

THE RELIGIOUS CAUSE OF THE RECENT FLOODING ON THE SOMERSET LEVELS

by STEPHEN PERKS

THE recent flooding of the Somerset Levels in the winter of 2013–2014, and particularly the flooding at the beginning of February 2014, has been one of the main items in the United Kingdom news media for some time now. There has been excessive rainfall, there is no doubt about that. But the extreme flooding in early February has not been caused by excessive rainfall. It has been caused by the nation's rejection of Christianity and its conversion to a new religion, secular humanism, which has provided a haven for the champions of neo-pagan eco-activist and "back to Nature" ideology. Now, I know this claim may seem rather incredible, but please give me a minute to explain. There is nothing magical about this, and I am not saying God sent heavy rain as a punishment for our abandonment of Christianity. The flooding is a form of judgement of course, but not in that sense; rather it is a judgement in the sense that it is the consequence of man's rejection of the Cultural Mandate. Nor am I saying there has not been excessive rainfall; there has, and this would have caused flooding in any event. This is not the problem. The Somerset Levels are prone to flood, and flooding is a common occurrence there, *but not on this scale*.

Some years ago a deliberate decision was made to let the water table rise on the Levels to preserve the wildlife habitat. The dredging machines were sold off for scrap and it was decided that the Levels should flood more often. According to Gordon Rayner, writing for *The Telegraph*:

"Michael Eavis, the farmer and organiser of the Glastonbury Festival, said the Environment Agency had sold off 50 dredging machines for scrap several years ago because it had decided its priority was 'to preserve the riverbank life—river oysters and little voles and things.' He said: 'It floods every winter here now. It's not a 100-year thing. It floods every single year and it never used to. For the sake of the meadows and the wild flowers and the fields and the farmers and the cows, this drainage has to be done. There's no other way of doing it. The choice is to abandon the farmland and let it all flood and leave it all to wading birds. (Farming) is so fundamentally important and an essential part of the Somerset Levels and the alternative is a terrible, terrible prospect.' Critics of the Environment Agency have pointed out that it recently spent £31m creating a bird sanctuary at the mouth of the Parrett river in Somerset—six times the estimated cost of dredging. There have also been claims that the RSPB [the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds] has become

too powerful a lobby group, with too much influence over the Environment Agency's decisions on how to balance the needs of farmers with the needs of wildlife"¹

The reason for this is the growing acceptance of the ideology peddled by the eco-activists in which wildlife takes priority over man. The Bible teaches that God created man to develop the world, which was not meant to be a wilderness. Man's Creation Mandate was to conquer the wilderness and tame it, and develop it: the result was civilisation. Of course managing wildlife is part of this and no one with a biblical understanding of this would want to see the extermination of species and the obliteration of the countryside etc.—rather the reverse. But man cannot live in a wilderness. Man's job is to tame the wilderness and manage the earth for God's glory and the betterment of mankind and the world itself. Part of that task in some countries has been draining the land and cultivating it so that it can sustain mankind. This is what has happened on the Levels, which without the management of man would be frequently in the condition it is now and worse. This management of the land was made possible by the deliberate policy of dredging to allow the water to drain off the land.

There is also a further aspect to this, namely deforestation of land for farming, since it has been argued that the existence of more forests and bogs on higher ground would help prevent excessive flooding down stream by holding back the water to some extent.² In other words, the alternative to dredging is to let the land revert to a wilderness. Of course there could be a balance between these two things. But it seems that such a balance has been achieved neither in the past nor in the present.

On the morning of 10 February 2014 Evan Davis interviewed Baroness Barbara Young on the BBC Radio Four *Today* programme about the flooding on the Somerset Levels. Barbara Young is a former Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and was Chief Executive of the Environment Agency

1. Gordon Rayner, "Dutch engineers could be called in to sort out Somerset Levels flooding," *The Telegraph* (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>), Monday 10 February 2014.

2. See for example George Monbiot, "Dredging rivers won't stop floods. It will make them worse," *The Guardian* (<http://www.theguardian.com/>), 20 January 2014.

from 2000 to 2008. She has also been vice chair of the BBC and chairman of English Nature. Davis questioned her as to whether there has been a deliberate policy to allow the Levels to flood more often for the sake of the wetland wildlife. Here is what he said:

“You were quite keen on habitat protection . . . you gave talks called *Instant Wildlife: Just Add Water* . . . we’ve got this document, it’s a consultative document, but it appears to be outlining what the policy is . . . the draft we have does suggest that the Somerset Levels, from your time there [i.e. her time as Chief Executive of the Environment Agency—SCP], the policy should be to increase the frequency of flooding. I’m just wondering what your take on that is.”

She evaded the question with typical political waffle saying she sympathised with the people affected and blaming the problem on the excessive rain. She also said that it is seven years ago since she was involved. But of course the problem goes back much further than this. I can remember hearing people complain over twenty years ago that one could walk over the river Parrett in places because it was so shallow due to there having been insufficient dredging. She was asked again if there was a deliberate policy to allow the Levels to flood more often: “But do you recollect it being a policy to have more flooding in the Somerset Levels?”³ Again she evaded answering the question. The BBC did not pursue it any further, but the answer was obvious. We’ll take that as a yes then. When you stop the dredging and let the water table rise to facilitate greater wetland wildlife what do you think the result will be? It’s not rocket science. Wetland wildlife was prioritised over the people who lived in the area.

