

***RENEWING CREATION:***



**ANSWERS TO  
OBJECTIONS**

**Written and compiled by  
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# **RENEWING CREATION: ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS**

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# INTRODUCTION

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*

(1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

- Jesus Christ is Creator, Integrator, and Reconciler; yet many who call on his name abuse, neglect and do not give a care about creation. That irony is there for all to see. Honouring the Creator in word, they destroy God's works in deed. Praising God from whom all blessings flow, they diminish and destroy God's creatures here below. The pieces of this puzzle do not fit! One piece says, 'We honour the Great Master!' The other piece says, 'We despise his great masterpiece!'
  - Calvin B. DeWitt, 1998: *Caring for Creation: Responsible Stewardship of God's Handiwork*, page 16.
- Had we put as much effort into preventing environmental catastrophe as we've spent on making excuses for inaction, we would have solved it by now. Everywhere I look, I see people engaged in furious attempts to fend off the moral challenge it presents.

The commonest current excuse is this: "I bet those protesters have phones/go on holiday/wear leather shoes." In other words, we won't listen to anyone who is not living naked in a barrel, subsisting only on murky water. Of course, if you are living naked in a barrel we will dismiss you too, because you're a hippie weirdo. Every messenger, and every message they bear, is disqualified on the grounds of either impurity or purity.

As the environmental crisis accelerates, and as protest movements like *YouthStrike4Climate* and *Extinction Rebellion* make it harder not to see what we face, people discover more inventive means of shutting their eyes and shedding responsibility. Underlying these excuses is a deep-rooted belief that if we really are in trouble, someone somewhere will come to our rescue: "they" won't let it happen. But there is no they, just us.

- George Monbiot, "Only rebellion will prevent an ecological apocalypse", *The Guardian*, Monday 15 April 2019.

- ...right understanding remains necessary if we are to know how to think and act. It is moreover our conviction that right understanding about ourselves and the world depends on God's revelation of himself to us in his Word.
  - Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo, 2018: *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, page 24.
- ...it is difficult but possible to get men to understand that pollution is biologically disastrous, aesthetically offensive, equally obviously economically self-destructive and socially reductive of the quality of human life. But it is a very difficult job to get even Christians to see that so to deal with the Creation is *Christianly* blasphemous. A proper doctrine of creation and redemption would make it perfectly clear that from a Christian point of view the ecological crisis presents us not simply with moral tasks but requires of us a freshly renovated and fundamental theology of the first article whereby the Christian faith defines whence the Creation was formed, and why, and

by whom, and to what end.

- Joseph Sittler, 1970: "Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility", *Zygon* 5, June, page 179.

- One thing is clear: if current trends continue, we will not. And that is qualitatively and epochally new. If religion does not speak to [these things], it is an obsolete distraction.

- Daniel C. Maguire, 1993: *The Moral Code of Christianity and Judaism*, page 13.

- We have to walk people who are in a drugged state, keep them moving. That is not an exaggerated reference about where we are and what is happening in the dissolution of the earth's ecosystems.

- Thomas Berry, 1991: *Befriending the Earth*, page 95.

- Our point is not that religion is either a good thing or a bad thing. Our point is only that the changes that are now needed in society are at a level that stirs religious passions... Getting there, if it happens at all, will be a religious event.

- Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb Jr., 1994: *For The Common Good*, page 381.

- Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience to God today concerns the responsibility of the Christian in a technological society towards creation and God's will for his creation. If our hope is in a temporal and secular humanism of technological and political progress, we will find ourselves, in the name of Christ, joining in the stupidity and barbarism of those who are despoiling His creation in order to make money or get power for themselves. But our hope must be in God. And he who hopes in God will find himself sooner or later making apparently hopeless and useless protests against the barbarism of power.

- Merton, Thomas: 1998: *Dancing in the Water of Life: The Journals of Thomas Merton*, Volume 5: 1963-65. Reflection for April 15, 1965.

- For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an "ecological conversion", whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

- Pope Francis I, 2015: *Praise be To You: Laudati Si: On Care For Our Common Home*, Section 217, page 144.

- Only those who do not sense the stars and galaxies declaring the glory of God can be *indifferent* to the pollution that hides them from view.

- Tony Campolo, 1992: *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, page 29.

Indifference can be extremely damaging in the long run. It is often generated by the personal disadvantages of facing up to a pressing issue. In other words, self-interest driven

by inconvenience.

"An Inconvenient Truth" was the name Davis Guggenheim gave to his 2006 concert documentary film. Al Gore applied this term to climate change, referring to an inescapable fact that many would prefer to ignore.

It is indeed true that some people want to ignore environmental problems even though the evidence for them is becoming increasingly difficult to deny. It is *particularly* ironic that so many people of faith claim to know the Artist but lack any strong motivation for protecting the artwork.

Wendell Berry is scathing in his assessment:

*Despite its protests to the contrary, modern Christianity has become willy-nilly the religion of the state and the economic status quo. Because it has so exclusively dedicated itself to incanting anemic souls to Heaven, it has been made the tool of much earthly villainy. It has, for the most part, stood silently by while a predatory economy has ravaged the world, destroyed its natural beauty and health, divided and plundered its human communities and households (2002: 319).*

Even if there is only a smidgen of truth in such criticism, it is not surprising that many today call the Church to confession and renewal. As God's followers, we believe that our faith is relevant to the issues of the day. Why is it, then, that we aren't doing more to respect the Creator in the way we treat creation? Perhaps it is because so many of us remain unclear about God's perspective on the environment. All of us live under the same sky, but we don't all have the same horizon.

Over the time that I have been involved in the Christian environmental movement, I have heard nearly every possible objection and excuse for disregarding the Biblical mandate and choosing not to be involved in caring for what God has made. Many people think we don't need to take care of the earth for one reason or another. This book addresses thirty of the most common issues that arise, citing answers from a range of experts and commentators.

The reflections in this collection are two-edged: they should nourish assurance in the minds of committed environmentalists, and prepare them for engaging with those who are still skeptical, especially for answering their issues and misgivings, exploding the eco-myths and lies as well as creating healthy doubt in their minds.

They are like miniature road maps in the search for an authentic and biblical Christian response to the pressing environmental issues of our day. Road maps are useful at any time, but especially in this time when the landscape seems to have changed so radically that many wander around lost, and when the old road maps have been scorned, mutilated, or discarded. Whether you are asking the questions yourself, or responding to others who do, I hope they prove to be helpful.

Perhaps there will be times when the writers accurately encapsulate what you've been thinking privately. They might also express a view that you profoundly disagree with, which is fine. Disagreement is part of learning. Maybe, at the very least, you'll be provoked to think

about something afresh, from a new angle or an altered perspective. As you read, you may also sense that some very common human character flaws are being exposed for scrutiny, such as pride, greed, self-interest and a tendency toward a limited, earthly, short-term perspective. What you read will indeed become food for thought.

Tony Campolo says: *It took evangelical Christians a long time to wake up to the fact that the Bible calls us to be socially responsible. I hope and pray that it does not take as long to realize that the Bible also calls us to be environmentally responsible. Too much is at stake and the time is very short* (1992: ix).

I agree with Campolo. The need for us to take seriously our responsibility within creation has never been greater, and the possible consequences of not doing so have never been so cataclysmic. If this book removes any of the impediments, and enables us to more intentionally carry out our God-ordained rule as His agents for the restoration of nature, it will have achieved its purpose.

In one sense, perhaps we should thank all those who make excuses not to act. They serve to awaken a sleeping giant. People that have never had to think about serious issues, stood up for themselves, had their voices heard, or put their bodies on the line, are now stirred and outraged, and some are within the Church.

My earnest prayer is for the church to regain its confidence not only in the saving grace of God in Christ, but also in the renewal of the entire created order, all of which the Bible tells us has been made possible through Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection.

Phillip Donnell  
Tauranga, New Zealand  
April 2020

# **15**

# **MAJOR**

# **OBJECTIONS**



## OBJECTION 1

# THE EARTH IS DESTINED FOR DESTRUCTION, SO WHY BOTHER?

**If this present earth is going to be destroyed eventually, what is the point of our taking care of it now? Why get sentimental about a container that has served its purpose?**

### Phillip Donnell

The fate of the Earth is certainly a key aspect of biblical eschatology. Peter says that our great hope for the final state of eternity is new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells — the same as John in Revelation 21. Debate rages, however, as to what precedes that final state.

My grandfather liked charts, especially ones that depicted “the last days”. I recall his explaining one on the lounge wall which graphically portrayed dispensational stages in human history and beyond, including the eternal state. One glaring and frightening feature was an image of our planet engulfed in flames. It was an image that always bothered me.

Keith Dyer has summed up what he calls “the eschatology of inevitable disaster that dominates much of popular theology” in six broad principles:

1. *The principle of imminent cataclysm* - Earth is headed for disaster (sooner rather than later).
2. *The principle of disconnectedness* - we humans don't have to share or feel responsible for Earth's fate (salvation is for humans, not Earth).
3. *The principle of inevitability* - there's nothing we (or Earth) can do about it.
4. *The principle of transcendence* - what really matters is the next world (or 'heavenism' as Habel describes it).
5. *The principle of sovereignty* - God is in ultimate (even direct) control of all this.
6. *The principle of self-interest* - God will rapture 'believers' out of this mess in the nick of time.

(in Habel and Balabanski (eds), 2002: 45)

A key question arises out of these six commonly-held notions: Will the new earth really be the result of God destroying the present material universe and starting all over again, or will it be the culmination of a more gradual restoration process which I may participate in and which God will ultimately complete? For many people, the answer to this question significantly determines whether there is any point at all in seeking to care and conserve creation in the here and now. Their reasoning goes like this: Isn't God going to destroy this earth anyway? If it is all going to be annihilated and obliterated, then who really cares? Why get sentimental about a container that has served its purpose and is about to be completely replaced? Why bother? Negative attitudes to creation's future inevitably lead to neglect at

best, rampant destruction at worst. But if it can be shown that the Earth is not actually going to be destroyed in judgment, the primary objection to Christians combating environmental degradation vanishes.

After outlining his six principles, Dyer goes on to comment: *It comes as no surprise that within this kind of operational framework, every ecological disaster and every sign of degenerating human behavior is seen as proof that 'the end times' are indeed upon us. This in turn tends to reinforce faith as a kind of grim paralysis, stoically enduring the decline of our planet in the hope of something better in the next life... Long-term policies to address the underlying causes of environmental and social degradation are simply irrelevant to those who are convinced that things have to get worse before they can get better and that they will only get better through the direct intervention of God to bring this sorry planet to an end. In Norman Habel's words, those who hold such a perspective 'reduce Earth to a ball of corrupted matter about to be thrown into the waste dump of eternity'* (in Habel and Balabanski (eds), 2002: 46)

For years, I heard that this world would be destroyed completely when Christ returned in judgment. But deep down something felt wrong, and as I started reading the Bible myself, my questions grew, so I looked into the issue. I wanted to know whether the Bible really does teach that the creation itself has no future. I discovered some interesting facts. Here are some reasons why modern thinkers increasingly struggle with the “do away with/start over” scenario...

- THE "OBLITERATION" IDEA IS RELATIVELY RECENT

According to Dave Bookless, the notion that earth will be destroyed “*isn't what most people have believed down through the ages. It's a relatively modern view that grew up alongside the Industrial Revolution*”. He says: “*Perhaps the link is unfair, but I sometimes think it's been very convenient to believe the earth is disposable, at a time when we've been exploiting and destroying its resources as never before.*” (2008: 15)

It has been rightly noted that the view of Earth being obliterated only emerged as the cosmic understanding of redemption lost ground in Western Christendom after the Reformation as a result of the powerful force of the Enlightenment and the growth of secularism. In particular, the origin of the bleak apocalyptic outlook espoused by so many may be found in nineteenth and twentieth century America. Western science, fundamentalist biblicism, and the pressure to find a religious justification for the exploitative components of industrialization, combined to change the landscape of eschatological interpretation, finding expression in the dispensationalism of Darby and Scofield. The outcome was “*large numbers of Bible-believing Christians who seem to be trapped into inactivity by such a world view (or rather, world-denying view) - faithfully tending our rose gardens while the tropical rainforests are destroyed to appease our profligate consumption*” (Keith Dyer in Habel and Balabanski (eds), 2002: 48)

Over the past 30 years, an increasing number of voices have echoed the great leaders of the early church (before the King James Version!), asserting that the new earth will not be something totally different and divorced from the present one, but more like a renovation and restoration of it. They reject the concepts of annihilation of the present cosmos and of a

sharp discontinuity between the old earth and the new. Wayne Grudem, for example, states categorically: *"The Bible leads us to believe that the earth will be renewed, not recreated"* (2009: 166).

As many prominent theologians from the mainstream of Christian tradition have insisted in the past, including Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley, we hope for the redemption of all creation, a notion which lies at the very heart of the gospel.

- THE REAL PROBLEM IS SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

If God's going to destroy the creation, why does he make it 'very good' (Genesis 1:31), and continue to sustain it, delight in it, and renew it (Psalm 104)? The problem is not the materiality of the creation, from which we need to be released. The problem is sin and its ruinous consequences. Angelic rebels, and later Adam and Eve, took nature with them when they fell. When God sets out on the long road of redemption, his goal is to remove sin and its effects so that the good creation can again be his kingdom. His plan is to destroy the enemy of his good creation (Genesis 3:15; I John 3:8), not to destroy the creation itself. In short, God did not create matter just to throw it away.

Anthony Hoekema (1979: 281) makes a valid point when he says: *"If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory. For then Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when he shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan's evil machinations."*

It is salient to observe that in Revelation 21-22, the great passage where heaven and earth are braided together, seven elements of the old order are abolished. The sea, symbol of primeval chaos and the beast's abode, is gone. Death, both untimely and natural, is no more. Mourning, crying and pain disappear. God's curse (of Genesis 3) is repealed, lifted, and abrogated. And last, the night, realm of darkness and deception, is banished. The end result is a world of *shalom*.

- THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Jewish writing contained a genre known as apocalyptic literature. It used highly symbolic language to describe this-worldly events, or as Tom Wright puts it: "to evoke the cosmic or theological *meaning* of events in the space-time world by means of a sometimes complex system of metaphors" (1999: 27). The chapter in question clearly fits within this genre.

For example, Isaiah depicts the destruction of the city of Babylon as a time when "the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon shall not shed its light" (13:10), possibly referring to the obscuring effect of smoke. Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple being accompanied by earthquakes (Mark 13). The former does not allude to astronomy nor the latter to geology. Rather both events are to be understood as metaphorically "earth-shattering".

Peter's writing here very much reflects the apocalyptic genre found elsewhere in the Bible

(such as Matthew 24, Isaiah 13 and 34, and Malachi 3), so any expectation that the fire of 2 Peter 3 is literal may well be misplaced.

- MISTRANSLATIONS HAVE HIDDEN A VERY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATION

2 Peter chapter 3 is, in my experience, the passage that is most often used as a "proof text" by those who see the earth as doomed and therefore abrogate any responsibility to exercise environmental stewardship. Poor and confusing translations of 2 Peter 3 from the original Greek have a lot to answer for. Here are several examples:

**- vs.7,10: annihilated or purified? Burned up or disclosed?**

*The question is whether the fire of judgment will annihilate or purify the world. Fire can do both. In Scripture the fire of judgment destroys that which is evil but purifies what is good. Malachi speaks of the refiner's fire that destroys impurities but purifies metal. In a similar way Paul speaks of fire of judgment that tests the quality of human work. It will either burn it up in destruction or purify it (I Corinthians 3:13-15). It is like that with the creation; the creation will be purified but the evil that pollutes it will be destroyed. The language of 2 Peter can mean both things.*

- Michael W. Goheen in his article *(Re)New(ed) Creation: The End of the Story*

Michael Goheen is one of many recent commentators suggesting that Peter is describing a "cleansing fire" rather than a destructive fire. They come to that conclusion because the word translated "burned up" (in verse 10) in the KJV (*katesetai*) does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts, which contain a word meaning "found" or "shown" (*heuresetai*). This word enjoys the earliest and best textual support. It refers to finding or discovering. Our word "eureka" comes from it. It is translated "laid bare" in the TNIV, NIV and NEB. The NRSV has "will be disclosed." The Bauer Lexicon suggests a slight modification of this: be found as a "result of judicial investigation."

Mick Pope comments as follows:

*This understanding of purification and renewal is made clear when we think carefully about how we are to understand verse 10 and the phrase "the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed." The word "disclosed" reflects, as Bouma-Prediger notes, the Greek word **heurisko** from where we get our English word heuristic, which is a method of finding things out. This helps shape our understanding of the role of the fire, and what it means for the elements to be dissolved. In this reading, the fire is for the purification of the Earth from sin, and not the physical Earth's actual destruction. The idea of a process of refining is alluded to back in 1 Peter 1:7 where Peter writes "so that the genuineness of your faith - being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory when Jesus Christ is revealed". The phrase "may be found" reflects our word **heurisko** again, and the revelation of Jesus refers to his return to earth as described in the book of 2 Peter.*

*It is in this context that the language of destruction in verse 11-12 should be properly understood. The day of the Lord's appearing is about the judgment of deeds: the works are laid bare or revealed (verse 10) so that the new heavens and Earth may only consist of righteousness (verse 13). This has implications for the current lifestyle of the believer - which should be characterized not by the abandonment of the world to its fiery fate, but rather by*

*holy living.*

(Dawson and Pope, 2014: 63)

What this passage seems to be all about is that the earth and everything in it will be 'found out', that is, exposed and laid bare before God's judgement so that the wicked and all their works will no longer be able to hide or find any protection. Everything that prevents humanity standing naked before God will be removed.

Theologian Cornelis Venema adds another shade of meaning:

*"The word used in the older manuscripts conveys the idea of a process that does not so much destroy or burn up, but uncovers or **lays open for discovery** the creation, now in a renewed state of pristine purity"* (2000: 468, emphasis mine) God's fire of judgment will consume the bad but refine the good, exposing things as they really are (compare Malachi 2:2-4, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). Once the judgment has taken place and the fallen powers have been destroyed, the earth will be revealed again for what it was originally intended to be. For Venema, the emphasis is *"all about the cleansing fire of purifying judgment, rather than the destructive furnace of blind anger...God judges in order to enable a new beginning, not in order to completely wipe out."* (2000: 468)

Dave Bookless says of verse 7: *"...the Old Testament background is critical. Mention of 'fire' and 'burned up' would not have taken people to images of exploding planets, but to Malachi 3:2-3 where God's judgment is seen as a refining fire, purifying and cleansing, not destroying but leaving the final result without blemish. What is destroyed is not the earth, but 'ungodly men' (verse 7)..."* (2008: 83)

#### **- v.10: physical or spiritual elements?**

The original word used here for "elements" is *stoicheion*. In the New Testament this word usually refers to the basic principles that had rebelled against God (see Galatians 4:3,9; Colossians 2:8,20). Accordingly, *"the 'elements' that will melt with heat are not the iron or carbon of the periodic table but the elemental spirits of this world. It is the distorted powers that have turned against God and prevented his righteous and just rule that are to be destroyed, so that God's kingdom rule might be fully established"* (Bookless, 2008: 83).

Like a good surgeon, God will remove all the cancerous growth caused by sin and evil in our world, so that a healthy new earth can be established, truly "the home of righteousness" (v.13)

#### **-v 10: pass away/vanish or be transformed?**

In v.10 Peter describes how the present earth and heaven will "pass away." He goes farther and three times says that there will be destruction of the present world:

Verse 10: "the elements will be destroyed with intense heat."

Verse 11: "these things are to be destroyed."

Verse 12: "the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat."

