

# Christians and the Environment

## Genesis 1:26-29

### Sermon

*Hobart, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

*Devonport, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

*Launceston, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014*

### **Genesis 1:26-31 NLT**

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make human beings\* in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created human beings\* in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup> Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Or *man*; Hebrew reads *adam*.

\* Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*.

<sup>1</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ge 1:26-31). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

## INTRODUCTION:

### I. THE ENVIRONMENT

#### A. THE ENVIRONMENT IS ONE OF THE LONGEST RUNNING AND CONTROVERSIAL CONCERNS SOCIETY HAS FACED OVER THE LAST 50 YEARS

1. It came to the forefront in the 60's with Paul Erlich, Rachel Carson, the Paddock brothers and many others telling us that we were destroying the environment and that large areas of the world would soon face mass starvation and other major disasters
2. On top of concerns about environmental pollution, over consumption, excessive waste—came global warming, and ongoing concerns about the removal of habitat for endangered species
3. Today right here in our own state we have had continual battles over the environment which are right at the forefront again right now
4. Dr. David T. Williams, South African theologian has written at length about environmental issues from a Christian, Trinitarian perspective;

One of the major issues confronting the world in the twenty-first century is that of the environment. Human activity has been such that world ecology has been seriously affected, and all indications are that without determined action, concern will move to crisis.

Questions of pollution, whether of land, sea or the atmosphere, of the depletion of resources, of the changing patterns of life and the extinction of many species, of erosion, of population growth and of poverty are each of major concern, and more so because they impinge upon each other.

Even if the crisis warned against has not yet come, it must be inevitable sooner or later unless there is concerted human action. There may of course be a major catastrophe, such as a meteorite impact or a nuclear

war, or God may directly intervene in a dramatic way, but without these, which cannot be presumed upon, action must be taken.<sup>2</sup>

## **B. YET SADLY, AND STRANGELY CHRISTIANS DON'T SEEM TO BE VERY MUCH INVOLVED WITH THESE MATTERS**

Granberg-Michaelson cites a social study by Kellert of Yale which indicates that increasing commitment to Christianity is accompanied by a decreasing concern for the environment.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Williams notes that;

It would even seem to be the case that there are fewer Christians than people as a whole who are convinced that they need to act for the environment.<sup>4</sup>

### 2. Scientist and Christian, Dr. Raymond Bohlin, adds,

The news media are full of stories concerning environmental disasters of one kind or another, from global warming to endangered species to destruction of the rain forests to nuclear accidents. Some are real and some are imaginary, but its not hard to notice that the environmental issue receives very little attention in Christian circles. There are so many other significant issues that occupy our attention that we seem to think of the environment as somebody else's issue. Many Christians are openly skeptical of the reality of any environmental crisis. Its viewed as a liberal issue, or New Age propaganda, or just plain unimportant since this earth will be destroyed after the millennium.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. But clearly there are many major areas in which the earth is being impacted

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<sup>2</sup> David T. Williams, [David T. Williams, "Trinitarian Ecology," Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology 18.2 \(Autumn 2000\)](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/18-2_142.pdf), p.142; [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/18-2\\_142.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/sbet/18-2_142.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Williams, p. 144

<sup>4</sup> Williams, p. 144

<sup>5</sup> Raymond G. Bohlin, Christian Environmentalism - A Biblical Worldview Perspective on You and the Earth, [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian\\_Environmentalism.htm](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian_Environmentalism.htm)

**C. CALVIN DEWITT LISTS SEVEN OF THEM;<sup>6</sup>**

**1. Land use.**

- a) Forest and other natural habitat is continually being taken over for agriculture
- b) Agricultural land is being taken over for housing

**2. Extinction of species**

- a) It is claimed that as many as three species a day become extinct.
- b) Each one has a role in the ecosystem, so their loss has an ongoing impact

**3. Pollution of the soil** by pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers.

**4. The problem of storage and disposal of hazardous substances,** including nuclear waste

**5. Pollution of the earth and seas with plastics and other rubbish**

**6. Global warming**

**7. Seventh the loss of cultures experienced in sustainable life styles**

- a) Bohlin says about this problem, that;

we are losing the experiences of cultures that have lived in harmony with the creation for hundreds or even thousands years. Cultures such as the Mennonites and Amish, as well as those of the rain forests, are crowded out by the expansion of civilization.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin DeWitt, editor., *The Environment and the Christian: What Does the New Testament Say About the Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Bohlin

## S.P.S:

### **A. BOHLIN THEN GOES ON TO ASK THE QUESTION THAT WE ARE LOOKING AT TODAY;**

Never before have human beings wielded so much power over God's creation. How should we as Christians think about these problems?<sup>8</sup>

### **B. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO TAKE A LOOK AT THESE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND CONCERNS FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

1. Should Christians be concerned about the environment?
2. Should we be actively involved in helping save and restore the environment?
3. What do we learn from God and Scripture about this topic?

### **C. PRAYER**

## BODY:

### **II. WHY DO MANY CHRISTIANS NOT PUT MUCH PRIORITY ON THE ENVIRONMENT?**

#### **A. FIRSTLY, WE TEND TO BE LIKE OTHER HUMANS AND ACT SELFISHLY**

1. David Williams writes;

When, as in the first world, life is comfortable, or, as in the third world, questions of immediate survival are pressing, it is hard to motivate action for the environment if this is seen to worsen the situation of the individual. It is the usual case that concern for self takes precedence over concern for others or for the world, and that immediate benefit outweighs benefit in the future. It takes a powerful motivation to overcome these.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Bohlin

<sup>9</sup> Williams

**B. SOME CHRISTIANS THINK THAT WE SHOULD LEAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE EARTH TO GOD**

1. After all he is the creator and sustainer
2. So some feel trying to fix the earth's problems is a usurping of what is God's responsibility.

**C. BUT MORE COMMONLY I THINK IS THE BELIEF THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULDN'T BE FOCUSED ON THE MATERIAL WORLD, BUT ON THE SPIRITUAL**

1. The feeling that as Christians we should put all our efforts and concern on God and the preaching of the Gospel, and not be involved with solving mundane earthly matters
2. This is part of the dualistic problem we have talked about before
  - a) Where material things are seen as inferior and/or bad
  - b) And righteous people are to focus just on the spiritual which is good

**D. ANOTHER SIMILAR IDEA IS THAT OUR DESTINY IS HEAVEN, SO THE EARTH ISN'T IMPORTANT**

1. Williams comments that these views are "closely allied to the Protestant emphasis that God works primarily in the individual."
2. Too often Christianity is seen as being purely about our individual spiritual growth, our knowledge, our joy, our happiness, success and relationship with God, our future
3. The world around us, its future, the animals and the state of the oceans and the atmosphere don't seem relevant or important—"God will fix it!", "it is not our problem!"

**E. ANOTHER ISSUE WILLIAMS RAISES IS**

1. "the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*"
2. He writes;

Where a reliance on the Bible as final authority just involves a demand for specific chapter and verse on every issue, some concerns, such as the ecological, and even doctrines such as belief in the Trinity, are difficult to justify.

...on the one hand, it is true that the Bible indeed says little on the problem directly. There are a few exceptions, such as the action of Noah, Job 38f. and Psalm 104, but these are rare.

Even Jesus says almost nothing; despite a rural setting and the use of nature in many parables, he says little about its care.<sup>10</sup>

3. The problem here is that many take the Bible so literally and legalistically that unless something is specifically mentioned as being a priority or direct commanded, it is seen as either unimportant or as wrong
4. So because the environment doesn't seem to be a focus of any particular verses, it has not become a priority for most Christians

#### **F. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE BIBLE IS OFTEN ACCUSED OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEM**

### **III. GENESIS 1:26-28**

#### **A. MANY CRITICS BLAME GENESIS 1:26-28 AS BEING AT THE HEART OF WESTERN SOCIETIES APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENT;**

#### **Genesis 1:26-28 KJV**

<sup>26</sup> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth<sup>f</sup> upon the earth. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Williams

<sup>f</sup> moveth: Heb. creepeth

1. Because it talks about man having rule and dominion over the earth this passage has led historically in western society to us taking an attitude of superiority over the animals and the rest of creation
  - a) And has been used to justify humans seeing the earth as solely there for our use and exploitation
2. While we may not agree with such an interpretation of Genesis 1: there is no doubt that it has been used in that way, and has influenced how western Christian nations have used and abused the earth
  - a) Because of this many today blame Western culture's Judeo-Christian heritage for the environmental crisis.
  - b) Even David Attenborough has made this point in an interview with the highly respected UK science magazine, *Nature* in 2009
3. He spoke of

The influence of the Bible's book of Genesis, which says the Lord God said 'go forth and multiply' to Adam and Eve and 'the natural world is there for you to dominate, you have dominion of the animals and plants of the world'. That basic notion—that the world is there for us, and if it doesn't serve our purposes it's dispensable—has produced the devastation of vast areas. We have assumed that we can build a house on it, dig it up, put tarmac over it; that's OK because it's there for us."<sup>12</sup>

4. Historian Lynn White made this point in the 60's, writing that; "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for environmental damage since the Middle Ages.

We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1995 (electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.) (Ge 1:26-28). Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>12</sup> David Attenborough, quoted by Dennis P. Gordon, Duty of Care: What is a Christian's responsibility toward the rest of creation? art. in *Christian Odyssey*, June-August, 2009, p.5

<sup>13</sup> Lynn White, "The historical roots of our ecologic crisis", art. *Nature*, March 1967; quoted by Dennis P. Gordon, Duty of Care: What is a Christian's responsibility toward the rest of creation? art. in *Christian Odyssey*, June-August, 2009, p.5

5. This view is commonly held by most conservation groups, and probably has some degree of truth as western society was heavily influenced by the Bible and Christian beliefs for almost 2000 years.

a) But a more balanced view would acknowledge that the human selfishness is the real problem.

b) Also that many non-Christian cultures have demonstrated the same lack of regard for the environment as Christian ones

**B. UNFORTUNATELY MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE MISUSED THIS PASSAGE IN GENESIS**

1. It has too often been read in the dualistic way we have already discussed

v26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

2. Many interpret this to mean that because we are made in God's image, we are spiritual and important, and that the rest of the creation is just material and not important

3. Also the fact that we are given dominion over the fish, birds and animals, leads us to think we can use them as we please.

**C. SOME OF US WERE TAUGHT THAT ONLY HUMANS HAVE A SPIRIT, OR ANY REAL CONSCIOUSNESS OR INDIVIDUALITY**

1. That view can tend to lead to an uncaring and even abusive and exploitive attitude towards animals, let alone other living things and even more so the inanimate parts of creation

**D. BUT WHAT DO OTHER PHILOSOPHIES OFFER INSTEAD?**

1. The pantheistic, New Age religions tend to place man, animals and plants on the same level. All is god, and god is all.
  - a) They believe man should leave everything in the environment alone as much as possible.
  - b) Rats, cows and trees have the same value as people.
2. We end up in the other ditch with humans suffering as a result
  - a) As Bohlin puts it;

But while pantheism elevates nature, it simultaneously degrades man and will ultimately degrade nature as well. To the pantheist, man has no more value than a blade of grass. In India the rats and cows consume needed grain and spread disease with the blessings of the pantheists. To restrict the rats and cows would be to restrict god, so man takes second place to the rats and cows. Man is a part of nature, yet it is man that is being restricted. So ultimately, all of nature is degraded.

Pantheism claims that what is, is right. To clean up the environment would mean eliminating the undesirable elements. But, since god is all and in all, how can there be any undesirable elements? Pantheism fails because it makes no distinctions between man and nature. <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bohlin

## IV. HOW SHOULD WE READ GENESIS 1?

### A. ONE OF THE CLEAREST MESSAGES OF GENESIS 1

1. Is that God is the originator of all things
  - a) He created space and time
  - b) He brought matter and life into existence
  - c) All is his, all belongs to him
  - d) He is sovereign, he has authority over it all, and sustains it, and takes ultimate responsibility for its existence and its future

### Genesis 1:28-31 NLT

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup> And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life." And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup> Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! <sup>15</sup>

2. God made everything good from the beginning
3. v29 he provided for human beings
4. v30 He also provided for all other living things
  - a) God cares about all of them

### B. BUT WHAT ABOUT V 28?

<sup>28</sup> Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

1. It is too easy to jump to the conclusion that ruling and having dominion over the earth and other living things means doing whatever we want to

<sup>15</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ge 1:28-31). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

a) That the earth is just there for us, and that material things aren't really important of themselves

2. This is a fundamental misunderstanding and misassumption about Godly rulership

**C. HOW DO WE KNOW HOW TO GOVERN AND REIGN OVER THE EARTH?**

1. The earlier verses give us a clue

2. Vss. 26-27 tell us we are "made in God's image"

a) This gives us the most important starting point in understanding our role in the environment and life in general

3. We are made in God's image, so our rulership, or "dominion" (1:26 KJV) is to be like God's rule and dominion.

**D. IN THE SECOND VERSION OF CREATION IN GENESIS 2, WE READ;**

**Genesis 2:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.
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1. This expands on our role in relationship to the earth

2. We are to tend and watch over what God made so good.

a) To care for it

b) To be stewards, tending and watching over it responsibly, following in the way of the tree of life, not doing our own thing selfishly apart from God

3. Bohlin;

But a responsibility goes along with bearing the image of God. In its proper sense, man's rule and dominion over the earth is that of a steward or a caretaker, not a reckless exploiter. Man is not sovereign over the lower orders of creation. Ownership is in the hands of the Lord.

God told Adam and Eve to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15), and we may certainly use nature for our benefit, but we may only use it as God intends.<sup>16</sup>

### **Genesis 2:16-17**

<sup>16</sup> But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— <sup>17</sup> except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

4. We aren't to just have dominion over the earth as we desire and decide
  - a) We are to rule, to tend and improve and manage the earth according to God's way
  - b) As his image bearers, we are to be like him in the way we rule over and act as stewards of the earth.

### **E. WE LEARN MOST CLEARLY ABOUT GOD AND HOW WE ARE TO LIVE IN HIS IMAGE AND ACT AS STEWARDS OF GOD'S CREATION THROUGH JESUS--**

1. Who was and is the perfect image bearer of God
2. Who succeeded where we have failed
3. Who gives us the opportunity to share in his life, in his role as King and judge, manager and carer for the earth, and all living things

### **F. JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES THAT THE GREATEST LEADER IS THE ONE WHO IS THE GREATEST SERVER**

1. He laid down his life to redeem our lives, and our relationship with God, with one another
  - a) But also to redeem our relationship with the earth
2. God's plan in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit is to teach and mature us through our relationship with him
  - a) So we can participate more effectively with Jesus in restoring and healing all of the earth

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<sup>16</sup> Bohlin

3. There is a new series of articles on the Kingdom of God by Gary Deddo

- a) One of the main points I am sure will be that the Kingdom of God is with us already through Jesus
- b) And that we are to be living the future of that Kingdom today, building towards it, and showing a glimpse of what life in with God in the future will be like

**Romans 8:19-23**

<sup>19</sup> For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. <sup>20</sup> Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, <sup>21</sup> the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. <sup>22</sup> For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering.

4. Clearly it is God's will that all things be brought back into proper relationship with him

- a) That includes the earth being released from sin and suffering
- b) It is his will that we be part of that restoration and healing right now
- c) Participating already in the harmonious, uplifting relationship between God and the creation
- d) The Holy Spirit can use us here today to give others a foretaste of how Jesus Christ and his people will relate to the environment by helping to release it from sin and suffering right now in our lives today

5. Jesus showed that in his Kingdom, rulership and stewardship are all about love

- a) Selfish individualism, and materialistic consumerism among Christians is the opposite of the image of God we are to bear, and contradicts the message of the Kingdom Jesus lived and taught

6. God cares for all creatures, and we are to do the same

- a) All of our planet exists in intricate ecological relationship with every other part
- b) All are vitally important and need to be understood and respected for their role
- c) What each part does effects the other

#### 7. Clearly humans have the most impact by far

- a) and also, uniquely, have the ability to understand these interrelationships and to manage and care for them, or on the other hand recklessly exploit and damage them, as we have so disastrously

#### 8. Raymond Bohlin

While God intended us to live in harmony with nature, we have more often than not been at odds with nature. This reality tells us that man has not fulfilled his mandate. The source of our ecological crisis lies in man's fallen nature and the abuse of his dominion.

Man is a rebel who has set himself at the center of the universe. He has exploited created things as though they were nothing in themselves and as though he has an autonomous right to do so. Man's abuse of his dominion becomes clear when we look at the value we place on time and money. Our often uncontrolled greed and haste have led to the deterioration of the environment. We evaluate projects almost exclusively in terms of their potential impact on humans.

For instance, builders know that it is faster and more cost effective to bulldoze trees that are growing on the site of a proposed subdivision than it is to build the houses around them. Even if the uprooted trees are replaced with saplings once the houses are constructed, the loss of the mature trees enhances erosion, eliminates a means of absorbing pollutants, producing oxygen, and providing shade, and produces a scar that heals slowly if at all.

Building around the trees, while more expensive and time-consuming, minimizes the destructive impact of human society on God's earth. But, because of man's sinful heart, the first option has been utilized more often than not.

Christians we must treat nature as having value in itself, and we must be careful to exercise dominion without being destructive.

To quote Francis Schaeffer, We have the right to rid our house of ants; but what we have no right to do is to forget to honor the ant as God made it, out in the place where God made the ant to be. When we meet the ant on the sidewalk, we step over him.<sup>17</sup>

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## CONCLUSION:

### G. RAYMOND BOHLIN

Many Christians are openly skeptical of the reality of any environmental crisis. Its viewed as a liberal issue, or New Age propaganda, or just plain unimportant since this earth will be destroyed after the millennium. What we fail to realize is that Christians have a sacred responsibility to the earth and the creatures within it. The earth is being affected by humans in an unprecedented manner...

I believe that as Christians we have a responsibility to the earth that exceeds that of unredeemed people. We are the only ones who are rightly related to the Creator. We should be showing others the way to environmental responsibility.

Christians, of all people, should not be destroyers, Schaeffer said. We may cut down a tree to build a house or to make a fire, but not just to cut it down. While there is nothing wrong with profit in the marketplace, in some cases we must voluntarily limit our profit in order to protect the environment.

When the church puts belief into practice, our humanity and sense of beauty are restored. But this is not what we see. Concern for the environment is not on the front burner of most evangelical Christians. The church has failed in its mission of steward of the earth.

We have spoken out loudly against the materialism of science as expressed in the issues of abortion, human dignity, evolution, and genetic engineering, but have shown ourselves to be little more than materialists in our technological orientation towards nature. In this respect we have essentially abandoned this very Christian issue.

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<sup>17</sup> Raymond G. Bohlin, Christian Environmentalism - A Biblical Worldview Perspective on You and the Earth, [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian\\_Environmentalism.htm](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian_Environmentalism.htm)

By failing to fulfill our responsibilities to the earth, we are also losing a great evangelistic opportunity. Many young people in our society are seeking an improved environment, yet they think that most Christians don't care about ecological issues and that most churches offer no opportunity for involvement.

As a result, other worldviews and religions have made the environmental issue their own.

As the redeemed of the earth, our motivation to care for the land is even higher than that of the evolutionist, the Buddhist, or the advocate of the New Age.

Jesus has redeemed all of the effects of the curse, including our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with the creation (1 Cor. 15:21-22, Rom. 5:12-21).

The Bible contains numerous examples of the care with which we are expected to treat the environment...

