preserve the natural environment and respect the independent value (and the

glory) of fellow-creatures, can fairly be recognised as immune from this charge, without ceasing to be one of stewardship (15).

PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL ATTITUDES

The fathers of the early church added an awareness of pagan attitudes to nature; while some sought to blend Greek philosophy with Christianity, others took on Gnosticism. Thus Irenaeus, the second-century Bishop of Lyons, rejected the Gnostic belief that nature is evil, and maintained that nature is cared for by God as a home for humanity, and is to share in the fulfilment of the creator's plan (16). The role of humanity in completing creation became a recurrent theme among patristic writers including Origen, Basil and Ambrose, and modern writers such as John Ray, William Derham and many others.

The Stoic view that irrational creatures have been made for the sake of rational ones became more explicit in Origen's reply to the contemporary Epicurean philosopher Celsus' rejection of such teleology (third century) (17). Origen, however, considered the diversity in the world the result of a decline from the unity and harmony of the original creation, and attributed it to a primeval fall, prior to the creation of humanity (18), which would be rectified at the eventual restoration at the end of time. But this speculative view diverged so far from belief in the goodness of the nonhuman creation around us that it was rejected by most of Origen's successors, including Augustine, who cited in reply the

significance of Genesis 1:31 ("And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good") (19).

Much more influential within Orthodox churches (and beyond) were the fourth century Cappadocians Basil the Great, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, their sister Macrina and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus. These writers respected classical Greek culture, and in particular Plato's *Timaeus,* but supplied Christian correctives to pagan accounts of creation, of ethics and of the soul. While revering the Christian scholarship of Origen, they ascribed the diversity of nature to God's creation and not to the wickedness of prehuman creatures. Thus Macrina and Gregory of Nyssa held that it was impossible for "all created nature ... to hold together" "without the care and providence of God" (20), and that all things "are moving towards the goal" of "the transcendent good of the universe" (21).

Developing a form of writing launched in Philo's meditation *On the Creation,* Basil composed a *Hexaemeron* or commentary in popular style on Genesis 1, a practice in which he was shortly to be imitated by Ambrose, an influential figure in the Latin West. The world is presented as a work of art, which is both beautiful and useful as a training-ground for human souls. However, at the original creation it was incomplete, and its completion is to be achieved in part by humanity: "for the proper and natural adornment of the earth is its completion: corn waving in the valleys - meadows green with grass and rich with many-coloured flowers - fertile glades and hilltops shaded

by forests" (22).

According to Basil, the grasses serve both animals and man (23). That Basil's is not an entirely anthropocentric cosmology may also be learned from a prayer of his: "And for these also, o Lord, the humble beasts, who bear with us the heat and burden of the day, we beg thee to extend thy great kindness of heart, for thou hast promised to save both man and beast, and great is thy loving-kindness, o Master" (24).

Overall, the Greek fathers certainly saw nature as a symbolic source of edification, expressed in many an allegory (25), and regarded it too as offering a retreat from contemporary civilisation, with all its compromises. They were also careful to avoid the pantheism often implicit in pagan religion, to avoid idolatry at all costs, and to distinguish sharply between the creature and the Creator (26), much as they relished arguing from the creation back to its source. But they also saw nature as created both for God's glory and as an invitation and challenge to human creativity and adornment; the impact of sin had not altogether deprived it of its perfectibility or humanity of the potential to complete God's work. All these themes have remained important in Orthodox theology down the centuries, and have also strongly influenced Western churches within the ecumenical movement throughout the twentieth century.

In the West, Ambrose, following Basil, popularised the conception of humanity as partner of God in improving the earth (27). Augustine, a much more original thinker, developed another theme of Eastern origins, that of nature as a book. Earlier, Athanasius had praised the book of creation which proclaims the divine master and creator of its harmony and order, and John Chrysostom had imparted how the book of nature was available to peoples who do not understand the language of the Bible (28). Augustine now stressed how nature's book was open even to the most unlettered: "heaven and earth cry out to you: God made me!" (29). In later centuries the nature-as-book analogy found new uses as a defence of the empirical methods of natural science.

