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There is at least one area where the modern mind finds it possible and even necessary to see a connection between human behavior and upheaval in nature: the area of ecological wrongdoing. Few of us today would deny that irresponsible and profit-driven deforestation, overuse of chemicals in fertilizers, uncontrolled fuel and waste emissions, nuclear contamination, and other practices harmful to the environment have indeed led to anti-creational phenomena: the dying of fish in rivers and lakes, erosion of soil, asthma and allergies, nuclear accidents, just to name some major examples.

Many people in the modern world interpret this scenario as clearly understandable in terms of cause and effect. They accept the need of change, but place their hope in the human ability to manage nature better. Others think in terms of a nature mysticism that amounts to a religion. Nature knows best, they say, if only we leave it untouched.

For Christians, however, the ecological upheavals and their healing must be related to God. The concepts of sin, judgment, and repentance provide the appropriate language for discussing these problems and seeking solutions. This does not exclude the search for scientific understanding and technological improvements, but it places this search into the context of ethical accountability to the one true LORD and Creator.

In the language of our Exodus text, the proper response to ecological disaster is to abandon a mentality of exploitation. We must "let the slaves go," even at great cost to the standard of living and the self-aggrandizement of human power through monument building, whether the palaces of Egypt, or the skyscrapers and space shuttles of today.

Pharaoh's Hardening of Heart

Does Pharaoh harden his own heart, or does God harden Pharaoh's heart? The answer is not a matter of choosing between these two options. They are subtly intertwined [*Pharaoh's Hardening of Heart*]. In the history of theology, this question has been debated almost endlessly as the theme of human free will versus divine predestination. Do human beings have a free choice to respond properly to God, or has God already predetermined—programmed, in computer language—the human response, so that the latter only appears to be a genuine human choice?

All thoughtful theologians realize that the answer cannot be one or the other, but must be a combination of the two. Both human freedom, itself a gift from God, and divine sovereignty over all of life are biblical, make philosophical sense, and are supported by experience.

Nevertheless, there have been significant divisions throughout church history as to which side should receive the primary emphasis.

Augustine, Luther, and Calvin are the great names associated with an emphasis on divine predestination. Their motivation was reliance on God for salvation. God must work a change within my "heart"; my own efforts are totally insufficient. In this emphasis, these theologians leaned heavily on the apostle Paul (e.g., Rom. 9:6ff.), but also on OT passages like those concerning God's work on the plane of the human heart (see notes on 3:21-22 and 11:2-3).

Others, especially in the Calvinist tradition, developed more problematic positions. Most controversial is the notion of double predestination, the doctrine that God predestines some for salvation and some for damnation (thus the Synod of Dort, 1618-19). Related to the doctrine of predestination is the widespread notion of God's fixed plan for all of history and for each individual life. Many Christians never draw the full conclusions of this version of predestination, but nevertheless accept a somewhat rigid notion of "God's plan for my life."

By contrast, human free will was emphasized by Augustine's contemporary Pelagius and is often called Pelagianism. During the Reformation era, the emphasis on free will and decision was the position of Erasmus, of Arminius, and of Anabaptism; many Mennonites still hold to this, though not usually in an extreme form ("semi-Pelagian"; some perhaps are "semi-Augustinian"; cf. quotation below). Rooted in this emphasis is the understanding of the church as a community of those who commit themselves voluntarily to follow Christ, and confirm this through adult baptism.

Human free will was further abetted by the Wesleys and Methodism, and by the various subsequent revival movements, with their strong appeal to personal decision or conversion. The many scriptural exhortations to return, repent, choose the right way, etc., offer ready support for this emphasis. Furthermore, it appeals to the sense of most people that their decisions are indeed their own. Only on deeper reflection, or in situations of personal helplessness, is that sense of being free to choose and decide occasionally challenged.

This must remain a mere thumbnail sketch of a vast and complex subject. An interesting and significant secular variant has received prominence in our time. It surfaces most clearly in the area of criminal justice. If a criminal is caught and the guilt is assessed in court (or in public opinion), two sides may well emerge. Some demand a harsh sentence, for this person has clearly chosen a criminal course over against the available alternatives. The guilt rests fully with the criminal.

Others plead extenuating circumstances. They point to the person's poor home background and other factors, or even to the impact of our society generally. They argue that the person did not really have a free choice, but was predisposed, perhaps almost predestined, by a combination of hereditary and environmental factors to follow the course that led to the criminal act. The guilt rests at least partially outside the criminal.

No strict separation of free will and predestination is helpful. They must be held together, as the following confessional statement attempts to do:

Through sin, the powers of domination, division, destruction and death have been unleashed in humanity and in all of creation. They have, in turn, further subjected human beings to the power of sin and evil. . . . The more we sin, the more we become trapped in sin [and less able to choose the good]. By our sin we open ourselves to the bondage of demonic powers. Because of sin and its consequences, the efforts of human beings on their own to do the good and to know the truth are constantly corrupted. . . .

But thanks be to God, who has not allowed the powers to reign supreme over creation or left humanity without hope. (*Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 31-32, art. 7; cf. Commentary, 33, n. 4)

We should also not overburden with interpretation texts like those concerning Pharaoh's hardened heart. They cannot and should not be the basis for the whole debate on free will and predestination. They can and should, however, stimulate Christians to study the issue. If we realize the interplay between Pharaoh's side and God's side, we can be led to deeper insights into the nature of sin and judgment, repentance and grace, human action and God's sovereignty [*Pharaoh's Hardening of Heart*].

The Inclusion of All Egypt in God's Judgment on Pharaoh

One of the problems raised by the plague texts is the inclusion of all Egyptians in God's judgment signs on Pharaoh. In some of these texts, we noted certain options for Egyptians to distance themselves from Pharaoh's decisions and to escape the judgment. Nevertheless, for modern individualistic thinking, the suffering of "innocent civilians" in the battle between God and Pharaoh is unjust. The same is true, of course, in many other biblical stories.

Contemporary reality, however, supports the ancient scenario. The crushing of ruthless dictators or regimes always draws into suf-