The question then is: Does this mean that the earth we live on and the heavens we live under will be totally done away with? And will God start over with a totally new creation?

It is salient to observe that the word Paul uses to describe what happens to the old nature of

the believer in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is the same word Peter uses v.10, and which John uses in Revelation 21:1, to refer to the fate of the old heavens, namely *parerchomai*. Like the old nature, the heavens will “pass away”, but this does not have to mean that they go out of existence; rather, there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away, somewhat like metamorphosis.

Dave Bookless comments:

*"...the New Testament speaks of Christians as 'new creations in Christ' (2 Corinthians 5:17). Does this mean that if I become a Christian my old physical body is thrown away like a cast-off snakeskin, and I now grow a different biological set of clothing? Of course not! I am the same flesh and bones and DNA as before, but in God's eyes I have indeed become a new creation, and a process of transformation has begun. At present this is invisible, but one day (when Jesus returns and God's kingdom is fully here) I will become a new person, not brand new, but fully renewed and restored... Just as God is into recycling broken, spoiled, messed-up people, and making them into new creations in Christ, so this whole damaged and groaning creation will be made new again."* (2008: 80).

**- v.13: new in origin/time or nature/quality?**

In English we have only one word for “new”, but in the Greek New Testament there are two: *neos* and *kainos*. The word *neos* means new in time or origin (as in our expression “brand new”), whereas the word *kainos* means new in nature or quality - different, unlike anything previously known.

Both in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 the Greek word used to designate the newness of the cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos* - *not brand new but new in nature and quality*. *Kainos* refers predominantly to a change in quality or essence rather than something new that has never previously been in existence. It does not imply replacement but renewal. Creation is restored, repaired, redeemed, renovated and rejuvenated, not a cosmos totally *other* than the present one, but one which stands in glorious continuity. This is no cosmetic makeover, but a comprehensive remodelling. God is an expert in recycling.

If Peter and John wanted to speak of something that was new in origin or time, they would have used *neos* instead of *kainos*. Again, this makes perfect sense when we go back to 2 Corinthians 5:17, which speaks of Christians as ‘new creations in Christ’ - *kainos*: new in nature, not new in origin.

Therefore, the expression “*new heavens and new earth*” means “*not the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present one, but the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present one*” (Hank Hanegraaff, 2000: 87).

- PETER'S ALLUSION TO THE NOAH STORY IS NOT CONSISTENT WITH THE TOTAL OBLITERATION VIEW

There is another cogent argument from 2 Peter 3 to show that the theme of continuity and restoration after judgment is what the author actually had in mind. In vs.5-7 the coming judgment is compared to the flood at the time of Noah (Genesis 9). Peter says that the fire of judgment the present world will face will be just like the floodwaters which engulfed the

earth at the time of Noah. Yet of course, the earth was not completely and utterly destroyed by the flood. It was cleansed, purified and finally laid bare, so that a new start - a new world - could begin. Cleansing without complete obliteration.

We also have to ask: Why did God rescue all those species in the Ark, and what about that saving Covenant with all living creatures and the Earth itself (Genesis 9:9-17)? In the Noah story God demonstrated that his saving intentions included all creation, both by the passenger list for the ark and, more remarkably, by who was included in the covenant promise not to destroy the earth ever again in such a way. God says: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." God has a unique and precious covenant with the earth itself, a promise he cannot break.

Consider the following four reflections on this analogy:

*...even though Peter predicts a destruction by fire, and even though in verse 6 he says that the world was "destroyed" by the original flood, Peter knows that as it was for Noah's flood, so it will be in the end: The result will not be destruction but renewal. Through Noah's ark God kept alive the variety of creatures he had made. When the waters dried up, the beautiful creation of God was still intact, ready to be rehabilitated.*

(Scott Hoezee, 1998: 99-100)

*With the whole planet freshly scrubbed and spouting life anew, God agreed to a covenant of contract that bound him not just to Noah but to every living creature. It promised one thing only: that God would never again destroy all creation. You could view the covenant with Noah as the barest minimum of a relationship: one party agrees not to obliterate the other. And yet even in that promise God limited himself. He, the sworn enemy of all evil in the universe, pledged to endure wickedness on this planet for a time - or rather, to solve it through some means other than annihilation.*

(Philip Yancey, 1992: 69)

*The analogy that 2 Peter uses in the immediate context is telling: the future judgment by fire is compared to the Flood of Noah's day, when 'the world of that time was deluged and destroyed' (3:6). The reference to the Flood narrative reminds readers of God's 'everlasting covenant' with all the creatures of the earth (Gen 9), of his faithfulness and commitment to his creation, of the promise anticipated in his call of Noah to save all non-human life through the waters of judgment. The waters of the Flood, like the fire of final judgment, certainly meant 'destruction' for a world corrupted by injustice and polluted by evil. But it is not a destruction into nothingness, a rubbing of this earth and a starting over with something else (all anachronistic ideas for first century readers). The earth that Noah and his family discovered after the waters receded was the same earth they had stood upon before the flood, yet it was also a new world, cleansed of the human evil and violence that had been corrupting and destroying it (cf Genesis 6:11-12). The 'new' world that emerges on the other side of judgment is quite clearly this world made new, a world purified and reclaimed: 'a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells' (2 Peter 3:13).*

(Jonathan Moo, 2016: 37)

*The second thing to note about this passage is the comparison between the return of Christ and the fire, with the Flood of Noah... in the Flood, the waters above the earth and the*

*oceans which were separated at creation come together in an act of "uncreation". The world returns to formlessness. This is not a material destruction as we would think of it, a complete obliteration of the Earth. Instead, the proper functioning of the creation is disrupted. Furthermore, Peter fails to mention the Ark, by which both humans and non-humans were saved from destruction. He also doesn't mention that the waters eventually retreated as an act of re-creation. He failed to mention these things because they were understood by his readers. Does this drawing of parallels between "destruction by fire" and the Flood help us in understanding Peter's approach to the "end of the world"? Certainly it does. It means that the destruction by fire is not an obliteration of what is, but an apocalyptic way of talking about its purification and renewal.*

(Mick Pope in Dawson and Pope, 2014: 62-63)

- BIBLICAL IMAGES OF THE NEW EARTH SOUND VERY MUCH LIKE THIS PRESENT EARTH MADE NEW

In Acts 3:21 Peter refers to *"the times of the restoration of all things of which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets."* What did the prophets say about the new earth? Isaiah 11:6–11 gives us an example:

*And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Cf. Isaiah 65:25; Micah 4:3.)*

If we're heading for an otherworldly heaven or a completely different version of the planet, why are the biblical images of 'new creation' so full of landscapes, rivers, wild animals and fruit trees, e.g. the lion and the lamb (in Isaiah 11), fruit trees with leaves for healing (in Ezekiel 47), the river flowing from the throne of God (in Revelation 22)?

This point is colourfully interpreted by Edward Thurneysen (1931: 209): *"The world into which we shall enter at the Parousia of Jesus Christ is therefore not another world; it is this world, this heaven, this earth; both...renewed. It is these forests, these fields, these cities, these streets, these people, that will be the scene of redemption. At present they are battlefields, full of the strife and sorrow of the not yet accomplished consummation; then they will be fields of victory, fields of harvest, where out of seed that was sown with tears the everlasting sheaves will be reaped and brought home."*

So history as we know it will come to an end with God at the centre. His glory will be so bright as to make a moon out of the sun (Revelation 21:23). And on the earth there will be a great sea of knowledge reflecting the glory of the Lord back to him. And just as the rejection of that knowledge brought a curse on the creation, so the restoration of that knowledge will bring blessing to the creation and the animals themselves will be free from the curse and reflect the beauty of the Lord.

Perhaps you used to think of heaven as some nebulous ghostly place where spirits wander around together, passing through each other, where you would reach out to shake



someone's hand only to find nothing to hold on to. Do you picture clouds with ghost-like figures riding about the expanse of the sky? Bring your thinking down to earth. Literally. God is going to resurrect, redeem, restore this universe, this world, just like He will your body.

You will live here! You will walk on grass and feel it on your feet. You will walk on streets, stand by rivers, see mountains, trees, people. There will be a city with gates that you will walk through. You will eat with Paul, Peter, and John. You will be able to walk, run, jump, swim, stand, sit, kneel, and sing!

We will be raised in a physical body which will dwell on this physical earth (made new) for all of eternity, and our God will make His dwelling with us on this redeemed earth. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus calls it "the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne." Creation will be "born again."

- OTHER BIBLE PASSAGES DON'T AGREE

The "obliteration" understanding of 2 Peter 3 is out of sync with what the Bibles says elsewhere about the future of planet Earth. The Bible most often portrays God purposing to redeem the earth and to invert the effects of the curse. Jesus comes to end history, to raise the dead and judge the world, to impart to God's children their final glory and to usher in a reconstructed universe. I have alluded to Isaiah above. Here I mention three further examples:

- In *Romans 8:20-21*, creation is described as 'waiting to be set free from its bondage to decay', instead of waiting to be taken out of existence. When Paul tells us that the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, so that it may be set free from its bondage to decay, he is saying that it is the *present* creation that will be liberated, not some totally different creation. The basic ideal expressed is that the new earth will issue from God's sovereign and redemptive work on what we have now.

Jonathan Moo and Robert White make a lengthy analysis of *Romans 8:18-24* (2014: 100-114), following which they comment:

*Paul makes it unmistakably clear in Romans 8 that the same creation in which we now live will participate in the new creation to come, that the Christian's longing for resurrection is matched by creation's longing for its own future liberation. But for many readers 2 Peter 3 seems to challenge us with quite a different picture and even call into question Paul's hopeful vision for creation... While we must be careful not to miss the unique message that each of these letters has for us, we are also right to seek coherence and consistency in what they reveal about Christian doctrine and to allow that which is clearer in one text to help us interpret that which is less clear in another... As it turns out, the popular caricature of the message of 2 Peter 3 proves inaccurate in any case when we take the time to explore beyond a superficial reading and consider the passage within its wider context. We will see that the apparent conflict between 2 Peter 3 and Romans 8 reflects primarily a difference in emphasis between these two texts rather than a substantive difference in eschatological vision.*

(pages 116-117)

A detailed examination of 2 Peter 3 is then presented (pages 117-124) before their summation:

*We live in expectation of God's promise to bring in the new creation, living now as those who are Christ's subjects, renewed through the Holy Spirit and enabled to do work that has genuine value before God. In this passage, Peter merely expands the new Testament picture by suggesting that God actually uses our efforts now to speed the day of his coming (page 125).*

- *Revelation 21:1* speaks of a new heaven and Earth. Spatial duality, however, is quite foreign to the world of prophetic and apocalyptic literature. Rather, this and other biblical texts portray heaven and Earth as interactive parallel universes. The language here is not to be taken as referring to the annihilation of Earth and its replacement by a totally new creation (Reid, 2000; Howard-Brook and Gwyther 1999). While maintaining the prerogative of the Creator to de-/re-create the creation, it also encourages our eager expectation of, and participation in, such a process.

In *Revelation 21:5* we read that God intends to make "all things new." Notice he says "all things new", not all new things. The word for "new" is *kainos* (new in the sense of nature or quality), not *neos* (new in the sense of origin or time). Dave Bookless puts it well:

*"It is worth noting that God speaks of his ultimate plan in terms of 'I am making everything new!' (Revelation 21:5). If God were going to start again from scratch, surely he would speak of making lots of new things, rather than making every (existing) thing new. Like a great sculptor restoring a damaged work of art, God is going to remove all that is corrupted by evil and sin and re-mould all that is good and beautiful and right within creation by making everything new again."* (2008: 80)

Eugene Boring (1989: 220) comments:

*Even though the first heaven and first earth have passed away, the scene continues very much as a this-worldly scene. This is due, in part, that the other world can be spoken of only in language and images from this world. More importantly, it is an affirmation of the significance of this world and history, even after the new heaven and new earth arrive. The vision of God in chapter 4 is fulfilled: God is the Creator. Yet the one who does not quench a smoking wick or break a bruised reed (Isa.42:3; Matthew 12:20) does not junk the cosmos and start anew – he renews the old and brings it to fulfilment. The advent of the heavenly city does not abolish all human efforts to build a decent earthly civilization but fulfils them. God does not make "all new things" but "all things new" (21:5).*

Douglas Moo concludes:

*Revelation reminds us from the beginning that the hope of God's people is not to escape to heaven but to 'reign on the earth' (5:10), and this reign is not confined to a temporary millennial period but encompasses the 'forever and ever' of the new creation (22:5).*

(cited in Bell and White, 2016: 38)

- THERE IS A CLEAR ANALOGY BETWEEN THE NEW EARTH AND THE RESURRECTION BODIES OF BELIEVERS.

Romans 8 and other passages indicate that there will be both continuity and discontinuity between the present body and the resurrection body. The differences, wonderful as they are, do not take away the continuity: it is we who shall be raised and it is we who shall be always with the Lord. Those raised with Christ, will not be a totally new set of human beings

but the people of God who have lived on this earth, apparently with our current personalities but devoid of sin. By analogy, we would expect that the new earth will not be totally different from the present one, but will be the present one wondrously renewed.

Douglas and Jonathan Moo's remarks are helpful:

*The physical resurrection of Jesus is...a sign – the only one we have – of what our own future resurrection might be like, of what life will be like at the time of what Jesus calls the **palingenesia**, the “renewal of all things” (Matt.19:28). We see that God is not finished with our physical bodies, nor with the whole of his good creation.*

(2018: 123)

*We add to this exegetical support for a transformation model an important theological point: the resurrection of the body. The destiny of God's people is to live forever in resurrected bodies; our bodies will be changed (I Co 15:51), not replaced. And this permanent embodiment demands a significant continuity of some kind between this world and the next.*

(2018: 164)

- THE LIFE, MINISTRY AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS BEGAN THE NEW CREATION.

Don't Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection show God's plans, not just for people but the whole creation: matter affirmed as Jesus took material form, the curse removed as he took the sin and alienation of all creation into himself, and creation radically renewed in Jesus' physically-resurrected body, providing a template for the renewal of all things?

Douglas and Jonathan Moo challenge us to look to Jesus for creation's goal: resurrection and new creation. In the kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurates, the new creation breaks into the old:

*...any discussion of Christian eschatology and the fate of the cosmos must begin and end with the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is both the sign of the general resurrection and the new creation to come, and the means by which it has been made possible...(2018: 123)*

Tom Wright (*Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 5,282 and *Simply Christian*, 2011: 79,99,185-202) develops the restoration scenario, pointing to *Easter* as a key argument. The Christian hope for “new heavens and new earth” has already come to life in Jesus, whose resurrection is “the utterly characteristic, prototypical and foundational event within the world as it has *begun to be*” and “*inaugurates* the new creation right within the middle of the old one.” He speaks of “the launching of the new creation *in the present*”. He sees a new earth as our eternal home, and convincingly argues that our view of life *after* death directly affects what we believe about life *before* death. If God intends to renew the whole creation – and if this has already begun in Jesus' resurrection – the church cannot stop at ‘saving souls’ but also work for God's kingdom in the wider world right now.

In light of the above, the only conclusion we can reach about the *traditional* interpretation of Peter's prophecy is "It ain't necessarily so". An equally, if not more accurate understanding is that God's judgment of all that is fallen, evil and sinful will mean a radical purification of the whole creation, but God's saving love towards all he has made will eventually lead to the remaking, reshaping and renewal of creation. 2 Peter 3 is not about the annihilation of this world in a final conflagration but about the refining fire of judgment

leading to the earth 'laid bare' – like a farmer's field before planting.

Mick Pope agrees:

*2 Peter 3 doesn't describe the literal burning up of the Earth but its refining. In the same way the Flood was an act of judgment and salvation, "uncreation" and re-creation, the fire in 2 Peter 3 talks about salvation as well as judgment (Dawson and Pope, 2014: 60).*

A closing illustration may be helpful. Imagine a child who is healthy in every way but somehow contracts a disease that begins to have a devastating effect on her body. The doctor diagnoses the disease and seeks to prescribe a remedy that will remove the disease and its debilitating effects. The doctor that destroys the patient and proclaims victory over the disease would be a poor doctor indeed! Similarly, God's redemptive remedy has the goal of destroying sin and its effects so that the creation can be healthy again, the way it was supposed to be. Salvation is the healing of the creation, not an escape out of it, or a doing away with it. When properly understood, 2 Peter 3 actually gives us great hope for the future of this planet, a future that will include great trauma but will finally lead to a gloriously renewed and restored creation.

Anthony Hoekema sums up: *"In his redemptive activity, God does not destroy the works of his hands, but cleanses them from sin and perfects them, so that they may finally reach the goal for which he created them. Applied to the problem at hand, this principle means that the new earth to which we look forward will not be totally different from the present one, but will be a renewal and glorification of the earth on which we now live"* (1979: 73).

Tomorrow morning, do yourself a favour. Get up and go to a window. Survey what you see. Where you are is where hope is coming. The new creation is the transfiguration of - not the doing away with - what you are looking at.

### **Michael Abbate**

People ask, "Isn't the planet going to burn anyway? Don't 2 Peter 3 and Hebrews 1 say this world will come to an end? If it's all ultimately going to be destroyed, what does it matter if it's not in pristine condition when it goes?"

Yes, like our physical bodies, this earth will be transformed in ways we do not understand. However, the earth will not be annihilated or wiped from the universe. God is not admitting defeat or failure and asking for a "do over." Instead, the earth will be transformed into the creation that God originally intended, not marred by sadness, violence, or pain.

Jesus explained the coming New Age as a *renewal* of all things, not a destruction and re-creation (Matthew 19:28). Something renewed is recognizable as the original, but fresh, clean, pure and in like-new condition. The risen Christ returned to this theme in Revelation 21 when he said that he was making everything on heaven and earth new.

In the first days of the neophyte Christian church, the apostle Peter preached that Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21).

Note that Jesus is coming to *restore* everything, not remake it or re-create it...

Perhaps people have found it convenient to think that this earth is going to be eliminated. Such thinking takes away the pressure to practice sacrificial stewardship. Maybe a faulty understanding of eternity has allowed us to abrogate our responsibility...

Since Scripture tells us that the earth is going to be renewed rather than eliminated and replaced, we should consider the potential eternal consequences of our activities here and now, both for our spiritual health and for the earth's spiritual health... we will have to explain ourselves and the way we treated his creation.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 98-100

### **Randy Alcorn**

We're told that a time is coming when God will restore *everything*. This is an inclusive promise. It encompasses far more than God merely restoring disembodied people to fellowship in a spirit realm... It is God restoring mankind to what we once were, what he designed us to be – fully embodied, righteous beings. And restoring the entire physical universe to what it once was...

God will restore everything *on Earth*. The prophets are never concerned about some far-off realm of disembodied spirits. They are concerned about the land, the inheritance, the city of Jerusalem, and the earth they walked on. Messiah will come from Heaven to Earth, not to take us away from Earth to Heaven, but to restore Earth to what he intended so he can live with us here forever.

Will the earth we know come to an end? Yes. To a *final* end? No.

- *Heaven*, 2004: 90

Still, many cannot reconcile the idea of redemption through restoration with the statements of 2 Peter 3:10 that "the heavens will disappear with a roar," and "the elements will be destroyed by fire," and "the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." John Piper says of this passage, "What Peter may well mean is that at the end of this age there will be cataclysmic events that bring this world to an end as we know it—not putting it out of existence, but wiping out all that is evil and cleansing it by fire and fitting it for an age of glory and righteousness and peace that will never end" (1995: 376)

I think the key to understanding the qualified meaning of these images of destruction in 2 Peter lies within the passage itself. The passage draws a parallel between the earth in the time of Noah, which was "destroyed" through the Flood, and the time to come when the present world will be destroyed in judgment again, this time not by water but by fire (2 Peter 3:6-7). The stated reference point for understanding the future destruction of the world is the Flood. The Flood was certainly cataclysmic and devastating. But did it obliterate the world, making it cease to exist? No. Noah and his family and the animals were delivered from God's judgment in order to re-inhabit a new world made ready for them by God's cleansing judgment. Flooding the whole world didn't destroy all the mountains (Genesis 8:4). Though many people believe that the Tigris and Euphrates rivers near Eden (Genesis 2:14) weren't the same rivers as those we know today, the fact that they were given the same names as the originals suggests some continuity.