Jesus spoke on two occasions of how much the Father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Matt. 6:26, 10:29). How can we do less? <sup>18</sup>

## H. PRAYER

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<sup>18</sup> Bohlin

## NOTES

### V. BILLY GRAHAM

Answers by [Billy Graham](#) • *May 12, 2006* •

[Answers](#)

Q:

Does the Bible say anything about taking care of the environment? I have some friends who are very passionate about this issue, but they don't really believe in God or Jesus the way I do, and they even claim the Bible is anti-environmental. Are they right?

A:

I'm grateful for your friends' concern for the environment—but no, they aren't right when they say the Bible isn't concerned about the environment. In fact, of all people, Christians should be the most concerned for the environment.

Why is this? The reason is because Christians know God created the world, and we are only its stewards or trustees. The very first verse of the Bible says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). When we see the world as a gift from God, we will do our best to take care of it and use it wisely, instead of poisoning or destroying it.

We don't worship the earth; instead, we realize that God gave it to us, and we are accountable to Him for how we use it. After creating Adam, the first man, the Bible says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). God didn't tell him to exploit the world or treat it recklessly, but to watch over it and use it wisely. Like a good ruler, we should seek the welfare of everything God entrusts to us—including the creation. The Bible says, "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal" (Proverbs 12:10).

Yes, we should take care of the environment. But most of all, we should take care of our souls. Is Christ the center of your life, and are you seeking to live for Him every day?<sup>19</sup>

### VI. A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CREATION CARE

This briefing was prepared for the John Ray Initiative by Professor R. J. (Sam) Berry, Professor of Genetics at the University of London.

Thanks are also due to Dr Paul Marston, Sir Timothy Hoare and the JRI Trustees for their helpful comments.

<http://www.jri.org.uk/brief/basis.htm>

#### **A Biblical Basis for Creation Care**

The Bible gives us a very simple and clear-cut basis for a Christian doctrine of the environment:

##### **1. Creation belongs to God.**

<sup>19</sup> <http://billygraham.org/answers/>

2. He has entrusted it to us.
3. We will be held accountable, not only for the way we treat our environment, but also for our acknowledgement of and abuse of its Owner.

Looked at this way, a failure to look after the environment is disobedience to a divine command. It is a sin. This is very different from the common Christian view (particularly among Protestants) that the world is merely the stage for God's saving work. We congratulate ourselves for emancipating ourselves from the Greek view that matter is evil and spirit good; we insist that both inanimate and animate nature is neutral. We are careful to point out that God and creation are separate. We are not animists or pantheists, seeing God in the rocks or the animals, but theists worshipping a God who is distinct from His creation although using natural processes for His own purposes (as in the plagues in Egypt or stilling the storm in Galilee). We fail to understand that God has specifically and explicitly appointed us as His stewards (or trustees or managers or tenants - there are disagreements about the best word to use).

The Bible tells us that "the Earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:1) and that "the Earth he has given to mankind" (Psalm 115:16). There is no conflict between these statements: the Earth belongs to God by creation and to us by delegation; God has not handed His creation over to us in such a way as to relinquish His ownership, but He has delegated to us the responsibility of looking after it on His behalf. This means that we must avoid both the deification and exploitation of nature; our calling is co-operation with God in conserving and developing the environment for the common good.

It is not novel to read scripture in this way. In the second century AD, Irenaeus, faced with gnostic claims now recycled as New Age philosophy, made a similar point. John Calvin in his Commentary on Genesis 2:15 wrote: "The custody of the garden was given in charge to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition that being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take what shall remain."

Notwithstanding, for centuries we have maltreated our world with little compunction or conscience; it seemed clear to us that any damage was rapidly 'repaired' by natural processes. We now know that this was wrong. To the discredit of Christians, these errors surfaced because of their physical consequences rather than their moral implications. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher surprised many people in 1988 when in a lecture to the Royal Society she said: "For generations we have assumed that the efforts of mankind would leave the fundamental equilibrium of the world's systems and atmosphere stable. But we have unwittingly begun a massive experiment with the system of this planet itself."

## 1. Christianity Blamed:

In a frequently quoted book (Design with Nature, 1969) Ian McHarg described God's command to "have dominion" over all living things (Genesis 1:26,28) "as one text of compounded horror which will guarantee the relationship of man to nature can only be destruction, which will atrophy any creative skill ... which will explain all of the

despoliation accomplished by western man for at least these 2000 years ... The Genesis story in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature, encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in man, rather than those that are deferential and creative ... God's affirmation about man's dominion was a declaration of war on nature."

An even more influential attack on Christianity was made by Lynn White in a paper 'The historical roots of our ecologic crisis' (Science, 155: 1204-7, 1967). He wrote: "We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim ... Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature that no solution can be expected from them alone."

This understanding of God's Genesis command is faulty on two counts:

1. Although the word translated 'dominion' is one used of kingly, authoritarian rule, it should be remembered that the Hebrew ideal of kingship was the servant-king, typified by David or Our Lord Himself. Our dominion is properly exercised as a caring support for creation, not as an absolute right to plunder – see Psalm 72.
2. The command to "have dominion" was given in the context of humans "made in God's image" which implies responsibility and trustworthiness.

In other words, the first command to the human race, made right at its beginning, was to undertake caring stewardship for God. Far from having a licence to exploit creation, we are given a charge to care for a 'cosmos' (the Greek word translated 'world' in John 3:16) which God loves and Christ has redeemed (Colossians 1:20).

We are not asked to look after a world that is only a 'thing'; we are required to be God's agents in managing a world which He created, redeemed and sustains. This biblical responsibility is commonly misunderstood and ignored. Christians are blamed for 'de-sanctifying' nature, degrading a sacred earth into mere matter. During the 1960s in particular, many people turned to the pantheism and mysticism of Eastern Religions, in the belief that they somehow offered salvation for the environment. This proved vain. Jaques Delors, the President of the European Commission commented:

"The Oriental religions have failed to prevent to any marked degree the appropriation of the natural environment by technical means ... Despite different traditions, the right to use or exploit nature seems to have found in industrialised countries the same favour, the same freedom to develop, the same economic justification." [1].

Japan and the former Eastern Bloc countries are among the most polluted in the world, although they owe comparatively little to Christianity.

Another attempt to find a truly 'green religion' has been through the New Age, an amorphous creed marked by the world moving from astrological rule by Pisces (the symbol of Christianity) to the barrier-less Aquarius (the water-carrier), where all things blend together so that we are submerged into a massive cosmic unity, with no distinction between spirit and body, or between god(s) and humanity. New Age adherents often claim credibility for their beliefs through Jim Lovelock's Gaia which is a scientific hypothesis postulating complex feedbacks between life and atmosphere, i.e. that the cosmos functions as a vast single organism (called Gaia after the Greek Earth goddess). As science this

hypothesis has been valuable in stimulating research, but the assumption that the Earth and life form a single unit is more mythical than realistic. It should not be used to support religious beliefs.

An unfrocked Roman Catholic priest, Matthew Fox has attracted a considerable following in the U.S.A. by his invention of 'creation spirituality', in which he seeks to combine so-called 'traditional wisdom' (native myth and religion) with cosmology; he argues that 'fall/redemption' theology (i.e. conventional Christian belief) should be replaced with a creation-centred theology, which he sees as an optimistic progression. For him, Crucifixion and Resurrection are transferred from the historical Jesus to Mother Earth; Easter is the life, death and resurrection of Mother Earth, a constantly sacrificed paschal lamb. Fox rejects Bible teaching: "The stewardship model (that God is an absent landlord and we humans are serfs, running the garden for God) does not appeal to the young or to our hearts - it is just one more duty, one more commandment to follow ... We need mysticism - God IS the garden." [2]

A number of more conventional theologians have proposed ways to make their understanding of Christianity fit more comfortably with their perception of the environment. This is not the place to summarise all these, see [3], but it is worth mentioning process theology and its associated panentheism, because it is widespread in much Christian environmental writing. Process thought is based on the assumption that God cannot be insensitive to the suffering in the world and therefore interacts and changes with time; consequently God's attributes alter, and His timelessness disappears, and with it the historical certainty of the atonement. God is seen as incorporating the universe within Himself, although he is more than the universe (panentheism). This is obviously much closer to orthodoxy than the views of (say) Matthew Fox and is helpful in emphasizing God's immanence, but it carries implications at variance with traditional Christianity and its basis in the eternal saving work of Christ.

## 2. God and the Environment:

We can restate the Biblical basis for creation care in four propositions:

1. God works in the world. The best way to understand the connection between divine and natural causes is complementarity. For example, a painting can be described 'scientifically' in terms of the distribution of chemicals on a surface, but it can also be described in terms of the plan and intention of the artist. We can have two (or more) descriptions of the same object which do not overlap or contradict in any way; we call them complementary. In the same way, God can be understood as working in the world (by faith: Hebrews 11:3) without conflicting or diminishing any scientific (or rational) knowledge we may have of the same event.

2. God is separate from creation. The world is not an extension or emanation from God. Although it is not explicitly stated in Scripture, from early Christian times it has been believed that God created "from nothing"; if he had used existing material, this would mean that he was dependent on something outside of Himself, and hence not "before all things". As humans we are a part of nature but we are unique in being made in God's image and, as we have seen, responsible to Him.

3. Christ has redeemed all things by his death on the cross (Col 1:20). Christians often base their teaching about creation care solely on God's creating work as described in the early chapters of Genesis. That ignores other significant elements in the Bible. The Christian faith is trinitarian, not unitarian. As the Father creates, so the Spirit upholds that which Christ has redeemed.

4. Our response is stewardship, involving active management not dedicated preservation. The man who concentrated on guarding his talent so as to hand it safely and unchanged back to his master was the man who was roundly condemned as a "useless servant" (Matthew 25:30). The statement in Genesis 2:2,3 that God had "finished" His work refers to a pattern of rest and workings for the seventh day, not to a situation where creation was ended. After all, the creator never rests (Psalm 121:4; John 5:17).

At this point, it is relevant to consider the Fall. The man (Adam) was told in Genesis 3:17 that because of his disobedience "the earth will be cursed" i.e. there would be a significant change in creation from the state when God saw all that He had made and for Him "it was good ... very good." What does this mean for ecology?

1. We need to be clear that when God declared His work to be 'good', he was speaking from His viewpoint not ours. There was certainly death in the world from the earliest days of biological life, because God gave the plants to the animals for food, and plant death is as much death as animal death. Moreover, there were many, many generations of animal death before humans came on the scene. The dinosaurs had flourished - and then become extinct. We know from their fossils that they suffered from bone disease, just as we do. [4] We are wrong to assume that there was no death or disease before the Fall.

2. The 'death' that entered the world with Adam (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:21) was primarily separation from God, the source of that which makes us truly human. Our first parents 'died' the day they sinned; they were removed from God's presence (i.e. evicted from Eden), but they survived for years and had all their children outside Eden. Through Christ's redeeming death, we are raised to life, "born anew" by being reunited with God.

The key to understanding the Fall is in the New Testament. (Interestingly neither the rabbinic nor the Jewish apocalyptic tradition has any concern about a Fall. Judaism emphasises individual responsibility for our failings, not some intrinsic curse upon creation. The Fall is a Christian doctrine).

Probably the most important passage for understanding the Fall is Romans 8:19-22, where we are told that the created universe "was made subject to frustration ... yet with the hope that the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality ... Up to the present, the whole created universe in all its parts groans as if in the pangs of childbirth."

This is a difficult passage, and most commentators are unhelpful. One theologian who gets to grips with it is Charles Cranfield in a magnificent *reductio ad absurdum* argument. He asks "what sense can there be in saying that the sub-human creation - the Jungfrau, for example, or the Matterhorn or the planet Venus - suffers frustration by being prevented from properly fulfilling the purpose of its existence? The answer must surely be that the whole magnificent theatre of the universe, together with all its splendid properties, and all the varied chorus of sub-human life created for God's glory is cheated of its fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his

rational part. The Jungfrau and the Matterhorn and the planet Venus and all living things too, man alone excepted, do indeed glorify God in their own ways, but since their praise is destined to be not a collection of independent offerings but part of a magnificent whole, the united praise of the whole creation, they are prevented from being fully that for which they were created to be, so long as man's part is missing, just as all the other players in a concerto would be frustrated of their purpose if the soloist were to fail to play his part." [5]

Derek Kidner uses the same analogy in commenting on Genesis 3: "Leaderless, the choir of creation can only grind in discord. It seems from Romans 8:19-23 and from what is known of the pre-human world, that there was a state of travail in nature from the first, which man was empowered to 'subdue', until he relapsed into disorder himself." [6] Gordon Wenham puts it: "The sentences on the man and woman take the form of a disruption of their appointed roles." [7] God made and appointed us to be stewards, caretakers. By our disobedience, we have not only removed ourselves from fellowship with and support from our Creator, but have brought all the rest of creation into a state of disorder and inability to fulfil its role (Psalm 19, Psalm 148, etc.). The French theologian, Henri Blocher argues that "if man obeys God, he would be the means of blessing the earth, but in his insatiable greed ... and in his short-sighted selfishness, he pollutes and destroys it. He turns a garden into a desert (cf. Revelation 11:18). That is the main thrust of the curse of Genesis 3." [8]

From beginning to end, the Bible speaks of our links with nature. Sometimes we are given direct commands, as when we are told "have dominion"; on other occasions, the instructions are implicit (the perils of a journey, the care needed for a farm or flock of animals, the mastery we should expect over wild animals or fierce weather). The Bible is full of expressions of environmental concern. For example, sin led to Noah's flood and also to drought (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28); the food laws regulate hunting; a very positive attitude to nature is set out in Job, Proverbs and the Song of Songs; and so on. In all cases we interact with creation, a part of it as well as apart from it. But throughout is the parallel theme, that this is God's world, that He has made a covenant with us which He will not break, and that both creation and ourselves were reconciled to God by Christ's death on the cross. God's message comes to us in various guises; sometimes described as two books, one of words and the other of works. [9] He is faithful; He calls us to be obedient, and then we will enter into the inheritance prepared for us and the universe will no longer be groaning in frustration.

### 3. Where now?

How should we respond to the God who has called us to be managers of His creation? Clearly we need to be responsible for the way we treat the world, as gardeners, husbandmen and women, as planners, as industrialists, as tourists.

We need to examine our life-style, not for fashion's sake or to escape obesity or becoming embedded in our own pollution, but because we are living in a world made, redeemed and upheld by God. Some of us will be called to be activists, perhaps with a general caring group like the National Trust or the RSPB, or perhaps with a Christian environmental organisation such as Christian Ecology Link, A Rocha, or the John Ray Initiative. But above all, we must remember and proclaim that God is the Lord of All. He is not linked only to human affairs. He is not a Creator distant in time and space who finished his work

and retreated above the bright blue sky, descending every now and again to adjust the workings of the world. A theology of the environment is above all a theology of a Creator who holds all things together.

Decades of debate about creation and evolution have obscured and confused our understanding of a triune God, who was and is and ever shall be. We need to remember that the transcendent Creator of the Universe is also the immanent Spirit of power, love and a sound mind. We must not attempt the spiritually impossible by worshipping a God who is infinitely distant whilst experiencing and praying to One who is with us moment by moment. Our God ought to be Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. If He is not, He is too small.

## 4. Notes

1. Delors, J. (1990). Opening address. In *Environmental Ethics: man's relationship with nature, interactions with science* 19-28. Bourdean, P.L., Fasella, P.M. & Teller, A. (eds). Luxembourg: Commission of the European Communities.
2. Fox, M. Lecture given in St. James' Church, Piccadilly, London in 1990.
3. Cooper, T. (1997) *Sustaining the Earth*. Nottingham: St John's College.
4. Rothschild, B & Martin, L. (1993). *Paleopathology: Disease in the Fossil Record*. London: CRC
5. Cranfield, C. (1974) 'Some observations on Romans 8:19-21' in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology* 224-230. Banks, R. (ed). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
6. Kidner, D. (1967). *Genesis*. London: Tyndale Press.
7. Wenham, G. (1987) *Word Bible Commentary 1. Genesis 1-15*. Dallas, Texas : Word Publishing.
8. Blocher, H. (1984). *In the Beginning*. Leicester : IVP.
9. On the title page of *The Origin of Species*, Charles Darwin quotes Francis Bacon "Let no man think or maintain that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word or in the book of God's works; but rather let men endeavour an endless progress or proficience in both."

## 5. Credits

This briefing was prepared for the John Ray Initiative by Professor R. J. (Sam) Berry, Professor of Genetics at the University of London.

Thanks are also due to Dr Paul Marston, Sir Timothy Hoare and the JRI Trustees for their helpful comments.

## VII. SCRIPTURES;

### A. WILLIAM T. JOHNSON

#### 1. Research on Biblical verses referring to the environment;

Some 2,463 verses have been topically organized into nine sections. Four appendices present the full-text of this collection in addition to selected hymns, which have been instrumental in teaching the truths of Scripture over the years. This compilation of verses constitutes approximately eight percent of the Bible.<sup>20</sup>

The Bible contains numerous examples of the care with which we are expected to treat the environment. Leviticus 25:1-12 speaks of the care Israel was to have for the land. *The Sabbath Year*

25 While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him,<sup>2</sup> “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year.<sup>3</sup> For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops,<sup>4</sup> but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year.<sup>5</sup> And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest.<sup>6</sup> But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you.<sup>7</sup> Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.

<sup>21</sup>

Deuteronomy 25:4 and 22:6 indicates the proper care for domestic animals and a respect for wildlife.

Deuteronomy 22:6<sup>6</sup> “If you happen to find a bird’s nest in a tree or on the ground, and there are young ones or eggs in it with the mother sitting in the nest, do not take the mother with the young.<sup>7</sup> You may take the young, but let the mother go, so that you may prosper and enjoy a long life.<sup>22</sup>

Deuteronomy 25:4<sup>4</sup> “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Le 25:1-7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>22</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Dt 22:6-7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>23</sup>Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Dt 25:4). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Psalm 104:27-30 speak of God's nurture and care for His creation. Psalm 104 tells us that certain places were made with certain animals in mind. This would make our national parks and wilderness preserves a biblical concept. And Jesus spoke on two occasions of how much the Father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Matt. 6:26, 10:29). How can we do less?

### **God has a Relationship with All of His Creation**

*Psalm 96:10-13.* The Lord reigns... Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the seas resound and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy, they will sing before the Lord for He comes, He comes to judge the earth.

*Psalms 104:25, 27.* Animals, both small and great.. they all wait for Thee to give them their food in due season.

*Matt 6:26.* Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And are you not worth much more than they?

**B.**

### **C. SELFISH AND ABUSIVE USE OF THE EARTH;**

#### **God Expects Humans to be His Stewards with Nature**

*Genesis 1:26.* Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*Lev. 25:23-24.* The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

*Ezekiel 34:17-18.* As for you, my flock... Is it not enough for you to feed on good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?

*Isaiah 24:4-6.* The earth dries up and withers, the world languished and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth lies under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.

*Jer. 2:7.* I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and you made my inheritance detestable.

*Luke 16:2,10,13.* And He called him and said to him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous in much. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

*James 5:5.* You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

*Mark 4:19.* ...and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

*Revelation 11:18.* The nations were angry and your wrath has come. The time has come for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

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## VIII. INCARNATION AND TRINITY

Is environmentalism a necessary implication of the Christian faith, even if it may not be found explicitly in the Bible? (p.145)

I have elsewhere tried to take the central affirmation of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and to suggest that such identification with humanity in incarnation must have ecological implications. 15

As God incarnate, Jesus played a unique part in reconciling people to God; this can be related to ecological concerns.

