



The Lawyers' Christian Fellowship

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## Relationship: an environmental perspective

### Your place in the Trinity

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The common point of departure for a consideration of God and the Environment is the Creation story in Genesis and the concept of stewardship, moving on through Paul's doctrine on the groaning of a damaged world in Romans 8 awaiting its redemption. However, as this issue is all about relationship, I would like to explore the God-environment relationship in a more personal way.

Before becoming a lawyer, I lectured and researched in different aspects of the environment: the reconstruction of ancient environments and projection of trends of change into the future, and separately, the inter-relationship between human activity, the changing environment and changing economic circumstances in sensitive, finely balanced mountain communities. I explored the human-land relationship and learnt something about the social relationships alongside local beliefs and traditions that shaped, conserved and controlled access to limited resources.

It was not until I became a Christian that I became consciously part of the trinity comprised of "God-Environment-Human" and therefore fully aware of the meaning of stewardship in the context of God's kingdom. By this I mean, not just theoretically aware of the existence of spiritual dogma in "traditional" societies that determined the way that people controlled, revered and lived within their environment and resources, but with a new understanding from a glimpse of God's perspective of what it means to live in His creation, His way and to feel for it as He does.

I have always been wary of technological or developmental interventionist strategies, whilst recognising the need to find real solutions to the problems of feeding and powering a burgeoning human population with arguably less impact on less space left on this planet. I have been particularly cautious of international development initiatives that may have as unforeseen impacts on human relationships and the environment as the misapplication of the cloning technology that produced Dolly the sheep. However, whilst out in field work in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, soon after my conversion, I spent some time reading Leviticus, Deuteronomy and Job, and then seeing it in reality set out before me in the landscape below my eyrie on a high rock. The landscape below was both a mosaic in terms of its use and features, but also Mosaic in the way that it was being used: how snow and glacier melt waters, crops, individual trees and their fruits and each terrace and field could be both owned by an individual, but also available for the common good at different times of the year. The complex rules and mores that controlled land, water and living resources that I had been exploring were all written down on the pages in front of me in the early chapters of the Bible.

I found this an extraordinary revelation which opened my eyes to the presence of God and His ways in a remote and "unchristian" part of His world. The persistence of these ancient traditions quite apart from the writings of the Bible, confirmed to me that God is everywhere, and that the world is His and all that is in it. It gave me an exciting new perspective on, and connection with, both God and His world. It was the difference

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between seeing just the human-environment relationship in 2D and then revisiting it in the knowledge of God in 3D. It also was a turning point career wise, when I knew that I would be leaving academia and the study of these mountain communities, even just at the point of a new revelatory understanding of “how” and “why” and “what” those communities were all about and the wealth of knowledge relevant to our much less traditional societies.

So, even as God called me away just on the cusp of a new chapter in my academic thinking, He also gave me assurance that these places were “safe” in His hands and His heart, but that it was not for me to pick up this baton, or follow that road. Instead, He made me a lawyer: an environmental lawyer (of course) - after a certain amount of blundering into closed doors on my part. So now I clean up dirty land - all in the UK - and build useful things on it. I am called upon to solve problems for clients faced with contaminated land, compliance with environmental regulatory requirements in corporate transactions; and to secure planning consent for big and small developments relating to mining, the film industry, retail development, housing schemes, major artistic structures, for sports and science, education as well as corporate bodies. There are opportunities to influence new policy and law, to mediate between conflicting agendas, and to encourage “corporate social responsibility” in clients and colleagues.

It seems a far cry from travelling all over the world to remote mountains and deserts, investigating the impacts of economic and environmental change on the lives of real people. But by pursuing that line of enquiry as an end in its “intellectual” self in the context in which I worked, I could not solve problems, only identify them, which was worthwhile but, for me, frustrating.

Whilst now I may still raise controversial and inconvenient truths in the course of my work, I am also able at least in part to solve some in a very small way. God has given me a glimpse of His laws in action in remote places, in which I take huge comfort and encouragement, but which also made me ask what it was I was trying to achieve there. He has blessed my obedience in following His leading into law and in trusting Him, I find that, like all the Dorotheas of George Eliot’s “Middlemarch” (although with rather less grace!), I am more than content with my small place in His big world, and try to walk in His ways at the task that He has set me.

He has given me other, different, but no less creative gifts in place of the travelling and first hand experience of different peoples and places. But the insights and memories of those times still shape my thinking and inform my evolving understanding of the Trinitarian relationship of God with His world and with me; of me with my God and the world I live in; and the environment as a reflection of both God’s glorious creation and humankind’s stewardship - both good and bad. We are, of course, all called upon to act wisely in our use of God’s world. God has shown me that this means starting from yourself - being right with God, seeking Him first, in the place where He has put you, doing that which He has set apart for you to do. It may mean turning away from something that seems very good, right, useful, significant, meaningful, Godly and perhaps exciting and even glamorous, to do something that may seem small, local, insignificant and mundane but which, if you are there in obedience to God, will be fulfilling, satisfying and a source of peace to your heart and joy to God’s. When you are right with God, then He will reveal the third “leg” of the stool, be that environment, law, medicine, money, people or prayer and will not just reveal it so that you see it, but will cause His light to shine upon it so that it is a beautiful and wondrous thing.

As the Psalmist says - “Be strong, take heart, and trust in the Lord” Ps27.