The cleansing with fire will be more thorough than the Flood in that it will permanently eliminate sin. But just as God's judgment by water didn't make the earth permanently uninhabitable, neither will God's judgment by fire.

The King James Version translates 2 Peter 3:10 this way: "The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." But the word translated "burned up" does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts, which contain a word that means "found" or "shown." The New International Version translates it "laid bare," and the English Standard Version renders it as "exposed." God's fire of judgment will consume the bad but refine the good, exposing things as they really are.

Theologian Cornelius Venema explains, "The word used in the older and better manuscripts conveys the idea of a process that does not so much destroy or burn up, but uncovers or lays open for discovery the creation, now in a renewed state of pristine purity" (2000: 468). Likewise rejecting "burned up" as the best translation, Albert Wolters argues that "translations of this text have often been influenced by a world view that denies the continuity between the present and future state of creation" (1985: 57). Venema makes the connection between 2 Peter 3 and Romans 8 when he observes, "*Second Peter 3:5-13 confirms . . . the basic ideal also expressed, though in different language, in Romans 8. The new heavens and earth will issue from God's sovereign and redemptive work. . . It will involve the renewal of all things, not the creation of all new things . . . [and] it follows that the life to come in the new creation will be as rich and full of activity in the service of the Lord as was intended at the beginning.*" (2000: 469)

Several prominent ancient theologians acknowledged the continuity between the present Earth and the New Earth. Jerome often said that Heaven and Earth would not be annihilated but would be transformed into something better. Augustine wrote similarly, as did Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and many medieval theologians.

#### THE MEANING OF "NEW"

As we've seen, the expression "Heaven and Earth" is a biblical designation for the entire universe. So when Revelation 21:1 speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth," it indicates a transformation of the entire universe. The Greek word *kainos*, translated "new," indicates that the earth God creates won't merely be new as opposed to old, but new in quality and superior in character. According to Walter Bauer's lexicon, *kainos* means new "in the sense that what is old has become obsolete, and should be replaced by what is new. In such a case the new is, as a rule, superior in kind to the old."

It means, therefore, "not the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present one, but the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present one" (Hoekema, 1979: 280)

Paul uses the same word, *kainos*, when he speaks of a believer becoming "a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The New Earth will be the same as the old Earth, just as a new Christian is still the same person he was before. Different? Yes. But also the same.

When a house burns to the ground, the components of the house do not cease to exist, but

take on another form. According to the first law of thermodynamics (conservation of energy), the fire doesn't obliterate the wood but transforms it into different substances, including charcoal and carbon dioxide. What we consider annihilation is not what it appears.

Resurrection, however, goes beyond that. A new house is not made out of the materials of a house that burned, but out of new materials. Though it may be on the same ground, made according to the same blueprint, it's a different house. Resurrection, however, is about continuity—the same body that was destroyed is reconstructed into the new.

As God may gather the scattered DNA and atoms and molecules of our bodies, he will regather all he needs of the scorched and disfigured Earth. As our old bodies will be raised to new bodies, so the old Earth will be raised to become the New Earth. So, will the earth be destroyed or renewed? The answer is both—but the “destruction” will be temporal and partial, whereas the renewal will be eternal and complete.

- *Heaven*, 2004: 154-157

### **Dave Bookless**

There are two main answers to this question. First, whatever God has in mind for the future, the task of Christians now is to be obedient to God's command to care for the earth (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15). In one sense, it's none of our business if God wants to destroy what he's made – our job is to look after it until then. However, secondly, the idea that God might totally destroy the earth is actually built on very shaky biblical foundations. The fact is, whenever the Bible talks about the future of the earth it holds in tension the twin themes of destruction (judgment) and renewal (salvation). Often Christians have grabbed at one of these (usually destruction) and constructed a theology around it while totally ignoring passages that point in the other direction. A truly biblical understanding avoids both false extremes: the notion that God is going to destroy the earth completely, and the equally wrong idea that things will slowly improve and evolve towards perfection. Rather, a balanced Biblical understanding recognizes that God's judgment of all that is fallen, evil and sinful will mean a radical cleansing of the whole creation, but that God's saving love towards all he has made will eventually lead to the remaking, reshaping and renewal of creation.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 145-146

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

*Referring to 2 Peter 3, verse 10, he comments:*

To put it bluntly, this verse represents the most egregious mistranslation in the entire New Testament. The last clause of verse 10 in Greek is: kai ge kai ta en aute erga heurethesetai. The Greek verb in question here is heurethesetai, from heuresekein, “to find,” from which we get our English expression “eureka.” In other words, the text states that after a refiner's fire of purification (v.7), the new earth will be found, not burned up. The earth will be discovered, not destroyed... As Thomas Finger insists in his careful study of this text, ‘The main emphasis of the text is that everything will be scrutinized or assessed by God, and not necessarily destroyed’ (1998:5). Thus 2 Peter 3 rightly rendered speaks of a basic continuity rather than discontinuity of this world with the next. Creation is not ephemeral and unimportant – some second-rate way station until the eschaton – but rather, it is our proper home. Biblical eschatology affirms the redemption and restoration of creation.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 68-69

Christian eschatology is earth-affirming. Because the earth will not be burned up but rather purified as in a refiner's fire, we can act with confidence that our actions today are not for naught. Because we long for a renewed heaven and earth, we can work in expectation that our faithful deeds here and now will be gathered up in the eschaton. Because we rely on God's promises and character rather than human ingenuity or skill, we know that, despite the despoliation of our planetary home, the whole world is, as the song says, in God's hands. In practical terms, if our news is truly good, then recycling and composting and bicycling to work are not whistling in the dark. They are, rather, hope-filled ways of living in harmony with God's own loving, restorative way with the world.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 118

### **Edward Brown**

This picture (2 Peter 3:7,10-13) has tended to muddle our thinking as Christians about the earth. If "it's all going to burn up anyway" it seems not to matter much what we do with the earth. And since Peter tells us to "speed its coming," maybe we're doing God a favor by helping that final destruction along...

First, there's a possibility that the traditional interpretation of Peter's prophecy is wrong. Steven Bouma-Prediger is one of several recent commentators suggesting that Peter is describing a "cleansing fire" rather than a destructive fire and that his allusion to Noah's flood might suggest that the "new earth" we're looking forward to could in fact be this old earth, cleansed and renewed. God might be, in Bouma-Prediger's view, "the great recycler."

...we should be aware that a passage as critical as this one might not say exactly what many of us thought it did.

But let's assume, for the time being anyway, that the traditional reading of Peter's prophecy is correct – that this present world will burn up and vanish in a mighty cosmic cataclysm, along with the destruction of the heavenly bodies, to be replaced with a new earth and a new heaven that will all be perfect. Where does that leave us? Answer: it doesn't change anything! It doesn't matter! The process of redemption...will and must carry on, regardless of whether this old earth is destined for fire in six months or six centuries. In fact, Peter says as much: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." Even if the traditional view - "it's all going to burn up anyway" - turns out to be correct, Peter sees this as a reason for being more careful about how we live, not less so.

- *Our Father's World*, 2008: 79-81

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

...we acknowledge that there are a collection of ostensibly "destructive" texts in the New Testament. For instance, as the author of 2 Peter reflects on the coming eschaton, he appears to imagine a future destruction of the Earth...

What do we do with texts like this? What does the transformation of the world (*transformatio mundi*) and "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1) look like? Or, to put it another way, will the Earth be renovated or replaced?



Evangelical biblical scholar Douglas Moo offers three rationales for why he surmises 2 Peter 3 should not be read apocalyptically, signaling the physical end of the planet. First, the text is problematic for translators - he points out that few agree on an acceptable rendering. Second, the Old Testament image of "fire" commonly refers to God's purifying judgment and not a literal destruction, even as Noah's flood was the judgment of God against humanity, but did not destroy the entire planet. The final judgement does not have to be different. Fire, writes Moo, "need not bring total destruction." And third, Moo points out that the Greek word for "dissolve" (*lyo*, in vv.10,11 and 12) does not, in other biblical texts, convey entire destruction or annihilation, but rather "a dissolution or radical change in nature." When *lyo* is used elsewhere, it denotes a loss of fruitfulness, the wasteful use of ointment, the uselessness of wineskins when they have holes in them, or the loss of a coin. In not one of these cases does the object being referred to *cease to exist*. Nor should we expect it with Creation. While it is essential that we do not undermine the pointedness and abruptness of texts such as 2 Peter 3, we must also not overemphasise them, building theologies of destruction on uncertain readings or difficult translations.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 138

### **Keith Dyer**

There remains a huge problem for eco-theology in those texts that resist retrieval and advocate our 'earnestly desiring (hastening) the *parousia* of the day of God through which the heavens will be torched and dissolved, and the elements melt with fire (2 Pet.3:12). The problem is not the imagining of an end to the created order as such - that has been inevitable not only since Nagasaki and Hiroshima, but really since Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler, and the dethroning of the Earth as the centre of the universe, the apple of God's eye. Rather, the problem lies in 'earnestly desiring' such an end, and in seeing it as part of the Creator's plan for the creation, as a 'good thing' that cannot happen soon enough. Such a conviction can only result in passive disinterest in the fate of the environment at best, and may even underlie active exploitation and despoiling of the created order.

- in Habel and Balabanski, 2002: 48

*Referring to 2 Peter 3:7-12, he writes:*

Even though the context may again be hortatory, and the destructive process understood as part of a cyclical renewal, the 'hastening' or 'earnest desiring' of the torching and dissolving of the heavens and the fiery melting of the elements presents irretrievable problems for an ethical response to ecological problems. Again, the hope is for a (re)new(ed) heavens **and** earth (2 Peter 3:13), but the active encouragement to hasten the demise of the old Earth is an invitation that too many Christians have accepted too easily already.

- in Habel and Balabanski, 2002: 56

### **Thomas Finger**

*All evangelical eschatologies anticipate significant degrees of continuity between our present earth and the future world.* To be sure, this contrasts greatly with what seems to be believed in some evangelical churches: that our ultimate destiny is an immaterial, spaceless heaven, and that our present earth will be wholly destroyed. Wherever these views may come from, they have no sound foundation in either evangelical theology or Scripture.

- "Evangelicals, Eschatology and the Environment", 1998: 27 (emphasis mine)

**Scott Hoezee**

...in verses 10-13 Peter predicts an ultimate preservation at the end of time. Because the fire will be a renewing fire - a cleansing, not an annihilation. When the fires of God sweep over the creation, when the smoke clears and the last embers go out, what we will see will not be a scorched and barren landscape but a renewed creation. As Isaiah says, it is the power of evil that leaves behind a scorched and scorching place of destruction. But where God is there is lush new life.

Indeed, Peter concludes in verse 13 by saying that what will result from the fire will be "the home of righteousness," or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases this passage, it will be a creation "all landscaped with righteousness". It will be a stunning thing to see...

So it will be in the end, Peter says. And the good news is that because we know this is coming, we need not fear the day of the fire...because we know that when it is over there will be a new creation...the place where everything delightful and right will fit in naturally and well.

- *Remember Creation*, 1998: 100

**Michael Lloyd**

To destroy creation would be to finally give up on it. This is an option on which He (God) turned his back at the Flood, and which He promised never to revisit. It would be a defeat and it would be a waste. For there is much about our world that is beautiful. There is much of human behaviour that is noble, and much of human achievement that is profoundly impressive. Much better, surely, to preserve what is good, and to purge what is bad - in other words, to judge.

And that is what he has promised to do. He will not only separate the wheat from the weeds: He will burn up the weeds (Matthew 13:30). He will not only separate good and evil: he will also eradicate evil from His creation.

- *Cafe Theology*, 2009: 333-334

**Brian McLaren**

The eschatology of abandonment is being succeeded by an engaging gospel of the kingdom... Understandably, Christians in the power centres of modernity (England in the 1800s, the United States in the 1900s) saw nothing ahead in the secular story of industrial modernity...nothing but spiritual decline and global destruction. Their only hope? A skyhook Second Coming, wrapping up the whole creation like an empty candy wrapper and throwing it in the cosmic dumpster so God can finally bring our souls to heaven, beyond time, beyond messy matter, beyond this creation entirely. There is virtually no continuity between this creation and the new heavenly creation in this model; this creation is erased like a mistake, discarded like a non-recyclable milk carton. Why care for creation? Why get sentimental about a container that's served its purpose and is about to be discarded into the cosmic trash compactor of nothingness?

This pop-Evangelical eschatology made an understandable but serious mistake: it wrongly assumed that modernity was all there ever would be...

For pop-Evangelical eschatology to proliferate, it had to ignore or, better, reinterpret much written by the Old Testament prophets. Prophetic visions of reconciliation and shalom *within* history...had to be pushed *beyond* history, either into a spiritualized heaven or a millennial middle-ground... They also had to marginalize Jesus with all his talk of the kingdom of God coming on earth, being among us now, and being accessible today.

But now, as more and more of us celebrate Jesus as Master-teacher as well as Savior, we are struck by the present hope of 'the kingdom of God' that is so central in Jesus' message...

- *A Generous Orthodoxy*, 2004: 267-268

### **Jonathan Merritt**

Why worry about the future of an earth that has no future? Try applying it to another element of God's creation like the human body: *My body will ultimately be glorified so I'll treat it poorly in the meantime. I'll smoke a pack of cigarettes a day because I am going to die one day anyway.* Ridiculous!

Future knowledge doesn't change our present obligations. Our stewardship responsibilities transcend our eschatology – our theology about end times. Many Christians believe that the earth will not be destroyed, but renewed and perfected. Neither scenario revokes your stewardship responsibility.

*After discussing the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:15-19, Merritt continues:*

This story is, of course, one of Jesus' most famous parables, and it teaches an important lesson to those who claim that we can bury our obligations to this planet because Christ is going to return soon. The knowledge of a returning Master does not free us from earthly obligations; it calls us to them...

When those clouds peel back and my Savior returns to this planet, I want to be caught in the act of loving people, worshiping Christ, and obeying all Christ's commands, including the command to care for His creation.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 87,89

### **Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

There is no doubt that a belief that our present creation will continue in some form into eternity provides a stronger basis for creation care than the alternative "replacement" model. The longer we think something is going to last, the more we tend to care for it. I take much better care of a valuable book that I hope to pass on to my children than the morning newspaper, destined for the recycle container within a few hours. But even if we should think that the Bible teaches that our present creation will be replaced with a new one, care for our created world would still be imperative. For one thing, the eventual destruction of this creation would not negate or in any way detract from the clear teaching of Scripture that God has given human beings the responsibility to care for this world – however long it may last or whatever its destiny may be. For another thing, the realization that something may be destined for destruction does not entail a lack of concern for its present condition. Suppose I were to be given a revelation from God that the house I am currently living in is destined to be destroyed on day... Should I therefore neglect its upkeep? Should I not rather work to make it as comfortable and enjoyable a place for me and my family to live in as long

as it lasts? We may believe that creation is destined for destruction – that, as the popular saying has it, “it’s all going to burn” – but we should not therefore conclude that we can treat it in any way we want in the meantime.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 146-147

When we look carefully at the meaning of Peter’s keywords and take into account the “language game” of apocalyptic prophecy that Peter is playing, the idea that he is predicting an eventual annihilation of the universe by fire is not so evident. To be sure, this *could* be what the text means. We still think, taken on its own terms, that this is not the most obvious meaning of the passage. But when we turn back into the larger biblical-theological issue and seek to fit the puzzle of 2 Peter 3 into the overall picture provided by the rest of Scripture, this interpretation becomes even less attractive. We think it is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that 2 Peter 3 does not intend to describe the annihilation of the universe on the day of the Lord. Rather, as the parallel with the flood suggests, Peter is predicting that God will “destroy” this world by judging evil, establishing justice and peace, and radically transforming the creation into a place where “righteousness makes it home,” reflecting God’s original intentions for it from the beginning.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 161.

#### CREATION TRANSFORMED

So what does the picture of the end of creation look like now that we have tried to fit together some of the key puzzle pieces? The pieces of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21-22 could certainly be shaped in a way that seems to support a “replacement” model. But, as we have argued, a closer look at both passages, sensitive to their style and the metaphorical nature of their language, raises serious doubts about this conclusion. On the other hand, at least two other puzzle pieces – Romans 8:19-22 and Colossians 1:20 – can only fit a picture of creation’s transformation.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 163

#### **Jonathan A. Moo**

It has sometimes been suggested that other biblical texts - notably the book of Revelation and 2 Peter 3 - teach that this earth will be left behind or destroyed and discarded in the end. If this world is going to be tossed aside, so the argument goes, then perhaps we ought not to spend time and effort in caring for the present creation; it would be as futile as polishing the railings of a ship that is destined to sink. But in the light of the whole of the biblical story of God's faithfulness to creation, the *Titanic* analogy is simply wrong. Such a negative conception of the earth's future is most obviously contradicted by Paul's portrayal of an entire creation that anticipates sharing in the freedom and glory that attends our resurrection, the 'children of God to be revealed' and the 'redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8:19-23). Whatever discontinuity there may be between the present age and the age to come, this same creation finds the creator's intentions for it fulfilled, its future secured, and its healing accomplished in the new creation. Yet even if Scripture did suggest that there was no continuity between this world and the next, the command to love God and neighbor would still compel us to care well for the world as it has been entrusted to us now, for the sake of future generations.

Consider 2 Peter 3, a text that more than any other emphasizes discontinuity, the break

between this age and the age to come... Due to some textual confusion among original manuscripts, some readers might think that 2 Peter 3:10 also describes the burning up and destruction of the earth itself... But as recent commentators have recognized, and as reflected in the most contemporary translations, the best Greek manuscripts attest to a reading that has the earth and the works being done being 'found' or 'laid bare' before God. The emphasis of 3:10 is on the impossibility of anything being hidden from God's final judgment and on the concomitant importance of how life is lived now...

The 'elements' which 2 Peter 3:10 says are 'destroyed by fire' may well refer to the heavenly elements, the *stoicheia* that later texts associate with the stars, sun and moon. The scenario described in 2 Peter 3:10 would then be best understood as a picture of God coming to his creation, the heavens that symbolically separate his throne-room from the earth disappearing with a roar, the elements in between dissolving before his fiery presence, and the earth and all the works of humanity being 'found' before him, laid bare and discovered for what they really are...

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 36

### **John Piper**

First, I would say that when Revelation 21:1 and 2 Peter 3:10 say that the present earth and heavens will “pass away,” it does not have to mean that they go out of existence, but may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away. We might say, “The caterpillar will pass away and the butterfly emerges.” There is a real passing away and there is a real continuity, a real connection. Or we might say, “The tadpole passes away and the frog appears.”

And when 2 Peter 3 says that this heaven and earth will be “destroyed,” it does not have to mean entirely “put out of existence.” We might say, “The flood destroyed many farms.” But we don’t mean that they vanished out of existence. We might say that the immediate surroundings of Mt. St. Helens were destroyed. But anyone who goes there now and sees the new growth would know that “destroy” did not mean put out of existence.

And so what Peter may well mean is that at the end of this age there will be cataclysmic events that bring this age and this world to an end as we know it — not putting it out of existence, but wiping out all that is evil and cleansing it, as it were, by fire and fitting it for an age of glory and righteousness and peace that will never end.

