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A CHRISTIAN SPEAKS ON CONSERVATION

As we are nearing both Christmas and the end of Conservation Year, it seems appropriate to blend the two realities which they represent, God and Nature, in one article. The following is a translation of a sermon pronounced from the pulpit of the Swiss Church in Endell Street, London, by Pasteur A. Nicod, during this summer. Pasteur Nicod was a farmer in the Canton of Vaud before becoming a minister and feels particularly strongly about the problems of conservation.

* * *

*"Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,
who have eyes, but see not,
who have ears, but hear not,
Do you not fear me? says the Lord;
Do you not tremble before me?
I placed the sand as the bound for the sea,
a perpetual barrier it cannot pass;
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,
though they roar, they cannot pass over it,
But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;
they have turned aside and gone away.
They do not say in their hearts,
"Let us fear the Lord our God,
who gives the rain in its season,
the autumn rain and the spring rain,
and keeps for us
the weeks appointed for the harvest".
Your iniquities have turned these away,
and your sins have kept good from you".*

Jeremiah 5: 21-25

The weather is probably the most frequently recurring theme of our daily conversations. It is our simplest and most genuine means of communication with our grocers. It also determines our mood and our tempers, which are more often than not related to what comes down upon us from the sky. But mundane conversations on the weather can become serious. They can even be very serious—and this is our intention this morning.

The passage from Jeremiah which we have just heard ends with this sentence: *Your iniquities have turned these away*—where the Prophet refers to the spring and autumn rains, to the

sun which fecundates the earth and brings forth rich harvests. Jeremiah was haranguing the people of Israel who had been hit by a drought. A drought in those days often had dramatic consequences. It involved famine, the death of cattle and the starvation of the most disfavoured members of the community. When such a disaster struck the land, the people crowded in the Temple to ask of God the rain, and with it the bread necessary to life. Covered in sackcloth to show their repentance, the people invoked their God, the Creator and Ordainer of the world. The Master of nature was reminded to a humbled people awaiting in prayer for the promises of God, for His blessing and for the fertile rain. But in the days of Jeremiah, something had been broken in the relationship between God and his people and the Prophet was telling his people: "This time God will not answer, your iniquities have turned away the fruits of the earth, they have upset the order of creation".

In the French agricultural province where I once had a parish, I often used to chat with the winegrowers about the weather. Our conversations were of a very concrete nature because the sugar content of the grape depended directly on the weather. "I tell you", they used to say, "the seasons have been deranged, they don't run out like they used to. Either there's too much wet or too little . . . Don't you think they've put the seasons out of order with all their atom bombs?"

This question may appear simplistic, but it all the same reflects a cruel truth: The massive and reckless intervention of man in every domain of nature has resulted in very serious environmental disturbances. In fact, my vinegrower friend had reached, in a perhaps undefined way, the same conclusion as Jeremiah: *Your iniquities have upset the order of creation.*

Are we really responsible for the weather outside? A meteorologist will probably say that there is nothing we can actually do. On the other hand physicists and environmentalists have asserted that there was, and have already given the alarm. Man is behaving like a bandit in the wonderful creation given to him by God. His madness, his selfishness and his lack of intelligence drive him to mutilate the fauna and the flora of our planet; and these things have been established in a free equilibrium, in accordance with laws which it would be fatal to upset. But man has already forayed in the Tree of Knowledge without discretion, without restraint and without modesty,

to depredate it like a robber. Some have done so through science, others through psychology, some have even sacrificed the lives of their fellow-men to their own interests.

We have penetrated everywhere, we have dissected everything, we crave to master everything and know everything to become like Gods. One may ask whether we are not living through one of the visions of the *Revelations*. I believe that we are. And as members of the Church we are the Two Witnesses, the Two Olive Trees and the Two Chandeliers. We have the duty and the right to say why the Heavens became closed and why the water was changed into blood.

Christian voices and prophetic voices have already been raised to warn us that the great worry of the governments of tomorrow will not be inflation, political conflicts, or even war! . . . but the eventuality of a cataclysm produced by the rupture of the fragile harmony of life on the earth and in the seas.

"Your sins have upset the order of creation". What are we to do, if not to repent, that is to say, to think about these things and go back to their source? What do the Scriptures tell us? They say that creation is a permanent act of God. It is the setting in which He has placed man so that he may live. It is the reflection of His glory and it is associated with the praise which man, as shown in Psalm 148, must give to his God. If God loved men so much as to give them His Son, then it means that His will is to renew His creation. This creation sighs and suffers in Jesus Christ while it waits for the new order (Romans 8/22). The Psalmist says that nature is placed under the feet of man, but we must understand "man" as being submitted to Jesus Christ. Our actions on nature will depend on our relations with God and our fellow men, and Jeremiah is crying out that "nature is suffering" because Israel has broken its relation with God.