More than this however, the purpose of the incarnation was for salvation. This, as with the Greek word *sozo*, must include the nuance of preservation as well as of re-creation. The world, as well as people, will experience a transformation in continuity.

This can then be taken a stage further, because flowing from an affirmation of the deity of Jesus came the doctrine of the Trinity. Such does have some parallel in other religious traditions, but essentially it is a unique Christian teaching. Now this has been neglected for various reasons, but

if God is indeed Trinitarian, this should impinge upon every aspect of belief, and affect every human activity, which will include attitudes to, and action connected with, the environment. P.145-6.

What is clear is that the action of the Trinity, specifically in the incarnation, gives evidence for God's love and care of the world. God acts by

participation as well as by command. 1 John 4: 10 asserts that love for humanity is demonstrated by the sending of God's Son and by his death; the inference is that otherwise we could not be sure that God does in fact care for us. We could be dealing with a capricious God, delighting in the suffering and pain of humanity, even at the same time protesting his love. We could be dealing with an impotent God, really loving, but making empty promises that he is unable to fulfil. We could be dealing with a deistic God, happy to create and to do nothing more at all. It is the incarnation, so the Trinity, which gives evidence that this is not the case, and even that this love is not just to humanity, but is for the whole world (Rom. 8:22). Not that this latter can really be disputed; humanity is so much a part of the world that love for one cannot be expressed while ignoring the other. Such then gives a stronger motivation for love and care for the world by humanity than just an affirmation of creation. P.147

Christian theology traditionally sees the purpose of the incarnation in reconciling people to God. If this is the case, it follows that it also enables reconciliation between human beings, harmony as God intended, and presumably then also with the rest of creation. If the biblical explanation for the environmental problem is human disobedience (as Genesis 3), 1 ~ dividing not just humanity from God, but humanity from humanity, and also from nature,<sup>211</sup> then the ultimate solution is by reconciliation with God.

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## IX. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY:

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## X. TRINITARIAN ECOLOGY; DAVID T. WILLIAMS

SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY  
**TRINITARIAN ECOLOGY**

DAVID T. WILLIAMS, UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE, SOUTH AFRICA

One of the major issues confronting the world in the twenty-first century

is that of the environment. Human activity has been such that world ecology has been seriously affected, and all indications are that without determined action, concern will move to crisis. Questions of pollution, whether of land, sea or the atmosphere, of the depletion of resources, of the changing patterns of life and the extinction of many species, of erosion, of population growth and of poverty are each of major concern, and more so because they impinge upon each other. Although the disaster foretold by the study led by Meadows in the early 1970s<sup>1</sup> has not yet materialised, the problems addressed by the study have not gone away. Even if the crisis warned against has not yet come, it must be inevitable sooner or later unless there is concerted human action. There may of course be a major catastrophe, such as a meteorite impact or a nuclear war, or God may directly intervene in a dramatic way, but without these, which cannot be presumed upon, action must be taken.

#### THE NEED FOR MOTIVATION

The major problem here, however, is how such action is to be motivated. The average person is unaware of the wider picture,<sup>2</sup> is unaware of how personal lifestyle is impacting on the environment, and even if aware, is likely to need further convincing that action must be taken. When, as in the first world, life is comfortable, or, as in the third world, questions of immediate survival are pressing, it is hard to motivate action for the environment if this is seen to worsen the situation of the individual. It is the usual case that concern for self takes precedence over concern for others or for the world, and that immediate benefit outweighs benefit in the future. It takes a powerful motivation to overcome these.

D. H. Meadows, *et al.*, *The Limits to Growth: a Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (London, 1972).

J. Porritt, *Where on Earth are we going?* (London, 1990), p. 21.

#### TRINITARIAN ECOLOGY

Even when the problem of the environment is appreciated, not everyone is convinced that action for it should be taken. It has, for example, been suggested that evolution<sup>3</sup> has proceeded as a result of environmental changes,<sup>4</sup> and so that a stable environment would result in a stopping of the development of the species. Such a feeling must however be treated with caution; there are echoes here of Nietzsche and the Nazi attempt to promote the race by means of the Holocaust. In any case, it must be noted that even if the race were to develop, it would still need a liveable environment, and presumably would want a more pleasant one than would seem to be developing as a result of current human activity. It must also be stressed that the problem of environment is an immediate concern, while any process of evolution would be lengthy. Furthermore, encouraging an interest in environmentalism is because the ecological crisis is a result of technical progress.<sup>5</sup> It is because humanity has been successful in the scientific enterprise that the environment has suffered. Continued human progress has become an assumption, despite its cost to the planet and indeed to the quality of peoples' lives, which suffer due to the demands made on them. Industrialism can be dehumanising;<sup>6</sup> Moltmann can even call progress a fate rather than a hope.<sup>7</sup> However, the frequent hope is that continued scientific progress will solve the ecological problem without a detrimental effect on lifestyle. There is some substance in this, such as by radio and fibre optics reducing the dependence on copper, and the replacement of CFCs by less destructive alternatives. Nevertheless even this may cause its own problems, such as in regard to the moral propriety of the genetic manipulation of plants and animals for human benefit.<sup>x</sup>

This is not to accept the theory of evolution as proven, but to note the influence of a widely accepted theory. In fact, in addition to the problem of relating the theory to the Bible, which is however not insuperable, there are several other problems with it such as its relation to the idea of entropy, its possibility in the available timescale, and even the initiation of life and matter.

M. Nicholson, *The New Environmental Age* (Cambridge, 1987), p. xii.

S. McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth: the Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London, 1994), p. 159.

T. Cooper, *Green Christianity: Caring for the Whole Creation* (London, 1990), p. 77.

J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London, 1985), p. 28.

McDonagh, *Passion for the Earth*, p. 24.

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#### SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

##### CHRISTIAN MOTIVATION

Many Christians are aware of the problems and are convinced that there must be changes in the way human life is managed. There has accordingly been a flood of books and articles addressing questions of ecology. Such are commendable, but what must be asked is how far such material is really Christian, but could, with minor modifications, belong to any religious tradition, or even to none. Is there such a thing as a distinctively Christian approach to ecology, based upon ideas unique to the Christian faith?

It would even seem to be the case that there are fewer Christians than people as a whole who are convinced that they need to act for the environment. Granberg-Michaelson cites a social study by Kellert of Yale which indicates that increasing commitment to Christianity is accompanied by a decreasing concern for the environment. ~ There are several possible reasons for this. Firstly, it could well be felt to be an usurping of what is God's responsibility. He, after all, cares for the sparrows. Closely allied to this is the feeling that Christian concern should be relating to God, not the world, which would be paganism. Again, with a similar dualistic undertone, God is seen to give heaven to his people, so that this world does not matter. This is closely allied to the Protestant emphasis that God works primarily in the individual. Again, the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura* must shoulder some of the blame. Where a reliance on the Bible as final authority just involves a demand for specific chapter and verse on every issue, some concerns, such as the ecological, and even doctrines such as belief in the Trinity, are difficult to justify. Indeed, it is noticeable that ecological concern has been more evident within the Catholic tradition. Here, on the one hand, it is true that the Bible indeed says little on the problem directly. There are a few exceptions, such as the action of Noah, Job 38f. and Psalm 104, but these are rare. Even Jesus says almost nothing; despite a rural setting and the use of nature in many parables, he says little about its care. On the other hand, the Bible is often accused of contributing to the problem in its record of the giving of dominion over nature to humanity (Gen. 1:28), interpreted as permission to use and to exploit. This may be connected to a dualistic belief in that possession of the image of God, which gives that dominion, is often identified with the spiritual nature of humanity, which it is often felt only humans possess, and which alone is really important.

9 W. Granberg-Michaelson (ed.), *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 3.

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Each of these points has been challenged. Humanity was commanded to work in the garden, indicating the value of the physical, and also of ecological care. Moreover, dualism is frequently attacked as a vestige of a Greek worldview, the belief being that the Hebrew notion was more integrated. In keeping with this, it has been suggested that the idea of the resurrection indicates the survival and importance of the body, and that at the same time this world will be re-created, maintaining a measure of continuity, so that its present state is important. Such points naturally deserve more detail than is possible here.

Perhaps more important for motivation are direct biblical statements, and here it is crucial to point out that the Bible speaks in a world very

different from the modern, where environmentalism was not a concern. In particular, the 'dominion text' has its own context, one of human impotence and under-population. At the same time, 'dominion' need not imply authority to use and abuse, but as that of a king, authority to be able to serve. 111

Important though these are, it is hardly sufficient to answer critiques of a concern for the environment, but it is necessary to go a step further and to ask if there are positive reasons for Christians to act. Is environmentalism a necessary implication of the Christian faith, even if it may not be found explicitly in the Bible?

This again has several aspects, but of great importance is that common concern for the environment is felt to follow from the understanding of God as creator and sustainer." God's love and care for the world should then be imitated by people. Thus McDonagh 12 stresses the significance of the first line of the creed, and Durrell 13 wonders how Christianity, with such a belief, could have been so ecologically insensitive in the past. This can be developed further, as with Moltmann, 14 who feels that the institution of the Sabbath, resting on creation, implies a command to care for the world. But valid though this is, is it really distinctively Christian?

There are several possible approaches to a really Christian ecology, which cannot be developed here. I have elsewhere tried to take the central

1° For a fuller explanation, and exegesis of the Genesis text, see my 'Fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28): Dominion to Exploit and Pollute?' *Scriptura* 44 (1993), pp. 51-65.

11 E.g. F. van Dyke et al., *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1996).

12 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

13 L. Durrell, *State of the Ark* (London, 1986), p. 12.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 277f.

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affirmation of the Christian faith, that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and to suggest that such identification with humanity in incarnation must have ecological implications. 15 As God incarnate, Jesus played a unique part in reconciling people to God; this can be related to ecological concerns. More than this however, the purpose of the incarnation was for salvation. This, as with the Greek word *sozo*, must include the nuance of preservation as well as of re-creation. The world, as well as people, will experience a transformation in continuity.

This can then be taken a stage further, because flowing from an affirmation of the deity of Jesus came the doctrine of the Trinity. Such does have some parallel in other religious traditions, but essentially it is a unique Christian teaching. Now this has been neglected for various reasons, but if God is indeed Trinitarian, this should impinge upon every aspect of belief, and affect every human activity, which will include attitudes to, and action connected with, the environment. It is striking that a major work on ecology from a Christian perspective, such as that of Santmire, 16 contains almost no reference to the Trinity.

#### THE TRINITY AS GOD'S MODEL

It is perhaps significant that while Christianity has been accused of ignoring environmental concerns, even of causing ecological damage, this has usually been connected to a simple monotheism such as by Moltmann, 17 who however suggests that a more accurate understanding of God as Trinity would not do this.

Whiteix is quite correct to suggest that monotheism drives a wedge between a transcendent God and nature, and so devalues the latter.

However the basis of a Trinitarian view is that while transcendent, God involved himself fully in creation by sending his Son. This immediately gives a value to the world. It is also by God's immanence that we know that the Trinity exists, and then by our immanence to the world that care for it comes.

15 D. T. Williams, *The Christian and the environment: prophet, priest and*

king', *Evangelical Quarterly* 66 (1970), pp. 143-58.

<sup>16</sup> H. P. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> J. Moltmann, 'The ecological crisis: peace with nature?' *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies* 9 (1988), pp. 8,9.

<sup>18</sup> L. White Jr, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis', *Science* 155 (1967), p. 1205.

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Some strands of Christian thought do relate God's action to the world in a Trinitarian way. Based upon texts such as Colossians 1: 15f. or I Corinthians 8:6, it is possible to see God the Father as the ultimate source of all that is, and God the Son as the agent by which creation was enacted. Then to complete the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit may be viewed as the fount of life. Differences are found as to whether such belief is a real reflection of a division of labour in the Godhead, or whether, emphasising the unity of God, such are really just 'appropriated' to the three persons, and that all activity of God in the world is an undivided action of the entire Trinity.

What is clear is that the action of the Trinity, specifically in the incarnation, gives evidence for God's love and care of the world. God acts by participation as well as by command. 1 John 4: 10 asserts that love for humanity is demonstrated by the sending of God's Son and by his death; the inference is that otherwise we could not be sure that God does in fact care for us. We could be dealing with a capricious God, delighting in the suffering and pain of humanity, even at the same time protesting his love. We could be dealing with an impotent God, really loving, but making empty promises that he is unable to fulfil. We could be dealing with a deistic God, happy to create and to do nothing more at all. It is the incarnation, so the Trinity, which gives evidence that this is not the case, and even that this love is not just to humanity, but is for the whole world (Rom. 8:22). Not that this latter can really be disputed; humanity is so much a part of the world that love for one cannot be expressed while ignoring the other. Such then gives a stronger motivation for love and care for the world by humanity than just an affirmation of creation.

Christian theology traditionally sees the purpose of the incarnation in reconciling people to God. If this is the case, it follows that it also enables reconciliation between human beings, harmony as God intended, and presumably then also with the rest of creation. If the biblical explanation for the environmental problem is human disobedience (as Genesis 3),<sup>210</sup> dividing not just humanity from God, but humanity from humanity, and also from nature,<sup>211</sup> then the ultimate solution is by reconciliation with God.

This latter point is strengthened by the sending of the third Person, the Spirit, for it is by this power that peace and harmony is in fact  
<sup>19</sup> L. Osborn, *Guardians of Creation: Nature in Theology and the Christian Life* (Leicester, 1993), p. 88.

<sup>211</sup> F. A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton & London, 1970), p. 67.

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achieved. The life-giving Spirit of God gives relationship in created things.<sup>21</sup> A good example of this is in Christian healing, where the Spirit's action restores health and harmony to a diseased body. Likewise the action of the Spirit may be seen as giving life to a diseased creation. Such action is again evidence of God's desire for harmony within the wider creation, and again a motive for Christians, led by the Spirit, to do what they can to that end.

The doctrine of the Trinity however provides far more than evidence of God's care for the world, and a motivation of human care for it, however much this would otherwise be little more than empty hope. If the world is a creation of the triune God, what may be expected is that this trinity

would be reflected in the way things are. Not only does God's action as the economic Trinity provide an example for human action, but God's very being as the immanent Trinity also has ecological implications. Such is not an unreasonable idea; if two people do one job, it will inevitably be done differently, and the difference can be related to the nature of those individuals. Who they are affects the nature of the work that they do. There is thus an ancient idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis*, a belief that vestiges or marks of Trinity should be visible in the world. Thus Bonaventure (1221-74), for example, sees a Trinitarian unity in the whole created order; creation reflects God throughout.<sup>22</sup> Teilhard ~ Chardin (1881-1955) sees creation as a replica of the Trinity.<sup>23</sup> Several suggestions have been made in this regard, such as a tree being roots, trunk and branches, or water in a spring, river and lake, or the inherent threeness of dimensions or of the states of matter. The classic is of course the attempt of Augustine of Hippo in his *de Trinitate* to see the Trinity reflected in the human mind. This may be taken to imply that the actions of the Trinity in the world are like the workings of the mind, not visible; this is in keeping with the famous *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* (external works of the Trinity are undivided). This would make the Trinity irrelevant to the world outside the mind.<sup>24</sup> The whole idea of the *vestigia Trinitatis* has quite naturally been severely criticised. For example, very often an artificial threeness has been forced, and if a desire

<sup>21</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, 1992), p. 225.

<sup>22</sup> Santmire, *The Travail of Nature.*, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> E. J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 289.

<sup>24</sup> C. E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh, 1991 ), p. 106.

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had been to see a duality or a quaternity, such could equally well have been put forward. Certainly, as Barth stresses, it would seem to be illegitimate to use evidence of threeness in the world as evidence for belief in the Trinity. The doctrine has to have a different basis. Yet even if it is not valid to deduce the doctrine from the world, it is acceptable to use the nature of the world to illustrate it. By all accounts, the Trinity is hard to understand, and illustrations from nature are of great value in aiding comprehensibility. More than with any other doctrine, except perhaps Christology, parallels and analogy are of great value, and are legitimate if God is the creator.

Now in this case, it is also valid to work in the opposite direction as well. If it is valid to see the way in which the world works as illustrative of the Trinity, then the idea of the Trinity may be used to deduce what the correct operation of the world should be. Thus as humanity is a part of the created order, it is likely to relate to that order in a way parallel to the relationships within the Trinity.<sup>25</sup> 'One has not to understand God from what he has done, but the things he has done, from God.'<sup>26</sup> Although humanity, more than the created world, is in the image of God, the world should still reflect the nature of the Trinity to some extent.

It is probably too much to expect to see every facet of Trinitarian belief as reflected in ecology. Nevertheless, the essential nature of the Trinity is to be found, and is indeed then valuable in understanding how the world should interrelate. The classic belief is that there is one God, who exists as three coequal persons; this essentially means that within the Godhead there is distinctiveness, but at the same time there is harmony, even unity. These are indeed to be found in the created world. Although, as is common in the West, emphasis has been placed on substantial pictures of the Trinity, the *vestigia* idea can also be applied dynamically or relationally. On the one hand the world is replete with the distinctions between what is living and what is not, between material and spirit, between different species, and so on. On the other these interrelate in a variety of ways. Life-forms depend on others, and on the inanimate world for their survival, and indeed there is a majestic unity to the whole

of creation. As with the Trinity, both distinctiveness and oneness are essential, and neither may be affirmed at the expense of the other. It is this which lies at the heart of correct ecology.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. Elsdon, *Greenhouse Theology: Biblical Perspectives on Caring for Creation* (Tunbridge Wells, 1992), p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> E. Jtingel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming* (Edinburgh & London, 1976), p. 6.

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This essential point may well be stressed by reference to the great Trinitarian heresies. Heresy may be seen as good and valuable when it prompts the development of correct belief. This happened in the case of belief in God, and can be paralleled in the development of correct attitudes to the created order.

At the very crudest level, Trinitarian belief is then the affirmation of both distinctiveness and oneness. It is thus a rejection on the one hand of an excessive distinctiveness without oneness which manifests itself as tritheism, and on the other hand of an excessive oneness without distinctiveness, manifesting as belief in a simple monad. Both of those beliefs are present in the world and are rejected by Christians, and at the same time, the ecological parallels are present, and should then also be questioned from a Christian perspective.

#### TRINITARIAN INTER-RELATEDNESS

Tritheism is a lack of appreciation of inter-relatedness. The core reason for belief in the Trinity is the New Testament affirmation of the divinity of Jesus (and then of the Holy Spirit), but held in relation to his own affirmation of the Fatherhood of God. This however immediately gives a relationship between the divinity of Jesus and that of his Father, but the Old Testament insistence on monotheism means that there is a deep unity between the persons. If this is put into ecological terms, it means that the value of each living species is to be respected, and even that there is value in the inanimate creation as well. This is because the various forms of life and of the material environment have a deep interrelationship. Such relating may be seen as perhaps even more fundamental than being itself.<sup>27</sup> In fact this can be put even more strongly; the three persons of the Trinity do not just interrelate, but interpenetrate (*perichoresis*), a feature which may be understood as fundamental to correct Trinitarianism.<sup>28</sup> This is a participation in each other paralleled in the world.

This means that there must be extreme caution in human activity lest the very delicate interrelationships are damaged. When industry results in acid rain, or when the Amazon rainforest is felled indiscriminately, the effect on the atmosphere presents a danger ultimately to humanity

<sup>itself</sup> A further example of this problem is the use of DDT to control

<sup>27</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation*, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See B. McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London, 1990).