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<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-happens-when-you-die-glorified-and-free-on-the-new-earth> (accessed 29 April, 2018)

### **Mick Pope**

2 Peter 3 does not describe the literal burning up of the Earth but its refining. In the same way the Flood was an act of judgement and salvation, “uncreation” and re-creation, the fire in 2 Peter 3 talks about salvation and judgement.

There is no such thing as the Rapture. I Thessalonians describes believers welcoming Jesus back to the Earth to rule over it.

Heaven is not an escape from Earth. Instead, heaven means the place where God rules – and God’s rule will one day be fully revealed on this Earth.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 60

Let's assume for a moment that the Bible tells us that God is coming to scrap the whole creation project and start from scratch, or even that physical creation is to be abandoned for heaven with harps, wings, fluffy clouds, etc... this would not justify the mistreatment of creation. Not only would it be the result of sinful patterns like greed, the worship of money, power and status, it would be an abdication of our divine status as God's image-bearers and would make us into bandits rather than Good Samaritans.

- Dawson and Pope: *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 61-62

### **Jay Ruka**

Likewise, for the Church the huia critiques our Christian worldview: how long are we going to foster theologies that blindly assume that the planet is 'going to burn', that we don't need to care for earth, just the souls of humans on it. That is dualism. Huia don't like dualism; they don't like being separated. When they are, they die.

- *Huia Come Home*, 2017: 139

### **Francis Schaeffer**

On the basis of the fact that there is going to be total redemption in the future, not only of man but of all creation, the Christian who believes the Bible should be the man who – with God's help and in the power of the Holy Spirit – is treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be then. It will not be perfect, but it must be substantial, or we have missed our calling... we should exhibit substantial healing here and now, between man and nature, nature and itself, as far as Christians can bring it to pass.

- as quoted by McGrath, *Reenchantment of Nature*, 2002: 51.

### **Matthew Sleeth**

If you close your eyes and picture heaven, what do you see? Do you see rivers and trees, or shopping malls and parking lots? Is the air clean and rivers clear, or are they filled with smog and trash? Do you hear leaves rustling in the breeze, or horns honking in traffic jams?

Jesus taught his disciples to pray for God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven." The implication is that we should make earth more like heaven. But what does heaven look like? Is it lush and green, or is it blacktopped and eroded?

For the Christian, the question is not moot or academic. We are either in God's will or we are not. We are either making earth look more heavenly or we are making it more hellish.

At the beginning of this century, if you had asked me what heaven looked like I would have said, "That's an interesting question" and then backed away from you. I didn't believe in heaven. I didn't believe in God.

All that changed when I found a Bible and read it for the first time. It was as if the Lord literally reached into my brain and connected it with my heart and soul. From that point onward, the Bible has been my source of truth. Over the next two years, my entire family came to know and love Jesus. We had no idea where God was leading us. In the coming years, I would quit my job as a doctor, my Jewish wife would become a Christian, my daughter would become a pastor's wife, and my son would become a missionary doctor

serving in Africa.

But now I take the question about what heaven looks like seriously. Does heaven have trees? Are birds allowed near God? Over the past decade and a half, I've come across Christians who think that everything on earth eventually will be burned up, so nothing here really matters. They are right—partly. Paul tells us that our old corruptible bodies will be changed into new bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-55). I believe this. In the same way, we are told that the earth will be renewed (2 Peter 3:13).

Does this mean that nothing in the here-and-now matters? Does this mean that you don't have to brush your teeth before you go to bed, or that we can bulldoze every forest without repercussions? Not if we want to keep our teeth or have clean water to drink.

God asks us to be faithful in little things. Later, we will be given bigger things. Modern scientists are forever pointing out how small and insignificant the earth is compared to the universe. They say that my life is a small and accidental, too. But Christianity affirms that these little things matter to God. We have the kind of God that groans when a single sparrow falls. The earth and everything on it is the Lord's! (Psalm 24)

Our bodies are a temple of the Lord, a living, breathing church. Although non-believers are not bound by the same constraints, a Christian's treatment of their body reflects the respect we have for its ultimate owner—God.

When I became a Christian, I had to grapple with the fact that my body, time, talent, and treasures were not mine to do with as I pleased. They belong to God. He asks me to steward these gifts in order to further the kingdom of heaven here on earth.

At the time I first met Christ, I wasn't taking very good care of my body. Rather than take responsibility, I used the conveniently self-serving "let it all burn" theology. My *Amen* to this theology was, "Hello chip and dip!"

Then, while studying a quite different subject, the Lord led me to read a book written by John Wesley in 1747. When Henry the Eighth expelled the Church of Rome from Britain, he closed all the church hospitals. The Church of England came to believe that it had no responsibility to care for sick people. It was concerned with people's souls—not their physical health. Wesley tackled this situation with his best seller, *Primitive Physick*. It is a treatise of practical home health care.

Although I can't recommend Wesley's medical treatments (his cure for baldness doesn't work!), Wesley's theology is spot on. Gluttony and sloth were the underpinnings of my "let it all burn and give me my new body" theology. That was ten years and forty pounds ago. It turns out that I can serve God more effectively when I maintain a healthy body weight and exercise regularly than I could as an out of shape, out of breath man. Like a 12-year-old who leaves their new bike outside and expects their parent to buy them a new one when the old one rusts or is stolen, I'd been treating my body like a spoiled child would—thinking of God as an overly indulgent parent.

Likewise, the underpinnings of a "Just give us a new earth, and let's blast this one to Hades" theology are equally self-serving, slothful, and gluttonous. When someone says that we can do anything that strikes our fancy and God will mitigate the effects, I want to ask for an

explanation of the rest of their theology. New Age theology, not Christianity, believes that there is no ultimate right or wrong, that man is the master and measure of all things, and that we are the center of the universe. Christianity teaches that man reaps what he sows. That is not to say that we should in any way worship the creation—God forbid! The creation, however, is a living and indisputable argument for the existence of God (Romans 1:20). As such, it cannot be dismissed as trivial.

God gave mankind the awesome responsibility of caring for the planet and the power of dominion to do the job. How will we account for the missing elms on Elm Street, the chestnuts on Chestnut Lane, the caribou in Caribou, Maine, or the buffalo in Buffalo, New York? What did we do with the blue pike—once the most abundant fish in the Great Lakes—and the passenger pigeon—the most numerous bird species in North America?

God put Adam and Eve in the garden. We were naked and unashamed. Our instructions were “to dress it and keep it” (Gen 2:15 KJV). All of creation was ours; we only had to refrain from eating from one tree.

You know the story. We have been naked, ashamed, and ripping leaves off trees ever since. We have been at enmity with God and nature.

Christ died on a tree so that we might have access to the Tree of Life—not the mall, not the stadium, not entertainment. Our hope isn’t in our ability to flatten every forest on earth. Our hope is in an empty tomb and the man Mary mistook for a gardener. That was not a mistake. Christ is the new Adam. He does not strip the forest for vanity—or to hide from God—like the old Adam (Romans 8:22-25).

When I close my eyes and picture heaven, I see birds near God’s holy throne (Psalm 84:3), taste water as clear as crystal, and hear all creation praising the Lord (Revelation 4:6-7). The trees shout for joy. God has come to judge the earth, His forest always knew how the verdict would go! (1Chronicles 16:33)

In heaven, God’s throne faces a tree that stretches from one edge of the river of life to the other. The water that feeds The Tree of Life is unpolluted (Revelation 22:1-5). A lamb is there! Its blood was once spread on wooden doorposts to seal out death (Exodus 12:7). Now its blood is spread on a wooden cross that opens the door to our true home (1 Corinthians 5:7). I see a desert blooming! I see acacia, myrtle, and olive trees. I see cypress and pines (Isaiah 41:18-20). I see a city of God—perfect harmony. I hear quiet (Revelation 8:1).

When you close your eyes and think of heaven, what do you see? *On earth as it is in heaven.*

*- This article originally appeared on greenjesus.com under the title “Why care for the earth if it’s all going to burn up anyway?”. It was extracted from the Blessed Earth website in September, 2017.*

### **Sleeth again**

I have heard every kind of objection and rationalization for not protecting our earthly ark of life. Most of the arguments boil down to selfishness. I have met those who would bet the



futures of their grandchildren on wishful thinking that the earth will end tomorrow; however, I've met none willing to bet their 401Ks on such end-time thinking.

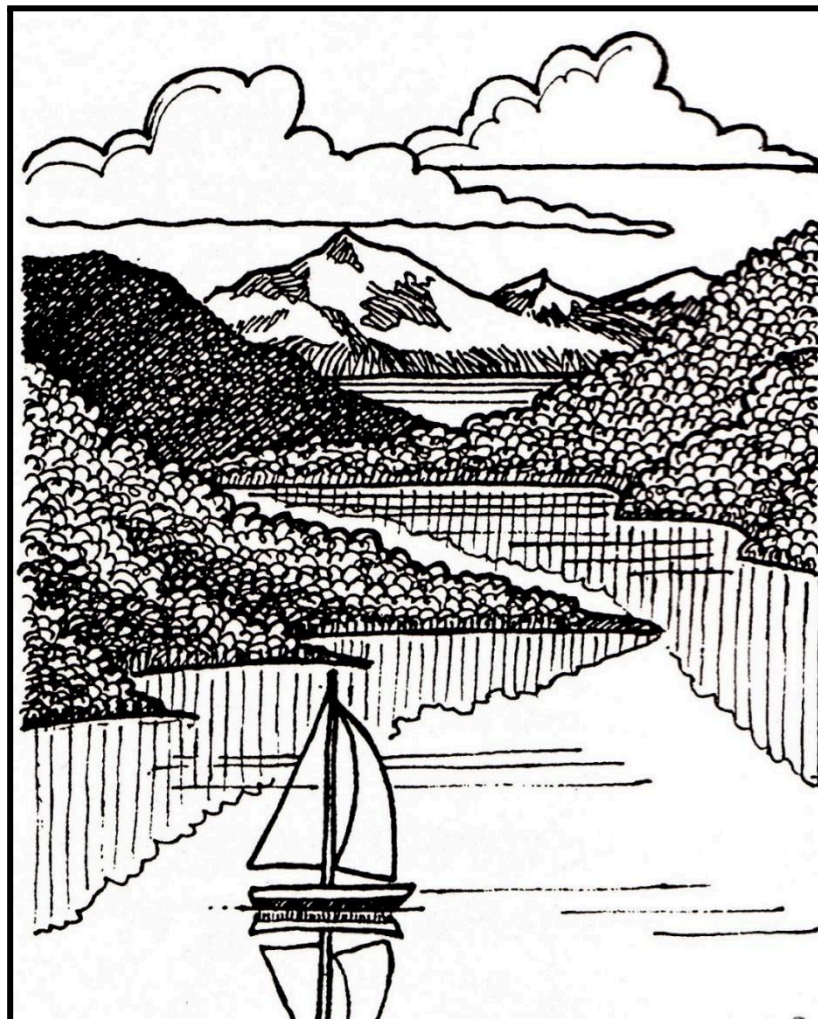
- 2008: "The Power of a Green God" in *The Green Bible*, p.1-22

(Note: In the United States, a 401k plan is the tax-qualified, defined-contribution pension account)

**N.T. Wright**

When Paul speaks of 'meeting' the Lord 'in the air,' the point is precisely not – as in the popular rapture theology – that the saved believers would then stay up in the air somewhere, away from earth. The point is that, having gone out to meet their returning Lord, they will escort him royally into his domain, that is, back to the place they have come from.

- *Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 133



**OBJECTION**

**2**

## SAVING SOULS IS OUR PRIMARY TASK, SO IT'S A DISTRACTION!

**Isn't this business about 'saving the earth' a distraction to the church's task of 'saving souls'? Isn't that our mission?  
Shouldn't we just be focusing on evangelism rather than worrying about caring for the planet?**

*See also Objection 8.*

### **Phillip Donnell**

What we are really concerned about here is the scope of God's redemptive purposes. It is an important issue. Many Christians believe that God is far more interested in the redemption of the spiritual than the physical, and that we should care about people to the exclusion of any other species that God has made. They also adopt an apocalyptic view of God's kingdom which looks for Christ's return to rescue true believers out of this world. Especially in the past century, this emphasis has given rise to massive efforts towards preaching the gospel and personal evangelism. Other concerns, such as reforming political and economic structures, or the promotion of social justice, or caring for the environment, fall outside the church's concern. After all, these are aspects of this present fallen world; they will be destroyed when the day of the Lord arrives. Such notions need to be challenged, for they are not necessarily the correct interpretations. As with other issues, we must ask, "What does the Bible teach?"

### REDEEMING THE MATERIAL AND THE NON-MATERIAL

In Scripture, redemption is conceived most fundamentally as the reversal of the fall and the restoration of God's good purposes from the beginning. By way of contrast, Greek dualism conceived redemption as transference from a lower, inferior realm (variously understood as body, earth, matter, nature or the secular) to a higher, more valued or esteemed realm (understood as soul, heaven, spirit, the realm of grace or the sacred). This dualistic assumption, inherited from Greek philosophy, is often simply superimposed over biblical texts that address redemption and so leads to a distortion of the Bible's message.

Humans were created to be *physical* beings in a *physical* environment. This in no way detracts from the truth that they were also created *spiritual* beings in a *spiritual* environment, that is, in relation to God. Every Old Testament image of salvation included the regeneration of the physical as well as the spiritual. Recall the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9. For Noah there was the stark reality of a totally enclosed mini-world in the ark. Who perishes? Who is saved? Are species less important than individual people? For Abraham and his Israelite descendants it was the fruitful land of Canaan as the new Garden of Eden for the people of God. In the prophets the same scenario is projected as a future attainment in which the full glory of God's kingdom will exist and yet in a physical

environment.

The New Testament continues this holistic emphasis. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds state explicitly our belief in the resurrection of the body, but frequently we operate with the Greek pagan notion of immortality of the soul; of a destiny of timeless and matterless eternity in an ethereal spiritual state. We need to distinguish redemption in the biblical testimony from its logic in the Greek philosophical tradition that has come down to us from Plato — a tradition that has deeply distorted the western church's worldview.

The fact, which is often overlooked, is that the bodily resurrection of Christ points not only to the fact that matter itself matters to God. It also points to our own resurrection, and carries with it the guarantee of the redemption of the whole physical universe (see Romans 8:19-23 – discussed below). Whereas a dualistic understanding of redemption typically devalues the good Earth God created and encourages an aspiration to transcend finitude, the biblical worldview leads to an affirmation of the goodness of creation, along with a desire to pray and work for the redemption of precisely *this world* (including human, socio-cultural institutions) - that earthly life might be restored to what it was meant to be. Salvation means *all* relationship restored – moral, spiritual, mental and physical .

#### A COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATION

Cornelius Plantinga Jr (2002: 96) writes: *“Everything corrupt needs to be redeemed , and that includes the whole natural world, which both sings and groans. The whole natural world, in all its glory and pain, needs the redemption that will bring shalom. The world isn't divided into a sacred realm and a secular realm, with redemptive activity confined to the sacred zone. The whole world belongs to God, the whole world has fallen, and so the whole world needs to be redeemed – every last person, place, organization, and programme; all 'rocks and trees and skies and seas'; in fact, 'every square inch', as Abraham Kuyper said. The whole creation is 'a theatre for the mighty work of God,' first in creation and then in re-creation.”*

The Bible tells the story of the progressive march of God toward this final cosmic restoration. Throughout its pages we gain glimpses of where the story of God's redemption is headed, and it is clearly all-encompassing. In tempting Adam and Eve to rebel against God, Satan sought to thwart God's plan – and he succeeded, at least to the extent that sin and its effects now touch all of creation. But when God set out to deal with sin and its ruinous consequences, his plan was to destroy the enemy of his good creation, not to destroy the creation itself. To destroy what he had made would have been to concede a tremendous victory to Satan, but the story of the Bible moves towards a conclusion in which God's restorative work will utterly undo all of Satan's mischief.

Numerous passages briefly open windows on God's ultimate intention for his creation. The Old Testament prophets depict God's kingdom as a place and time of cosmic restoration characterized by shalom. The ultimate harmony and bounty of creation in the kingdom of God are emphasized (e.g. Joel 2:18-27). It is especially the language of “new heavens and a new earth” that makes this clear (Isaiah 65:17; cf. 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1-3). Peter is well aware of such passages: after Jesus conquered sin on the cross and returned from the grave in triumph over death itself, Peter proclaimed the good news in Jerusalem, saying :

(Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to “*restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets*” (Acts 3:21 TNIV). When Christ returns, God's agenda is not to destroy everything and start over, but to “restore everything.” The perfection of creation once lost will be fully regained, and then some.

There are many New Testament texts that define Christian hope as the repairing of what went wrong as a result of rebellion against God, and that apply this repair to all creation, human and non-human. Richard Middleton (2006: 90) summarises some of the key texts as follows:

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Saving Activity of God Described</b>	<b>Object of God’s Saving Activity</b>
Acts 3:17-21 (esp. 21)	Restoration	Everything
Ephesians 1:7-10 (esp. 10)	Bringing together, unifying (under one head)	All things in heaven and on earth
Colossians 1:15-20 (esp. 20)	Reconciliation (by removing the source of enmity, through the blood of the cross)	All things whether on earth or in heaven
2 Peter 3:10-13 (esp. 10 & 13)	Uncovering, laying bare (having purified); Re-creation, renewal, making new	The earth and everything in it Heaven and earth
Romans 8:19-23 (esp. 21 & 23)	Liberation, setting free (from bondage to decay); Redemption	Creation itself; humanity Our bodies
Basic Characteristics of Salvation:	Restorative: Salvation is God repairing what went wrong with creation (not taking us out of the world, to “heaven”)	Comprehensive and holistic: God intends to redeem or restore “all things” in heaven and on earth, including our bodies (salvation doesn’t just apply to the human “soul”)

When we pull together the unifying strands of these five texts, a consistent pattern emerges. Salvation is conceived, not as God doing something completely new, but rather as *re-doing* something, fixing or repairing what went wrong, an interpretation that is congruent with the biblical language of restoration, reconciliation, renewal, and redemption. Moreover, this restorative work is applied *holistically and comprehensively* to all things in heaven and on earth. Since “heaven and earth” is how Scripture typically designates the created order (with the earth consistently understood as the dwelling of humanity), the final state envisioned in these passages clearly supports the idea of a renewed earth as a future dwelling-place of the redeemed.

As alluded to above, when God set out to redeem his creation from sin and sin’s effects on it, his ultimate purpose was that what he had once created as “very good” (Genesis 1:31) should once again live and thrive under his beneficent rule. The final chapters of the Bible

are a vision of a creation completely restored to its original goodness. The redeemed of God will live in resurrected bodies within a renewed creation, from which sin and its effects have been expunged. This is the kingdom that Christ's followers have already begun to enjoy in foretaste.

## TWO SALIENT PASSAGES

Elaboration on just two of the above passages will be illustrative and salutary. The clearest picture of God's kingdom is in the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus is the moment all creation had been awaiting. It is interesting that Jesus himself used the word "cosmos" in John 3:16, a term used elsewhere (e.g. Acts 17:34) to refer to the whole material universe.

That Christ's person and work was mysteriously and inextricably linked to the salvation of the entire created order is a notion Paul expands on in **Colossians 1:15-23**. He is very clear on the scope of God's redemptive work: 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to *reconcile to himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross' (vs.19-20). Since humans were made to be God's stewards over creation, so the one through whom all things were made, the eternal Son, the eternal wisdom, becomes human so that he might truly become God's steward, ruler over all his world. The apostle points out that just as nothing in creation remained untouched by sin after Eden, so nothing in creation can remain untouched by God's redemption after Christ's victory on the cross. In verse 23b he reiterates that in some mystical way the redemption gained through the sacrifice of Jesus affects the entire universe: "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to *every creature* under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant". "Every creature" is literally "all creation", as in the ESV. When Colossians was written, the gospel had not been preached to every person, or even all in the Roman Empire. Rather, the point is that the gospel had been proclaimed not just to people but to everything God had made and all things were being redeemed.