Augustine produced a new synthesis of themes from the Bible and from Aristotle and, more particularly, Plato, elaborating a Christian version of belief in the Great Chain of Being. All the rungs on the scale of possible being are occupied, sentient beings having greater value than nonsentient, intelligent beings greater value still, and immortal ones like angels having greater value than mortal humans. The human body, however, has a beauty and dignity expressive of the glory and beauty of its creator (30). More generally, the world's phenomena glorify their divine artificer "not with respect to our convenience or discomfort, but with respect to their own nature". Aristotle's conception of the end of a species being internal to itself (31) is blended here with the Pauline theme of the diverse glories of creatures, in a statement which excludes anthropocentrism, and is barely

reconcilable with Augustine's despotic stance on relations with animals, noted earlier.

The works of humanity are also wonderful, but nothing in creation is to be compared to the creator. However, the entire created world is now infected with the effects of human sin. While Origen's view of a pre-human fall is rejected, all evil is to be ascribed to humanity, which, since Adam's fall, is hopelessly depraved unless saved by God's grace in Christ (32). Augustine thus produces a remarkable combination of life-affirming and of ascetic themes. As Glacken acknowledges, summaries could be devised presenting his valuation of nature as a low one (33), as Matthew Fox has done in *Original Blessing* (34); but in Glacken's own summary, echoed by H. Paul Santmire, for Augustine "The earth, life on earth, the beauties of nature, are also creations of God. Man, full of sin and prone to sinning, is nevertheless a glorious product of God's greatness" (35). While his advocacy of an extreme doctrine of original sin has been influential and arguably pernicious, Fox is demonstrably mistaken to represent him as a despiser and distruster of creation; as Bauckham shows, his affirmative doctrine of nature and its glories actually supports an ecologically sensitive approach (36).

While the character of Augustine's influence remainss open to debate, for many the teaching of Christianity about nature was mediated instead either by monasteries, for which sites of beauty were often sought, or by the church's liturgy. Monasteries now (in the sixth century) began to be founded in

the West, in accordance with the Rule of Benedict. Work, as in gardens and fields, was regarded as prayer, and was conducted partly for its own sake and partly to enhance the land, its fertility and thus its self-sufficiency (37), especially among the later Cistercian foundations, as described by Bernard of Clairvaux (twelfth century) (38). Hildegard of Bingen, the eleventh-century founder of an abbey, also used to celebrate the beauty and glories of the natural world (39).

Meanwhile the medieval Roman liturgy incorporated prayers for sick animals and stables, as well as curses on vermin and pests (40); like the well-known and much-loved story of Christ's nativity in a stable, such words cannot have presented a dispassionate or instrumentalist attitude to nature. The same is true of the 'Benedicite', which has been used liturgically from earliest times to the present day.

Passmore claims that "Augustinian Christianity neither laid the task [of completing God's creation] on man's shoulders nor promised God's help if he should undertake it" (41), but Augustine held that humanity participates in God's work through the arts and the sciences, including agriculture (42), and Western monasteries, from Benedict to Bernard, bore this out in practice. The belief that human wickedness was sufficient to infect nature with evil, granted the technology of the time, certainly smacks of arrogance (43); but the human effort invested over the next few centuries in the improvement of nature has recently generated White's opposing charge of a domineering attitude, specially prevalent in Western attitudes

(44), and embodied in medieval deep ploughing, irrigation and forest clearances. However, White is now widely recognised as guilty of overgeneralisation and exaggeration; the domineering attitude prevalent in nineteenth and twentieth century technology does not require Western patristic attitudes for its explanation. Indeed, while the Benedictines accepted the inherited belief in the dominion of humanity over nature, Rene Dubos has aptly characterised their attitude of caring for and enhancing the land in their charge as one of stewardship, and therewith a paradigm of environmental responsibility (45).