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insect pests, resulting in the build-up of the chemicals in other forms of life to their detriment, and ultimately to that of humanity.

It may also be noted that ecological damage may be traced to excessive human consumption. This has a variety of causes, but one major factor is excessive purchases beyond those required by need, often to impress others, so ultimately caused by a lack of correct relationships with others. Similarly pollution may occur due to a lack of concern for others. Although older societies sought equilibrium, those which strive for growth cannot avoid ecological damage, leading ultimately to their own destruction, a point applicable to modern socialism as much as to capitalism.<sup>311</sup>

#### TRINITARIAN ONENESS

The opposite extreme to tritheism is so to affirm the unity of God that

there is no distinction between the Persons. This is not an affirmation of God's oneness as in Judaism or Islam which then demands that Jesus is not divine, but is such a unity as is consistent with that divinity. It could well follow that all people, indeed all animals, plants and other material also manifest divinity to some extent. After all, even Jesus, quoting the Old Testament (Ps. 82:6), said that his hearers could be called gods (John 10:34). Is it possible that all are divine, and in this all is united? Such ideas are common, for example appearing in the modern New Age movement, a form of pantheistic monism, in which people seek to realise their inherent divinity to a greater extent.<sup>31</sup> In this case there is no fundamental distinction between Christ and anyone, even anything else. Ecologically, this means that all is valuable, all is sacred, a short step to the veneration of sacred cows and, albeit a bit inconsistently, to vegetarianism. Concern for the environment, the protection and enhancement of life follows naturally from this view; each creature is of value.<sup>32</sup> It is hardly surprising that much ecological concern comes from a pantheistic worldview;<sup>33</sup> sometimes the whole world is seen as an integrated, living organism, the *Gaia* hypothesis.<sup>34</sup> But if all are divine, or all are just material, the differences between individuals tend to be lost, especially where the stress falls on overall unity and harmony.

<sup>30</sup> Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, pp. 24, 28.

<sup>31</sup> D. R. Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, Illinois, 1986), pp. 18, 22.

<sup>32</sup> n Osborn, *Guardians of Creation*, p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age*, p. 115.

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However, Trinitarianism, while affirming the full divinity of all three persons, also distinguishes clearly between them. Jesus, while himself divine, could still refer to his Father as 'my God' (John 20: 17). The Persons are each God, but they are not the same. Likewise a human being and other animals, even plants, all share life, and human beings, with all creation, share a material nature, even being made of the same essential elements, yet there is a distinction which must be made. People are not just animals, not just material, but in the very diversity is something of value. If all are divine to some extent, the implication may well be, not that each is valuable, but on the contrary, that specific individuals, even species, are expendable, as deity is also manifested elsewhere. As Schaeffer<sup>35</sup> points out, in pantheism the whole has meaning, but individuals lose value. But if diversity in itself is of value, people cannot be content to witness the extinction of species, currently running at about one per day,<sup>36</sup> or even worse, at another estimate, one hundred per day.<sup>37</sup> This means that whereas, to cite one example, it is hard to appreciate that rhinos have a great contribution to make to ecological relationships, it is still a tragedy when they are hunted to the brink of extinction for their horns. The rhino has value not just because it exists as part of an expression of a pantheistic 'one', not even because it was created and was good, but from the value of diversity. This point is well appreciated in the secular world: the 1982 UN World Charter for nature says that 'every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth for man'.<sup>38</sup>

#### INTER-TRINITARIAN RELATIONSHIP

Tritheism or pantheism, while they may be viewed as consistent with an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus, have hardly been a threat to Trinitarian doctrine, indeed they can hardly be viewed as Trinitarian heresy at all. Despite this, their ecological equivalents are present and need to be rebutted, although it may well be suggested that as with any 'Christian' tritheism or pantheism, adherence to them is not so much from a deliberate choice, but from a lack of a real consideration of the issues. Trinitarianism has however been threatened by two more significant

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> ~ R. Ambler, *Global Theology: The Meaning of Faith in the Present World Crisis* (London & Philadelphia, 1990), p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Osborn, *Guardians of Creation*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>

κ J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (London, 1981) p. 77.

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heresies, and it would seem that these two also have ecological parallels that have had a much wider acceptance and thus need a more definite rebuttal. In the case of the Trinity, history witnessed a long battle against them, a battle which is by no means over, insofar as both constantly reoccur in various guises. The same is true with ecology.

Here the parallels between the Trinity and the workings of the world need to be expanded. It is really inadequate to speak of the Trinity just in terms of distinction and inter-relatedness without defining a little more closely how the relationships occur. Here Trinitarianism speaks of the generation of the Son from the Father and of the procession of the Holy Spirit. This means that the activity of both the Son and of the Holy Spirit is derived from the Father. The parallel to this is a common feature of the world, where every living being exists in a derived form, and even much inanimate material comes from other sources, deriving from them by chemical or nuclear processes. This dependence has other facets as well, such as dependence due to eating, of physical support such as roots of trees, and then when the continued existence of an animal or plant depends absolutely upon the choice of another.

A further very significant factor is that the inter-Trinitarian relationships are stable and eternal. The world likewise should ideally be stable, with sustainable use of resources, and production of waste only at a level able to be absorbed by the ecosystem.

Inter-Trinitarian relationships are a process, and likewise ecological relationships. God is life, and in the world life depends on the constant cycling of resources. These are held in balance, with no Trinitarian Person being dominant; ecological problems arise due to lack of balance, resulting in lack, as when species become endangered, or excess, requiring culling or weed control.

#### ECOLOGICAL ARIANISM

Perhaps the major threat to orthodox Trinitarianism arose in the fourth century with Arianism, and lingers today in groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Although this affirms the divinity of Jesus, its stress falls on the absolute monotheism so clear particularly in the Old Testament. The solution presented is that only the Father is God in the full sense. The divinity of the Son is not eternal, but is created and so derived from the Father, which means that the Son is inherently subordinate to the Father, so that his divinity is of a lesser degree. As is well known, the result of this was a protracted theological debate, intertwined with problems of language and of politics, until the Nicene affirmation that Father and Son

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(and Holy Spirit) are of the same substance, so coequal and eo-eternal, could be affirmed without denying a difference between them.

Ecologically, the Arian subordination of the Son to the Father is paralleled in the dominion of humanity over the rest of the created order. Just as the Son is always obedient to the Father (John 6:38), so humanity has authority over the rest of the created order. Warrant for this is usually seen in the 'creation mandate' of Genesis 1:28. This is often taken as divine sanction for human use of the environment, so permission to use and exploit, and even to abuse. The verse has also been taken as a divine command to breed as much as possible. Both aspects have had an obvious and enormous effect upon the environment.

Apart from the underlying philosophical ideas which prompted the emergence of Arianism, part of the justification for its system was the clear references to subordination in the New Testament. The classic text is John 14:28: 'the Father is greater than I', and there are several other

texts commonly adduced. Not the least bit of evidence is the fact that the Son is called a 'Son', so logically less than the Father.

Ecologically also, the subordination of the rest of creation to humanity can also be justified by reference to humanity being in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Other animals, and the rest of creation, not being in the image, are therefore subordinate.

Now the biblical references to the subordination of the Son can well be seen as consistent with equality of essence between Father and Son. In the incarnation, the Son assumed a state of humiliation in order to relate fully to the world (Phil. 2:7), but this need not be seen as an inherent subordination. As for the fact of his being a Son, this also is not inherent subordination; in the human case, a father and son are absolutely equal as regards their essence of humanity.

In the same way, humanity and the rest of creation indeed share an equality of essence. All are made of the same material elements, and all living things share life. This latter is particularly clear in that human beings, as other animals, must feed on life in order to survive. They cannot eat the inanimate, or even things that have been **dead** for too long a period of time. The only distinction here is that the Genesis account distinguishes the life of people from that of other animals and plants; whereas the account speaks simply of their creation in Genesis 1, which includes humanity, the account in Genesis 2 distinguishes between the material creation of the first man and the breathing into him of life (Gen. 2:7). This latter could however simply be an elaboration of

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the general process, or could be interpreted as the giving of a spiritual capacity.<sup>39</sup>

If there is this equality of essence, humanity should not be seen as enjoying fundamental superiority over the rest of creation but should again be conscious of interdependence. Schaeffer<sup>40</sup> thus distinguishes between sovereignty and dominion. It is perhaps significant that the dominion of Genesis 1:28 comes immediately after the implication of divine plurality, so interdependence, of Genesis 1:26. Dominion is to be seen, not in the sense of the rule of a superior over an inferior, but that of a state of service. This may indeed be seen when the first man exercised dominion; this was expressed in the naming of the animals (Gen. 2:19).<sup>41</sup> A further example of this may be seen later in Israelite history. In contrast to the hegemony exercised by Mesopotamian and Egyptian kings, the Israelite king was appointed as a servant. It was not a case of the people existing to benefit the king, but the king to serve the people. This point should be clear in reference to humanity being in the image of God. This does not mean a dominant position of superiority, but of service. The New Testament makes it plain that the image of God in the full sense is Christ; and certainly he did not come to dominate from a position of superiority, but on the contrary 'the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'(Mark 10:45).

Perhaps part of the reason for the striking omission of the idea of the image of God after the three initial references in Genesis (1:26; 5:1; 9:6), was that the ancient near East in general applied it to the king,<sup>42</sup> and that it was then interpreted as rule rather than service.

Thus far from a state of superiority, paralleled to the Arian heresy, the relationship of humanity to the rest of creation is that of orthodox Trinitarianism. Particularly if the plural 'let us make' in the context of the 'dominion mandate' (Gen. 1:26) is accepted as referring to the Trinity, then the exercise of dominion must be Trinitarian. Here there is an absolute equality in essence, but a distinction in role. Just as the Son was sent to do the will of the Father, and so serves the Trinity, and indeed the three Persons serve each other, so humanity and the rest of creation also

<sup>39</sup> H. Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester & Downers Grove, Illinois, 1984), p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> D. I. A. Clines, 'The Image of God in Man', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), p. 83.

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have an equality in essence, but a relationship of mutual service.

Dominion is never arbitrary rule, but is given for the benefit of those 'dominated'.

#### ECOLOGICAL SABELLIANISM

Historically, whereas the fear of the Western church was always of Arianism, the Eastern church tended to be prone to this because of the fear of Sabellianism. Despite their fears, this latter was never such a challenge to Trinitarianism as was Arianism. The heresy of Sabellius was an attempt to safeguard the unity of God, and it did this by suggesting that the one God manifested himself in different modes at different times. God then effectively changes between modes, the Father becoming the Son and then becoming the Holy Spirit. The extreme implication of this is of patripassianism, which means that the Father himself suffered and died. Because of such difficulties, and because there are several clear biblical references, such as the baptism of Jesus, where the three persons occur together, Sabellianism only ever enjoyed limited support. It was never a real alternative to Trinitarianism.

The essential idea is one of single entity operating in various ways depending on the circumstances. This is quite attractive in an ecological context, where the occurrence of particular life forms is seen as dependent upon their suitability for a particular set of circumstances such as climate and availability of food. Less clearly the case, it has been suggested<sup>43</sup> that the very emergence of life was due to the occurrence of a favourable set of circumstances. Then the modern diversity is due to the changes due to changing environments. Obviously evolution is very consistent with this idea.

Quite naturally, the complementary idea is to change the nature of reality by changing the circumstances. Now this is what human activity does to a large extent. We plant seeds, irrigate and remove unwanted vegetation; we selectively breed animals to encourage desirable traits; even building houses can be viewed as local climatic modification. All these, and others, are done in response to the circumstances.

Now it would seem that God as Trinity has done something similar, acting in a way different from the Old Testament by the incarnation of the Son and in the sending of the Spirit. (Gal. 4:4).

Human activity has always to be relevant to circumstances.

Technology, for example, has to be such as is appropriate to the setting;

<sup>43</sup> D. Bridge, *God of Science, God of Faith* (London, 1988), p. 49.

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much modern equipment cannot work in the third world due to lack of the required infrastructure, such as the provision of trained personnel, availability of spares or even a stable power supply. A second very pertinent example is that the 'dominion mandate' of Genesis 1:26 is sometimes taken as a command to multiply. This may have been appropriate when the earth was empty, but surely not today. Moss<sup>44</sup> comments that the earth is now full, the command has been fulfilled.

Activity as relevant to circumstance does not mean that it is legitimate to take advantage of a situation for personal gain. Examples of this are legion, such as unloading banned or expired drugs onto a third world situation because they cannot be used in the first, or similarly of disposal of toxic waste in the third world. Most pertinently, Liberation theology has drawn attention to the exploitation of the poor, possible because of their circumstance, the lack of choice of alternatives. God's action, on the contrary, as in the incarnation, was of positive help even at great cost to himself. This change in God's activity, as others, was a response to circumstance.

However Sabellianism does not just say that God changes the way he acts in accordance with circumstances, but that he changes in himself. It

hardly needs to be said that change is a major feature of the modern world. Particularly due to technological innovation, the modern world is very different from that of the last century and even of a few decades, even years ago. Now it is not this change that has generated the current spate of ecological problems, but the current state of the world which gobbles resources, generates pollution and erosion and stimulates growth in population; the modern, however, world effectively puts its faith in continued change which will then enable these problems to be overcome. There is some evidence for such a hope; towards the end of the last century a major ecological problem in large cities was the disposal of the droppings of horses used for transport. Then came the development of motorised transport, and with this change, the problem simply disappeared. It is then a hope that there will be continued change and problems such as the depletion of oil reserves, and the pollution of the atmosphere and of the oceans, will equally become irrelevant. The basic idea is that one situation can be changed to another. Ecological damage is then not serious. A similar hope as regards population growth is that the third world, where the great growth of population is being experienced, will also change its attitudes, and then experience the same demographic transition as has resulted in numerical stability in the developed world.

<sup>44</sup> R. Moss, *The Earth in our Hands* (Leicester, 1982), p. 38.

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More than the hope of the world being based on continued change, its very ethos is similarly based. Much modern technology is based on the principle of planned obsolescence so that a particular machine is built for a specific life expectancy, with the intention that it be replaced by a newer model. Such a philosophy naturally compounds the ecological problem of resource usage, as rather than repair components, the whole machine has to be replaced. Similarly the capitalist economic system depends on continual change, especially expansion.

If the hope of the world is pinned so firmly upon change, then human effort is expended in order to promote such change. It is here that problems occur. Firstly of course the development of new technology in itself is liable to exacerbate existing problems or cause new ones.

Examples of this are legion, such as the development of hybrid grain, which gives high yields, but is prone to disease and requires extra feeding, requiring the use of expensive and polluting chemicals. Secondly the temptation is to work for change in ways such as genetic engineering or more crudely in the removal of unwanted elements such as in the extermination programmes of Nazism.

The other side of Sabellianism is that of the unity of the Godhead. There is no divinity other than that manifesting at a particular time. The parallel to this is that outside of the ecosystem there is then no other reality; this would indeed be the prevalent modern assumption. This means that change is the only solution. In contrast, Christianity sees divine intervention, from 'outside' the world, as the solution to human problems. Thus God sent his Son to die and to rise to give salvation, the Holy Spirit is given to enable a relationship with the transcendent God. More pertinently, when Christ died, that was not deity in total dying, so that the world would still be maintained, and that God could raise Christ from death.<sup>45</sup> Patripassianism has always been a major problem for Sabellians!

Thus the Christian solution to ecology is not that of change as such, but of divine intervention. There is no solution in the world as such without God's action for it.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 2:24,32; Rom. 6:4,8:11; I Cor. 6: 14; Gal. I: I; Eph. I :20. Although a few texts, notably John 2: 19 and I 0: 17, would appear to indicate that the resurrection was Jesus' own act, these must be read in the context of the others, and also of John 2:22 and 10:18. The resurrection could perhaps be seen as a joint act, but this would also then imply a distinct Father.

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As with Arianism, there is a sense in which Sabellianism is correct. The Father may not change into the Son but he does impart his being to the Son. Life is transferred, the life of the Father is received by the Son, and likewise the Holy Spirit receives by procession. This however involves no loss to the giver. Likewise in the world, life is transferred and changed continually, usually by the process of eating. In the world this is, however, as in the divine prototype, part of the overall process of equilibrium. Life participates in food chains, but all, as species, survive. What Sabellius proposed is something different; the generation of the Son was at the cost of the being of the Father, so there was total loss. Sabellian ecology is also at the cost of total loss, and in that way it is wrong.

#### CONCLUSION

Arianism and Sabellianism parallel the commonest attitudes to the environment. On the one hand the attitude of domination and on the other the process of change are both in a sense valid but when taken to extremes are detrimental to the environment and so ultimately to human beings themselves. Schaeffer<sup>46</sup> significantly points out that much ecological damage is caused by human greed and haste; willingness to spend more money or take more time would solve many of the problems. It could well be suggested here that Sabellianism results from an incorrect view of time, while Arianism is a distorted view of value. A correct view of the Trinity gives a correct perspective on each and so when paralleled in the environment would benefit rather than harm it. Indeed, a Trinitarian attitude, respecting the value of every part of the environment, its diversity and interdependence, will benefit each part, and so ultimately humanity.

The challenge of the Trinity is not only of understanding it, which is ultimately impossible, but of ordering life and worship in a way consistent with it. So often in practice, as a doctrine it is ignored with its implications. The challenge for Christians is rather to work out the practice on the grounds of a Trinitarian understanding and so develop a distinctive approach to life and its problems.

<sup>46</sup> Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, p. 83.

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## XI. THE BIBLE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: A 21ST CENTURY PRESCRIPTION

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Quodlibet Journal: Volume 2 Number 4, Fall 2000

ISSN: 1526-6575

This article also appears in *Electronic Green Journal*, vol 12. (<http://egj.lib.uidaho.edu/egj12/>) Interested readers will find this article's full appendices there.

#### Abstract

It may come as a surprise to some, but the Bible has a great deal to say about the environment and its conservation some 20 centuries since it was written. Perhaps among the most surprised will be Bible-toting church goers who may have never heard a sermon related to the "environmental crisis" which has become such a concern to so many around the world. This lack of attention by Christians is especially perplexing since many of our environmental problems are rooted in the Christian faith, according to some scholars. However, by examining the doctrine of Christianity, the basic text of the faith, the Bible, we find an entirely different message. The purpose of this discussion is to present the entire portion of Scripture which relates to

environmental principles whereby we may develop a Bible-based, 21<sup>st</sup> Century prescription of environmental conservation. Some 2,463 verses have been topically organized into nine sections. Four appendices present the full-text of this collection in addition to selected hymns, which have been instrumental in teaching the truths of Scripture over the years. This compilation of verses constitutes approximately eight percent of the Bible. The Authorized Version, also known as the King James Version, was used in the preparation of this collection due its widespread distribution and influence since 1611. Based on the Bible, Christianity's positive contribution to environmental conservation is consistent with its positive contributions to other fields such as literature, art, music, education, health, and science.

### **Landscape of Environmental Literature: A Forest Without Trees**

Christians, like many other groups, have served as convenient scapegoats over the years, being blamed for all kinds of social ills, including environmental problems (White 1967). While the allegation that our present environmental problems lie rooted deep within Christianity, has been well answered and refuted by Harrison (1999) as well as many others, ill-informed finger pointing continues as the new millennium dawns (Worster 1993). Rather than address the behavior of Christians, genuine or otherwise, it is first of all necessary to examine the basic doctrine and text of the faith – the Bible.