Joseph Sittler sums up this passage more eloquently than most:

*These verses sing out their triumphant and alluring music between two huge and steady poles: "Christ" and "all things". Even the Ephesian letter, rich and large as its vision is of the church, moves not within so massive an orbit as this astounding statement of the purpose of God. For it is here declared that the sweep of God's restorative action in Christ is no smaller than the six-times repeated **ta panta**. Redemption is the name for this will, this action, this concrete Man who is God with us and God for us – and all things are permeable to his cosmic redemption because all things subsist in him. He comes to all things, not as a stranger, for he is the firstborn of all creation, and in him all things were created. He is not only the matrix and **prius** of all things; he is the intention, the fullness and the integrity of all things: for all things were created through him and for him. Nor are all things a tumbled multitude of facts in an unrelated mess, for in him all things hold together.*

- from "Called to Unity" in *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology and Ethics*, ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken, 2000.

Not surprisingly, then, according to **Romans 8:19-23**, both the non-human creation and Christians are described as groaning as they await the completion of their redemption. Here

Paul draws on both the imagery of childbirth (labour pains) and the language of Exodus 2:23-24, which portrays the Israelites groaning in their bondage under Pharaoh (a different sort of labour pains). Paul applies these images not just to the human condition, but to the entire created order. Utilizing the model of deliverance from Egyptian bondage, he portrays salvation first (in verse 21) as *liberation* or *setting free* from bondage, and this is applied to *creation itself* and also to *humanity* (described as the sons/children of God). It is because the human race implicitly takes the place of Pharaoh in Paul's picture (subjecting creation to frustration) that non-human creatures await human liberation. Since humans have been granted dominion over the non-human world, the oppressor has first to be liberated. But human liberation is not simply "internal" (affecting only the "soul"), since salvation, portrayed as *redemption* — which continues the exodus imagery—is applied in verse 23 to our very *bodies* (a reference to the resurrection).

Paul says that as God's children we will enjoy "the redemption of our bodies." Our bodies will be fixed, made better, transformed, even returned to the perfection of Eden, but so will the rest of creation. We are told that the non-human creation, which for so long has shared in the misery of humankind's fall into sin, is now looking forward to the coming renewal. Paul says the present creation will be liberated from its bondage to decay, joining Christians in "the glorious freedom of the children of God." Indeed, the word translated "liberated" — *eleutheroo* — is used elsewhere in the New Testament only to refer to the freedom that Jesus gives Christians. The implication is plainly that the creation will be given the same freedom that Christians enjoy — freedom from the curse. This is such an important text because it highlights the inclusion of *all* of creation in the hope of the gospel.

It is a connection that Paul has made elsewhere. When we enter into relationship with Christ, we become a "new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Paul declares that the old creation "has gone" - *parerchomai* - the same word Peter uses in 2 Peter 3:10 when he says that the old heavens will "pass away". In both cases, he is referring to present nature, not existence. The work God will complete in us at the end of time has begun to such an extent that we are a "new creation" already. For us, it has already happened, because God has already re-formed us by giving us his Spirit, making us into spiritual beings. We already have the "first fruits of the Spirit," so we have already begun to receive the re-creation that the rest of the heavens and earth are looking forward to. Our new creation is for a purpose — God anticipates in us what he will one day finish, in order that we will join him in his redemptive work. We are re-created to be like God (Ephesians 4:22-24), and to do the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). *In short*, God makes us into new creations in anticipation of making the heavens and the earth into new creations. Indeed, we are called to become instruments through whom he can achieve that purpose.

In such passages as these, we begin to see God's final purpose unveiled. The whole of human life is purified, and even the non-human creation shares in this liberation from the former slavery to sin and death. They lead us to look forward in hope to a creation restored to perfect wholeness, and within that gracious fullness there is a place for us. Human beings were created to enjoy fellowship with God in the full context of creational life. The comprehensive scope of God's redemptive work means that the non-human creation, forming the context for human life, will also be restored to what God intended all along.

#### HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

In *The Bible and the Future* (1994: 32), Anthony Hoekema sums up: *“Fully to understand the meaning of history, therefore, we must see God’s redemption in cosmic dimensions. Since the expression ‘heaven and earth’ is a biblical description of the entire cosmos, we may say that the goal of redemption is nothing less than the renewal of the entire cosmos, of what present-day scientists call the universe. Since man’s fall into sin affected not only himself but the rest of creation (see Genesis 3:17-18; Rom. 8:19-23), redemption from sin must also involve the totality of God’s creation.”*

In the light of the truths explored in this article, we may say that, at the very least, care for living species cannot be disregarded because of the importance of people. While people, created in his image (Genesis 1:26), have always held a special place in God’s heart, and we must engage in pointing others to him, it is also true that the entire material universe reflects his eternal power and divine being (Romans 1:20) and we have been charged to care for it (Genesis 2:15). Too often our view of the future has emphasized solely the salvation of the individual person apart from the full creational and relational context in which human beings live their lives. Frequently the whole of Biblical story seems to revolve around me. Yet the Bible is quite clear that God’s goal is a restored creation in which we can find a place. Not only will every aspect of human life be restored, so will the whole of the non-human creation. The essential truth we need to grasp is that God’s redemption is cosmic as well as personal in its scope. It covers all creation, not just humans, and that truth has ongoing practical implications. We must be concerned not only about saving souls, but also saving seals.

The comprehensive scope of God’s redemptive agenda that I have outlined above tells us that it is not a case of “either/or” but “both/and”. The two are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, as hinted above, one may foster and facilitate the other. When it comes to caring for the earth, non-Christians often lead the way, showing more enthusiasm for good earth-keeping than Christians who claim that “The earth is the Lord’s,” but who do not act or vote that way. It is true, of course, that some non-Christians want to care for the earth only because they tend towards materialistic pantheism. Christians and Jews say, “the earth is the Lord’s.” Materialist pantheists say, “the earth is the Lord.” But, ever the master of irony, God uses even idolatrous philosophy to achieve excellent earth-keeping.

Citizens of the kingdom of God yearn for shalom, but non-Christians often yearn for it too, and sometimes work so tirelessly for this that they put Christians to shame. Creation care furnishes an immediate point of mutual interest, shared vision, identification and commonality. It also provides a context in which to forge meaningful relationships as a prelude to evangelistic influence. For this reason, Christian environmentalism is currently the fastest growing missional enterprise in the global church. When a church engages in an environmental project or initiative, it raises questions among the neighbouring people, “Why are they doing this?” It gives opportunities for them to find out that their ecology is based on the gospel and their gospel is centred on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This question may also be addressed by asking a similar question – “Is parenting a distraction from our Christian task of evangelism?” For those of us with children, parenting is

a time-consuming responsibility we carry out daily. It's part and parcel of living in obedience to God. We rarely need to choose between caring for our children and witnessing for Christ. We perform each duty when it is required and doing either one does not contradict the other. In the same way, earth-keeping is a natural and integral aspect of our day-to-day decision-making regarding spending, work, consumption, transportation, waste management, and so forth. As God smiles on parenting, so also he smiles on Earth-care. The problem is that not until recently have we come to understand how irresponsible we have been regarding this foundational aspect of daily living.

In the final analysis, the basic cause of environmental degradation is our broken relationship with God, which leads us on a futile quest for fulfillment at the expense of the Earth. Instead of porveying more gloomy news and passing more laws, lasting progress can only come about when people have a radical change of heart. The fruit of gospel witness should be transformed hearts and reordered lifestyles towards God, other people and the creation, all as an integral part of our discipleship. The conservation movement today is in dire need of hope that the good news has to offer. Every time we care for creation, we are really witnessing to the Creator and demonstrating to the community with our lives the practical outworking of the gospel.

Another statement by Hoekema (1994: 54) is worth pondering: *"Being a citizen of the kingdom, therefore, means that we should see all of life and all of reality in the light of the goal of the redemption of the cosmos. This implies, as Abraham Kuyper once said, that there is not a thumb-breadth of the universe about which Christ does not say, "It is mine." This implies a Christian philosophy of history: all of history must be seen as the working out of God's eternal purpose. This kingdom vision includes a Christian philosophy of culture: art and science reflect the glory of God and are therefore to be pursued for his praise. It also includes a Christian view of vocation: all callings are from God, and all that we do in everyday life is to be done to God's praise, whether this be study, teaching, preaching, business, industry, or housework."*

Environmental stewardship is a loving response to God which is expressed in caring for both people and for non-human elements of his creation. Both have been blighted, both are in need of rescue, and *both should be an integral part of the church's outreach agenda*. We may not accord them *equal* attention in terms of our mission and ministry, but *neither can be neglected* if we are to fully cooperate with God in achieving his present and future intentions.

### **Phillip Donnell again**

*"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"* is a Christian hymn by Charles Wesley. By general repute, it is among Wesley's finest, justifiably famous and beloved, better known than almost any other hymn he wrote. Judging by its distribution, it is also among his most successful.

Like many hymns, *Love Divine* is loosely Trinitarian in organization: Christ is invoked in the first stanza as the expression of divine love; the Holy Spirit in the second stanza as the agent of sanctification; the Father in the third stanza as the source of life/grace; and the Trinity (presumably) in the final stanza as the joint Creator of the New Creation.



Like many hymns, too, this one is a tissue of Biblical quotations, including "Alpha and Omega" (st. 2) as an epithet of Christ, from Revelation 21:6; the casting of crowns before God's throne (st. 4), from Revelation 4:10; the promise that Christians shall be "changed from glory into glory" (st. 2 and 4), from 2 Corinthians 3:18; as well as other, more general allusions.

The omission of the second stanza is consistent with several other textual variations in the hymn. The passages which are most subject to change tend to be those that advance a distinctively Wesleyan "perfectionist" account of the Christian life, i.e. those that suggest that one can be completely cleansed of sin in this life, by means of a "second blessing" whereby committed and sanctified Christians rest wholly in God and may be said to share the holiness of Christ himself.

Many, certainly including those of a more Calvinist persuasion, and even perhaps Wesley's brother John, found this idea troublesome. Even some fairly innocuous lines ("Let us all thy life receive," stanza 3) were probably read as suspiciously perfectionist, hence the common alteration to "Let us all thy *grace* receive."

The same is probably true of other oft-changed lines. It was doubtless on theological grounds that the line "Finish then thy new creation," (stanza 4) was often replaced by "Carry on thy (or 'the') new creation," the latter suggesting an ongoing process of sanctification rather than its achievement; and "Let us see thy great salvation / Perfectly restor'd in Thee," frequently changed to "...*our whole* salvation / *secured by* Thee", a formulation which also resolves some ambiguity, and which, if less striking, was felt to be clearer and more orthodox.

For all that, the final stanza of the hymn enshrines a prayer that offers profound hope for a shattered world. The Bible indicates that in some strange way, angelic and human disobedience has affected the whole of creation. Defection from God has done damage to the rest of what God has made – or at least held it back from reaching its full potential. However, the Bible also tells us that when God became part of his own creation, by being born into it in the person of Jesus, he set in motion a long-envisioned process of restoration. As a man, in a sense, had been creation's downfall, so a man – Jesus – would be its Saviour. When God's redemptive power finally and completely transforms those who trust in him, it will transform the whole creation as well.

God's process of restoration begins with humans. Because of sin, God's image in us is partly distorted. It is not seen as clearly as it once was. Though the Bible is clear that humans are still "made in the likeness of God" (James 3:9), that likeness, defiled by sin, doesn't look like everything it is supposed to. For example, sin distorts our moral judgement, clouds our thinking and hinders our fellowship with others.

The good news is that God's image is being restored. God redeems his children through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, so that they can be "conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29 ESV), who is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15 ESV). Paul says that fellow Christians have a new nature "which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10 ESV). We "are being transformed" into Christ's image "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

This is a gradual and painstaking process, rather like a sculptor working on an unformed block of marble to eventually produce a completed statue. "We are his workmanship"

(Ephesians 2:10 ESV) and the divine craftsman labours on our lives carefully and patiently, seeking to produce beauty and usefulness. But there is a culmination, for at the end of time, all of God's children will become fully like his Son, Jesus Christ. "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (I Corinthians 15:49 ESV). Christ "is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4 ESV) in a perfect sense. In Jesus we see God's likeness as it was intended to be, and because of Jesus we will eventually be changed to fully reflect God's image as we were intended to do (I John 3:1-2).

Logic tells me that the gradual process of restoration that God is currently undertaking in people, is a process that he also wants to pursue in the rest of what he has made. I would like to suggest that, by extension, the renovation of the created order is not something that he will neglect until some ultimate and instantaneous transformation at the end of time, but rather a gradual process that he is working on even now and will one day bring to its culmination. Both are within the scope of his redemptive purposes in the here and now. Frederick Buechner comments: "...all ground is holy because God walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it. If we are saved anywhere, we are saved here. And what is saved is not some diaphanous distillation of our bodies and our earth, but our bodies and our earth themselves..." (*Wishful Thinking*, 1993: 52).

God invites us to cooperate with him in redeeming "our earth". As creatures made in God's image, we were also made to be his representatives on the earth. As such, we are called to take care of his creation. When God commanded Adam and Eve to "subdue" the earth and "have dominion over...every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:28 ESV), he did so as a king telling his representatives to care for his kingdom in a way that honoured him. Therefore, though we are free to take from the abundance of God's earth, we are to do so in a way that demonstrates care for it and respect for its Creator. Since God loves what he has made, and has planned to transform it, we must tend and care for the environment. Rather than adopting a cavalier or wasteful attitude, we should have deeper appreciation of the created world – a desire to deal gently with it, protect it, and preserve its wonderful creatures and resources. When we take the opportunity to make improvements to the world in which we live, we are bringing God the glory by making it look more like he designed it to look.

The restoration of both people and the planet is part and parcel of the "new creation" which Wesley (and thousands since) have prayed for God to carry through to its finish. As God's image-bearers, representatives of the king of the universe, we have the awesome responsibility to help restore both his people and his planet to the way they were meant to be. We get the opportunity to work alongside the king who is "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5 ESV). Therefore, we have great hope and respect for the world that God has entrusted to us. We long to see it returned to its original state – a world without "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18 ESV). And as we joyfully work towards this goal, we give God the glory we were created to bring him.

What I describe in this article, and long to see, is a contemporary vision of creation that is authentically Christian, something rooted in revelation and consistent with the Great Tradition of Christian belief and teaching, something which may unify Christians of various denominations and understandings. Why is this important? Besides the urgency of a unitive

spirit among authentic Christian believers in an increasingly postmodern, pluralistic culture, there is the urgency of the global ecological crisis.

Does Christianity have something to contribute to the unity of humankind and to the penultimate redemption of nature from destruction by pollution and exploitation? The answer is a resounding “Yes!”. Christians hold in common the heritage of a worldview that esteems the natural world highly while viewing it as less than God. The world is distinct from God, but at the same time not separated from God and not alone or uncared for. In his 2002 book *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, Roger Olsen asserts that “*the rediscovery and reassertion of creation as good because created by God with meaning and purpose would go far toward such unity and healing. If the world is God’s good creation, as Christianity has always said when it is faithful to its own sources, then nature is worthy of being preserved and restored*” (page 174). As we have observed, ultimately only God can totally renovate nature, as he promises to do in Romans 8:18-25. In the meantime, however, Christians can *anticipate* God’s final restorative act, and *honour* God’s original creative act and declaration that its products were good, by caring for the garden of nature.

To sum up, just as God raised the body of Jesus Christ from the tomb of death and glorified it to a new form of existence, so Christianity can assert that God will raise creation from its bondage to decay – the curse under which it has fallen – and give it a new mode of glorified existence in a new union of harmony with him. This vision of creation gives value to the world and hope for its eventual redemption, but it also motivates those who are grasped by it to work toward the healing of creation from all that corrupts it as a present and ongoing commitment.

### **Thomas Berry**

St. Paul indicates that the whole universe is involved in both a primordial fault and a primordial healing, and this dramatic narrative provides the story line for all of history.  
- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 70.

### **Dave Bookless**

Firstly, Jesus didn’t only focus on ‘saving souls’! He cared for whole people in their physical and social as well as spiritual context. To Jesus, people’s relationship with God could not be separated from their relationships with one another and the world around them. He taught that loving God and loving your neighbor are linked. So, healing the sick, releasing the prisoner and stilling creation’s storms are all part of the ‘good news’ (the gospel of the kingdom of God) that Jesus taught and modeled. Evangelism (‘saving souls’) is a core Christian calling and people can only come into a living relationship with God when their sins are forgiven through Christ, but evangelism should not be separated from living out the whole gospel. Take the example of Noah’s ark – it’s about God’s purposes in rescuing us from the effects of sin... yet it was not only ‘souls’ but whole people who were saved. In fact, it wasn’t only people but ‘every living creature upon the earth’ (Genesis 6-7), so perhaps God’s view of what needs saving is somewhat bigger than ours has sometimes been!

Second, when evangelism is not only words but is accompanied by Christians showing care for the whole world in practical ways, it is much more powerful. When Christians have nothing to say about today’s ‘big issues’, including the environment, it puts many people off

Christianity. In contrast (to quote the late Rob Frost), ‘when Christians take the earth seriously, people take the gospel seriously.’ This is the experience of A Rocha’s projects, where for many people the Christian faith suddenly seems to make sense when they see it loved out in relationship to other people and the whole planet. So, in conclusion, it’s not a case of either evangelism or saving the earth, but both the good news of salvation *and* good news for creation.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 144-145

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

Soteriology is, of course, central for any evangelical theology, but in a properly biblical vision the full scope and extent of Christ’s work should be explicit. As Colossians, among many biblical texts, makes clear, Christ’s work is as wide as creation itself. It is nothing short of the restoration and consummation of all creation... Indeed, if Jesus did not die for white-tailed deer, blue whales, and Belizean rain forests, then he did not die for you and me. Jesus comes to save not just us but the whole world.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 116

### **Tony Campolo**

The reason for the absence of environmental concerns in both our beliefs and our actions is probably due to accepting a theology in which, to use J.B. Phillips’s expression, “Our God is too small.” We evangelicals have preached a God who sent His Son into the world to save us, but we have been reluctant to grasp the biblical truth that His salvation was meant for more than humans. Our sermons have taught that God loves people and wills to rescue them from sin and Satan, but in our homilies, we have ignored the message of God’s saving work for the rest of creation.

It is time for the world to know that when John 3:16 declares that “God so loved the world,” the word *world* in this verse is, in the original biblical language, the word *cosmos*. The salvation that John 3:16 talks about is for everything in the universe, not just for people.

- *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: ix

When Jesus conquered Satan, He not only provided for our deliverance from eternal death’ he also initiated the freeing of nature from the evil effects of Satan’s work. The ultimate result of the work of Christ is that all of nature and all of humanity will be giving God glory and worshiping Him throughout all eternity.

- *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: 39

With Eastern Orthodox Christians, salvation is not as “human-centred” as it is in the theologies of the West. They explain for us that when Jesus died on the cross He did not do it just to provide passage for people like you and me to heaven when we die. He also did it, they claim, to restore everything and every creature in the entire cosmos so that all can worship God.

- *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: 43

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

Sometimes Christians ask, “Isn’t it more important to save people than to save species. Refresh yourselves on the story of Noah and the flood in Genesis 6-9. You might reflect by

asking questions like these:

- Why did God save living creatures, according to their kinds (species), as well as people?
- If saving people is always more important than saving species, how might this story have been written?

