

### Three Pathways to Being Green

What follows is an account of my personal progress. I was brought up from a small child to appreciate Nature – the flora and fauna we observed on country walks and the birds and other living creatures we saw in our gardens. Also to be kind to them, including the insects (except wasps). I was taught that everything was here for a reason – including wasps. I was also brought up to believe that the works of man could never compare to the works of God for beauty or for their ability to elicit the experience of wonder. No man can truly paint a sunset.

In this Romantic vein, I'm apt to see a motorway constructed in a beautiful landscape as a kind of sacrilege, a quarry or a factory as an abomination, a blot on the landscape. I'm glad that most of the new housing built in Halling since I moved into the parish has been built on former industrial sites rather than in virgin countryside.

This is a bit naive. Human beings are as much part of nature as are sunsets or wasps. Our ability to make things is God-given. God has given us our talents, our skills, the materials with which we work, the time in which we do our work. We are free to use what God has given us as we choose for good or ill (and one day we shall answer for our choices) but what we do is not distinct from Nature. We are part of nature. In the strictest sense of the word, a dam made by human beings is no less natural than a dam made by beavers.

Anyway, it's hardly realistic to oppose the construction of every new road and workplace and to resist the mining and quarrying of the materials the world needs. People need to be able to travel. We have to be able to shift goods to where they are needed. People need places to live and jobs. Given that human beings are made in the image of God, isn't it a sacrilege that so many people live in poverty, lacking the basic necessities which industry and agriculture on an industrial scale provide for the rest of us?

Nevertheless, I'd still rather take a walk in the country than visit an art gallery or attend a concert. I'd sooner ride my bike than drive or fly or travel by train (unless it was a steam train on a preserved railway).

I was born in 1954. I was a teenager in the sixties and seventies. I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*! When I was growing up was the time that we were getting seriously worried about acid rain, rivers so polluted that nothing could live in them and high levels of lead compounds and other toxic fumes in the atmosphere. We were becoming concerned that powerful pesticides such as DDT were killing far more things than the insects they were designed to protect us against. There were increasing worries about global warming, although the evidence was much less clear then than it is now. There were quality of life issues as roads became more and more congested and our historic towns and cities were first choked and then bashed about to provide ring roads and car parks. This was the time when the stars were fading, outshone by light pollution and obscured by toxic chemicals in the air. In the eighties we discovered that the fluorocarbons which we thought of as so safe in aerosols and fridges were actually destroying the ozone layer and allowing dangerous rays from the sun to reach the earth's surface. In this respect, the first couple of weeks of the first lockdown were paradise regained.

The saying *Live simply so others may simply live* was very popular at the time. The thought was that, if those of us in the richer parts of the world consume more than our fair share of the world's resources, there must be that much less left for the poor. Similarly, we relatively rich people produce more than our share of pollution, but it is often the poorest people in the world who will face the consequences. Rubbish from western countries is shipped to poorer places to be dealt with. Much of the low-lying land threatened with flooding because of global warming is occupied by some of the poorest people in the world. This somewhat Romantic Victorian Christian became a bit of a hippy.

Again, there is a danger of naivety here. Industrial scale agriculture feeds far more people far more cheaply with much less labour than traditional peasant farming is capable of doing. We wouldn't like to live without many of the goods produced in factories and it is the prosperity generated by industry and commerce which has made possible the advances in medicine and the sciences from which we all benefit. The fact that we consume so much of what grows or is produced in poor countries – from coffee to cheap clothes – provides jobs for people in those countries and is a source of the hard currency which they need in order to invest in their own economies. There's a balance to be struck between care for the environment and anxiety about inequality on the one hand and progress towards greater prosperity for everyone on the other. I wouldn't like to say where that balance ought to fall.

Finally, there is the issue of what it is truly to be human. In the end, what really matters? Jesus said, *For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. It's our desire for material things which is destroying the environment, using up valuable resources to acquire goods which we don't need, to travel to places

we don't need to go to and to purchase services we could very well manage without. In doing so, we despoil nature both by using up raw materials and by generating pollution. And, in the end, material goods can never satisfy us. That's why we always want more. What we have is never enough. Ultimately, our needs are spiritual and we can only be fulfilled as people when our spiritual needs are met.

And once again, I'm being naive. We can't live without things like food and clothes and homes to live in. We are material beings as well as spiritual and we do need a certain amount of stuff. But how much stuff do we need? We've got used to "needing" things we'd never even heard of a few years ago. I heard a couple of people on the radio complaining about the terrible shortages on the shelves of our supermarkets caused by a lack of lorry drivers. But I didn't have much sympathy for them. They weren't starving (as so many people are in the world today). They just couldn't get the brands they preferred. But I mustn't be too condemnatory. I've just been from shop to shop making sure I could get the dog biscuits my spaniel prefers. So, again a balance, but where should the balance be struck? Greta Thunberg or Henry Ford?

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