Various authors have presented bits and pieces of the Bible as they have sought to either validate or invalidate the charge against Christian teaching (Joranson and Butigan 1984). I submit that the Bible can well speak for itself and is presented in its entirety with regard to environmental issues. Appendix A is a compilation of 1929 verses from the Old Testament and Appendix B lists 638 verses from the New Testament. These two appendices organize the Scripture topically so a small number of verses have been included in more than one section. Appendix C lists the scriptural references sequentially but does not include the actual text nor does it list any verse more than once.

The importance of examining the Bible, as the message of Christianity, rather than the behavior of Christians, as the representatives of Christ, is underscored by the fact that relatively few people actually read the Bible. This phenomenon is not new. Foxe (1981) reported that after 1500 years of Christianity, though the words of Christ were relatively widely distributed, few actually read the text. Hence the Bible had relatively little influence on the culture at that time. Little interest in reading the Bible also characterizes this day and age (North American Scene: Religion in School 1987, Glenn 1990, Christianity in America 1995, and Stafford 1986). Therefore, in order to understand what God has to say on this issue, it is essential that the entire word of God be examined. The assumption upon which this discussion is based is that the Bible is the word of God and as such it is trustworthy and timeless. It is trustworthy because it is truthful. It is timeless, hence practical and relevant today, because God never changes.

### **A Message with Melody**

In addition to the biblical text, selected hymns from across many centuries of hymnody, have been compiled (Brown and Norton 1995, Osbeck 1990). This collection is not comprehensive but representative of the environmental message of Christianity as an echo of that which appears on the pages of Scripture. Appendix D presents the full-text of these church songs organized within the same topical framework as the Scriptural text. Singing is central to the Bible, so it is considered quite appropriate to include the music of the church in this discussion. The task of teaching with church music has also been very important throughout history, as literacy levels have varied.

### **International Insight**

If the implication were true that Christianity lies at the root of the modern environmental dilemma, one might expect that those regions of the world where Christians are relatively few might enjoy a better track record of environmental conservation. However, one need look no further than the daily news to discover that serious environmental problems are reported from areas where Islam, Buddhism, Atheism, and other religions dominate. See the following list. As Anderson, Slovic, and

O'Grady (1999) point out, technological advances have done more to negatively impact the environment and diminish our identification with the natural world, rather than the so called "dualism" of Christianity.

#### International Reports of Environmental Problems

1. Asia (EnviroLink 24 January 2000)
2. Azerbaijan (Wolfson 1993)
3. China (Kriz 1997)
4. India (EnviroLink 21 February and 24 March 2000)
5. Indonesia (Cohen 1994, EnviroLink 21 February 2000)
6. Iran (Wolfson 1993, EnviroLink 3 January 2000)
7. Japan (Gros 1999)
8. Kazakhstan (Wolfson 1993)
9. Kenya (EnviroLink 7 March 2000)
10. Malaysia (Cohen 1994)
11. Russia (Wolfson 1993)
12. Turkey (Juhasz 1992)
13. Turkmenistan (Wolfson 1993)

#### Science and Faith: Greening Collaboration?

Christians have been relatively quiet about environmental problems, but this is changing (Joranson and Butigan 1984). Catholics have actually been addressing environmental issues for several years. Caldecott (1996) refers to the Green Pope and the scriptural basis for environmental conservation. The Catholic Catechism includes a section on creation and responsible care for the environment. Anderson, Slovic, and O'Grady (1999) include an essay entitled "U.S. Bishops" where religious leaders address environmental concerns. However, politics predominates many discussions as environmental radicals and the media supply a healthy mix of misinformation, exaggerations, and biased views along with scientific data (Sanera and Shaw 1996 & 1997, Lichter and Rothman 1999, Wallace and Christy 2000).

However, science and faith are beginning to share more and more over this issue, yet significant disagreement over fundamental definitions remain. For example, Bunk (1999) claims that faith is not evidence-based but the Bible paints another picture. He also states that science deals with what is knowable where as religion involves that which is unknowable. Once again, according to the Bible, God is knowable and a personal relationship with the God of the universe is possible, even necessary if one is to experience eternal life.

In spite of these fundamental differences, church leaders and scientists are beginning to share the platform with one another as allies instead of adversaries. This collaborative relationship makes some uneasy, but it reflects an important new direction as we face the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Web pages, sermons, Bible study groups, and environmental cleanup projects discussing cooperation between former foes are bound to make the headlines (Climate Change II: Plea from the Pulpit 1999, Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project 1999, Lampman 2000, Lowy 2000, Savoye 2000).

The common thread among the different faith groups that have gotten involved with environmental conservation projects is the belief that the God of the Bible cares about the environment and holds people accountable for its sustained management. The Bible serves as the guidebook for Christian conduct and, if followed, will have a positive impact on the environment. Surprisingly, the human conduct that benefits the environment the most, relates less to direct interaction between people and the world around them and more with how people relate to God and one another. In other words, environmental improvements are a natural consequence when people are rightly related to God and one another. This constitutes an environmental prescription for change as the next millennium dawns.

#### Christianity's Consistent Contributions

In light of the fact that genuine Christians and Christianity have contributed so much that has benefited society over the past 2000 years, it is quite reasonable to expect no less when it comes to finding solutions to our environmental problems. Christianity's contributions to the world of music have been extensive (Kavanaugh 1996). In America alone, the Bay Psalm Book became the first book of any kind published in the Colonies. Additionally, in 1838 Christian music was taught in Boston's public schools "in preparation for making the praise of God glorious in families and churches" (Reynolds 1963). Christianity's contributions to science and literacy merit made additional comment (Jeffrey 1999 and Livingstone 1999).

Christian contributions to science include such diverse fields as natural history, chronology, geography, cosmology, physics, and biochemistry by men and women throughout the ages, including the Venerable Bede, John Ray, Sir Isaac Newton, Michael Behe, and J.C. Polkinghorne, among many others (Stevens 1985, Eckenrode 1971 & 1976, Behe 1998, Polkinghorne 1996). The environment too has benefited from Christianity's influence, despite claims to the contrary. According to Armstrong (1973), environmental care and concern has been widespread among Christians for centuries, from the time of Christ to the time of Saint Francis. The impact of Christianity upon Society through literacy and education is particularly noteworthy and partially illustrated with the following table.

<p>More people have learned to read with the Bible and other Christian literature since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century than with anything else.</p>	<p>See the "Legacies of Literacy - Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society" by Harvey J. Geaff and published by Indiana University Press in 1987, pp. 10, 13, 29-31, 91, 113-114, 150, 241, and 286. Also note "Heresy and Literacy 1000-1530" edited by Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, published by Cambridge University Press in 1994, p. 257.</p>
<p>The arrival of the printing press in the western United States was directly linked to Christian missionary activity.</p>	<p>See "Indian Mission Printing in Arizona: An Historical Sketch and Bibliography" by James H. Fraser. <i>Journal of Arizona History</i> 10(summer 1969): 67-68.</p>
<p>Public libraries in the United States were largely an outgrowth of church libraries.</p>	<p>See "Thomas Bray: A Study in Early Eighteenth Century Librarianship" by Norma S. Gordon. A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC in 1961, p. 89.</p>
<p>Modern schools grew out of a system of Christian schools in the Middle Ages.</p>	<p>See "A History of Education in Antiquity" by H.I. Marrou. Translated by George Lamb and published by the University of Wisconsin Press in 1956, 317 and 336.</p>
<p>No ancient society was more devoted to a written text (Hebrew Bible) than the Jews of the Roman Period.</p>	<p>"Literacy and Power in the Ancient World" edited by Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf. Published by Cambridge University Press in 1994, p. 99. Also see, "Books and Readers in the Early Church - A History of Early Christian Texts" by Harry Y. Gamble, published by Yale University Press in 1995, p. 7.</p>
<p>Clearly the contribution of the Sunday School</p>	<p>See "Schooling the Poorer Child - Elementary</p>

and its allied press essentially sustained the development of literacy throughout the first half of the 19 <sup>th</sup> Century.	Education in Sheffield 1560-1902" by Malcolm Mercer and published by Sheffield Academic Press in 1996, p. 91.
The Bible is the number one best seller of all time. It is the only work which may be confidently attributed to Gutenberg's own workshop in 1455.	"Orality, Literacy, and Rhetoric: Historical Transitions in Christian Communication" by Greg Boulton. A thesis submitted to the Emmanuel School of Religion, Johnson City, TN, 1995, p. 53.
The religious connection with literacy goes back to the beginnings of historical time in Russia, when the first written words were the Christian Scriptures and religion was stressed in the official school curricula.	See "When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Culture 1861-1917" by Jeffrey Brooks, published by Princeton University Press in 1985, pp. 22, 32, 49, and 306-308.

### Exemplary Excerpts

Nine excerpts, representing each of the topics presented in appendices A and B, are presented to illustrate what the Bible has to say to us today relevant to environmental conservation. Each section will be designated as either a major or minor theme based on the number of books of the Bible from which verses were compiled. Verses from the Old and New Testaments are displayed in each table, along with a representative section of a hymn from Appendix D. The nine topical designations are: 1) Creation, 2) Stewardship, 3) Provision, 4) Pleasure, 5) Praise, 6) Power, 7) Witness, 8) Consequences, and 9) Perspective. A tenth section concludes appendices A and B, each with a handful of miscellaneous verses, which do not fit well in any of the nine categories presented.

### Section One

Creation deals with the creative nature and activity of God. This is a major theme of the environmentally relevant verses found in Scripture, (29 books of the Bible). It is a consistent theme from Genesis to Revelation and is accepted by extra-biblical writers as well (Lactantius 304 or 305, Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994).

<b>Jeremiah 32:17</b>	<b>All Things Bright and Beautiful</b>	<b>Ephesians 3:9</b>
Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee:	Each little flow'r that opens up Each little bird that sings He made their glowing colors He made their tiny wings	And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:
	<b>Cecil Frances Alexander</b> 19 <sup>th</sup> Century	

The Bible records that God created everything from nothing, simply by speaking it into existence. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each mentioned in the creation account and God's creative activity is understood to be ongoing. Just as this is a consistent theme, throughout the Bible, is also frequently mentioned in sacred song.

### Section Two

Stewardship though not a major theme of Scripture, included in only 19 books, this is one of the more hotly contested topics discussed today (White 1967). However, it is not my desire to reinvent the wheel by continuing the debate. This issue has been dealt with very effectively by Harrison (1999) and others. A couple of comments are appropriate, however. White asks, "What did Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment?" His answers were not derived from the Bible. This led to a number of false conclusions, e.g. "nature has no reason to exist save to serve man." The Bible paints an entirely different picture. Nature belongs to God and exists for His pleasure, not men. It is interesting to note that White capitulates the real solution to our environmental problems to religion rather than to science. Is this to set up Christianity for additional blame if the environment fails to improve? Based upon the tone of Whites remarks, one can only wonder. White is not the only one to link our contemporary attitudes toward the environment with Christianity. Nash (1967) attributed the ancient biblical view of wilderness as the basis for our modern view.

How does religion influence a person's attitude or behavior toward the environment? Is there any psychological evidence linking our environmental behavior with religious beliefs? Numerous studies have examined the issue and the results are consistent: Religion does not foster negative environmental behavior. In a few cases, it actually helps (Stern 1992, Wolven 1991, Lutzenhiser 1993, Winett and Ester 1983, Stern and Dietz 1994, Eckberg and Blocker 1996). Perhaps, religion that makes no difference could be considered negative since, at least some formal religious education programs teach that we are charged with the responsible management of God's creation. (Caldecott, 1996).

<p><b>Deuteronomy 22:6</b></p> <p>If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones, or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young:</p>	<p><b>O Love That Will Not Let Me Go</b></p> <p>O love that will not let me go I rest my weary soul in Thee I give Thee back the life I owe That in Thine ocean depths its flow May richer fuller be</p> <p><b>George Matheson</b> 19th Century</p>	<p><b>Hebrews 2:8</b></p> <p>Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.</p>
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Stewardship includes verses related to the relationship between people and the environment, including the fact that God owns the earth and people are merely charged with caring for it. Caring for the environment involves management for sustainable yields and balancing work with rest. This section also addresses caring for the needs of one another based upon the principles of God's economy. Relatively little church music has been devoted to this topic.

### Section Three

Provision is a major theme, included in 28 books of the Bible. God's people expect God to provide for their needs, all of them. God also does something unexpected, He provides for the needs of those who hate Him just as He provides for the needs of those who love Him. In so doing, He demonstrates that people too, are to love their enemies.

<p><b>Ruth 1:6</b></p> <p>Then she arose with her daughters in law, which she might return from the</p>	<p><b>I Sing the Mighty Power of God</b></p> <p>I sing the goodness of the Lord That filled the earth with food He formed the creatures with His word And then pronounced them good</p>	<p><b>Matthew 5:44-45</b></p> <p>But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them</p>
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<p>country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.</p>	<p>Lord, how Thy wonders are displayed Where I turn my eye If I survey the ground I tread Or gaze upon the sky</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Isaac Watts</b> c1700</p>	<p>that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.</p>
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Section three sheds some light on the purpose of the environment, that of provision. This is, of course not the only purpose of nature, but it is an important one. Verses here relate to the relationship between the environment and people where nature meets our needs for food, clothing, shelter, etc. Included here is the idea of contentment, trusting God to meet our needs. This is a common theme in church music around Thanksgiving, though acknowledgments of Gods blessings are sung throughout the year.

#### Section Four

Pleasure presents another purpose for the environment. Though a minor theme, based on the number of books, which include this concept (17), it is nonetheless, a critically important principle that God takes pleasure in what He has made. Nature is first for God, for His pleasure and praise. It is not something just for us. After all, we are created beings too and our purpose is no different, to please God.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Deuteronomy 11:12</b></p> <p>A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Friendly Beasts</b></p> <p>And every beast, by some good spell In the stable dark was glad to tell Of the gift He gave Emanuel The gift He gave Emanuel</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Traditional English Carol</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Revelation 4:11</b></p> <p>Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.</p>
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Section four includes verses related to the relationship between God and the environment as well as how the various elements of the environment relate to each other. God demonstrates His care and concern for the natural environment and we find that God takes pleasure in what He has created in its natural state, not modified with "human improvements." Christ's example of personal refreshment through time spent in the wilderness is illustrated here.

In his book, *The Wisdom of God*, John Ray concludes our creator delights in the beauty of His creation (Raven 1950). Dandi (1995) offers this biblical teaching to children indicating that creation (animals) are not for human exploitation. Selfishly exploiting that which God takes pleasure in, is inconsistent Christian behavior. This children's book encourages young people to care for and simply enjoy all of God's creation as He does. Soll (1991) and Austin (1988) tie together God's plan of salvation with His love for the non-human elements of His creation based on a passage of the New Testament found in the eighth chapter of Romans. Here creation is described as groaning in anticipation of its final redemption with fallen mankind. Like section two, few church songs may be found which illustrate this topic.

#### Section Five

Praise unlike sections two and four, offers a greater selection of sacred songs from which to choose than any other single category. However, this purpose of nature, to praise its Creator, is a minor theme, found in only 17 books. As one might expect, many of the verses are found in the Bible book of songs and celebrations, Psalms.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Psalm 69:34</b></p> <p>Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>All Creatures of Our God and King</b></p> <p>All creatures of our God and King Lift up your voice and with us sing Alleluia! Alleluia!</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Francis of Assisi</b> c1200</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Revelation 5:13</b></p> <p>And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.</p>
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Verses in section 5 relate to the relationship between the environment and God where elements of creation express praise. Nature worships God rather than being worshipped as a god. God is clearly portrayed as preeminent in creation and He alone is to be worshipped. Included here are two of the Ten Commandments.

**Section Six**

Power is a major biblical theme in relationship to verses about the environment. Thirty books include this topic.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>I Kings 18:1</b></p> <p>And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Come Ye Faithful Raise the Strain</b></p> <p>Come ye faithful raise the strain Of triumphant gladness God hath brought His Israel Into joy from sadness Loosed from Pharaoh's bitter yoke Jacob's sons and daughters Led them with unmoistened foot Through the Red Sea waters</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>John of Damascus</b> 8<sup>th</sup> Century</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Luke 8:25</b></p> <p>And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.</p>
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Section six involves authority. As Creator, God has authority over His creation. This is expressed as power and control over the laws of nature. Creation actually "melts" under the awesome power of God and several events recorded as miracles are located in this section. Creation reveals that the wisdom of God is far above any of the elements of creation, including human beings.

**Section Seven**

Witness is a minor theme for the Bible as a whole (21 books) but constitutes the largest single section of New Testament verses on the environment. Frequently, when verses that might otherwise have been classified as belonging in section six, clearly stated that the event was to bear witness of the presence of God, they were placed here instead.

<p><b>Exodus 9:29</b></p> <p>And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD's.</p>	<p><b>The Heavens Declare Thy Glory Lord</b></p> <p>The heavens declare Thy glory Lord In every star Thy wisdom shines But when our eyes behold Thy word We read Thy name in fairer lines</p> <p><b>Isaac Watts</b> c1700</p>	<p><b>Acts 14:17</b></p> <p>Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.</p>
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Harrison (1999) discusses this point when he says, "nature ... was to be known in order to determine its moral and spiritual meanings and not so that it might be materially exploited." Joranson and Butigan (1984) help us to understand St. Francis more clearly than White (1967) with respect to what motivated St. Francis. His respect and appreciation for creation was so profound because it always led him to the Creator. Keynes (1951) conveys what John Ray concluded as he studied the natural sciences. In *The Wisdom of God*, Ray wrote that he could see in nature evidences of innumerable proofs of an omnipotent Creator.

While nature may constitute a "book" which is fascinating to read, God as the author of the book, is far more interesting. Nature merely serves to reveal something about its author. Several of the parables of Christ illustrate here how the every-day aspects of nature teach us something about God. The spiritual lessons taught by nature are among the most profound.

## Section Eight

Consequences is a major theme of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament (33 books). Verses here relate to the environmental consequences of human behavior. This includes verses where the environment suffers as a consequence of war. Additionally, environmental metaphors are used to describe the fate of the ungodly and where nature is called as a witness against the people of God. It's not all negative, however. Occasionally, Scripture reveals that the consequence of a growing relationship with God is an environmental blessing.

Morality is frequently mentioned in discussions involving environmental abuses (Caldecott, 1996). According to the Bible, reckless environmental damage is immoral but more importantly, immorality in any area, such as being out of fellowship with God, leads to the worst and most widespread environmental damage. Therefore, the biblical prescription for a healthier environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century includes loving God with all your being and loving others as yourself. The natural consequences will include a healthier environment. This is not to say that we need not bother with recycling, carpooling, energy conservation, managing natural resources for sustained yields, etc. All of these things may be important but according to the Bible, they are futile apart from first having a right relationship with the Creator of the universe.

The Bible does not present an environmental agenda such as the many found elsewhere. The World Resources Institute (1999a) focuses on maintaining or restoring ecosystem functions. Later, World Resources Institute (1999b) includes population, food shortages, over consumption, energy use, ozone depletion, nutrient cycles, acid rain, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water consumption. Birnie and Boyle (1995) simplify things suggesting the need to respect nature,

protect biodiversity, and exercise sustainable productivity. The Worldwatch Institute (2000) includes climate modification and population control on its agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Other environmental agendas focus on ecosystem dysfunction, climate concerns, water, environmental activists promoting social change, and having a global view (MSNBC 2000). The United Nations (1999) is concerned about sustainable development, clean air, and mentions linking environmental protection with education, human health, and employment. Christians have not been silent when it comes to proposing environmental agendas. Bube (1994) suggests a model limited to two elements creation and stewardship. The Evangelical Environmental Network (1999) have established a Declaration on the Care of Creation which acknowledges that the earth is the Lord's.