Thomas Aquinas persistently defended the goodness of nature, in criticism of Albigensians and others who held that nature, including the human body, was evil. Each part of the universe, he argued, exists for its own particular end, and all are needed to comprise the hierarchy of being; *pace* Origen, nature is not a reflection of sin, and, on the contrary, everywhere reflects God's glory (46).

However, the fall has reduced the obedience of other creatures to man; since the fall, domestication has been necessary to master the animals. This is in keeping with God's plan, whereby rational creatures rule over others; but this mastery depends on God, a fact which brings to mind the need for humility (47). Here Aquinas accepts Origen's view about the subordination of irrational creatures to rational ones, despite his beliefs about the distinct value of all creatures. Indeed he sometimes comes close to the view that it is indifferent how humans behave to animals, but then adds that

insofar as animals are sentient, pity at their sufferings is natural, and that this accounts for Proverbs 12:10, the text about consideration for domestic animals. Though his text at once reverts to human needs, this point is prefixed with "besides", indicating that the previous point had some independent weight (48). Yet Thomas' eventually influential position still represents a narrowing of Christian teaching, and has sometimes been taken to deny any moral standing to nonhuman creatures.

A rival view was held by Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and some of his followers. Francis, like Aquinas, accepted the goodness of creation in all its diversity, but he also praised God for all his creatures, not only as types but also as individuals, regarded them as brothers, and urged them to praise God too, as in Psalm 148. Francis actually preached to birds, fishes and flowers (49). While his stress on the individuality of creatures exempts him from the charge of pantheism, and also from Lynn White's label (of 'panpsychism'), his belief in God's immanence in each and every creature makes him, as J. Donald Hughes suggests, a panentheist (50). Thus, without rejecting the human dominion over nature, he intepreted it in a companionable, non-despotic manner.

Within the medieval period (when the days of printing and mass literacy lay in the future), ordinary believers were probably influenced less by the theologians than by the liturgy (see above) and by the lives of the saints. For St. Francis stood

at the end of a thousand-year-long succession of saints, many of them famed for their fellowship with and compassion for animals, both wild and domestic, from the days of St. Antony the Great (third century), founder of an ancient monastery in Sinai (51). Both in East and West, stories circulated widely of saints who resorted to wilderness for tranquillity and meditation, and in many cases (such as the seventh-century Cuthbert in Northumbria) sought to live in the spirit of Jesus' companionship with the beasts.

ATTITUDES OF THE SUBSEQUENT PERIOD

The humanist writers of the Renaissance emphasised the supremacy of humanity over nature to the virtual exclusion of any ties with nonhuman creatures. Among them, the sense of creatureliness has disappeared, and an unlimited doctrine of human despotism has replaced traditional interpretations of belief in the dominion of humanity. Indeed Bauckham comments that "The attitudes which have led to the contemporary ecological crisis can be traced back to this source, but no further" (52). My comment is that where the humanists abandoned belief in creatureliness and in creation, they also stepped outside Christianity, sometimes adopting a combination of Hermeticism and pantheism instead.

The Protestant Reformation reemphasised dependence on the lordship and grace of God, Martin Luther stressing God's immanence in every grain of creation (53). It also brought explicit discussion of stewardship on the part of Jean Calvin,

who wrote: "Let every one regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses" (54), upholding a vocational view of all human activity. Like Aquinas and Luther (55), Calvin adhered to an anthropocentric stance; but he combined this with the belief that the beasts, though created for humanity, were to be treated with respect and not misused. Thus God "will not have us abuse the beasts beyond measure, but to nourish them and to have care of them." "If a man spare neither his horse nor his ox nor his ass, therein he betrayeth the wickedness of his nature. And if he say, "Tush, I care not, for it is but a brute beast," I answer again, "Yea, but it is a creature of God" (56). Calvin's view was echoed in England in the next century by George Hughes; man's rule was "subordinate and stewardly, not absolutely to do what he list with God's creatures" (57). Here stewards are subordinates with creaturely duties concerning fellow-creatures, owed not to them but to God: an anthropocentric version of stewardship, comparable to Aquinas' view. Other Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, adopted more biocentric views (58).

