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### **Prince Charles Speaks for the People - and Scientists Too**

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A slightly edited version of this article appeared in  
*The Guardian*, (24 May, 2000) under the title, "Back to Nature".

Prince Charles embarrassed the government and the scientific establishment with his Reith lecture broadcast on BBC Radio 4 last Thursday. In his wide ranging talk, which drew on the work of theologians, philosophers, scientists and economists, he said much that surely expressed the views of the majority in this country. Is it possible that the prince is more in touch with the common people than our elected Government?

The idea that there is a sacred trust under which human beings accept stewardship for the earth is common to most spiritual traditions, including those that do not acknowledge a Creator. The Prince urged us to recapture this sense of the sacred, in which we accept that there are bounds of balance, order and harmony in the natural world and that development is progress only if it is sustainable. He singled out gene biotechnology for attack as an unacceptable transgression of Nature's limits, treating our entire world as a "laboratory of life" with potentially disastrous consequences.

Did he attack science? Was he anti-science, as has been claimed? Not at all. Many scientists, myself included, were quite comfortable with what he said. His attack was aimed at the "impenetrable layers of scientific rationalism" (he might have said, "rationalisation") that obscure our sense of the sacred and respect for the earth, and in the end lead us to regard the whole of nature, including human beings, as something that can be "engineered for our own convenience or as a nuisance to be evaded and manipulated". That view may indeed infect science, but it is not at all inherent in it.

Nor do you have to believe in a Creator to agree with Prince Charles that that there is a "perfect unity, order, wisdom and design of the natural world" and opposing Bertrand Russell's view that that the universe is "all spots and jumps" without continuity, coherence or orderliness.

Prince Charles was speaking for the people when he called for support for organic farming. Who could disagree when he argued that if a fraction of the money currently being invested in developing genetically manipulated crops were applied to understanding and improving traditional systems of agriculture, which have stood the all-important test of time, the results would be "remarkable"?

There is already a holistic approach to sustainable agriculture that integrates indigenous with western science, and is adapted to local ecological and social conditions. Some 12.5 million hectares world wide are successfully farmed in this way. Yields have doubled and tripled, and are continuing to increase, far in excess of anything that GM crops have to offer. Support for this is growing among farmers, trade-unions, consumers, indigenous peoples and diverse public interest organisations. Not, however, from industry, because when farmers are free to keep their seeds, and to harvest and sell their own produce locally, corporate monopolies cannot hold the hungry to ransom.

Prince Charles could have taken heart from the fact that the mechanistic view is rapidly losing ground within contemporary western science. An organic revolution is sweeping across the disciplines, from quantum physics to the ecology of complexity and molecular genetics. In every discipline, the message is the same: nature is dynamic, interconnected and interdependent. Proponents of gene biotechnology are stuck in the mechanistic era, and our mainstream academic institutions are perpetrating the outmoded paradigm if only because it serves so well to promote the genetic engineering of life. The emerging science of the organism reinstates the holistic perspectives of indigenous cultures world wide. It also reveals that the romantic poets' vision of the oneness of nature is the truly rational point of view, while the mechanistic tradition is deeply flawed and irrational.

I was disappointed that he ended by saying that taking a cautious approach or achieving balance in life is never as much fun as the alternatives. He made it sound as if living in a sustainable world means leading a less satisfying life. Yet just the opposite is the case. Instead of being isolated and anxious in a culture dominated by competition and exploitation, we can look forward to experiencing the joy of being connected and sustained. It is like being able to sing and dance in tune and in step with all there is in the universe while we take part in co-creating it.

Dr. Mae-Wan Ho, Reader in Biology at the Open University is among a group of more than 300 scientists from 39 countries who are calling for a moratorium on environmental releases of GMOs and support for organic, sustainable agriculture. For more details see [www.i-sis.org.uk/list.shtml](http://www.i-sis.org.uk/list.shtml)

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