So if God were exalted to His right place in our lives how would the environment look? Consider this table of contrasting views, as it sheds some light on this question.

### Contrasting Environments

<b>God Exalted</b>	<b>God Not Exalted</b>
Harmony	Disharmony
Sustainable harvests	Inadequate provisions
Absence of natural disasters	Abundance of (frequent) natural disasters
Good health and reproductive success	Disease and low reproductive success
Light	Darkness
Inhabited	Uninhabited
Peace	Violence
Safety	Danger
Satisfying Work	Meaningless work
Purpose	No work
Lack of Weeds	Weeds
Openness	Oppression
Generosity	Greed
Knowledge	Confusion

A right relationship with God leads to a right relationship among the elements of creation, people with other people, and between people and the environment.

<p><b>Jeremiah 12:4</b></p> <p>How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.</p>	<p><b>Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates</b></p> <p>O blest the land, the city blest Where Christ the ruler is confessed O happy hearts and happy homes To whom this King of triumph comes</p> <p><b>Georg Weissel</b> 17<sup>th</sup> Century</p>	<p><b>Revelation 11:18</b></p> <p>And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.</p>
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**Section Nine**

Perspective is a minor theme (21 books) which seeks to put the relationships between God, people, and the environment in balance. These verses relate to the relationship between people and the environment with an emphasis on the fact that, though people are part of the natural scheme of things, people have priority. In other words, the needs of people take precedence or are considered more important than the needs of the natural elements of the environment, such as animals. This is not to say that the Bible condones such behavior as cruelty to animals, but it does suggest that animal rights are secondary to human rights. This includes the observation that the manner in which people relate to one another is different than the way people relate to animals. In relationship to God, nature is seen as smaller than God and of a lesser magnitude than its Creator.

<p><b>Psalms 113:3-6</b></p> <p>From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same the LORD's name is to be praised. The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!</p>	<p><b>Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts</b></p> <p>Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts Thou fount of life! Thou light of men From the best bliss that earth imparts We turn unfilled to Thee again</p> <p>Attributed to <b>Bernard of Clairvaux</b> 12<sup>th</sup> Century</p>	<p><b>Matthew 12:11-12</b></p> <p>And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.</p>
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Nature as a mystic object of worship is common to many cultures, ancient as well as modern but the Bible condemns such practice as idolatrous (Anderson, Slovic, and O'Grady 1999). This section includes Scripture which reveals how nature, ultimately fails to fulfill a person's deeper needs. Solomon discusses this concept at length in Ecclesiastes. Augustine (1996) shares the same sentiment. While St. Francis is depicted by some as a nature mystic who puts creation ahead of Christ (White 1967), Joranson and Butigan (1984) help to clarify this picture of St. Francis as one totally committed to the Lord, not the land. It is a short step from saying "God is everywhere" to making "everywhere" your god. The very creation that is designed to help us know Him can cause us to forget Him (Whaley 1976). A Christian with a biblical perspective on the

environment will seek God first, not people (Bonacci 1999) and not the environment. With God on the throne, all the other elements of a persons life will assume a correct balance which will result in a healthier person and a healthier environment.

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## XII. THE BIBLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT - GORDON WENHAM

[http://www.jri.org.uk/resource/bible\\_wenham.htm](http://www.jri.org.uk/resource/bible_wenham.htm)

It was over 30 years ago that I visited Israel for the first time, and I remember how it transformed my reading of the Bible. Up to then I had never paid much attention to the place names in the text: I just focused on the characters and their actions. But after visiting many of the sites mentioned in the text my reading of the stories changed: I picture them taking place in the specific places mentioned in the Bible.

Something similar happened to me some fifteen months ago, when I was asked to read a paper to a conference of environmentalists on The Old Testament and the Environment. Though I was quite familiar with many of the texts in the Bible relating to environmental issues, I had not asked myself how the biblical writers regarded the environment. But once ask the question and you will soon realise it has a lot to say on this topic. Mind you I could find little help from modern biblical scholarship. They tend to share the blind spots of modern city dwellers and not address these issues either.

Richard Bauckham has observed:

Ancient literature...simply takes for granted that human life is embedded in the rest of nature and inextricable from it. But modern biblical interpretation has persistently ignored what the texts assume and say about the human relationship to nature.

Modern urban readers of the Bible assume references to nature are just picturesque illustrations of human life. They read into the text an ideology of human emancipation from nature. They set up a Platonic dualism contrasting history with nature, salvation with creation, contrasts that are quite foreign to the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Unwittingly I too was party to some of these errors, and this lecture tonight is an opportunity to confess them and I hope make some amends.

Let me first say it is quite impossible to do justice to this topic in a fifty-minute lecture. I can only hope to sketch a few relevant principles from the Bible, not explore all the texts that bear on the topic in any detail. Nor do I intend to try and apply biblical principles in any detail to the environmental crisis: that is the job of the scientific and political experts who have the detailed knowledge to make wise decisions in this area. I shall be content, if I can persuade you that if you take the Bible seriously you ought also be concerned for the environment. So to our topic: the Bible and the Environment.

The first point to make is that in addressing this issue, we must carefully distinguish between what the Bible describes and what it prescribes. We are well aware of this in other areas of biblical study: just because 2 Samuel describes David's adultery with

Bathsheba, it does not mean it is encouraging such behaviour. Similarly when it is describing agricultural practices, as Jesus does in the parable of the sower, we have to be careful not to draw normative principles from such descriptions. I think it is unlikely that Jesus was encouraging us to sow among thorn bushes or on stony ground. Nevertheless it is important to understand the world of the Bible, if we are to appreciate correctly the thrust of its normative statements. So I shall begin by sketching the lifestyle of the typical Israelite in Bible times, before trying to draw out the teaching of Scripture from those passages, such as laws, that do appear to represent the author's message to his readers.

## 1. The Life of an Ancient Israelite

Let us begin with description. I want to sketch the life-style of the typical Israelite farmer in Old or New Testament times. As I have already mentioned it is remarkable how little books on Old Testament theology and ethics say hardly say about environmental issues. Yet it has been observed that animals are mentioned on nearly every one of the thousand pages of the Old Testament. This is not surprising, for OT man was intimately involved in the environment throughout life. The weather determined whether his crops would flourish or fail. He drew his water from the local well. He depended on animals to plough his fields, transport his goods, for clothing, for food and for sacrifice. Often some of them lived in the courtyard of his house. Yet though much closer to nature than us, nature was also perceived as potentially more hostile. He could be killed by lions or bears. If drought did not cause famine, locusts or disease could be equally fatal.

By contrast modern urban dwellers are largely cocooned from the environment. We live in solid centrally heated houses supplied by well organised utility companies, depend on machines for transport, food and clothing production, and never feel threatened by other kinds of life except perhaps bacteria and viruses. Whereas in ancient times people lived in daily contact with the natural world, Westerners today only encounter it through TV or tourism or in vestigial form such as pets and gardening. But these are mere hobbies, optional extras not vital activities for human survival as they once were for nearly everyone.

Numerous historical, archaeological and geographical studies<sup>2</sup> as well as careful reading of the Old Testament text have given us a clear view of the life-style of ordinary Israelites in the period in which most of the texts were written roughly 1200 - 500 BC. The Israelite heartland, the hills of Judah and Samaria, would still have been heavily wooded when the Israelite tribes first settled there. They built their typical four-roomed houses round a courtyard and farmed the land around them. When the children grew up, the daughters married out but the sons stayed on the family estate, which they tried to enlarge by cutting down more trees. Apart from a few merchants, skilled workers, and those employed in the court, most people depended on their land and animals for survival. Figs, vines, and olives were grown on the terraced hills. Some grain would also have been planted on the terraces, and more in the valleys. Most families would have owned flocks of goats and sheep, which doubtless roamed far and wide looking for pasture. The most valuable animals were cattle which served as tractors as well as producing milk, meat and hides.

By and large the Old Testament paints a rosy picture of life in the land. Canaan is a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. Unlike Egypt which depended on human irrigation with the foot, Canaan is fed by rain from heaven (Deuteronomy 11: 11), and the grapes grow in

clusters so huge that they need two men to carry them (Numbers 13:23). The patriarchs' flocks flourished in the land (Genesis 26:14), while the psalmist rejoices that the 'valleys stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing.' (Psalm 65: 14)

But it was a precarious existence. Though the average winter rainfall of Israel is adequate (20"+), it is variable in its timing and quantity. Many a year it is 30% below average, which before modern irrigation would mean failure of many crops. And if that happened in two or three consecutive years, as it may well do, the average Israelite family would go bust or starve, if they did not emigrate or find a wealthy neighbour or relative to bale them out. Even in a year of average rainfall if the rain started late or ended early, crops would be poor. Without deep wells and sprinklers nothing humanly could be done to remedy the situation. Prayer, emigration or death were the only options when stores ran out (Genesis 12: 10; Ruth 1: 1).

Drought was not the only threat to life though. The woods were home in Bible times to numerous wild animals, such as lions and bears, which could kill humans and their livestock (1 Samuel 17:34). Survival could also be threatened by plagues of insects, such as locusts, or crop diseases (Deuteronomy 28: 22,39,42). Although Mesopotamians felt threatened by overpopulation, ancient Israel was concerned that for lack of energetic manpower they would not be able to keep the wild life at bay (Exodus 23:29) or prevent the cultivated vine terraces being overrun by briars and thistles (Proverbs 24: 30-34; Isaiah 7: 23).

The biblical writers were therefore fully involved with the natural environment. They knew at first hand the joys and problems of ancient Israelite agriculture. They recognised the natural fertility of the land given them by God, and saw this as one of his great blessings to them. But on the other hand they were well aware that their existence in the land could not be taken for granted: God could withhold the rain and that would bring national disaster, or mere sloth could bring personal ruin as the weeds gained the upper hand.

## **B. MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. Water and other natural resources**

This ambivalent situation is reflected in the texts that discuss the theology of the environment. Little is said about natural resources except water. Canaan is a 'land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills,.....a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.' 3 (Deuteronomy 8: 7-9). Deuteronomy expects these resources to be enjoyed thankfully: 'you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.' (8:10)

Deuteronomy's description of Canaan's bounty echoes the description of Eden in Genesis in which a large river flowed dividing into four branches presumably watering the many trees that it featured. Eden also contained gold and precious stones. Ezekiel also draws on this picture of Eden when he describes the new temple as having a river flowing out of it eastwards down the Kedron valley to the Dead Sea. 'When it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. And wherever the river goes every living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish...And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor

their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. (Ezekiel 47: 8-12). The very last chapter of the Bible pictures the heavenly Jerusalem as a new Garden of Eden.

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22: 1-2) Within the Bible water is often a symbol for the life-giving power of God, but in the hot dry climate of the Middle East it also inescapably reflects reality. Without water everything quickly dies.

## 2. Plants

Whereas earth's natural resources are largely a topic for wonder and grateful appropriation (e.g. Job 36:27 - 38: 38; Psalm 104), much more is said about plant life, its place in God's plan, and man's relationship to it. The account of creation in Genesis 1 climaxes with the creation of man on the sixth day and in a sense all the work of the previous days prepares for this. Day three with the emergence of the dry land from the universal ocean and the growth of the first plants is a large step in preparing a habitable environment for human life. Two main kinds of vegetation are distinguished, plants and trees. Both are characterised by bearing seed and propagating themselves according to their kind. The repeated references to seed bearing and kinds of vegetation hint at God's concern that life should continue and affirm that the different types of plant life are organised by him.

The relevance of plants to human existence becomes explicit on day six after the creation of land animals and man. Plants and trees bearing seed are assigned to man to eat, whereas other plants are given to the animals to eat. The reason for the distinction is not very clear, but basically man is assigned fruits and grain, whereas the animals are expected to eat grass and leaves. Both animals and man are here portrayed as originally all vegetarians, an idea that was widespread in ancient cultures. It is also striking that whereas in Babylonian thinking mankind was created to provide the gods with food, in Genesis God provides food for man.

The idea that God provides fruit trees to feed man is the starting point of the garden of Eden story. As soon as man has been placed in the garden 'the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food'. Adam is then told he may freely eat of every tree save one. In this way Genesis stresses God's bountiful provision for human need: in the beginning human beings enjoyed a more than adequate supply of high-quality food with minimum effort.

However mankind's decision to eat the one forbidden fruit led to a complete change in their situation. Fig leaves are used to cover their nakedness and they hide from God among the trees. A comic situation were its longer-term consequences not so tragic, for Adam and Eve are punished by expulsion from this rich orchard to labour on the land to grow their own food. The curse on the ground describes man's plight ever since:

Cursed is the ground because of you  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.  
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.  
(Genesis 3: 17-19)

In other words the difficulties faced by Israelite farmers go back to the first man disobeying God's only command to him: 'Do not eat of that tree.' Disobedience to God's command is thus the root cause of human problems in food production.

The law and the prophets continually hammer home the message that obedience to the law will ensure plentiful rains and good harvests, while disobedience will result in drought and other agricultural disasters. 'If you ..observe my commandments...I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.' 'If you will not hearken to me... I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase.'(Leviticus 26: 3-4, 18-20)

The fall profoundly affected eating patterns in another way. Genesis 3 is just the beginning of what has been termed an avalanche of sin. Adam and Eve's sin is followed by Cain's murder of his brother, Lamech's seventy-sevenfold vengeance, and universal violence by man and beast ('all flesh') fills the earth, so that God decides to 'make an end of all flesh'. The flood follows, destroying all mankind save Noah's family and pairs of every living creature. Genesis implies that the pre-flood violence does not just affect human beings but animals too, so that they attack each other and man as well. But Noah's sacrifice changes God's attitude to the endemic sinfulness and violence fundamentally, so that he makes a covenant with all flesh never to destroy the earth again in a flood. He also permits meat-eating with safeguards to underline the preciousness of life. Man may eat meat, as long as he avoids consuming the blood, for that is its life.(Genesis 8:20 - 9: 5).

In this way Genesis explains the situation that faced the peasant farmers of ancient Palestine. Good crops are God's gifts to an obedient people whereas crop failure is a mark of God's anger at human sin. It is the primeval sin of Adam that explains the difficulties faced by the ancient Israelite farmer. But this does not exhaust Old Testament thought about the significance of plants. Strong flourishing trees were admired, and often the righteous are compared to them (Ps 1:3; 52:8; 92: 12-14). In particular the vine is often a symbol of Israel (Ps 80: 8-16; Isaiah 5: 1-7). It also appears that wheat may also symbolise Israel or its tribes (Leviticus 24: 5-6). It is striking that these highly valued foodstuffs which are also used in sacrifice may be identified with the chosen people: something similar happens with clean animals, i.e. those which may be eaten and often sacrificed, which also clearly symbolise Israel. The relationship between man and plants is not so intimate as that between animals and man, but these parallels do suggest there is a relationship even if weak between human and plant life, so that Isaiah can say 'All flesh is grass...surely the people is grass.'(40: 6-7)

The law looks forward to a day when the nation will be so obedient that it will fully enjoy God's blessings, that the harvests will be so huge that they will not have finished gathering in one before the next is ready. 'Your threshing shall last to the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last to the time of sowing.'(Leviticus 26: 5) This hope becomes even brighter in the eschatological vision of the prophets. They look for the restoration to the prosperity of Eden

'The days are coming' says the LORD,  
when the ploughman shall overtake the reaper  
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.  
(Amos 9: 13)

Isaiah looks forward to a day when

The wilderness and dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom  
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly.  
(Isaiah 35: 1-2).

We have already looked at Ezekiel's vision of the new Jerusalem from which flows a huge river into the desert and makes the Dead Sea fresh. (47: 1-12). Thus in powerful images the prophets picture the perfecting of the environment so that it returns to the original peace and abundance that characterised creation at the beginning. A similar pattern characterises the prophets' handling of the animal world.

### 3. Animals

It was obvious to the ancients that man is much closer to the animals than any other part of creation, and Genesis while affirming this closeness also defines the differences between humans and animals quite carefully. For example birds, fishes, animals and man are all termed 'living creatures' (nephesh hayyah) Birds and fishes like man are 'created' ( a term used sparingly in Genesis 1 for the more dramatic stages of the creative process), they are all blessed by God, and commanded to be fruitful and multiply.<sup>4</sup> But only man is said to be made in God's image. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' It is because man alone is made in the divine image that he is given dominion over the rest of creation, a highly controversial topic in the environmental debate, so we shall pause and try and unpack Genesis' understanding of man's status here.

What constitutes the image of God has perplexed exegetes and theologians for centuries. It is something that distinguishes man from the animals and links him with God and the angels, so all sorts of human characteristics, rationality, speech, moral and spiritual powers, have been identified with the divine image. While there may be truth in many of these suggestions, we cannot be sure.<sup>5</sup> More help comes from ancient Near Eastern sources. In both Egypt and Babylon the king was often regarded as God's image, that is his representative on earth ruling on his behalf. While this does not explain the essence of the image, it certainly clarifies its function. Because man is made in God's image, he represents God on earth and rules for him. Making man in God's image and giving him responsibility for the rest of creation are closely connected in Genesis 1: 26: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish...birds...cattle and over all the earth.'

Psalm 8 puts the same ideas more explicitly and poetically:-

What is man that thou are mindful of him...?  
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,  
and dost crown him with glory and honour.  
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;  
thou hast put all things under his feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field.  
(Psalm 8: 4-7)

Where the Bible differs from Egypt and Mesopotamia is in affirming that every human being, male and female, not just the king is made in God's image. This means that every human life is sacred and must be protected (Genesis 9: 6). It also means that every human being is given authority over and responsibility for the rest of creation to manage it in the way that God would.

Two terms are used in Genesis to describe man's management function vis-a-vis the rest of creation. He is told to 'have dominion' (Hebrew *radah*) over other living creatures, fish, birds, cattle and creeping things and to 'subdue' (*kabash*) the earth. 'Have dominion' is quite a positive term for ruling. Whereas many people today have an anarchist streak, or at least an antipathy to those in authority, that was not the official outlook of the ancient Near East, who saw kings as essentially benevolent and concerned with their subjects' welfare. Psalm 72 puts this message powerfully:

Give the king thy justice, O God,  
May he judge thy people with righteousness  
and thy poor with justice!  
Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,  
and the hills, in righteousness!  
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,  
give deliverance to the needy,  
and crush the oppressor!  
(Psalm 72: 1-3)

To 'have dominion' means to be in charge of something, e.g. workers (1 Kings 4: 24; 9: 23). To be sure some people may abuse their authority and exercise power harshly (Leviticus 25: 43), but that is clearly not the intention here. Man is created in God's image, and so as his representative is expected to act in a Godlike way, and God throughout Genesis 1 and 2 is portrayed as a thoroughly creation-friendly deity. Furthermore as I shall argue below Genesis depicts a solidarity of man with the animals that precludes an exploitation of his power over them to their disadvantage.