Assuming an anthropocentric position, Francis Bacon understood human dominion as the right and power to use nature for human benefit (59). The fall had a double impact, engendering both sin and ignorance about nature, but both falls can in part be repaired, the former by faith, and the latter by intellectual labour. This latter restoration of the lost human dominion over nature was Bacon's central purpose (60). Unlike the Italian humanists, he recognises that this will be a gradual, painstaking task (61), requiring the humility to observe and thus conform to and obey nature, to discern "the footsteps of the creator imprinted on his creatures", and thus to discover (not dictate or remould) God's laws (62). For Bacon was strongly opposed to "domineering over nature" (63), which he believed to be the main failing of previous (Greek and medieval) natural philosophy, and to be responsible for humanity's second fall.

While Bacon's motive was love of humanity, his project was the control of nature for human benefit, with no sense of nature's independent value, or even of its aesthetic or symbolic value. But it would be wrong to conclude that science became instrumentalist from this point. This view disregards the belief of most of its sevententh-century participants that the study of science was an expression of the duty to glorify God. Meanwhile Bacon and his successors who founded the Royal Society presented theistic grounds for rejecting veneration of nature and the belief that scientific study and the application of that study were intrinsically impious; for (unlike pagan nature-worship) belief in creation implies that

nature is neither sacred or beyond investigation, while the biblical ethic suggests that effort is called for to relieve illness and hunger, and this presupposes that their causes can be discovered by humanity. Certainly Bacon's language about putting nature to the test and extorting her secrets, is exploitative (64), and lent support to the vogue for vivisection of the later decades of the century; but this approach was soon to be met with correctives within as well as outside the scientific community.

Bacon's contemporary Rene Descartes proposed a different method for investigating nature, but on a markedly similar basis. Within his rationalist approach, non-human animals were actually regarded as machines, although the widespread view that he held that they lacked feelings is open to doubt (65). (The reality of animal suffering was vindicated against followers of his by contemporary followers of Aquinas.(66)) Despite his aim that we should "render ourselves the masters and possessors of nature" (67), like Gassendi and Galileo, he rejected the view that everything was made for humanity (68).

The language of stewardship was explicitly related to nature, the animals and the Earth for the first time by Sir Matthew Hale, sometime Chief Justice of England, in 1677 in *The Primitive Origination of Mankind.* According to Hale, the purpose of "Man's Creation was that he should be the Viceroy" of God, "his Steward, Villicus, Bayliff, or Farmer of this goodly Farm of the lower World", man being "his Usufructuary of this inferior World to husband and order it, and enjoy the

Fruits thereof with sobriety, moderation and thankfulness." "Man was invested with power, authority, right, dominion, trust and care", to limit the fiercer animals, protect the tame and useful ones, preserve vegetable species, to improve the species, to curtail unprofitable vegetation, and "to preserve the face of the Earth in beauty, usefulness, and fruitfulness" (69). Besides supplying here the classical expression of Christian teaching on stewardship of the Earth, Hale was seeking to ground theology not in revelation but in nature and the purposes which seem to underlie it (70).

As Thomas points out, Hale's position was not exceptional; Thomas Tryon, for example, stipulates that humanity's rule is not to be tyrannical, but to conduce to the glory of God, the benefit (but not the wantonness) of humanity, and also to the wellbeing of the beasts in accordance with their created natures (71). With Tryon, a nonanthropocentric tendency is even clearer than in Hale.