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 59

### **Scott Hoezee**

The redemption that God has in store catches up not just human beings but also trees, shrubs, rivers, lions, lambs and snakes.

- *Remember Creation*, 1998: 79

### **Lausanne**

Creation care is a “gospel issue within the lordship of Christ.”

- *From the statement of the Third Lausanne Congress, 2010. The Cape Town Commitment. Part I.7.A.*

Informed and inspired by our study of the Scripture—the original intent, plan, and command to care for creation, the resurrection narratives. and the profound truth that in Christ all things have been reconciled to God—we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel, proclaiming and acting upon the good news of what God has done and will complete for the salvation of the world. This is not only biblically justified, but an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship to God for his wonderful plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, our ministry of reconciliation is a matter of great joy and hope and we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis.

- *Lausanne Study group on Creation Care: Jamaica Call to Action, November 2012.*

### **Denton Lotz**

There seems to be a conflict between those who emphasize saving souls and those who emphasize saving trees... This is a ridiculous conflict. We need saved souls who can live a meaningful life in God’s beautiful world of nature which is yearning to be free from pollution... Let’s not confuse evangelism with ecology, but let’s also show that true evangelists are also true ecologists.

- cited in Campolo, *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: 3

### **Jonathan Merritt**

Christians are charged with the task of evangelizing the world, the argument goes, so we can’t let environmental issues distract us from our true mission. They say we have to choose between evangelism and creation care, and therefore, we must pick evangelism.

We aren’t forced to choose between sharing the gospel and creation care. It is a false dichotomy. Both are possible. The very fact that the Bible tells us to do both indicates that evangelism and creation care can simultaneously be done well...

*Merritt describes the efforts of Rand Clark’s Genesis Church in Colorado to combine evangelism with creation care, then says:*

Not only is Genesis Church obeying the creation care teachings in Scripture, it has developed a unique platform on which to share the gospel. Rand tells me that people are always asking

why they do such things, which begins a great conversation about salvation found in Jesus. Just as Paul found a natural connection point with the Greek culture in Acts 17, Rand believes we can do the same thing through living as stewards in the twenty-first century.  
- *Green Like God*, 2010: 90,92.

### Jurgen Moltmann

...the kingdom of God is nothing other than the new creation of *all things* for eternal life.  
- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 11 (emphasis mine)

The resurrection of Christ is a meaningful postulate only if its framework is the history which the resurrection itself throws open: the history of the liberation of *human beings and nature* from the power of death. In the framework of history defined in any other way, the resurrection of Christ is not a meaningful postulate at all.  
- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 79 (emphasis mine)

In the perspective of human history the raising of Christ from the dead means that the general raising of all the dead has begun. But that is only the personal side of the hope. In the perspective of nature, the raising of Christ means the destructive power of death, which is anti-God, is driven out of creation. Death is 'destroyed' (I Cor.15:26) and in the new creation there will be no more death. *That is the cosmic side of hope...* In this hope I can love all created things, for I know that none of them will be lost.  
- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 85, 87 (emphasis mine)

When we turn to the New Testament, we find that the doctrine of Christ put forward in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians is a *cosmic* christology. But, like the patristic church's doctrine of the two natures, this was dismissed by modern Western European theology as mere mythology and speculation. Anthropocentric christology fitted better into the modern paradigm 'history'. But without meaning it, this anthropocentric christology actually became one factor in the modern destruction of nature; for the modern reduction of salvation to the salvation of the soul, or to authentic human existence, unconsciously abandoned nature to its disastrous exploitation by human beings. It is only a growing awareness of the deadly ecological catastrophes in the world of nature which has led to a recognition of the limitations of the modern paradigm 'history', and has prompted us to turn back, and ask again about the wisdom of ancient cosmic christology and its doctrine of physical redemption.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 88-89

The true church is the healing beginning of a healed creation in the midst of a sick world.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 93

We are therefore living in a moment of crisis, a particular moment or Kairos in which Christ and chaos meet, and we must confront the threat to nature with a 'christology of nature', in which the power of redemption *does not stop short at the hearts of men and women and their morals, but gathers in nature as a whole. Nature is the scene of grace and the sphere of redemption just as much as history.* A christology which is expanded to its cosmic dimensions will kindle a passion for the threatened earth.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 90 (emphasis mine)

**Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

...all of creation is included in the benefits of Christ's redemption of his people. So it is no wonder that the entirety of creation should form a cosmic chorus of praise for Christ and what he has accomplished. It also makes it less surprising that, in the longer ending of Mark's Gospel...Jesus instructs his disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). As Paul writes, it is precisely the good news of Christ's reconciliation of *all* things, "whether things on earth or things in heaven" (Col.1:20) that "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven (Col.1:23).

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 124.

In order to assess where creation care sits in our array of Christian responsibilities, it will be helpful to ask about how creation care relates to the central New Testament and contemporary Christian concern: the gospel. We make two points: creation care is part of the gospel itself, and creation care can never be separated for Christians from the transformation of people that is central to the gospel.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 172.

The "good news" is focused on the kingdom that is inaugurated in the first coming of Jesus (Matt.4:23;9:35;24:14; Luke 4:43,8:1,16:16; Acts 8:12). And, of course, the kingdom Jesus proclaims includes all that God is doing to bring all of his creation under his benevolent reign.

...there is no conflict between gospel and creation care. In fact care for the created world is a necessary implication of the gospel.

To use the language we used earlier in referring to redemption, we must say to many believers that "your gospel is too small." The good news is about the whole of the created world. It reveals the way in which God's purpose for all of creation is accomplished in Christ, the means by which a world wrecked by sin and corruption is renewed and restored to its Creator.

Becoming a disciple of Christ means adopting the habits and values that are in keeping with the "good news" story. That story recounts God's extraordinary grace in providing forgiveness for rebellious, selfish sinners – and so we tell fellow sinners about this astonishing good news. The story also speaks of God's purpose to reconcile people to one another, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 3:6...and so we work for reconciliation between ethnic groups and races and social classes. The story speaks of "good news for the poor". And so we reach out to the poor and the outcasts in our society. And the story speaks of creation being set free. And so we seek ways to begin our work of liberating creation.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 174,176,177

**Jonathan Moo and Robert S. White**

What is the gospel? Here is one way it can be summarized: it is nothing less than the good news that in Jesus, the Son of God and Messiah of Israel, God has defeated the powers of sin, death, and evil and has inaugurated his restored rule over all of his creation. He has made provision through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus for all people - Jews and Gentiles together - to receive forgiveness of sins and new life in the

Spirit, enabling them to live forever under the Lordship of Christ. *This good news is for the whole of the earth.* It reveals the way in which God's purposes for all creation are accomplished in Christ, the means by which a world racked by sin and corruption is renewed and restored to its Creator...

This "good news," with its proclamation of Jesus as Lord of all, is of such cosmic sweep that it necessarily challenges any and all other claimants upon our worship.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 92-93 (emphasis mine)

### **Mick Pope**

Being a disciple of Jesus involves more than saving souls.

Jesus calls us to make disciples - those who do as he commands - not just to make converts.

Jesus' view of the kingdom of God included God's people in God's place: land is important.

This included "the renewal of all things" (Matthew 19:28).

For Jesus and other Jews, salvation was not about going to heaven when you die, but rather the establishment of God's rule.

Loving people means loving the world in which they live; the two are not at odds with each other.

Jesus reconciles all things to himself, including non-human creation.

Some Christians protest that Christianity is all about making converts. Didn't Jesus give us the Great Commission to save souls in Matthew 28? Don't we detract from the job of doing this if we get tied up in issues like climate change, even if it really is happening? By now it should be clear that this can't entirely be the case, since our original mission was to represent God to the cosmos and to undertake the wise rule of the Earth. Since we are being remade in the image of Christ, we should be doing all the sorts of things we were originally called to do.

How can we go about saving souls while our very lifestyle's threaten people's wellbeing? Will they listen to us? Will our words be full of meaning and love for our hearers, like a beautiful song - or will it sound hypocritical and shallow. The Bible calls us to holistic mission: to speak and live the Gospel, practising peace, justice and creation care.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 41,44.

## **OBJECTION 3**

### **IT'S GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY!**

**It is God's job, not ours, to care for the planet. After all, God made the earth and it's his responsibility to preserve it. Since God is in control, shouldn't we just stand back and let him do whatever he is going to do?**



**God will ultimately take care of creation, so there is no compulsion on us to get involved in environmental issues. It's his problem – let him handle it!**

**Phillip Donnell**

First, God has actually commissioned *us* to care for what he has made. He has called us to that task, and that commission is still in force. Way back in Genesis chapter 2, we read that the Lord God took the man (representing humans) and put him in the Garden of Eden (representing the natural world) *“to tend and keep it”* (NKJV). The original word for *“tend”* there means "to work or serve" , "to till or cultivate", "to dress." It implies improvement, adornment, embellishment. The original word for *“keep”* means "to exercise great care over", to "guard", to "watch over", just as a caretaker maintains and protects and preserves what has been entrusted to him so that he can return it to its owner in as good or better condition than when he received it.

In other words, creation care is definitely something God wants us to be involved in. Right from the outset, humans were given permission to use the earth, not abuse it. We were appointed stewards or managers. God put us in charge of developing all the potentialities he built into the natural world – wisely, faithfully, and in a timely manner. This includes a concern for issues of justice, such as why the rich should have a disproportionate share of the earth's resources. It is a God-given commission, and with that commission comes great responsibility – one day he will hold us accountable for how well we have fulfilled that role.

Second, whatever God does in the future does not absolve us from doing what is right in the here and now. For example, suppose we heard a fiery meteor was going to hit the earth in seven days. Would this be an excuse for us to forgo God's commandments, and eschew any obligation he has placed before us? Would imminent destruction of the earth be a green light to steal, horde food, burn every forest, or ignore the poor? No way! Retirement from morality is not mentioned in the Bible. Those who have no belief in God could justify such selfish actions out of a *“that's all there is”* reasoning. However, knowledge of an end-time reminds believers to double their efforts to do the will of God.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray for God's kingdom to come. We then define what the kingdom is. It is where God's will is *“done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matthew 6:10 TNIV). What is God's will concerning creation? God's will concerning creation is to care for it, and that obligation is ongoing. Later (in v.33), Jesus indicated that the advancement of God's kingdom on earth was to determine our priorities. The kingdom is now here in part, but not yet in full, and we have a significant role in extending its influence and its manifestation.

Our Christian calling is to work for his kingdom in the world, and part of that is to demonstrate sustainable living. The fact that we will never see our prayer for the kingdom totally fulfilled before Jesus returns does not negate the fact that Jesus told us to pray that prayer; and exhorted us to start to move in the right direction at least, even if we do not fully achieve it. In short, the way we live now should point forward to what God's reign in its future fullness will look like. That applies to the way we treat the environment as much as anything else. Therefore we have every reason and motivation to care for creation today!

Third, we do not know when Jesus will come again, so maybe we shouldn't hedge our bets. In Mark chapter 13:32, Jesus says that even he doesn't know when the end will come. Instead he cautions us to conduct our lives in a way we would not be ashamed of if the world ended today. He says that we must always be ready for the end. What he is emphasizing is that since none of us knows the number of our days, we are to keep his commandments, and love God and all God loves, regardless of how much time is left. As if to reinforce this principle, Jesus told the parable of the ten servants. Before departing for a distant country, the nobleman gave some of his money to his servants with the instruction, "Do business with these until I come back" (Luke 19:13). In other words, "Yes, I am coming, but keep busy in the meantime!"

So, can we afford to wait around until Jesus comes to do something about our worsening global environmental problems? Apparently not. Knowing that God promises to restore the earth when Jesus comes is actually a reminder for us to do our part every day towards that end. That is how we act out our faith. Indeed, if Jesus tarries, and we do not act in the meantime, our children and grandchildren will inherit a dying planet and a world very different from the one we know. We need to be active now to secure the future of those who follow us. Those being born or yet to be born warrant an effort or sacrifice on the part of us who are older – today.

#### **Michael Abbate**

Jesus talked quite a bit about accountability. In the parables of the faithful servant, the ten bridesmaids, and the talents recorded in Matthew 24 and 25, he took pains to emphasize doing the right thing all the time and not counting on being bailed out by some remarkable event. The parables tell us to fulfil our responsibilities, use our resources carefully, and invest wisely for the future. From these and many other biblical parables, I learn that I should be grateful for this planet and nurture it always – the master or Bridegroom could return at any time and catch me in the act. And He's not real fond of excuses.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 100-101

#### **Thomas Berry**

None of the religions feel equipped to deal with this new challenge. It is why the religions of the world are not dealing with the ecology issue. If we depended on the religions of the world to deal with the ecology issue, we would already be much worse off than we are at present. None of the religions, in my acquaintance, have shown effective responsibility for the fate of the earth. By not accepting responsibility for the fate of the earth, there is a failure of religious responsibility to the divine, as well as to the human. We seem not to realize that as the outer world becomes damaged, our sense of the divine is degraded in a corresponding manner.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 9.

It is within our range of possibilities now to disintegrate many of the life systems of the planet. God is not going to save the planet if we decide to destroy it. It is time that we got shook up enough to remedy the situation.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 46.

Many people wonder if all we should do now is trust in God. But God is not going to take care of our present crisis. The deity is not going to pick up the pieces and remedy the disasters we bring about. God gives us the capacity to deal with these things... God is letting us kill off the most beautiful things around and evidently God is not bringing an end to it... God is telling us what to do. The natural world is telling us what to do. God speaks to us through the natural world.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 51-52

We cannot make a blade of grass, but there is liable not to be a blade of grass if we do not accept it, protect it, foster it. This represents a vast change in the functioning of the biosystems of the planet and places upon us new responsibilities in relation to the natural world.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 98.

### **Dave Bookless**

Not worrying about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34) does not mean not caring about tomorrow. Biblical faith is about depending on God 100% to meet all our needs, yet at the same time taking up God's call 100% to be co-workers in his kingdom. Somebody once put it: "It's my business to do God's business and it's his business to take care of my business." So, while God is committed to caring and caring for the whole creation, he's delegated much of that to us! The story of Noah is a great example: God didn't reach out and rescue all the animals; he asked a human being to act on his behalf. He still does.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 148

### **Edward Brown**

What about God? Where is he in all of this? We sing and we believe that "his eye is on the sparrow" – surely the future of his creation is in his hands, not ours? God would not allow us to destroy his creation, would he?

Well, yes, he might. It is absolutely true that God is in sovereign control of history (Isaiah 46:10). That is a biblical given. However, within the framework of God's plan for history, he has and does allow us human beings an astonishing amount of latitude in what we do with our lives, our surroundings – and yes, what we do with and to his creation. It is abundantly clear from history, ancient and modern, that God allows holocausts and wars and all kind of terrible things to take place. There is no objective reason – and certainly no biblical one – for saying that God would step in and prevent us as a race from causing the planet he gave us to become unlivable. He has allowed us to build weapons that could erase life on the planet in a matter of minutes. If we choose to destroy our home, God will not stop us.

Unless, that is, God were to step into history the way he usually does, through human beings who have aligned their lives with him and who are committed to accomplishing his purposes in their own small histories. Remember God's invitation to Moses in Exodus (3:7-8,10)...When God wants to do something in the world, he does step in, but he does it through people.

I believe God has seen the sufferings of people around the world, and I believe he is ready to step in to reverse the ecological disaster we have brought on ourselves. And he is calling his

church to take up this task on his behalf.

- *Our Father's World*, 2008: 16-17

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

Interventionism - any theology that leans heavily on God's ability and willingness to break into time and space in order to *intervene* on the world's behalf - may easily lead to a lax attitude towards Earthcare. In other words, statements like "God will ultimately save us" can easily lead to otherworldliness and to sidestepping the ecological work placed on us as human stewards.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 185

### **Tony Campolo**

I believe that the new heaven and the new earth will come in its fullness only with an apocalyptic return of Jesus. *He* will establish *shalom* at His coming. On that great day, He will put an end to the destructive violence that now plagues the earth. The second coming of Christ will signal the complete deliverance of creation from its present bondage to corruption.

What must be made clear is that each of us has a responsibility to do something about our polluted and trashed creation right *now*. In anticipation of His coming, we must go to work today and participate with Him in caring for all parts of His creation, making our contribution to the work that he will complete on the day of His coming (Philippians 1:6). The Bible tells us that the time is at hand to labor with Christ in initiating the cleanup...

Between now and then, the church must be about the business he will complete.

Since I am convinced that saving planet earth from pollution and ugliness is God's will, I am also convinced that Christians must be ready to become His agents.

In today's world, the body of Christ is the church. Through the church, God's contemporary work on earth is accomplished. The eternal Christ chooses to speak to our world through the church. And if this world is to hear God's message about creation care, it will be through the church.

Christians must set the agenda. We are the people who must declare the salvation of God for the cosmos. The church must lead the way for ecological renewal. God has commissioned His people to be the agents through whom he rescues the world from its polluted condition (Romans 8:19-23). Let us be faithful.

- *How to Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: 96,97,117,133,153

### **Herman E. Daly and John B.Cobb Jr**

Recognizing that human efforts to impose virtue make the course of history more bloody, some believers cry out for a final fulfilment that will reverse all this and yet make some sense of the slaughter bench that is history. Rather than see God as working through human efforts and the transcending perspective that guides those efforts, they appeal to God as one outside the historical process to intervene and put all things right. If that is the best that the prophetic tradition can offer, then Shepard is right. Better to abandon the knowledge of

good and evil, to accept what is for what it is, than to view it with helpless horror while counting on a supernatural intervention to redeem it in the end.

But we are not convinced that these are the only options. We think that deepening the knowledge of good and evil even now can put our situation into perspective that makes possible choices to reduce if not avoid the catastrophes towards which history hastens. We do not think it would be better if everyone simply went along uncritically in the course of present events.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 396

### **Ken Gnanakan**

The burden is therefore on human beings to exercise their responsibility along with love and concern for one another within God's creation. We have the responsibility to maintain God-given rights in our dealing with nature. In a very real sense this is an extension of human rights to their broadest implications within the context of ecological relationships. The responsibility given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to name and exercise control over all creation is perhaps a good pointer to the fact of such responsibility. We are quick to interpret it to refer to our authority over the natural world, but ignore a reference to the responsibility entrusted to us to respect and assign rightful place and value to everything within God's world.

- *God's World*, 1999: 172

### **Scott Hoezee**

...some Christians seem to think that since God will one day restore this whole creation anyway, we need not worry about its decay now. It is going to get worse before it gets better and since only God can make it better in the end, we will focus on more important, spiritual matters for now and simply allow the creation to slide into its inevitable end-time decay.

But if it is wrong to take this nonchalant, devil-may-care attitude toward the disintegration of the Christian moral life, then it is just as wrong to take this attitude towards the disintegration of God's larger creation.

- *Remember Creation*, 1998: 77

### **Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

If the land mourns, creation groans, and God himself weeps over the ruin of the earth, we surely cannot sit idly by when we see the destruction of creation. It remains possible for some people in some times and places to ignore creation's plight, to deny the reality of its groaning. There are today prominent Christians in well-off parts of the world who work hard to convince others that...the state of the earth and its life is unimportant or of little concern to Christians... Yet, to pretend that even good things cannot be poorly used or abused, or that a good and gracious God would not let us experience the consequences of our actions is to fail utterly to recognize the significant moral responsibility with which Scripture says God entrusts his human creatures. This line of thought sounds rather like the false prophets of Jeremiah's day who denied that anything was wrong or that God would ever act to judge his people's sin (Jer.14:13-14).