But 'fill the earth and subdue it' appears to strike a different note. 'Subdue' is used elsewhere in two main senses. When people are subdued, they are often turned into slaves (Jeremiah 34:11, 16; Nehemiah 5: 5), which sounds harsh to modern ears though not

necessarily to ancient ones (Genesis 47: 19; Exodus 21: 5)6. The other sense of ‘subdue’ means to ‘conquer’ the promised land (Joshua 18: 1; Numbers 32:22, 29). It may be that we have here the first hint of a very important theme in Genesis, the promise of the land of Canaan. What is clear is that subduing the land is the sequel to and probably the consequence of ‘multiplying and filling the earth’. Several times the Old Testament links depopulation of the land with it being overrun by wild beasts and reverting to jungle. For example ‘I will not drive them (the Canaanites) out from before you in one year lest the land become desolate and the wild beasts multiply against you.’ (Exodus 23: 29; cf. Leviticus 26:21-22; Isaiah 7:23-24; Hosea 2: 12). For ancient Israelites the battle with nature was real, and without sufficient manpower it would be lost. But that human beings must control their environment is not a licence for unrestrained exploitation. Genesis 1 depicts God as controlling and organising chaos, creating light, land, seas and all life, but in no way is he hostile to what he creates. It is all very good. So it follows that his appointed representatives should recognise the goodness of creation and treat it accordingly. That man should not prey on the animals or animals attack man is further suggested by the primeval vegetarianism of all living creatures (1: 29-30)

Genesis 1 thus suggests that man’s relationship to the rest of creation should be characterised by solidarity, benevolence and control. The same positive relationship is portrayed in Genesis 2, while chapter 3 portrays its breakdown. Like man animals are made out of the dust of the ground, and become living beings(2: 7, 19). It is not said that animals have had the breath of life breathed into them as man has, but other parallels between verses 7 and 19 imply this, as does Ecclesiastes 3: 19 ‘they all have the same breath’. Indeed the animals are created as helpers for man; obviously in the pre-machine era humans were much more dependent on animals than they are today. The emphasis in this passage is of course on the fact that no animal exactly meets man’s needs, which are only met by the creation of woman. But we must not overlook what is presupposed, that animals are both companions and helpers of man. Finally the authority of man over the animals is again asserted by his naming of them: ‘whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.’(2: 19)

Genesis 2 thus develops the picture of Genesis 1. It suggests that there is more to human-animal relationships than just common origin and nature. Animals are intended to be man’s companions and helpers, and to be subject to his authority. This was obviously not the case in Bible lands in Bible times and Genesis 3 shows how this state of affairs developed. The clever snake implies that it knows more than God and thus persuades the human couple to submit to its authority. This begins the eternal struggle between man and the animal focused in the danger posed by snakes:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel. (3: 15)

Whereas traditional readers have tended to understand this text theologically as the protevangelium, the first announcement of the gospel, and liberal commentators as etiology, why snakes bite humans, it is best to see it as both. One of the effects of the fall is hostility between man and the animal kingdom, but ultimately the seed of Eve will

triumph over the serpent's seed thus restoring man's authority over the animals which here also symbolise the powers of evil<sup>7</sup>.

More hints of the changed relationship between humans and animals are the use of animal skins to clothe Adam and Eve and the offering of animal sacrifice by Abel. Just as man was sentenced to return to the dust as a result of the fall, so animals also experience death for man's benefit. But it is the flood story that portrays most clearly the solidarity between man and beast as well as the conflict. The flood was triggered by an earth filled with violence in which all flesh (that is man and other living creatures) had corrupted itself. Genesis implies that it was not simply intra-human violence such as Cain and Lamech practised, it was violence between man and beast and possibly between different animals that God objected to. This is clear after the flood when animals as well as men who take human life are sentenced to death. 'For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man.' (9:5) Furthermore a fear of man is imposed on the animal kingdom and permission is given to eat meat, as long as blood is not consumed (9:2-4).

But despite the intense animosity between man and the animals implied by the flood story, it does at the same time underline the solidarity between them. Noah is of course instructed not simply to save his own family but a pair of every type of animal by embarking them in the ark. The flood starts to abate when 'God remembered Noah and the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.' (8:1). Much later God said to Jonah, 'Should I not pity Nineveh.. in which there more than 120,000 persons ...and also much cattle?' For his part Noah's kindness towards his animal passengers is beautifully summed up in his handling of the dove. But most striking of all is that the covenant made after the flood is not made simply between God and Noah, but 'with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth.' 'When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature.' (9:10, 16).

The solidarity between man and the animals is also demonstrated by the most important institution of sacrifice. It is Noah's offering of animal sacrifice that turned the anger that prompted the flood into the eternal covenant just discussed. (6:5 cf. 8:21). Running through sacrificial thought is the idea of substitution, namely that in some much disputed sense the animal represents the human offerer. This is clearest in the offering of the firstborn.

Originally first-born sons were consecrated to God, but by the offering of a lamb they could be redeemed. (Exodus 13:2, 12-13). The food laws also imply a strong connection between the human and animal worlds. Leviticus 11 (cf Deuteronomy 14) sets out the basic principles of Kosher food. No blood may be consumed out of respect for life. Only certain types of bird, land animals, and fish may be eaten: symbolically this reminded the Israelites that God had chosen only them out of all the peoples on earth. But incidentally it must have discouraged hunting many types of wild life because they could not have been eaten. Whereas for example in Assyria lion-hunting was a royal sport.

The dominant note in the rest of the Old Testament is of the solidarity even intimacy between animals and man<sup>8</sup>. A good number of personal names, Deborah 'bee', Caleb 'dog', Rachel 'ewe', to mention just a few, are names of animals. In Jacob's blessing many of the tribes are compared to animals. (Genesis 49). In several psalms Israel is compared to sheep. Proverbs draws various lessons from animal behaviour, while the

Song of Songs likens the lovers variously to mares, doves, gazelle, a young stag, and to fawns.

But the tension between man and beast implied in Genesis 3: 15 surfaces from time to time, most notably in the plagues of Egypt when the land is successively overrun by frogs, gnats, flies, and locusts as well as other disasters. In the desert Israel was punished by fiery serpents (Exodus 8-10; Numbers 21: 5-9). And the covenant curses envisage wild beasts making havoc of disobedient Israel (Leviticus 26: 22). But the long-term vision is positive: once again the vision of a restored Eden with peace and harmony between man and the animals and between the different animals is held up by Isaiah. Even the carnivores will become vegetarians again in the messianic age.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall feed;  
their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. (Isaiah 11: 6-7)

Debate has raged among commentators as to how literally this passage should be taken. Animals throughout the Bible are used to symbolise people and especially nations, so is Isaiah essentially just predicting peace between Israel and her enemies in this passage? Such an interpretation certainly makes good sense of what follows which predicts all nations submitting to a second David (11: 10-16). It would seem to me that at least such a politico-symbolic meaning is required here, but since violence between the animals is always seen as mirroring violence between humans, a more literal understanding is also probable. It is often thought that Mark sees a fulfilment of this prophecy in Jesus' experience in the wilderness: 1: 15 'he was with the wild beasts' (and was obviously not assaulted by them) indicates the dawn of the messianic age.

Thus in many ways the Old Testament vision for animals matches that of its view of plant life. Originally in God's creation there was peace and plenty, but this harmony was destroyed by sin, so that now life is a hard struggle to survive. Crops fail and animals eat each other. But in the messianic age there will be peace among men, peace between the animals, and food for all. Hosea brings all these together:

I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land... In that day... I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil.' (Hosea 2: 18-21)

## **C. MAN'S OBLIGATIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. Plants**

The Old Testament sees man as God's representative on earth, responsible for filling it with human beings and managing the other living creatures. Because he is made in a God's image, man must act in a Godlike way towards his fellow creatures. There is a solidarity between humans and animals both in nature and under the covenant, that implies a mutuality of interest: animals are man's helpers, so man should care for the animals implies Genesis. The Bible looks forward to a restored Eden, where water will be abundant and crops flourish, and man and the animals will live in peace together.

However reality is different. Drought, crop failure, attacks from animals and human beings characterised life from time to time in ancient as well as modern times. How does one live under these circumstances? How should man react to aggression by plants, animals, and other human beings? How do the principles of solidarity with and benevolent rule of the environment affect daily life? How do biblical ideals and hopes modify behaviour? The laws of the Old Testament represent an uneasy compromise between ideals and the facts of daily life. For example the permission to eat meat is a concession introduced after the flood, but God still insists that blood is forbidden, because to consume it would show no respect for life. Many legislative provisions in the Pentateuch must be read this way: they define not the perfect way to live, but a floor for behaviour below which no one dare fall without the threat of punishment.

There are few laws about plant life. Exodus 22: 5-6 insists on compensation to the owner where his crops are damaged by fire or grazing, but this is more a question of property rights than environmental protection. But Deuteronomy's (20: 19-20) ban on the cutting down of fruit trees in war to prosecute a siege does sound more environmentally motivated: 'you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field men that they should be besieged by you?' When fruit trees are planted, they must be allowed to crop without being picked for three years. The fourth year's produce must be given to God, and then from the fifth year on it may be harvested normally (Leviticus 19: 23-25). This patient waiting until the fifth year will ensure that they 'yield more richly for you.' It seems likely that the enhanced crop is seen as God's reward for giving to him the first fruits, not an automatic result of good horticultural practice. Throughout the law there is a requirement that first fruits of all crops, firstling domestic animals, and an annual tithe should be dedicated to God. As Proverbs 3: 9-10 puts it:

Honour the LORD with your substance  
and with the first fruits of all your produce;  
then your barns will be filled with plenty  
and your vats will be bursting with wine.

There are a number of rules on gleaning and fruit-picking designed to help the poor of society, but they do not shed any light on attitudes to plant life (Leviticus 19: 9-10; Deuteronomy 23: 24-25; 24: 19-22). There is a strong prohibition against mixtures. 'You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff.' (Leviticus 19:19 cf Deuteronomy 22: 9-11). The motivation for the mixture ban is obscure. It may be related to the emphasis in Genesis 1 that God created all plants and living creatures 'according to their kinds'. Is it a case of 'What God has set apart, let no man confuse'? Or has it a more symbolic value related to the stern prohibition of intermarriage between Israel and the Canaanites? The food laws certainly reminded Israel

of their election to be the people of God. These mixture laws could be making a similar point: Israel is different and distinct from the nations.

The law that looks most ecological in intent is that dealing with the seventh year: 'For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild beasts may eat.' (Exodus 23: 10-11 cf. Leviticus 25: 2-7). Here the land is portrayed as needing a sabbath (cf 26: 34-35), though the major thrust is once again on helping the poor. Most strikingly too it helps the wild animals, who more frequently are viewed as a major threat to human survival.

This legislation while not comprehensive does seem to convey a gentle non-exploitative approach to the environment. Resting the land every seventh year, giving first fruits to God, helping the poor and even the wild beasts are the reasons appealed to in order to justify these rules. Maximum yields the texts suggest will be achieved by putting God first and letting the poor share the harvest, not by overworking the land and retaining all its fruits for oneself.

## 2. Animals

The most striking example of human solidarity with the animals comes in the Ten Commandments, the central covenantal text of the Old Testament. The Sabbath rest is for the whole household including 'your cattle' according to Exodus 20: Deuteronomy is even more specific 'you shall not do any work...or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle.'(5:14). Genesis and Hosea include animals within the covenant: the Decalogue allows them to rest on the sabbath. Animals are mentioned again in the tenth Commandment against coveting.

The Ten Commandments seem to grant a moral status to animals; the laws on goring oxen appear to presuppose a degree of moral responsibility. As Genesis 9: 5 insists an ox who kills a human must die, but Exodus insists that the ox should be killed by stoning, a method of execution usually reserved for grave offences.

Striking for their humaneness are the laws dealing with the animals of an enemy. 'If you meet your enemy's ox or his ass going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the ass of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it, you shall help him to lift it up.'(Exodus 23: 4-5 cf. Deuteronomy 22: 1-4). Why does the law emphasise that the animals belong to an enemy? Presumably because no one should need encouragement to help a friend's beast. The law seems to be suggesting that even if you do not love the owner you should still love his animal.

Concern for animals' feelings seem to underline a law forbidding new-borns to be removed from their mother in the first week of life even for sacrifice, (Leviticus 22: 27-29). And in any case mother and young must not be killed on the same day, a bird and its eggs or chicks must not be taken at the same time (Leviticus 22: 28; Deuteronomy 22: 6-7). Three times the law forbids cooking a kid in its mother's milk (Exodus 23: 19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). The reason for this ban are never explained, but it could well be a combination of outrage at the apparent heartlessness of such a custom and the subversion of the natural order that it implies: milk should be used for sustaining the kid's life not

cooking it. Sustaining the life of man, animals and plants is a recurrent element of biblical thinking and some of these laws may have a similar function: they curb practices that could jeopardise the survival of a species, e.g. killing a bird and its chicks. The ban on castrating animals (Leviticus 22: 24) would seem more likely to reflect the legislator's devotion to maintaining life than concern for animal comfort. On the other hand 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain' is surely motivated by considerations of welfare (Deuteronomy 25: 4)

As I have already said legislation sets a minimum standard of behaviour: it does not specify the ideal. An Israelite finding a bird's nest who took both mother and chicks would be breaking the law, but if he took neither he would not. Indeed he might be coming closer to the lawgiver's ideal. Proverbs 12: 10 probably sums up the underlying philosophy of the Bible when it says:

A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast,  
but the mercy of the wicked is cruel.

It is not simply that the righteous wants his animal to survive, rather he cares for its *nephesh*. Though 'life' may be a suitable translation of *nephesh* sometimes, here it has more the sense of 'soul, inner self', so that we could paraphrase it 'a good man cares for the welfare of his animals.'

In examining Genesis we saw that man and the animals shared similar origins and natures and therefore there was a solidarity between them. Before the fall animals and humans lived in harmony together, but this degenerated into a universal reign of violence, which had to be regulated after the flood. The prophets look forward to a restoration of the original harmony, but in the interim the law constitutes the main means of regulating the potential violence and maintaining a semblance of order. Yet these regulations do not lose sight of the original goals of the creator. While man's control of the animals is reasserted through these laws, there is a benevolence towards other living creatures enshrined in them that expresses the solidarity between man and beast that goes back to creation. Man, the image of God on earth, should like his creator be concerned with the living creatures he reigns over: these laws show a concern not simply that animals should survive, but that those who serve man, particularly oxen and donkeys, should be treated with kindness.

#### **D. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE MESSIANIC AGE**

We observed that the prophets looked forward to a messianic age when there would be abundant crops and peace would reign among all creatures. We saw that Mark indicates the arrival of this age by the experience of Jesus living peaceably with the wild animals in the desert. But does not the rest of the New Testament suggest that this present earth will be destroyed and there will be a fresh start with a new heaven and a new earth. If this is the case, it perhaps does not matter if we let the present earth go to hell.

There are several difficulties with this position. Firstly, it is so contrary to the Old Testament vision that one would need very compelling texts in the New Testament to embrace it. As we have seen the book of Revelation deliberately describes the new Jerusalem in terms of a garden of Eden and the vision of Ezekiel. Furthermore the doctrine of the resurrection of the body is surely a paradigm of transformation and perfection of the

present existence rather its replacement. If God the Father glorified the earthly body of his Son by raising him from the dead and has promised to raise every human being in a similar resurrection, it would be reasonable to suppose that the rest of this earthly creation will be similarly transformed in the last day. Finally there is only one text that may speak of the destruction of the earth at the last day, but this understanding rests on an improbably textual reading. The fire that 2 Peter 3: 8 - 13 should probably be understood as purifying the earth and destroying the elements, that is the heavenly beings opposed to God. The new heavens and new earth results from this cosmic day of judgment will be a purified and glorified heaven and earth, just as we ourselves hope to purified and glorified on that day.<sup>9</sup>

## **E. THE BIBLE AND TODAY'S CRISIS**

It is obvious that we cannot transfer biblical laws straight over into our modern debate. Our society is so different that a literal transfer of the rules, e.g. muzzling oxen is out of the question. We have seen that their society depended on animals much more than we do in our mechanised age, that they felt threatened by drought, famine, and wild animals, whereas we do not. The wonderful yields obtained by modern farmers would surely have seemed like Eden to ancient Israelites. Similarly wild life, apart from insects, bacteria and the like, has been well and truly subdued, and mankind has made great progress in filling the earth. In many respects we seem closer to the golden age looked forward to by the prophets than they were.

On the other hand if the gloomier predictions of the climatologists prove correct, we could be facing problems that will make the occasional biblical drought and famine seem trivial by comparison. The curses of Deuteronomy 28: 20-24 for breaking the law will start to operate at a global scale instead of nationally. Resistant strains of bugs may wipe out crops or people despite the best efforts of modern science. How far are these threats the result of disregarding biblical principles to the environment?

But I shall leave you to answer these questions yourselves. What I was asked to talk about was the Bible and the environmental crisis. I think it is evident that the biblical writers would indeed be concerned about it. They saw mankind managing the rest of creation on God's behalf who was a benevolent creator who cared for his creatures. Man, his vicegerent was expected to do the same. But in Bible times this was difficult; drought, famine and wild animals often threatened human existence. But modern technology has transformed the situation. If thanks to technology human beings can now organise water and food supplies so that there is enough for everyone, even if because of political systems everyone does not get enough, technology coupled with human greed, is now destroying the human environment at unparalleled rate. Extinction of species as a result of human activity, e.g. deforestation and urbanisation is now occurring a hundred times faster than it would naturally.<sup>10</sup> Ghillean Prance, till recently director of Kew Gardens and fellow of this college, is concerned about GM foods for the same reason: he does not think they are likely to harm the eater, but they will destroy the diversity of wildlife in our fields, and what is more, these crops are being developed mostly to bring greater profits to the companies not meet real needs.<sup>11</sup> Activities that lead to the destruction of species are clearly quite incompatible with managing creation benevolently.

But though technology has led to man exploiting and destroying nature at a greater pace than at any time in human history, we should recognise that it is not technology itself that

is to blame, but technology in the service of profit and money-making. We see this quite easily when we look at the destruction of tropical rain forests or the depletion of fish stocks around our coasts. And we rich consumers of Europe and North America have a particular responsibility: a leaflet I picked up yesterday told me that whereas an average Indian consumes half his fair share of the world's resources, the average Briton consumes two and a half times his fair share of the world's resources. The USA with 5% of the world's population produces 60% of its Carbon Dioxide. That as we know is responsible for global warming. I think It is rather pleasant that England is a little warmer than when I was young, but climatologists tell us that the effects will be dire in the poor tropical areas of the world. There will be fierce climatic disruption in the tropics, such as hurricanes, rising sea levels, extremes of drought and flooding. 1998 saw Bangladesh, Nicaragua, and Honduras were all devastated by unusual climatic conditions.

More recently Venezuela and Mozambique suffered catastrophic flooding, and just this week another serious Ethiopian famine has been proclaimed. I do not know how far these disasters can be put down to global warming. But if we think the scientific analysis may be right, we do not need a sophisticated theology to tell us what to do. 'Love your neighbour as yourself' surely demands that we are as concerned as much with the effects of our actions on our neighbours in Africa as on our neighbours in Cheltenham. That is why we ought to take the environmental crisis seriously.