Attitudes to animals were importantly affected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the humanitarian movement, which simultaneously changed public opinion and practice in Britain and America in matters of slavery, punishment and working conditions. Thomas has shown the prevalence of blood-sports in sixteenth-century England (72). But concern about animal suffering was also expressed at least from the time of the Puritan, Philip Stubbes (1583) onwards (73). Subsequent advocates of compassion included Christians such as Locke, William Wollaston, John Balguy and Francis

Hutcheson, and in general Quakers, Methodists and Evangelicals, as well as scepticssuch asMontaigne such Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Hume and Bentham (74). During the nineteenth century the movement achieved a number of political reforms. With the introduction in the twentieth century of the practice of factory-farming and with increasing experimentation on animals, humanitarianism is still far from victorious, but both Christian and secular ethics have longsince accepted at the normative level the wrongness of treating nonhuman animals as simply means to human ends.

Negative attitudes to wilderness were transmitted from England by early colonists to America, 'America' being John Locke's term for 'wilderness' (75). But by the early nineteenth century they began to be superseded by contrary valuations, based on interpretations of wild nature as creation, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) (76), valuations more in line with those of the desert fathers, but appreciative also of the system of "Oeconomy of Nature" (Linnaeus' phrase), and the distinctive places of creatures within the meshes of its interlocking net. Subsequently, for the environmentalist John Muir "the basis of respect for nature was to recognise it as part of the created community to which humans also belonged" (77). Covertly a believer in the intrinsic value and rights of all creatures, Muir's entry into the politics of wilderness preservation led him (like many subsequent environmental campaigners) to adopt an anthropocentric public stance, laced with charges of sacrilege against destroyers of the temple of nature (78).

Charles Darwin's discovery of evolution by natural selection, presented in *The Origin of Species* in 1859, conveyed the continuity between humanity and other species. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin drew the implication that nature cannot be regarded as a hierarchy, with humanity as a special creation at its apex, and other species existing for humanity's sake (79). Among Darwin's contemporaries, Christians such as Charles Kingsley and Asa Gray welcomed Darwin's discoveries, and, as Owen Chadwick has pointed out, the main Protestant denominations in Britain and USA had accepted Darwinism by 1900 (80). Some twentieth-century self-styled "creationists" have attempted to retract this acceptance, but cannot claim that belief in creation requires rejection of Darwinism.

In the twentieth century, Catholic Thomist theologians such as Maritain and Journet have proved willing to accept duties owed directly to animals (81); while Anglican bishops have rediscovered the spirituality of eastern Orthodoxy and have been prominent in applying stewardship to environmental concern, some asserting that the sacraments of Christianity, with their focus on elements like bread and wine, strengthen the Christian awareness of value in the material creation (82). Certainly the charge of other-wordliness and of disparagement of life on earth has no remaining credibility, in view of Catholic advocacy of social justice and of the social teaching of the Life and Work Division of the Protestant and Orthodox World Council of Churches. Some

theologians even hail Darwinism for subverting the traditional static view of nature and introducing a more historical view, like that of the Bible (83).

OVERVIEW

Besides the charges of other-wordliness and of disparagement of life on earth, the more widespread charges that Christianity teaches a despotic and anthropocentric attitude to nature turn out to be similarly misplaced, despite their relevance to some tracts of medieval and early modern history. Such charges are usually based on unreflective interpretations of the Judaeo-Christian belief in human dominion over nature, which sounds as if it might support unqualified domination. But in view of the conditional and qualified understanding of all human authority in the Old Testament, and of explicit biblical teaching endorsing the independent value of natural creatures and recognising the place of nohuman nature in the scheme of salvation, such interpretations prove to have been no better than rationalisations of exploitative practices. Dominion over nature is rather to be construed as responsible stewardship, while, for Christians who are true to their scriptures, stewardship is best construed not anthropocentrically (as with Calvin) but as involving humble recognition of the intrinsic value of fellow-creatures.

