

A member of the Taliban recently stated that it's time that the cutting off of hands was brought back. 'It is good and necessary,' he says. So this way of thinking is very close – and one remembers pictures of our own colonial era and slaves being crucified or showing their stumps to the camera without any shame on the part of those in charge. No, this is the way the white man too must administer his (always *his*) God-given heritage; and so God has to speak to us in other ways, in more blessed metaphors from the powerless, more in tune with our God:

*the air is precious to the red man, for all things
share the same breath – the beast, the tree,
the man, they all share the same breath. The white
man does not seem to notice the air he breathes
like a man dying for many days, he is numb to
the stench. But if we sell you our land, you must
remember that the air is precious to us, that the
air shares its spirit with all the life it supports.*

This is chief Sealth speaking in 1854 – later known as Chief Seattle – in metaphors which have great power and spiritual insight, beginning with the truth of the Red man's powerlessness now before the advance of the 'industrial' white man with his talking wires and fences and killing of buffaloes for sport from railway carriages. We will accept the offer of a reservation elsewhere because we know the game is up for us – but one day, it will be up for you, too, if you do not learn to live in harmony with this land

continue to contaminate your bed, and you will one day suffocate in your own waste.

and he speaks with authority because it is the same God speaking through him.

*So if we will sell you our land, love it as we've loved it.
Care for it as we've cared for it. Hold in your mind the
memory of the land as it is when you take it. And with
all your strength, with all your mind, with all your heart,
preserve it for your children and love it...as God loves us all.*

But we object, and use the Bible in our defence. No, anything valid has to be said in the name of Christ, has to be strictly according to the tradition of the Church where power is handed down through a carefully delineated process – from God to the bishops (including the Bishop of Rome), to the priests, to the people. We can't have people outside this process telling us what to do: the powerless must remain powerless if we are to retain power.

But the Spirit blows where it wills – and we all share its breath.

(Excerpts from *Chief Seattle's Testimony* published by *Pax Christi* (1976) and illustrated by the Benedictine nuns of Cockfosters)

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