"Your sins have upset the order of creation". We must be aware of this new order and know that the Kingdom of God is coming, and that we can realise it in our own lives and for our fellow men. And there we find ourselves engaged on a path upon which we didn't expect to carry much responsibility. But the environment in which mankind lives today is part of its very life. Men are beginning to perish of asphyxia in our overgrown capitals; they are submerged by the refuse of our consumer civilisation; our flowers and our lakes are dead; "black tides" prevent us from bathing in the sea and a formidable wind of waste is sweeping over the land we live on and turning it into a Steppe. These are the signs of our times, as Jesus was already reminding his contemporaries. Talk about the weather, yes, but we must also go a little deeper than that and assume our responsibilities. We must now take the decision to live with nature which sur-

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*To be continued.**



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rounds us with a new attitude. Only our involvement will help to repair the disorder provoked by the unconsciousness of men. I can see three main paths. The first would reside in direct action, accomplished in a modest and personal way. It would simply be to love the creation which has been given to us, to plant and to protect trees, to defend the lives of animals and to thank God for sun and rain. Secondly, we should contribute to alert public opinion, so that it may open its eyes on the beautiful domain which God has entrusted us. We can help and support all those who are attempting to steer upstream by using the mass media. Finally, we

should alert our political masters so that they may, by dint of laws and conservationist institutions, throw a dike on the present tide of destruction. It is in this way that we may hand down to our little children the joy of seeing the swallows come again in the spring and of listening to the song of the wind in the hedgerows.

Our sins have upset the order of creation. Yes Lord, but with you I will try to look at the lilies of the fields and the birds of the sky with new eyes, and especially with a new and concrete sense of urgency, so that other men, my brethren, *may live*, and live the true life of God's Children. *Amen!*

right of vote to make themselves useful at war! They had rendered indispensable services during the last war. In Switzerland alone, a force of 20,000 Voluntary Servicewomen had put up more than 3½ million days of service. Their presence had even conditioned victory in many of the harder struggles of the war, particularly in the case of the Battle of Britain and in the defence of Finland. So the idea of involving women in military life—in fact, the Frauen Hilfsdienst was now 30 years old—was not new.

Miss Weitzel's conceptions on defence went even further than the official guidelines on "Total Defence of the Land" currently being worked out. To her defence was *an every day duty and exercise*. One defended one's country by adopting a *positive attitude* towards the national values by which we lived and by being prepared to pay a sacrifice to defend them. But we needed to know clearly what in fact we were to defend. This was firstly our *independence*, and secondly our *freedom* (which really covered all that might be called the "freedom to be Swiss" and what it implied).

Defence was, in Miss Weitzel's mind, primarily a moral question. One defended one's country by accomplishing the tasks of every day as usefully to the community as possible and within the framework of values which made this community what it was. Swiss women could also participate in defence by joining a defence *organisation*, namely, the Women's Auxiliary Service. There were also two other corps in which women could also enrol, they were the Red Cross and Civil Defence.

Miss Weitzel then proceeded to describe the work of the Women's Auxiliary Corps. It was not intended, she stressed, to replace the ordinary tasks of a male army. The female volunteers of the Service did not in any way accomplish the tasks which befitted a young man's muscularity and hardiness. The volunteers of the Auxiliary Service were given jobs suitable for them, and indeed there was a variety of fields within defence in which feminine qualities and specialities could be profitably put to use. Volunteers could choose between one of many assignments. They could become ambulance drivers or telegraphists; they could join the administration of the army in the field, or the communica-

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY SERVICE

The last monthly meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique gave the opportunity to members of hearing one of the most prominent women of Switzerland, Miss Andrée Weitzel. Miss Weitzel is well known as head of the Women's Auxiliary Service (Frauen Hilfsdienst) as well as for her involvement in the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the Commission for the Swiss Abroad and other official bodies. Many Swiss ladies who are now in their late thirties, have seen or heard her campaign in their secondary school days in favour of the Women's Auxiliary Service. Her last propaganda effort in this realm was a film on the life of a Voluntary Corps recruit, *Barbara*, which has been seen by hundreds of thousands of Swiss girls and has received a positive comment in the Swiss Press. But Miss Weitzel's talk to the N.S.H. had nothing propagandistic about it. She had come to speak to us in a purely private capacity and her purpose was to inform us on an original and refreshing subject.

Mrs. Mariann Meier, President of London's N.S.H. group, had to convey apologies for absence from many Embassy officials—who are usually N.S.H. regulars—as they had been invited to Buckingham Palace that evening. But despite these regretted absences, an encouraging attendance turned up to listen to such a distinguished speaker.

Miss Weitzel began her exposé by setting down its aim clearly: she would not talk on Swiss women, nor on women, nor on defence, but she would talk on the *position* of Swiss women with respect to National Defence and the Auxiliary Service.

Miss Weitzel introduced her subject by describing the changing nature of armed conflicts and by outlining the role which woman had to play in the society of today. She explained that the principal differences between modern

warfare and the battles of earlier times lay in the infinitely greater distance between the foes. What was once the close clash of clubs and swords has been depersonalised and stretched by the range of a gun or a rocket. War has indeed become terribly mechanical and impersonal. But as an immediate consequence of this, the geographical scope of its devastation has been multiplied. The old armies used to limit their looting to the villages and fields that lay in their way, but the rest of the countries they traversed remained relatively uninvolved.

On the other hand, the ravages of the modern invader affect a whole country. In Miss Weitzel's words, war has become more "*horizontal*". It has also become "*vertical*" in that there is no more definite front, no clear line of demarcation between friend and foe, but only a general and confused contact, established either by the physical means of rockets and strategic bombers, which can strike both warring parties at any time, or by the psychological means of beamed propaganda and political action. The notion of "defence" must, therefore, be more widely and vividly understood than ever before. Far more is at stake. If Switzerland should ever be involved in a war again, then the *whole population* and not just the males of fighting age, will be involved. It is in this context that the defensive role of women must be examined. There are reasons to believe that future wars will have an ideological character and that their belligerents will not be fighting over the ownership of their soil only, but also over *values*.

Miss Weitzel mentioned the increasing role of woman in modern society and recalled the necessarily increased awareness and patriotic responsibility which this involved. But women should not have to wait to be given the

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