

there was a moral issue that the poor were excluded from environmentally sound, sustainable development. The NRPE presented Vice President Gore with 35 projects to undertake, while making a pledge to closely monitor the ecological projects of the Clinton administration and the Congress, so that there would be “environmental justice.”

Sounding a bit like Martin Palmer himself, Gorman has said: “Ancient faith traditions are engaging a new world historical challenge here, in a way in which is both strengthening the cause of environmental sustainability and justice and renewing religious life itself.” The NRPE uses the following quote from Sen. Al Gore, Jr. on its web site: “Solving our global ecological crisis begins with each one of us understanding that while we are given dominion over the earth, we are required to be good stewards of the earth. That’s what my Bible tells me. The work of congregations across the nation to achieve this principle is important and necessary, and will make a crucial difference in determining whether we are successful in confronting the extraordinary environmental crisis we now face.” As for Reverend Morton, who, along with Gorman, assisted Gore in writing his book, he has said: “The challenge before the religious community in America is to make every congregation—every church synagogue and mosque—truly ‘green’—a center of environmental study and action. That is their religious duty.”

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Interview: Martin Palmer

The Gore connection to Prince Philip

This interview with Prince Philip’s spiritual adviser on ecology was conducted by Scott Thompson on Jan. 6. Thompson began by asking about Al Gore’s meeting with Prince Philip at the Washington National Cathedral in 1990.

Palmer: Right. But I know there had been a fair amount of correspondence before that, because Mr. Gore was very interested in the work that Prince Philip had initiated with the world religions in Assisi in 1986, where Prince Philip invited the heads of (initially) five major religions—the Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Muslims—to Assisi to create an alliance between religion and conservation to bring in the moral, ethical, and spiritual teachings of religion and to fuse that with the sort of environmental knowledge of the scientific community, and that led to tens of thousands of religiously based environmental projects around the world. And, there are now nine religions involved in that network. And, Mr. Gore was very interested in that work—

Q: That work is now with the World Bank isn’t it?

Palmer: . . . We’re doing it at two levels. There’s now a continuing program in which WWF—(what you call the World Wildlife Fund and we call the World Wide Fund for Nature, of which Prince Philip was the international president). They have sustained and developed this program with us. We act as their religious advisers. . . . It’s in that capacity I’m religious adviser to Prince Philip on ecology. We have a whole program that’s running worldwide on ecology, but we now have a parallel program which is being done with the World Bank, which brings the same nine religions—the Bahais, Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, and Taoists—together for working on development issues, in which, of course, ecology plays a major part. But, it is a slightly different program. Prince Philip has also been enormously supportive of that program.

Q: You say that Vice President Gore, even before he met Prince Philip, had been in correspondence with him.

Palmer: Right, he’d expressed interest in this alliance between religion and conservation. In his book, he has a section in which he talks about the importance of the spiritual, religious, ethical, and moral dimensions . . . that religion has.

Q: He seems to be very concerned about the Platonic Judeo-

Christian conception of “be fruitful, multiply, and” —

Palmer: Indeed.

Q: That reason will solve all problems, so don’t worry about nature.

Palmer: That’s right. I mean it does rather fall into the sort of romantic vision that the Eastern religions are all nature religions, and the Western religions are all mechanical thinking, which, I have to say, at the time that he and Prince Philip were in correspondence, was a little bit what Prince Philip thought as well. But, things have moved on since then. I’m not sure if Mr. Gore has. . . .

I know that the meeting took place. I know that there was correspondence before, because we were asked to advise on some of the religious issues and topics that were raised. I know it was a very good meeting. It was quite a meeting of the minds, because I think they’re both men who like to get on and do things, and, they are fairly impatient with abstract thought. And, yet, both of them, Prince Philip in particular, have recognized that without, as it were, the ability to change people’s hearts—that only religion can actually affect, on the network that religion has, down to the smallest community, through churches and mosques and synagogues—that the conservation methods are going to remain essentially an intellectual property, rather than a reality. And, I think that struck a chord with Mr. Gore, as I recall. . . . I know at one level, that an area the size of Belgium in the Amazon rain forest is cut down every year. . . . I know that, but it means absolutely nothing to me. Partly because I’m not terribly fond of Belgium. . . . But, if through a religious leader from that community (from one of the indigenous peoples) talking about what it meant to lose his *soul tree*, the tree that he’s been bonded with since birth, and, the pain he felt when it was cut down—that brings home to me the scale of the crisis.

And so, Prince Philip is now, and certainly since 1986, has worked always to balance the scientific with the emotional. He makes it clear that the scientific in a sense offers the answers, but not the means.

Q: You say that Vice President Gore was personally, deeply moved by this kind of approach?