Wearing blinders can enable us to ignore the consequences of our actions for other people

and for all of life now and in the future, and conveniently can allow us to carry on with our current way of life and do whatever we like. Yet surely the God who calls us to justice and mercy and who weeps over ruined mountains and withered grasslands would have his people take seriously our responsibilities in and for his creation. Surely our call is to face social and environmental challenges squarely and honestly and to work creatively to consider how our lives as God's children might even now begin to reflect God's purposes for us and his creation.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 111-112.

Christians must...resist various forms of "green utopianism": the idea prevalent among some environmentalists that our own programs, if only fully implemented, will usher in environmental nirvana. The story of creation in the Bible begins and ends with an act of God. On the other hand, however, our distinctive Christian hope does not mean we should fall prey to a pessimistic "what good can we do anyway?" passivity. It is God who ultimately transforms his creation. But this does not mean we have no calling or role in working to bring creation closer to the goal God has set for it. The revelation of God's purposes carries with it a calling to participate in those purposes. And while our role ultimately cannot be to transform creation, we do have a role in bringing creation closer to that goal. We cannot create Eden on earth; only God can – and will! But God expects us, indeed commands us, to anticipate to the best of our ability that final state.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 152.

Given the value of non-human creation to God and the impossibility finally of separating the flourishing of human beings from the flourishing of creation, we are failing in our responsibilities as God's people if we do not take time to pay attention to the health of the earth.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 195.

### **Mick Pope**

We should admit though, that for too long large sections of the Church have abdicated their responsibility to properly care for creation. In our efforts to avoid viewing nature as divine, we have seen it as disposable and reaped the rewards of this view in the form of environmental destruction.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 27

One objection Christians sometimes have about climate change is that since God is in charge, he wouldn't let it happen, and if he did it is obviously his will so there is no point doing anything about it...

So does climate change happen according to God's permission or his prescription? Is it God giving us over to our sin and its consequences because of our idolatry, or God carrying it out so that there is no alternative for us? I think it is the former.

He (God) holds us responsible for our sins against his creation and those that suffer as a result. A verse often overlooked by Christians is Revelation 11:18, which warns that those who destroy the Earth will be destroyed.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 35,39-40

**Jay Ruka**

Likewise, for the Church the huia critiques our Christian worldview: how long are we going to foster theologies that blindly assume that the planet is 'going to burn', that we don't need to care for earth, just the souls of humans on it. That is dualism. Huia don't like dualism; they don't like being separated. When they are, they die.

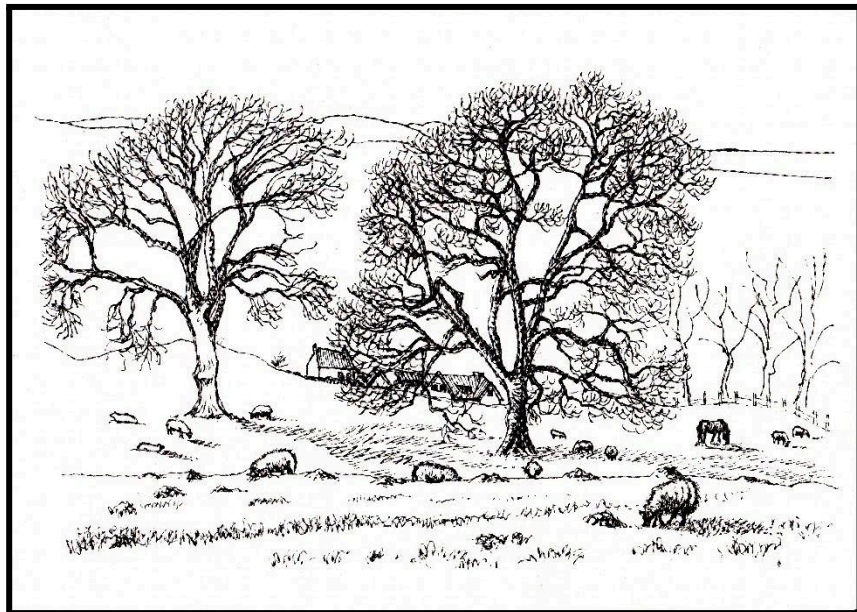
- *Huia Come Home*, 2017: 139

**David Wallace-Wells**

The climate system...has been brought to the brink of total instability by just one generation of human activity. But that instability is also a measure of the human power that engineered it, almost by accident, and which must now stop the damage, in only as much time. If humans are responsible for the problem, they must be capable of undoing it...

The path we are on as a planet should terrify anyone living on it, but, thinking like one people, all the relevant inputs are within our control, and there is no mysticism required to interpret or command the fate of the earth. Only an acceptance of responsibility.

- *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019: 220, 226.

**OBJECTION 4****PEOPLE ARE THE PRIORITY**

Shouldn't we spend our time and resources helping people rather than nature?

**Michael Abbate**

Since God has made people more important than the rest of creation and has actually given us dominion over creation, it doesn't matter what happens to creation. We are the priority, not the created world around us. (Ah, it is so easy to place ourselves at the center of the universe. In fact, in this argument, we come dangerously close to placing ourselves, not God, on the throne.)

Asking which is more important to God – people or nature – is a loaded question. People are much closer to God's heart than the rest of creation, aren't we?

Of course. People are God's crowning creation. He created us in His own image, for heaven's sake! He willingly sacrificed His own Son to bring us back into proper relationship with Him. So people are, in fact, special to Him. And yet, as we have seen, the creation is important to God. It's not quite as if God votes "man" instead of "creation." He made both, loves both, and expects man to demonstrate that he can live in such a way that both are nurtured here on earth...

Man does have a special status in God's eyes; after all, we are created "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). However, God was pleased that through Christ, all things in creation – not just man – could be reconciled to Him (Colossians 1:19-20). It is clear that woven throughout Scripture is an additional message: man is an important part of God's creation, but not the only important part. God loves it all: mountains, seas, plants, animals and man. And His desire is that we all thrive. Together.

We are not the owner of creation – God is. We are as dependent upon creation as our fellow creatures. We share another similarity: both the creation and the creature man are unhappy with our current state, a frustration so intense it causes creation and man alike to groan in severe pain. We have a desperate longing to be freed from the degrading effects of sin on our planet and within our souls.

The creation is not what it was intended to be, and neither are we. But in the same way as God doesn't approve of us mistreating other fallen humans, He does not give us authority to degrade the environment either. In a manner very similar to the way our physical bodies will be transformed at Christ's return, the creation will also be "liberated" from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:21). This is our source of hope.

People are not the only part of creation that is dear to God. We must respect the importance of the natural world, as God does.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 101-102

### **Thomas Berry**

...we cannot have well people on a sick planet.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 100

### **Dave Bookless**

It's a false distinction to separate caring for the poor from caring for the planet. God has made a world that is interdependent, where we as humans cannot survive without healthy ecosystems to give us food, water, shelter, clothing, fuel, and even the air we breathe. It is



the world's poor who are suffering most from climate change and who are most directly dependent on the natural systems around them. Dr Stella Simiyu, a Kenyan botanist and member of A Rocha International's Council of Reference, puts it like this: "The rural poor depend directly on the natural resource base. This is where their pharmacy is, this is where their supermarket is, this is in fact their fuel station, their power company, their water company. What would happen to you if these things were removed from your local neighbourhood? Therefore we really cannot afford not to invest in environmental conservation. It is also very important to remember that we should care for everything God cares for – which includes the wildlife he made, sustains, and entrusts to our care.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 147

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

A principal reason to care for Creation is *mutuality*: the wellbeing of humankind is dependent on the wellbeing of the planet. And vice-versa... Like other biblical covenants, the Noachic covenant is instigated by God; in response to God's covenantal commitment, humans bear covenantal responsibilities. However, unlike other covenants and promises, this one is universalized to include *all* creatures; it is essentially an ecological covenant. To keep covenant or to fail to keep covenant has consequences for the whole Earth community.

The biblical theology of covenant means that when it comes to the planet's welfare, we are all in this together... Dan Erlander calls this mutuality "cosmic koinonia," in which "every part of creation participates in the life and shalom that God intends for every other part."

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 27-28

The truth is that the underprivileged in the world experience the desolating effects of ecological degradation *disproportionately* in comparison to the economically privileged...

The ecocrisis is as toxic to humans as it is to the rest of Creation, yet we in the first world remain comfortably insulated, while those in the majority world suffer the devastating effects of this human-made apocalypse...

The negative consequences and burdens of a changing climate will fall disproportionately on those whom Jesus called 'the least of these': the poor, vulnerable and oppressed...

Ecojustice teaches us that by protecting and ensuring the quality of life for the most vulnerable and those on the margins, we protect all people, creatures and ecosystems.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 31,49,51,166.

### **David Chong**

Vinoth Ramachandran once remarked that the question is like asking a poor mother not to bother about her child's education because feeding him is more important. Of course, both basic needs should be our concern although in some contexts, saving lives would have higher priority than environmental conservation. In most situations, however, it's not an either/or choice. The well-being of rural poor is often dependent on a sustainable ecosystem. The natural resources are their 'pharmacy' (from which they gather medicinal herbs) and 'local supermarket' (from which they are supplied daily needs) and water supply system. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor. Since there is close interdependence in the ecosystem, animal and plant extinctions would ultimately be unhealthy to people as well. Helping people to manage and develop their natural resources

in a sustainable manner would in turn alleviate poverty.

Therefore, we must care for both people and for non-human elements of God's creation. Obeying God's commandment to be responsible stewards of His world is also an expression of love for the Creator and for people, especially the rural poor.

The main challenge to creation care is to start with ourselves. None of us likes to change our lifestyle if it involves perceived inconvenience. If each of us care enough to act in the light of what we discover, we can begin to live a simpler lifestyle, reduce pollution load and free up more resources for those really in need. Dean Ohlman wrote, "We must not prioritize our ethical obligations to such an extent that we excuse the plight of animals made to suffer unnecessarily by our neglect or cruelty."

- Extracted from the website of Biblical Environmental Stewardship, Malaysia.

### **Herman E. Daly and John B.Cobb Jr**

There are many theists who suppose that belief in God is opposed to biospheric thinking. Like economics, modern Western Christianity has often allied itself to anthropocentrism and the neglect of nature. It has generated suspicion of organismic views of human beings and their communities, and fear that the distinctiveness of human beings, both their specialness by virtue of having been created *imago dei* and their radical sinfulness, which distinguishes them from the rest of creation, will be obscured. Some modern Christians have been led by their investment in concern for human rights and identification with the oppressed to a suspicion that any major focus on the biosphere is a distraction from social justice issues. We take these suspicions seriously, but we believe that the biospheric perspective can be integrated into and grounded by theocentrism in a way that does not neglect justice, and indeed is required by justice.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 382-383

The biblical line is not drawn between humanity and the other animals but between God and creatures. The word translated in the Bible as "all flesh" expresses the commonality.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 393

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *We should care more about people than saving species of plants and animals*). We often hear this rationalization for not saving living species threatened with extinction. But again we must ask, "What does the Bible teach?" Recall the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9. Who perishes? Who is saved? Are species less important than individual people? At the very least, care for living species cannot be disregarded because of the importance of people. Christ's redemption covers all creation, not just humans.

- *The Green Bible*, 2008: I-26-27

### **Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

...I can care for creation at the same time as I care for other people. The balance of this concern and our particular focus will differ depending on our situation and calling, but there is no reason why meaningful involvement in creation care need interfere with other

Christian obligations.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 186.

### **Jonathan A. Moo and Robert White**

*After exploring the excuse of **pleading ignorance**, they continue:*

The second way we may try to evade our calling to care for creation is related to the first: we might claim that we must care first and foremost for our human neighbors and not get caught up in misanthropic “green” concerns that seem to neglect those who bear the very image of God. This excuse is related to the first because it reflects what today can only be an argument grounded in an almost willful ignorance, a refusal to see that it is almost impossible to care for our human brothers and sisters without caring for the environment in which they live. More nuanced arguments are sometimes made along this line about, for example, the prioritization of human welfare over the preservation of biodiversity. Most often, however, such prioritization turns out to be rooted in false trade-offs that ignore long-term consequences or that depend on conducting business as usual and hence are unimaginative in coming up with fresh and better ways forward. We also must remember, based on the testimony of Scripture, that non-human creation too has value before God, and so we are compelled wherever possible to come up with solutions that enhance the health of both human and non-human communities.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 165

### **Mick Pope**

We need to understand where Jesus saw himself with regard to God's unfolding story of putting the world right, and how that included "the renewal of all things" (Matthew 19:28), which includes the non-human creation...

If God truly loves the world, then we are to love it as well. This means people, and the world in which they live. People suffer because of environmental impacts such as climate change.

It is sometimes suggested that caring for the environment comes at a cost of caring for people... James reminds us that without caring for people's physical needs, our message of peace is empty (James 2:14-17).

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 42, 43

## **OBJECTION 5**

### **THE PROBLEM IS TOO BIG!**

**The ecological problems are so big and overwhelming.  
What I do won't make any difference, so what's the point?  
There's little we can do at an individual level because our impact will be negligible.**

### **Phillip Donnell**

*Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.*

(from The Talmud, the central text of rabbinic Judaism, which draws heavily upon the Old Testament)

How are Christians to respond to this global threat? In the same way that they have always met seemingly insurmountable challenges: by exercising the “faith factor”! We must not be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task ahead. God offers his help and resources, lest we overestimate the confronting problem but underestimate a possible solution. The Power behind us is always greater than the task ahead.

For example, in I Samuel 17:1-58, we read about Goliath—a giant, proven soldier, and Philistine champion - who defied, terrorized, and shocked the Israelites daily. They lapsed into severe anxiety and desperation. In stark contrast, David came on the scene. He was just a boy, but proved to be a true warrior for God. Choosing five smooth stones from the wadi, he slew the giant and put the Philistines to flight. By so doing, he also abolished negative emotional and spiritual giants in the Israelites’ hearts.

Similar hope, trust, courage and optimism can empower us to face our giants without fear or doubt. Active faith in the God who guides and enables our efforts, multiplies our usefulness, and enhances our effectiveness is the secret. As far as environmental stewardship is concerned, the big difference faith makes for me is the confidence that God is "reconciling to himself all things" (Colossians 1:15-20) and that He will in some mysterious way use us in this reconciling process.

A key way God works is through the Church - the world’s largest social movement, active in every country. Imagine the potential if every local church was to more effectively pursue its biblical mandate for environmental stewardship (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15) and take a lead for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). Indeed, the church’s re-awakening is seen by some as part of God’s answer to the looming crisis, an important initiative in his ongoing restoration programme.

If the destruction of the planet as a place suitable for humans is occurring because of the cumulative impacts of many small decisions, then it is equally possible that our planets healing will also be the cumulative outcome of many small decisions.

Our individual actions and our commitment to be a new community pointing to God’s hopeful future, may seem small, but collectively will have a significant impact and make a big difference to our world. We are all on this creation care journey together. If we can do a little more year by year, we're on the right path.

- Here are some stones that you as an individual can select from the wadi to be an “enviro-steward” with impact:

A SMALL STONE: Support an environmental organization.

A MEDIUM STONE: Get involved in a hands-on environmental project, e.g. community garden, habitat restoration, pest eradication.

A BIG STONE: Make earth-keeping an integral part of your lifestyle, reflected in day-to-day decision-making (spending, work, consumption, transportation, waste management, etc.). Simplify. Buy less. Waste less. Save more. Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.

- Here are some stones that your local congregation can select from the wadi to be an “enviro-church” with impact:

A SMALL STONE: Give some focus to creation and creation care in your worship services and other ministry programmes.

A MEDIUM STONE: Conduct an audit of your environmental impact, leading to practical and measurable steps to improve it (“shrinking the footprint”).

A BIG STONE: Plan, initiate and resource a practical environmental project.

*“The road must be trod, but it will be very hard. And neither strength nor wisdom will carry us far upon it. This quest may be attempted by the weak with as much hope as the strong. Yet it is oft the course of deeds that move the wheels of the world: Small hands do them because they must, while the eyes of the great are elsewhere.”*

Elrond's words in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring*, as he addressed the Council just before Frodo agreed to carry the ring to Mordor.

### **Dave Bookless**

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the scale of the environmental crisis, but here are a few thoughts that may help:

- Be local! Your responsibility is not to change the world on your own, but to ‘become the change you want to see in the world’. In other words, obedience to God's call rather than ‘success’ is what we're called to. Let's make sure we're changing what we can, and let God worry about the big picture.
- Get some perspective! ‘Climate change is not one big intractable problem, but billions of tiny, tractable ones.’ In other words, if we break things down into everyday decisions we all make, together we can make a huge difference. As the riddle goes: ‘How do you eat an elephant?’. One bite at a time!
- Be encouraged! World-changing movements can have small and seemingly insignificant beginnings. Think of William Wilberforce and the abolition of slavery, of Ghandi and the Quit India movement, or of how one travelling preacher in the Middle East 2000 years ago, who died a ‘failure’, transformed the world.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 148

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

...the enormity of the problem itself poses a difficult motivational dilemma for every Christ-follower. In the face of transnational economics and global ecological realities, any personal action can seem inconsequential and meaningless. But the notion of ecology carries with it the idea that everyone and everything are downstream from everyone and everything else. Small actions and incremental changes *do* have huge ramifications. Only inaction is meaningless. The overpowering temptation is to withdraw passively into sentimental escapism, a space in which our only hope seems to be a miraculous eschatological intervention by God. Where do we find the courage, hope and strength to become partners with the God of the universe in the redemption and reconciliation of all things in Christ?

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 18

### **Tony Campolo**

I once saw a cartoon that depicted a huge mass of people. The crowd stretched as far as the eye could see. Over each person was one of those balloons that cartoonists use. In this cartoon, each person in the gigantic crowd was saying, "What can one person do?"

Perhaps the most evil thing any of us can do in the face of the immense environmental problem that confronts us is to give up. When any one person stops to consider all that has gone wrong with humanity's stewardship of God's creation, it seems justifiable to throw up one's hands and ask, "What's the use?"

Such resignation is not allowed for followers of Christ. As the Holy Spirit gains control in the life of a Christian, there comes a still, small voice that whispers, "You can make a difference."

When it comes to environmental concerns, we must strongly affirm the significance of the individual. God saved you and expects you to act as His agent here on earth. He is calling upon *you* to do what *you* can do to deliver nature from its suffering and to prevent the destruction of the atmosphere.

- *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, 1992: 155-156

### **Claire Dawson**

Don't underestimate the power of your own life and example. God can work profoundly through the words and actions of people - including you!

The issue is challenging, and at times perplexing, but we must not lose hope. We must move forward toward real and helpful solutions as individuals, as workers, employers, as mums and dads, uncles and aunties, sons and daughters, grandparents - and as communities of faith...

As an individual, it is certainly within your power to make some small, incremental changes. They will help. They may change you. And they may make others around you think again and ask some new questions: they may begin to change too. And in time you find that you're ready to make a few more changes. take one step at a time, knowing that all around the world others are stepping forward just like you. You are not alone.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 229

### **John Houghton**

We may feel daunted as we face the seemingly impossible challenge posed by care for the earth and its peoples and the need for sustainability. But an essential Christian message is that we do not have to carry the responsibility alone. Our partner is none other than God himself. The Genesis stories of the garden contain a beautiful description of this partnership when they speak of God 'walking in the garden in the cool of the day' (Gen 3:8) - God, no doubt, asking Adam and Eve how they were getting on with learning about and caring for the garden.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 143

### **Naomi Klein**

The goal becomes not to build a few gigantic green solutions, but to infinitely multiply smaller ones, and to use policies that encourage multiplication rather than consolidation. The beauty of these models is that when they fail, they fail on a small and manageable scale - with backup systems in place.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 447

### **Jonathan Moo and Robert White**

The third excuse that we are tempted to employ in order to avoid contemplating radical changes in our lives is the most pious – and possibly the most dangerous in its consequences for life on earth. This is the apparently humble claim that human beings cannot possibly matter very much in the big scheme of things... It is tempting to write off many decades of scientific work and insight when it seems so reasonable to question how we puny creatures can possibly have any effect on a system as enormous and complex as the planet's climate. This claim is especially appealing to Christians, because we recognize humility as an important, even central, virtue. Indeed, humility must be one of the defining characteristics of Christian creation care. Our current ecological crises would not have arisen if we as a species had remembered our own limits, our own "creatureliness": that we are part of God's creation, not gods ourselves.

