

## The Archbishop on the environment...

The Archbishop of Canterbury employed some strange reasoning in his recent lecture *Renewing the Face of the Earth*. I'm afraid he lost me very early on when he said, "The exercise of the work of conserving is meant to be one of the things that holds us in Paradise." Really? I had thought we had long since been cast from Eden, never to return until God's promised creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Dr Williams' syntax so often appears as if it were devised by some Regius Professor of Obfuscation. Can anyone, for instance, tell me what the following sentence could mean in any possible world: "One of the providential tasks of human beings must be to limit damage and to secure space for the natural order to exist unharmed." The concept of the natural order as "unharmed" sits oddly in a world of tectonic shifts, earthquakes, floods, fires, tempest, drought and volcanic eruptions. Confusion is worse confounded when he goes on to refer to the world's "inner mechanisms for self-healing or self-correction." In what ways can we meaningfully speak of the world healing itself of an earthquake or self-correcting a tsunami?

The centre of the Archbishop's argument is the issue of climate change and here he insists that "We cannot but use our intelligence." Well, let us hope not. But what if it is not intelligent to believe in the hypothesis of global warming caused by human activity? Loftily, the Archbishop refuses even to consider that the global warmists might be wrong. He says, "I don't intend to discuss in detail the rhetoric of those who deny the reality of climate change."

Let us lay aside for a moment that huge iceberg of a begged question in Dr Williams' word the "reality" of climate change. Whether it is a reality or not, is precisely what is in dispute.

But never mind their rhetoric, Archbishop, what about the *arguments* of the very great number of extremely eminent scientists who do not accept the global warming hypothesis? What, specifically, do you reply to the fact that over the last ten years global warming was not actually happening, that there has been a steady fall in temperatures over that period, while at the same time greenhouse gases – the supposed cause – have increased? What to make of the fact that we have experienced many other warmer periods over the millennia, that the medieval warm period was hotter than ours, and the Roman warm period hotter even than that? Vines were once grown in Finland and Greenland. Are we to suppose that this was because the Vikings drove around in four-by-fours? What of the recent observations which suggest that, rather than decrease, the Arctic ice shelf has increased in thickness by about half a metre since winter 2008?

There are coherent arguments against the global warming hypothesis and the Archbishop does no service to his vaunted "intelligence" when he refuses even to discuss them.

Things only get worse when Dr Williams moves on from lofty disdain to moral blackmail: “If you live in Bangladesh or Tuvalu, scepticism about global warming is precisely the opposite of reasonable.” In other words, if on scientific grounds we reject the man-made global warming hypothesis, we are careless of the fate of the people of Bangladesh and Tuvalu. And if global warming is not in fact taking place, then it is as irrational to believe in it if you live in Bangladesh as in Scunthorpe.

The Archbishop involves himself in a further example of question-begging when he says: “It is not possible rationally to deny what the inhabitants of low-lying territories in the world routinely face as the most imminent threat to their lives and livelihoods.” On the contrary, it is perfectly rational to sympathise with their suffering in face of the rising water levels while disagreeing with the notion that man-made global warming is the cause of this rise.

In the Archbishop’s lecture, there is not much science or rational appraisal or even the “intelligence” of which he speaks so enthusiastically. What he said has been described by his fans as “prophetic.” Although he has the fine beard of the Old Testament prophet, there is no prophecy in his latest exercise in special pleading. Prophets utter words of sound judgement. There is no sound judgement in what Dr Williams said in York. He is simply that model of the very modern churchman who devotedly follows secular fads and fashions – only, like some Prince Consort, one dutiful pace behind.

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