

Editorial

The articles with which this issue starts illustrate the contribution that some Christians are making in the area of the Environment debate and also one of their problems. That Christians are very much involved and are listened to is a reason to be thankful. The problem is this: how far is what they have to say distinctively Christian? Is nearly all of it just good sense, only underlining what most others who have thought carefully about the issues are saying also? There is a feeling in some quarters that unless Christians are saying something distinctively *different* they are not making a significant contribution at all.

The first answer is to stress that the Christian way is 'wisdom' and that therefore it is not the exclusive possession of Christians. As the Bible repeatedly stresses it is the best way to live. Therefore, thankfully, most people can appreciate and even adopt many aspects of a Christian ethical outlook. Indeed non-Christians may get there first in specialist areas such as this. We welcome it whenever what Christians want to say is agreed by others because it is good sense, or has been maintained all along by people of good-will.

What emerges in these articles is that nevertheless Christians have distinctive reasons for saying what they say. This also gives them—or should give them—a certain tenacity and consistency in maintaining their position. To take one example non-Christians usually have great difficulty in finding any adequate reason for maintaining the value of the natural world, except for its value to humankind. They often *feel* that we should respect 'Nature', but that does not provide a very powerful motive for doing so. Christians, however, see it as a God-given trust to look after *his* creation, and to use it only in ways that respect its intrinsic value. Non-Christian cultures from Eastern Europe to Japan have found less powerful reasons for doing so, though greed has often overthrown the best ideals everywhere. Yet when people sit down to discuss the matter there are widely agreed practical priorities.

Christians can also give coherent reasons why we should respect the needs of future generations even at some cost to our own. They therefore emphasize very long-term needs. Other wise people do the same, but more easily forget it when short term demands are present—or an election is looming.

The things that Christians want to emphasize in this area therefore, such as sustainable development, are sometimes seen by others as just plain good sense, and so one hopes they are. Sometimes they are not seen that way, as when we stress the unique value of humankind, made in the image of God. But it was Jesus himself who told us that we are of more value than sheep or sparrows, even though they are of value to God.