Belief in stewardship is sometimes held to be actually inconsistent with belief in the independent value of natural creatures, or with God's immanent presence in creation, as it

supposedly involves a managerial and instrumentalist attitude to the material order. But these claims of inconsistency are an illusion; for stewardship (as with Hale) need not involve an instrumentalist attitude, and need not be solely managerial (as even Calvin shows in teaching ethical limits to the treatment of animals). Further, belief in divine immanence in nature cannot preclude its use by humanity, or this belief would also have precluded using nature for food and shelter from earliest times.

Yet criticism of dualism continues, even after charges of otherwordliness and of arrogance and lack of humility have been discarded. Thus Matthew Fox criticises an ethic of care for the garden of creation as dualistic, since it distinguishes between God and the garden, instead of recognising that God is the garden (84). But if God *is* the garden, then the garden (and the rest of the material universe too) is not created, there is no Creator, there are no fellow-creatures to care for, and the world is not God's world. Short of some other basis, belief in the goodness of creation collapses too. Belief in the distinctness of God and creation is essential to theistic ethics, whether Christian, Jewish, or Islamic. If this is dualism, then dualism (of this kind) is essential to theistic ethics, and to positions such as the panentheism of St Francis too. But this kind of dualism in no way implies either a dualism of body and spirit or the dualism of otherworldliness.

However, it is sometimes claimed that belief in stewardship

itself implies dualism in the form of an unacceptable relation between humanity and other species. For it implies that humanity is empowered to remould much of the natural world, despite the ethical constraints which attach to this power. This, it is suggested, too greatly privileges humanity; instead, humans should see themselves as simply one species among others, and humanity as a plain citizen in ecological society.

Now if this just means that equal interests should be given equal consideration, whichever creature has these interests, it can be accepted. But it also seems to imply that there is nothing distinctive about human agency and human moral responsibility; for it seems to imply that no higher priority should be accorded to developing, preserving and respecting capacities for freedom of choice than to the interests of creatures which lack these capacities. This, however, cannot be reconciled with a recognition of distinctive human moral responsibilities, which cannot be significantly exercised unless the corresponding capacities are fostered and respected. Once human moral responsibility is recognised, humanity cannot be seen as simply one species among others; and the distinctive role of humanity as empowered to shape considerable tracts of the natural world has to be recognised as well. This makes it all the more important to stress the ethical constraints on this power, as belief in stewardship does, rather than to pretend that this power does not or should not exist, as egalitarians in matters of species relations seem to do. Thus the distinctive role which belief

in stewardship assumes for humanity is not fundamentally objectionable, or therefore incompatible with the aims of clear-thinking environmentalists.

Yet there is a danger that the exercise of human power will too greatly erode both wilderness and other species, and that before all the mountains are mined, all the oceans are fished and all the forests are felled, we should plan to halt human expansion, and devise sustainable means of survival which preserve most remaining creatures and habitats. The Christian vision of companionship with the wild creatures supports such limits, as without such limits there will be no wild creatures to be companionable with, as opposed to domestic animals and species parasitic on human activity. The claim that such limits should be endorsed is compatible with belief in stewardship without being mandated by that belief; but this claim is in any case supported by the biblical belief in the independent value of wild creatures, and so a range of Christian teachings can be appealed to in its support.

Accordingly, despite ugly episodes and depressing periods in its history, Christianity turns out to encapsulate beliefs supportive of environmentally sensitive attitudes and policies, and can be appealed to as such. While this does not make Christian doctrines true, it means that no one need choose between Christianity and environmentalism, and that theistic belief in creation (whether Judaic, Islamic or Christian) can inspire sustainable relations between humanity and the rest of the natural world.

NOTES

1. John Muddiman,'A New Testament Basis for Environmentalism?', Fourth Yvonne Workman Lecture, Mansfield College, Oxford, 27 September 1995 (unpublished).

2. Exodus 23:19, 34:26; Leviticus 22:27f; Deuteronomy 14:21, 22:10, 25:4

3. Richard Bauckham, 'What was Jesus' Attitude to Animals?', forthcoming in A. Linzey (ed.), *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, London: SCM Press; pp.2f. of manuscript.

4. Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155.37, 1967, 1203-1207; John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, London; Duckworth, 1974, pp. 3-40.

5. Bauckham, p.9

6. Bauckham, p.12

7. Bauckham, p.13

8. Bauckham, ibid.; Augustine, *De Moribus Manichaeorum*, 17.54

9. Bauckham, p.14

10. Bauckham, pp.18-22; see also Richard Bauckham,'Jesus &

the Wild Animals (Mark 1:13): A Christological Image for an Ecological Age', in J.B. Green and M. Turner (eds.), *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 3-21.

11. Muddiman, p.4; Robin Attfield, 'Christian Attitudes to Nature', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 44, 1983, 369-386.

12. Muddiman, p.7

13. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore,* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, p.168. It is noteworthy that the historian Keith Thomas (in *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility,* New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, n.23, p.359) endorses, against John Passmore, Black's account of the Biblical basis of belief in stewardship (John Black, *Man's Dominion: The Search for Ecological Responsibility,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970, ch.4) to which I am indebted for the current paragraph.

14. These charges are made against a stewardship interpretation in Clare Palmer, 'Stewardship: A Case Study in Environmental Ethics', in Ian Ball, Margaret Goodall, Clare Palmer and John Reader (eds.), *The Earth Beneath: A Critical Guide to Green Theology,* London: SPCK Books, 1992, 67-86, at pp.69-82.

15. For mention of related criticisms of stewardship, see R.J. Berry, 'Creation and the Environment', *Science and Christian*

Belief, 7, April 1995, 21-43, pp.25f.

16. H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology,* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, p.35

17. Glacken, p.183

18. Glacken, p.182

19. Glacken, p.198

20. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture, New* Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993, p.255

21. Pelikan, p.325

22. Glacken, p.192, quoting *Homilies,* 2.3

23. Glacken, p.193

24. John Passmore, 'The Treatment of Animals', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 36, 1975, 195-218, p.198; Passmore there cites A.W. Moss, *Valiant Crusade,* London: Cassell, 1961, p.5.

25. D.S. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Greek Patristic View of Nature,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, and New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968, pp.122-125

26. Wallace-Hadrill, pp.128-130

27. Glacken, p.196

28. Glacken, p.203

29. Glacken, p.204; also cited in Richard Bauckham, 'The New Age Theology of Matthew Fox: A Christian Theological Response', *Anvil*, 13, 1996, 115-126, at p.120.

30. Bauckham, 'New Age Theology', pp. 120f.

31. Glacken, pp. 198f.; Glacken here cites *City of God*, XII, 4

32. Glacken, pp. 196-201

33. Glacken, p.202

34. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear, 1983

35. Glacken,p.196;Santmire,pp. 55-74

36. Bauckham, 'New Age Theology', p. 120

37. Glacken,pp. 302-304;Robert Nisbet, *The Social Philosophers*, London: Heinemann, 1974, pp. 326-328

38. Glacken, p.214

39. See Sean McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth,* London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986

40. C.W. Hume, *The Status of Animals in the Christian Religion,* London: Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, 1957, pp.94-98

41. Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature,* pp.33, 212

42. Glacken, pp.200, 299. Glacken also finds explicit stewardship teaching in Cosmas Indicopleustes, who compares the work of humanity on earth with decorating and furnishing a house: see p.300.

43. Glacken, p.212

44. Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change,* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952; also in 'Historical Roots' (see n.4).

45. Rene Dubos, 'A Theology of the Earth', in Barbour, 43-54; also 'Franciscan Conservation and Benedictine Stewardship', in David and Eileen Spring (eds.), *Ecology and Religion in History,* New York, Evanston, San Francisco and London: Harper & Row, 1974, 114-136

46. Glacken, p.233

47. Glacken, p.236

48. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2.1.102 a6 ad8.