## **F. FOOTNOTES**

1. R. Bauckham, Transformation 16: 3 (1999) p. 100.
2. These issues are discussed in Bible dictionaries and atlases. Two full and classic treatments are D. Baly, The Geography of the Bible and R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961)
3. For a description of ancient mining Job 28: 1-11. Copper was mined at Timnah in Bible times.
4. Though the land animals are not explicitly said to be created, blessed or told to multiply, I think this is just to avoid too much repetition and give a little variety. Since everything else created on days 5 and 6 is created, blessed and multiplied, the idea carries over to the animals too.
5. For fuller discussion see C. Westermann, Genesis 1-11 (London: SPCK, 1984) pp.142-55, and G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15 (Waco: Word, 1987) pp. 29-33.
6. Slavery offered security because basic needs were guaranteed by a rich employer, whereas freedom for a peasant farmer carried all the risks associated in today's society with self-employment.
7. For a fuller justification of this approach see G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1-15 pp.79-81
8. On the OT approach to animals B. Janowski, U Neumann-Gorsolke and U. Glessmer, Gefährten und Feinde des Menschen: Das Tier in der Lebenswelt des alten Israel (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993) contains a useful collection of essays on the topic. 9. E.C. Lucas, Transformation 16: 3 (1999) p. 97

10. M. Monaghan, *Priests and People*, 14. 2 (February 2000) p. 66.

11. G. Prance, *Priests and People*, 14. 2 (February 2000) p. 47-48.

## 1. Credits

This is the the text of the 1st Annual JRI Lecture, given by Professor Gordon Wenham as part of C&GCHE Environment Week.

This text will form one part of a forthcoming online biblical resource.<sup>24</sup>

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# XIII. CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM - A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW PERSPECTIVE ON YOU AND THE EARTH

Written by Dr. Ray Bohlin

*Dr. Bohlin applies a biblical point of view in determining a concerned Christian relationship to environmentalism. As Christians, we know we have been made stewards of this earth having a responsibility to care for it. Understanding our relationship to God and to the rest of creation gives us the right perspective to apply to this task.*

## 1. Is There an Environmental Problem?

The news media are full of stories concerning environmental disasters of one kind or another, from global warming to endangered species to destruction of the rain forests to nuclear accidents. Some are real and some are imaginary, but its not hard to notice that the environmental issue receives very little attention in Christian circles. There are so many other significant issues that occupy our attention that we seem to think of the environment as somebody else's issue. Many Christians are openly skeptical of the reality of any environmental crisis. Its viewed as a liberal issue, or New Age propaganda, or just plain unimportant since this earth will be destroyed after the millennium. What we fail to realize is that Christians have a sacred responsibility to the earth and the creatures within it. The earth is being affected by humans in an unprecedented manner, and we do not know what the short or long term effects will be.

Calvin DeWitt, in his book *The Environment and the Christian*,<sup>{1}</sup> lists seven degradations of the earth. First, land is being converted from wilderness to agricultural use and from agricultural use to urban areas at an ever-increasing rate. Some of these lands cannot be reclaimed at all, at least not in the near future.

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Gordon Wenham, *The Bible and the Environment*, [www.jri.org.uk/resource/bible\\_wenham.htm](http://www.jri.org.uk/resource/bible_wenham.htm)

Second, as many as three species a day become extinct. Even if this figure is exaggerated, we still need to realize that once a species has disappeared, it is gone. Neither the species nor the role it occupied in the ecosystem can be retrieved.

Third, land continues to be degraded by the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. While many farmers are rebelling against this trend and growing their produce organically or without chemicals, the most profitable and largest growers still use an abundance of chemicals.

Fourth, the treatment of hazardous chemicals and wastes continues as an unsolved problem. Storing of medium term nuclear wastes is still largely an unsolved problem.

Fifth, pollution is rapidly becoming a global problem. Human garbage turns up on the shores of uninhabited South Pacific islands, far from the shipping lanes.

Sixth, our atmosphere appears to be changing. Is it warming due to the increase of gases like carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels? Is the ozone layer shrinking due to the use of chemicals contained in refrigerators, air conditioners, spray cans, and fire extinguishers? While I remain skeptical of the global threat that many see, pollution continues to be a local and regional concern prompting ever more stringent emission controls for our automobiles.

Seventh, we are losing the experiences of cultures that have lived in harmony with the creation for hundreds or even thousands years. Cultures such as the Mennonites and Amish, as well as those of the rain forests, are crowded out by the expansion of civilization.

Never before have human beings wielded so much power over God's creation. How should we as Christians think about these problems?

## 2. The Environmental Ethics of Naturalism and Pantheism

Some people have blamed Western culture's Judeo-Christian heritage for the environmental crisis. These critics point squarely at Genesis 1:26-28, where God commands His new creation, man, to have dominion over the earth and to rule and subdue it. [\[2\]](#) This mandate is seen as a clear license to exploit the earth for man's own purposes. With this kind of philosophy, they ask, how can the earth ever be saved? While I will deal with the inaccuracy of this interpretation a little later, you can see why many of the leaders in the environmental movement are calling for a radical shift away from this Christian position. But what are the alternatives?

The need to survive provides a rationale for environmental concern within an *evolutionary* or *naturalistic* world view. Survival of the human species is the ultimate value. Man cannot continue to survive without a healthy planet. We must act to preserve the earth in order to assure the future of our children.

The evolutionary or naturalistic view of nature is, however, ultimately pragmatic. That is, nature has value only as long as we need it. The value of nature is contingent on the whim

of egotistical man. {3} If, as technology increases, we are able to artificially reproduce portions of the ecosystem for our survival needs, then certain aspects of nature lose their significance. We no longer need them to survive. This view is ultimately destructive, because man will possess only that which he needs. The rest of nature can be discarded.

In the fictional universe of *Star Trek*, vacations are spent in a computer generated virtual reality and meals are produced by molecular manipulation. No gardens, herds, or parks are needed. What value does nature have then?

Another alternative is the *pantheistic* or *New Age* worldview. Superficially, this view offers some hope. All of nature is equal because all is god and god is all. Nature is respected and valued because it is part of the essence of god. If humans have value, then nature has value.

But while pantheism elevates nature, it simultaneously degrades man and will ultimately degrade nature as well. To the pantheist, man has no more value than a blade of grass. In India the rats and cows consume needed grain and spread disease with the blessings of the pantheists. To restrict the rats and cows would be to restrict god, so man takes second place to the rats and cows. Man is a part of nature, yet it is man that is being restricted. So ultimately, all of nature is degraded. {4}

Pantheism claims that what is, is right. To clean up the environment would mean eliminating the undesirable elements. But, since god is all and in all, how can there be any undesirable elements? Pantheism fails because it makes no distinctions between man and nature.

### 3. The Christian Environmental Ethic

A true Christian environmental ethic differs from the naturalistic and pantheistic ethics in that it is based on the reality of God as Creator and man as his image-bearer and steward. God is the Creator of nature, not part of nature. He transcends nature (Gen. 1-2; Job 38-41; Ps. 19, 24, 104; Rom 1:18-20; Col. 1:16-17). All of nature, including man, is equal in its origin. Nature has value in and of itself because God created it. Nature's value is intrinsic; it will not change because the fact of its creation will not change. {5} The rock, the tree, and the cat deserve our respect because God made them to be as they are. {6}

While man is a creature and therefore is identified with the other creatures, he is also created in God's image. It is this image that separates humans from the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 139:13-16). {7} God did not bestow His image anywhere else in nature.

Therefore, while a cat has value because God created it, it is inappropriate to romanticize the cat as though it had human emotions. All God's creatures glorify Him by their very existence, but only one is able to worship and serve Him by an act of the will.

But a responsibility goes along with bearing the image of God. In its proper sense, man's rule and dominion over the earth is that of a steward or a caretaker, not a reckless exploiter. Man is not sovereign over the lower orders of creation. Ownership is in the hands of the Lord. {8}

God told Adam and Eve to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15), and we may certainly use nature for our benefit, but we may only use it as God intends. An effective steward understands that which he oversees, and science can help us discover the intricacies of nature.

Technology puts the creation to man's use, but unnecessary waste and pollution degrades it and spoils the creation's ability to give glory to its Creator. I think it is helpful to realize that we are to exercise dominion over nature, not as though we are entitled to exploit it, but as something borrowed or held in trust.

Recall that in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the steward who merely buried his talent out of fear of losing it was severely chastised. What little he did have was taken away and given to those who already had a great deal.<sup>{9}</sup> When Christ returns, His earth may well be handed back to Him rusted, corroded, polluted, and ugly. To what degree will you or I be held responsible?

This more thoroughly biblical view of nature and the environment will allow us to see more clearly the challenges that lie ahead. Our stewardship of the earth must grapple with the reality that it does not belong to us but to God though we have been given permission to use the earth for our basic needs.

## 4. Abuse of Dominion

While God intended us to live in harmony with nature, we have more often than not been at odds with nature. This reality tells us that man has not fulfilled his mandate. The source of our ecological crisis lies in man's fallen nature and the abuse of his dominion.

Man is a rebel who has set himself at the center of the universe. He has exploited created things as though they were nothing in themselves and as though he has an autonomous right to do so.<sup>{10}</sup> Man's abuse of his dominion becomes clear when we look at the value we place on time and money. Our often uncontrolled greed and haste have led to the deterioration of the environment.<sup>{11}</sup> We evaluate projects almost exclusively in terms of their potential impact on humans.

For instance, builders know that it is faster and more cost effective to bulldoze trees that are growing on the site of a proposed subdivision than it is to build the houses around them. Even if the uprooted trees are replaced with saplings once the houses are constructed, the loss of the mature trees enhances erosion, eliminates a means of absorbing pollutants, producing oxygen, and providing shade, and produces a scar that heals slowly if at all.

Building around the trees, while more expensive and time-consuming, minimizes the destructive impact of human society on God's earth. But, because of man's sinful heart, the first option has been utilized more often than not.

Christians we must treat nature as having value in itself, and we must be careful to exercise dominion without being destructive.<sup>{12}</sup> To quote Francis Schaeffer, We have the right to rid our house of ants; but what we have no right to do is to forget to honor the ant as God made it, out in the place where God made the ant to be. When we meet the ant

on the sidewalk, we step over him. He is a creature, like ourselves; not made in the image of God, it is true, but equal with man as far as creation is concerned. [{13}](#)

The Bible contains numerous examples of the care with which we are expected to treat the environment. Leviticus 25:1-12 speaks of the care Israel was to have for the land.

Deuteronomy 25:4 and 22:6 indicates the proper care for domestic animals and a respect for wildlife. In Isaiah 5:8-10 the Lord judges those who have misused the land. Job 38:25-28 and Psalm 104:27-30 speak of God's nurture and care for His creation. Psalm 104 tells us that certain places were made with certain animals in mind. This would make our national parks and wilderness preserves a biblical concept. And Jesus spoke on two occasions of how much the Father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Matt. 6:26, 10:29). How can we do less?

## 5. Christian Responsibility

I believe that as Christians we have a responsibility to the earth that exceeds that of unredeemed people. We are the only ones who are rightly related to the Creator. We should be showing others the way to environmental responsibility.

Christians, of all people, should not be destroyers, Schaeffer said. [{14}](#) We may cut down a tree to build a house or to make a fire, but not just to cut it down. While there is nothing wrong with profit in the marketplace, in some cases we must voluntarily limit our profit in order to protect the environment. [{15}](#)

When the church puts belief into practice, our humanity and sense of beauty are restored. [{16}](#) But this is not what we see. Concern for the environment is not on the front burner of most evangelical Christians. The church has failed in its mission of steward of the earth.

We have spoken out loudly against the materialism of science as expressed in the issues of abortion, human dignity, evolution, and genetic engineering, but have shown ourselves to be little more than materialists in our technological orientation towards nature. [{17}](#) All too often Christians have adopted a mindset similar to a naturalist that would assert that simply more technology will answer our problems. In this respect we have essentially abandoned this very Christian issue.

By failing to fulfill our responsibilities to the earth, we are also losing a great evangelistic opportunity. Many young people in our society are seeking an improved environment, yet they think that most Christians don't care about ecological issues and that most churches offer no opportunity for involvement. [{18}](#) For example, in many churches today you can find soft drink machines dispensing aluminum cans with no receptacle provided to recycle the aluminum, one of our most profitable recyclable materials.

As a result, other worldviews and religions have made the environmental issue their own. Because the environmental movement has been co-opted by those involved in the New Age Movement particularly, many Christians have begun to confuse interest in the environment with interest in pantheism and have hesitated to get involved. But we cannot allow the enemy to take over leadership in an area that is rightfully ours.

As the redeemed of the earth, our motivation to care for the land is even higher than that of the evolutionist, the Buddhist, or the advocate of the New Age. Jesus has redeemed all of the effects of the curse, including our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with the creation (1 Cor. 15:21-22, Rom. 5:12-21). Although the heavens and the earth will eventually be destroyed, we should still work for healing now.

### **For Further Reading**

Beisner, E. Calvin. *Prospects for Growth: a Biblical View of Population, Resources, and the Future*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990.

DeWitt, Calvin B., Ed. *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991.

Schaeffer, Francis. *Pollution and the Death of Man: a Christian View of Ecology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1970.

### **Notes**

1. Calvin DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Does the New Testament Say About the Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).
2. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155 (1967):1203-07.
3. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 26-27.
4. Ibid, 30-33.
5. Ibid, 47-49.
6. Ibid, 54-55.
7. Ibid, 49-50.
8. Ibid, 69.
9. Ibid, 69-70.
10. Ibid, 71.
11. Ibid, 83.
12. Ibid, 74-75.
13. Ibid, 74.
14. Ibid, 74.
15. Ibid, 90-91.
16. Ibid, 92-93.
17. Ibid, 85.
18. Ibid, 85.

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### **About the Author**

<sup>25</sup> Raymond G. Bohlin, Christian Environmentalism - A Biblical Worldview Perspective on You and the Earth, [http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian\\_Environmentalism.htm](http://www.probe.org/site/c.fdKEIMNsEoG/b.4218299/k.7078/Christian_Environmentalism.htm)



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### **(1) What is Probe?**

Probe Ministries is a non-profit ministry whose mission is to assist the church in renewing the minds of believers with a Christian worldview and to equip the church to engage the world for Christ. Probe fulfills this mission through our Mind Games conferences for youth and adults, our 3-minute daily radio program, and our extensive Web site at [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).

Further information about Probe's materials and ministry may be obtained by contacting us at:

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## **XIV.**

### **A Scriptural Call for Environmental Stewardship**

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

*Psalms 24:1*

Christians for Environmental Stewardship is dedicated to reaching the Evangelical and Conservative Christian churches with a scriptural message of environmental stewardship. We measure our stewardship by healthy ecosystems and sustainable, responsible consumption. We are calling on all Christians to search the scriptures to better understand the heart of God in relation to His creation. The Bible says that God expects, even demands, that we be stewards of His creation. Scripture is undisputable. God created the different species of plants and animals, blessed them, protected them and made a covenant with them.

Every time we, as humans, drive a species to extinction, we are stating that what God created, we can destroy. There is no scripture to support that view. Every time a species goes extinct, we are defaulting on the account that God has called us to manage. We are at the crossroads, able to choose to save or to destroy. It is our choice. The Bible is clear that creation expresses God's wisdom and power. Christians are called to be stewards, to nurture, to protect, to preserve His creation.

### **God Created the Earth and All of Nature in it**

*Psalms 104:25,30.* In wisdom you made them all, the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number - living things both large and small... When you send your Spirit, they are created and you renew the earth.

*John 1:3.* Through Him all things were made: without Him nothing was made that has been made.

*Colossians 1:16-17.* All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

### **God has a Relationship with All of His Creation**

*Psalms 96:10-13.* The Lord reigns... Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the seas resound and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy, they will sing before the Lord for He comes, He comes to judge the earth.

*Isaiah 43:20-21.* The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen.

*Deut. 32:1-2.* Listen, Oh heavens, and I will speak, hear, Oh earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

*Job 37:14-18.* Listen to this, Job. Stop and consider God's wonders. Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of Him who is perfect in knowledge?

*Psalms 104:25, 27.* Animals, both small and great.. they all wait for Thee to give them their food in due season.

*Matt 6:26.* Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And are you not worth much more than they?

### **God's Power is Seen in Nature**

*Joshua 2:11.* For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below.

*Romans 1:20.* For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

*Psalms 104:24.* How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number - living things both large and small.

### **God Calls All of His Creation to Worship**

*Psalms 19:1.* The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

*Isaiah 55:12-13.* The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. All this will be a memorial for the Lord, a sign that for all time will not be cut off.

*Nehemiah 9:6.* You made the heavens, even the highest heavens and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You gave life to everything and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

*Psalms 8:3-8.* When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man.

*I Chron. 16:7,30-34.* Tremble before Him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. Let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns!"

*Rev 5:13.* Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever."

*Job 9:5-10.* But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though no one wished to dispute with Him, he could not answer Him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, His power is vast. Who has resisted Him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine.

### **God Teaches Humans through Nature**

*Job 12:7-10.* But ask the animals, and they will teach you; or birds of the air and they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you; or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the lord has done this. In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

*Romans 1:19-20.* For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made. So they are without excuse.

*Isaiah 11:9.* They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

### **God Expects Humans to be His Stewards with Nature**

*Genesis 1:26.* Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*Lev. 25:23-24.* The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

*Ezekiel 34:2-4.* Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not the shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you did not take care of the flock! You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

*Ezekiel 34:10.* O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock.

*Ezekiel 34:17-18.* As for you, my flock... Is it not enough for you to feed on good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?

*Isaiah 24:4-6.* The earth dries up and withers, the world languished and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth lies under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt.

*Jer. 2:7.* I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and you made my inheritance detestable.

*Luke 16:2,10,13.* And He called him and said to him, "What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward. He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous in much. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

*James 5:5.* You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

*Mark 4:19.* ...and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.

*Revelation 11:18.* The nations were angry and your wrath has come. The time has come for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

### **God Expects Us to Obey Him in our Lifestyle**

*Luke 12:15,23,34.* And He said to them, "Beware and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does life consist of his possessions. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

*Leviticus 26:3-4,6.* If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you rain in its season and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit... and I will grant peace in the land.

### **God Expects Us to Obey His Commands**

*1 Peter 3:17.* It is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right, rather than for doing what is wrong.

*Psalms 37:34.* Wait for the lord and keep his way.

*Exodus 23:2.* Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.

*Hebrews 10:30-31.* For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

### **Scriptural Defense of Endangered Species**

#### **Fact #1 God Created the Different Species of Plants and Animals**

*Genesis 1:11-12.* God created plants.

Then God said, "let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced

vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

*Genesis 1:20-21.* God created fish and birds.

And God said, "let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

*Genesis 1:24-25.* God created animals.

And God said, "let the land produce living creatures according to their kind: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

### **Fact #2 God Blessed the Different Species of Plants and Animals**

*Genesis 1:22.* God blessed [the birds and sea animals], and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number."

### **Fact #3 God Protected the Different Species**

*Genesis 6:19-21.* God said, "You are to bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and them." Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

*Genesis 7:8-10.* Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

### **Fact # 4 God Made an Eternal Covenant with the Different Species of Plants and Animals**

*Genesis 9:8-9.* Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you - the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you - every living Creature on the earth."

*Genesis 9:12-13.* And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

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Scripture clearly states that God created, blessed, protected and made a covenant with the different species. As stewards of His creation we are called to do no less. It is our scriptural and moral duty to protect species and their habitat.

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## HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD AND HIS CREATION?

1. Read the foregoing Bible study. Learn the key points. Realize that how we care for creation must be raised to a moral issue, not simply viewed as an economic one.
2. Join Christians for Environmental Stewardship and stand up for God's creation.
3. Take the Bible study, copy it and pass it around. Ask family and friends to consider working with you on getting the message out.
4. Encourage your pastor and church leaders to study scripture to determine God's will towards the environment.
5. Contact your elected officials. Let them know that you are a Christian who believes that the Bible is clear that we must protect the environment from greed and exploitation.
6. Vote your conscience and protect the environmental policies such as the Endangered Species Act.
7. Live like a shepherd, not like a wolf. Remember, recycling is an act of worship!

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