Underpinning this was a *religious* perspective, namely that wilderness and wildlife have priority over man, that the problem with the world is man’s interference with the natural order, that Nature is normative and that man must be subject to Nature, not the Creation subject to man. I am not saying this is necessarily a self-consciously religious perspective. It may well not be, but that does not alter the fact that it is the result of a particular world-view, a particular religious perspective. I use the word Nature (with a capital N) here because what many people believe about Nature is a sort of throw-back to paganism. Actually there is no such thing as Nature in this sense; what we call Nature is God’s Creation. But when God is denied something has to take his place and for the eco-activists Nature becomes a sort of god. Some eco-activists have publicly criticised Christianity because of its doctrine of the Cultural or Creation Mandate, i.e. that man should rule over the earth and have dominion over it. This is wrong in their eyes. Man does not have the right

or duty to rule over Nature, which is effectively their god. This is a religious conflict. Our society has rejected Christianity as public truth. But now Christianity has been downgraded as public truth something has to take its place as public truth (public truth equals religion). What has taken its place is secular humanism, which is the dominant religion of course. But secular humanism is defenceless against neo-paganism and it has all the silliest neo-pagan religions you can think of nesting in its rotting boughs—just as Rome accepted all the Eastern mystery cults. If it is not man’s divine calling to have dominion over the earth, an idea that is now seen as a vicious doctrine that harms Nature, then man must be subject to Nature.

Before Christianity became dominant mankind was terrified of Nature. The modern “back to Nature” ideologues do not know what they are talking about. Ancient man did not see Nature in the way the modern “back to Nature” people see it. He was at its mercy and terrified by it. That is why he tried to placate it with his magical rituals. He used magic to attempt to control it. Christianity changed all this. The Creation is not man’s master. Man was meant to be master of the Creation. His task on earth is to subdue it to the glory of God and the betterment of mankind. This means that what we are to aim for is not a wilderness, but a managed environment. This includes looking after God’s Creation and managing the wildlife of course, which is why we have parks etc. But this is not the ideology that is now dominant. What has taken over is the idea that the wilderness has the priority and that man’s management of the earth, his dominion over it as God’s viceroy, is evil. The doctrine of the Creation Mandate has been openly criticised by well-known high profile Nature-buffs and eco-activists who are hostile to the biblical view and whom our rulers, in their zeal to debunk Christianity, are happy to cuddle up to, granting them whatever idiotic requests they make. What has happened as this new ideology, which is a form of neo-paganism, has become popular and triumphed is that man has again become subject to the terrors of Nature. Welcome to the real world of “back to Nature.” If Nature is normative (i.e. if the natural world is not God’s Creation, which man is meant to have dominion over in God’s name, but functions effectively as a god—it is a form of naturalistic pantheism of course) then man is subject to it, and of course subject to all its terrors.

The change of religious world-view in our society has led to a change in what is prioritised by those who manage the environment on the Levels. The Levels have always flooded. But when the Levels were dredged regularly the water could drain off before the next flood. The stopping of the dredging, brought about ultimately by a change of religious ideology, which led to a change of priorities in which wetland wildlife took precedence over mankind, has meant that the water

3. BBC Radio Four Iplayer, *Today*, 10/02/14 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03trkbz>), 02.49.55–02:52.20.

cannot drain off before the next flood. So the situation gets worse and worse. Now the South West is cut off by train and it will cost million of pounds to put right the problem caused by the stupidity of neo-paganism. But there is no guarantee that this problem will not recur. For a long term solution, the ideology, i.e. the religious world-view, that caused the problem needs to be addressed.

One of the problems with this is that even many Christians have bought into this neo-pagan eco-agenda,—eco-Nazism is what I've heard it called—and so the Church does not give clear teaching and direction to the nation. (By the way, the eco-agenda was a part of Hitler's original Nazi agenda as well—you eco-warriors did know that didn't you? You didn't? Oh dear! Well you need to look into it because there is a whole host of other stuff that the West is now embracing with gusto that is ant-Christian and that Hitler and his neo-pagan warriors were equally zealous about as well.)

Until we repent and turn again to the Lord Jesus Christ and govern our lives and society according to

his word we will have more of this, not because God sends more rain to punish man for his rebellion, but because ideas have consequences, and religion underpins civilisation; i.e. it underpins how we see mankind and his place in the world, and this governs how we go about living, whether and how we develop the world, and therefore what decisions we make about priorities. The Levels are reclaimed land. If we do not believe man has the right to reclaim land, that wetland wildlife has a prior claim, then there will be consequences. If we believe that God created the world and put man in it to subdue it and have dominion over it there will be a different set of consequences. The latter produced civilisation, the former produced paganism in which man is subject to Nature, becoming the slave of the idol Nature rather than master of the created order with dominion over it, which is what God intended him to be. The abandonment of a Christian view of man's place in the world by our society has led to the ideology that is at the root of the stopping of the dredging. And it is this that has caused the crisis. The rain always comes. What we do about it is ultimately a religious decision.

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