49. Glacken, pp.214-216; J. Donald Hughes, 'Francis of Assisi and the Diversity of Creation', *Environmental Ethics*, 18, 1996, pp. 311-320

50. Hughes, p.317

51. Susan Power Bratton, 'The Original Desert Solitaire: Early Christian Monasticism and Wilderness', *Environmental Ethics*, 10, 1988, 31-53.

52. Richard Bauckham, "Attitudes to the non-human Creation in the History of Christian Thought" (unpublished). I am grateful to Professor Bauckham for showing me a copy of this essay.

53. Santmire, pp.128-131

54. Jean Calvin, *Commentary* on Genesis 2:15, quoted from a translation of 1847 in F.B. Welbourn, 'Man's Dominion', *Theology*, 78, 1975, 561-568, at p.563

55. Santmire, pp.124f.

56. From *The sermons of M. Jean Calvin upon ... Deuteronomie*, trans. Arthur Golding (1583), quoted in Thomas, p.154

57. George Hughes, *Analytical Exposition of Genesis*, quoted

in Thomas, p.155.

58. Thomas, p.166

59. Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science,* trans. S. Rabinovitch, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, pp.102f.

60. Robin Attfield, *God and The Secular,* 2nd. edn., Aldershot: Gregg Revivals, 1993, 17-19

61. Bauckham, 'Attitudes to the Non-Human Creation', p.22

62. Attfield, *God and The Secular,* pp.18-26

63. Francis Bacon, *Works,* edited by R.L. Ellis, J. Spedding and D.D. Heath (7 vols) London: Longmans, 1887-92, II, p.14.

64. See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution,* London: Wildwood House, 1982, pp.164-190

65. John Cottingham, ' "A Brute to the Brutes?" Descartes' Treatment of Animals', *Philosophy,* 53, 1978, 551-559

66. Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (2nd edn.), Athens, Georgia and London: University of Georgia Press, 1991, p.38

67. Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method,* VI, in *The*

Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.T.R. Ross, 2 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967, I, p.119

68. Thomas, p.167

69. Sir Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind,* quoted at Black (see n.14), pp. 56f.

70. Black, p.57

71. Thomas Tryon, *The Country-man's Companion* (1683), quoted at Thomas, *Man and the Natural World,* p.155.

72. Thomas, pp.17-50

73. E.S. Turner, *All Heaven in a Rage,* London: Michael Joseph, 1964, p.35

74. On Locke, see Robert S. Brumbaugh, 'Of Mice, Animals and Morals: A Brief History', in Richard Knowles Morris and Michael W. Fox (eds.), *On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics,* Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1978, 6-25. On Wollaston, Balguy, Hutcheson and Evangelicals, see John Passmore, 'The Treatment of Animals', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 36, 1975, 195-218. For Quakers, see John Woolman's statement of 1772 in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends,* London: London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, 1960, para.478. On

Methodists, see Turner, p.50. On Montaigne, Hume and Bentham, see Passmore, 'Treatment of Animals'. Shaftesbury is mentioned in Norman S. Fiering, 'Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth Century Humanitarianism', *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 37, 1976, 195-218; and Voltaire in *Animal Liberation.*

75. John Locke, *Two Treatises on Civil Government* (1698), ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, II, sect.49

76. On Emerson and Thoreau, see Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics,* Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989, pp.36-38.

77. Nash, p.37

78. Nash, pp.40f.

79. Nash, pp.42-45

80. Owen Chadwick, 'Evolution and the Churches', in C.A. Russell (ed.), *Science and Religious Belief,* London: University of London Press, 1973.

81. Passmore, 'Treatment of Animals', p.206

82. As, for example, in Hugh Montefiore (ed.), *Man and Nature,* London: Collins, 1975.

83. Hendrikus Berkhof, 'Science and the Biblical World-View', in Ian G. Barbour (ed.), *Science & Religion,* London: SCM, 1968, 43-53

84. Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ,* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.