Palmer: This seemed to be the case. He seemed to feel that this made sense to him. I mean, bearing in mind his own family have quite strong religious connections. He certainly understood the power of religious authority.

Q: That was going to be my second question, because he is a rather deep-dyed Southern Baptist. . . .

Palmer: Indeed he is. And, I think, you see Prince Philip has a very strong view that religion is about authority, it’s about knowing what is right and wrong, and I think there was certainly a convergence of thought on that score. But, again, Mr. Gore’s understanding, as I recall it, of the role of religion was more authoritative, than it was emotional or emotive. . . . And,

therefore, he could see some logic in that —

Q: In other words, he could see that through the authority of religion claiming some kind of respect, the earth —

Palmer: This would be a useful ally. It couldn’t do it by itself, because it hasn’t done by itself. And, it took the secular conservation movement challenging the religious movement to really get the religions active on this. But, once they did that, it took off monumentally. I mean, so much so that Prince Philip was given an award in 1995 by the United Nations for having inaugurated this work with the religions, on the grounds that through the religious networks, the conservation message had reached untold millions, who otherwise would never have heard it or never thought it was relevant for them.

Q: I understand this approach of Prince Philip has moved Sir James Wolfensohn of the World Bank?

Palmer: Yes, that’s quite right, but I think it’s a little more complicated than that. I think that James Wolfensohn is, as I’m sure you are aware, seeking to change the culture of the World Bank. He looks at the work that had been done on ecology and religion, because we invited the World Bank to join us as Prince Philip’s guests at Windsor Castle in 1995, when the nine religions came together to evaluate the success of their work to date and to plan further work. The World Bank was present. And, this created an interest in the World Bank as to whether the religions might not be similar allies in development work. And, very much with Prince Philip’s encouragement—he hosted an initial reception at Buckingham Palace for this initiative to be discussed. Last October, he hosted a luncheon to raise funds for the project: the joint work between religions and the World Bank. . . .

Q: James Wolfensohn is working closely with Vice President Gore on something that is afield from what you’re talking about: the whole question of “crony capitalism” and the sort of thing that Transparency International has been addressing.

Palmer: Yes, exactly, very important.

Q: I was curious if there might have been any overlap on the ecological —

Palmer: Well, the religions have made it absolutely clear that they are wholeheartedly in support and willing to do whatever they can to further Jim Wolfensohn’s work on corruption and cronyism. And, in the statement that they issued at the meeting we held at Lambeth Palace (the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Palace), where this whole thing was kicked off by Prince Philip, the Archbishop, and Wolfensohn, the religions were wholeheartedly behind that initiative and certainly are doing what they can. . . .

Q: In other words, under crony capitalism, you might very well say, “Well, I’m going to pay off this official, and therefore I’ll be able to cut out even more soul trees in the Amazon

forest” —

Palmer: Exactly. Certainly the religions have made the point since 1986, that one of the major problems they encounter in working on environmental issues is that the laws may be in existence, but they are not enforced. . . .

Q: Do you have any idea, other than through this work with James Wolfensohn, whether or not Vice President Gore has remained in contact with Prince Philip?

Palmer: I understand that he’s remained in contact, but not on a regular basis. The correspondence does not have to do with religious leaders, and so I have not been consulted.

I know that Prince Philip admired Gore’s book [*Earth in the Balance*], and I know that Mr. Gore also admired Prince Philip’s book [*Down to Earth*]. . . . I think Prince Philip felt that what the Vice President was saying was important. I think he felt encouraged that a man obviously rising within the structure was making this statement. He certainly felt the book was an important contribution. He shared his belief that the spiritual and religious and ethical view was important to the scientific and pragmatic. This was respected from the other side. . . .

Q: Concerning the impeachment of our President: The situation is a little bit more questionable than some of the more

rosy news items are saying. And, so there is, as even the *Sunday Telegraph* acknowledged, the possibility that one of these scandals may bring Gore into the Presidency —

Palmer: Indeed.

Q: And, he would be more of his own man.

Palmer: Indeed. Indeed.

Q: Have you ever heard anything from . . . the Alliance of Religion and Conservation concerning that potential? . . .

Palmer: In terms of the Alliance of Religion and Conservation, I think we would take very much the approach that where we know that a political leader has, to some degree, made himself a hostage to fortune, by putting in print views which one would hope to see him pursue, that we would pursue those, particularly where that person has also a strong and an avowed religious life. . . .

Q: You would say, on the question of ecology, the Vice President is somewhat of a hostage to the administration, which is less oriented in this direction than he is?

Palmer: I would say that’s very much the case, and that if he becomes President, and therefore he would become even more a hostage to that, that what he has left is quite a powerful testimonial which can be used against him — i.e., his book.

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