In the present case, however, humility can be used as a smokescreen to disguise willful ignorance and abrogation of responsibility, and it serves to allow us to go on living however we like, oblivious of the consequences. We are reminded of a headline in a satirical newspaper *The Onion*: " ' How Bad for the Environment Can Throwing Away One Plastic Bottle Be?' 30 Million People Wonder." ... The best scientists and scientific bodies around the world no longer have any doubt that the collective actions of over 7 billion people with ever-increasing rates of consumption are having demonstrable, dramatic effects on all sorts of large-scale biological and physical processes on earth. Long before scientists began making these observations and suggested that we label this age "Anthropocene," Scripture made it clear in any case that we bear much responsibility for God's creation and that its fate is, in the end, bound up with our own.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 166-167.

### **Matthew Sleeth**

This stream of news about things "outside our control" leaves us feeling powerless. In one respect, it is consoling to believe that the problems of the world are too big for us as individuals. If they are too big or too complex for us to solve, we are relieved of any responsibility. Powerlessness can be comforting, which may explain our addiction to newscasts and newspapers. As a result, we overlook the dozens of decisions we *can* make every day to help build a better world...you and I can become the agents of the cure and jettison our paralyzing feeling of helplessness. We can help ensure that unborn generations will arrive on a healthy planet that needs and welcomes them.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 29,33

### **Loren Wilkinson**

There are many strategies Christians can and should pursue to help care for creation. One of the earliest evangelical books on the environment - Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man* - made one of the wisest observations: Christian households and churches

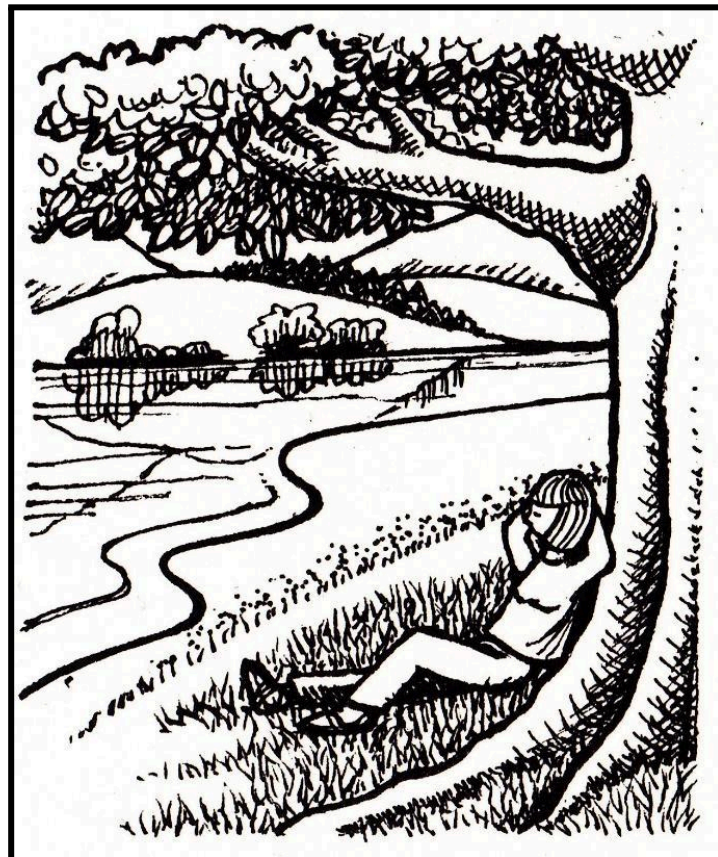
need to be "pilot plants" of the new creation. There the world can see, acted out in individual lives and communities, the healing of creation that only comes from being in fellowship with God in Christ.

(He then outlines practical steps under three headings: Individual Action, Community Efforts, Public Witness)

- in Trujillo, Kelli B, (ed), *Christianity Today Study Series: Creation Care*, 2008: 52

**OBJECTION 6**

**WE  
FOCUS ON  
SPIRITUAL  
THAN THE**



**SHOULD  
THE  
RATHER**



## PHYSICAL/MATERIAL

**Isn't the gospel about spiritual, not material matters?  
Doesn't God care about our souls, not our bodies?**

### Phillip Donnell

In Scripture, redemption is conceived most fundamentally as the reversal of the fall and the restoration of God's good purposes from the beginning. By way of contrast, Greek dualism conceived redemption as transference from a lower, inferior realm (variously understood as body, earth, matter, nature or the secular) to a higher, more valued or esteemed realm (understood as soul, heaven, spirit, the realm of grace or the sacred). This dualistic assumption, inherited from Greek philosophy, is often simply superimposed over biblical texts that address redemption and so leads to a distortion of the Bible's message.

Humans were created to be *physical* beings in a *physical* environment. This in no way detracts from the truth that they were also created *spiritual* beings in a *spiritual* environment, that is, in relation to God. Every Old Testament image of salvation included the regeneration of the physical as well as the spiritual. Recall the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9. For Noah there was the stark reality of a totally enclosed mini-world in the ark. Who perishes? Who is saved? Are species less important than individual people? For Abraham and his Israelite descendants it was the fruitful land of Canaan as the new Garden of Eden for the people of God. In the prophets the same scenario is projected as a future attainment in which the full glory of God's kingdom will exist and yet in a physical environment.

The New Testament continues this holistic emphasis. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds state explicitly our belief in the resurrection of the body, but frequently we operate with the Greek pagan notion of immortality of the soul; of a destiny of timeless and matterless eternity in an ethereal spiritual state. We need to distinguish redemption in the biblical testimony from its logic in the Greek philosophical tradition that has come down to us from Plato—a tradition that has deeply distorted the western church's worldview.

The fact, which is often overlooked, is that the bodily resurrection of Christ points to our own, and carries with it also the guarantee of the redemption of the whole physical universe (see Romans 8:19-23 – discussed below). Whereas a dualistic understanding of redemption typically devalues the good Earth God created and encourages an aspiration to transcend finitude, the biblical worldview leads to an affirmation of the goodness of creation, along with a desire to pray and work for the redemption of precisely *this world* (including human, socio-cultural institutions) - that earthly life might be restored to what it was meant to be. Salvation means *all* relationships restored – moral, spiritual, mental and physical .

### Craig Bartholomew

While the New Testament's theology of place is refocused, it is just as materialist as that of the Old Testament.

- *Where Mortals Dwell*, 2011: 244

### Dave Bookless

At the time the New Testament was written, there was a battle of ideas between the dominant pagan Greek philosophy and the new Christian ideas founded in Old Testament Jewish thought. At its heart, the battle was over whether ultimate reality was purely spiritual. Are human beings divine souls trapped in physical bodies, or are our bodies part of who we really are? The Bible is very clear. We are not merely spirits or souls, and our material bodies are vitally important. In I Corinthians 15, Paul reminds us that Jesus rose from death with a physical body, that after death we too will have physical bodies, and that Christianity falls apart without this. The biblical view is that mind-body-spirit together make up who we are. You will not find a single New Testament passage that speaks about 'saving souls', because Jesus was not interested in disembodied souls! He was interested in whole people; he healed physical and mental illnesses as well as forgiving sins. He taught us to pray for God's kingdom 'on earth', not just in heaven... This earth is our God-given home, and the Creator cares about his house-guests' behaviour.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 14

Underneath this question (which comes in many guises) is the deeply flawed idea that we can separate the 'spiritual' from the 'material' or physical. In reality, the Bible always sees human beings as a mind-soul-body unity that cannot be separated. We are whole people composed of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities, not simply immortal souls encased in physical bodies. This later idea stems not from the Bible but from Greek philosophy.

The very fact of creation, that God made a material universe and declared it "very good" (Genesis 1:31), and that God continues to uphold, sustain and renew the creation, shows that material things do matter to God. Even more so, the coming of Jesus, God made physical, is God's stunning affirmation of the material world. Both Jesus' bodily resurrection, and the promise that we too will have resurrection bodies (I Corinthians 15) continue to show how positively God sees material things. It is therefore deeply sub-biblical to say that the Christian message is about spiritual rather than material things.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 145

### Steven Bouma-Prediger

Are these dualisms (spirit and matter, soul and body) biblical? ...it is not at all clear that either the Old Testament or the New Testament supports the kind of body/soul dualism assumed by advocates of this argument... While the body is separate from and inferior to the soul for Plato, this is not the case for Scripture. Wendell Berry summarises well the correct biblical view:

*The formula given in Genesis 2:7 is not man = body + soul; the formula there is soul= dust + breath. According to this verse, God did not make a body and put a soul into it, like a letter into an envelope. He formed man of dust; then, by breathing his breath into it, he made the dust live. The dust, formed as man and made to live, did not **embody** a soul: it **became** a soul. "Soul" here refers to the whole creature. Humanity is thus presented to us, in Adam, not as a creature of two discreet parts temporarily glued together but as a single mystery.*

The same is true with respect to the supposed dualism between matter and spirit, in which matter is devalued. A variety of biblical texts – from Genesis to Revelation – and many basic Christian doctrines derived from the Bible – creation, incarnation, eschatology – affirm that for God, matter matters. God is, to put it sharply, an undeviating materialist. Thus, since the initial premise is unacceptable – the claim that the Bible promotes a dualism between soul and body or between spirit and matter – this argument is not sound.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 65-66

### **Ken Gnanakan**

The biblical teaching of the word becoming flesh to dwell with us underlines the fact that God's divinity does not diminish through a total identification with the material dimensions of creation. Jesus was born, walked, talked and took active part in the realities of our sinful world. Although the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews is careful to point out that Jesus was 'yet without sin', the important point to know is that in doing so Jesus initiated the transformation of this present Earth into a new Earth.

- *God's World*, 1999: 33

### **Jurgen Moltmann**

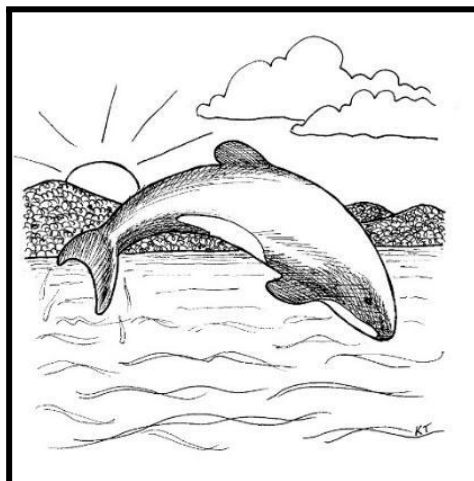
In the Lord's Prayer, we pray for the coming of the kingdom 'on earth as it is in heaven', meaning by heaven the side of creation which already corresponds wholly to God, and by earth the side of creation which is still in dispute. We expect from the future of the kingdom a new heaven *and* a new earth. So there is no salvation without this earth. God's kingdom is as earthly as Jesus himself was, and anyone who looks at Jesus' end will say: through the cross of Christ the kingdom is ineradicably implanted on this earth.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 20

### **Mick Pope**

It is clear that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on Earth. The nature of his rule then is not simply about what people identify as 'spiritual' issues like personal morality, prayer and evangelism. Jesus' authority is over such things as politics, sport, and the environment.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 42.



## **OBJECTION 7**

## THIS WORLD IS NOT OUR FUTURE HOME

**Our future home is heaven. Since we're headed for heaven anyway, why take care of Earth? Why bother, since we'll be safely whisked away in our spirits from this planet?**

### **Shamila Blair**

Recently I finally came to understand what Mick meant when he made a contentious point during a lecture earlier this year: "False hope is heaven. True hope is earthy." While this may sound like heresy for some, it has been most helpful to me as I seek to embrace my own journey of caring for this Earth as a responsible steward of God's creation. For far too long our Christianity has subscribed to a "pie in the sky - we'll go to heaven when we die" theology which has only absolved us of our guilty consciences as we continue to recklessly plunder God's Earth for our selfish gain.

- cited in the Epilogue of Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 285

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

*Referring to 1 Thessalonians 4, he points out that the verb "to meet the Lord"*

Means to go out to meet a visiting dignitary in the final stage of his journey in order to escort him back to your city... So when Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4 that we – the living and the dead – will meet the Lord in the air, this does *not* refer to some rapture. It refers, rather, to those in Christ joining the royal procession of Jesus the king coming to reign on a renewed and renovated earth. We are not whisked off the earth; rather, we join Christ as he comes to the earth.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 69-70

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

Eschatology has received a great deal of attention in evangelical theology. Premillennialism, especially the dispensational premillennialism found in popular evangelical end-time fiction, seems to *require* the destruction of the Earth for the salvation of the world... We wondered whether premillennialism was actually a detriment to Creation care. Or does postmillennialism offer a more hopeful approach to earthkeeping?... We agreed that "blueprint" interpretations of the book of Revelation - that there exists a prescriptive divine timetable for the future - are not the only way to understand eschatology.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 137

As a result of the shift from post- to pre-millennialism, the evangelical community on the whole withdrew from being active members in ushering in God's reign and focused even more on the salvation of souls... This shift led to a more pessimistic view of the Earth. Now hope was centred not on societal renewal as a preparation for Christ's return but on hope in Christ's return that would usher in a new Earth. It is worth re-engaging Scripture in its historical context in order to discover an eschatological perspective that offers a transformative hope for humanity *and* the rest of Creation.

It is difficult to deny that at least part of Christianity's ambiguous history with Creation lies in a traditional eschatological perspective in which the Earth is ultimately destroyed by fire and Jesus returns to create anew. Catherine Keller calls this perspective "unearthly," in that the indifference to nature implied in traditional eschatology becomes lethal. That is, its distraction from the earth complies with the destruction of the earth. Because a theology of Creation is essential to our vision of redemption, our conviction is that a belief in the physical afterlife does not have to result in disregard and disdain for the present life.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 136-137

The hope of heaven on Earth is not a hope of escape from our home planet. In *Surprised By Hope*, N.T. Wright explores a new way of imagining what he calls "life after 'life after death.'" Wright argues that heaven and Earth are "two different dimensions of God's good creation." However, we should not envisage salvation as a skyrocket escape *from* this creation but as resurrected bodies *within* this creation. By examining key eschatological texts in the Old and New Testaments, as well as an extensive reading of early church doctrines, Wright argues that any Christian theology of the end must incorporate all of Earth in the new Creation. The physical universe becomes the cradle within which heaven comes to rest. Our Christian goal becomes not to escape into some postmortem destiny but to embrace God's kingdom in the present. This calls for a rekindling of belief in a physical resurrection that will restore the Earth to its garden shalom. Wright says, "Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden, dimension of our ordinary life - God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together." Apocalypse, therefore, is not a future destructive judgment but a future creative judgment; God resurrects the world in which a new humanity will live...

Reading Revelation as a promise of supernatural rescue from our own recklessness allows us to divorce humanity from the natural world and removes any responsibility we have towards the rest of Creation... When our ecotheology deepens eschatology, it does so in order to create hope for a transformed present rooted in a new future. Eschatology means learning to live on Earth as it is in heaven. It does not promise that we will live to see this new future fulfilled, but it demands we participate in the work of creating that future in *this* moment...

The last step on this journey is to live "as if" the future we envision, which is nothing less than the commonwealth of God that Jesus proclaimed and gave his life to bring to fruition, is a "reality" that we can partner with God in bringing about.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 139, 140, 141, 248

### **George Caird**

*Caird explains Revelation 21:1 - 22:5 as follows...*

Nothing from the old order which has high value in the sight of God is debarred from entry into the new. John's heaven is no world-denying Nirvana, into which man may escape from the incurable ills of sublunary existence, but the seal of affirmation on the goodness of God's creation. The treasure that men find laid up in heaven turns out to be the treasures and wealth of the nations, the best they have known and loved on earth redeemed of all imperfections and transfigured by the radiance of God. Nothing is excluded but what is obscene and false, that is, totally alien to the character of God. Nowhere in the new

Testament do we find a more eloquent statement than this of the all-embracing scope of God's redemptive work.

- *Revelation of St John the Divine*, 1966: 279-280

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

Although it's true that people who believe in Jesus Christ receive the gift of eternal life, everlasting life in Christ includes the here and now. Just as we take care of our teeth, our hair, our bodies, our possessions – clothes, automobiles, homes, and so on – as Christians under the rule of the kingdom of heaven, so we take care of God's earth as part of God's rule today. The world we live in is much more enduring than ourselves or our possessions. So shouldn't the care of creation be part of our here-and-now concern?

- *The Green Bible*, 2008: I-25-26

### **George Ladd**

Throughout the entire Bible, the ultimate destiny of God's people is an earthly destiny... Biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence.

- *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 1972: 275

### **Lausanne: Jamaica Call to Action**

Jesus is reigning as Lord over history and creation, and will come again, restoring all things, and we will dwell with him, not in some disembodied existence, but in an imperishable new creation. Hope in the restoration of all things in and through Christ Jesus is one of the most important, and distinctly Christian, contributions that the church can give to environmental movements...

- cited in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 13

### **Mick Pope**

The very evidence that Jesus had overcome sin, evil and death, was that he was physically raised from the dead. The interest of the Jews was in land - physical and solid - and in lives richly and well lived. This should make it clear to us that people are not saved from the Earth but should expect to be renewed with the Earth: God's people in God's place. A well-thought-out resurrection theology should make it clear that being in God's place is not being out of the body in heaven, but rather having a resurrected body upon a renewed Earth.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 43

The view that the Earth will be physically destroyed usually goes hand in hand with the idea that when Jesus appears again, he will take Christians away before the end comes. We are to be beamed up just like in those Star Trek episodes... Rapture theology assumes that we will then go to live with Jesus in heaven, even though the text says no such thing. As New Testament scholar N.T. Wright notes in his *For Everyone* commentary, it is important to understand the common secular use of the Greek word translated as "appearance". When Caesar appeared at Rome after some great military victory, the dignitaries would go out to greet him - not to then go off somewhere else but rather to welcome him into the city! We are not raptured off to heaven: instead we will join Christ in a new heavens and Earth. The idea of being caught up into the clouds (I Thessalonians 4:17) is to be expected, as Jesus disappeared behind the clouds when he departed and would return in exactly the same way

(Acts 1:9-11). Nothing in the passage and everything about the Greek word for appearance suggest that we leave Earth for heaven.

This idea is also clear in Revelation 20-21, where we read of the city of God descending to Earth. There is no temple because the city itself is a temple and God is everywhere. Heaven and Earth meet where God's kingdom has come and his will is done. In this passage the new heavens and new earth replace the old (Revelation 21:1), but this replacement is one of character and not physicality as such - in this new order there is no more death or mourning or pain, for God dwells with people.

A final text that is sometimes used to promote an external future in heaven is John 14:2 where Jesus says "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places." Jesus says he is preparing a place for his disciples. The Greek word which is translated as *dwelling-places* refers to a temporary resting place or way station for a traveler.

Far from depicting heaven as a place where we will be *for all time*, heaven comes to Earth when Jesus returns. The implication of all this is that heaven is not an escape from all the difficulties of life, or merely a here-and-now responsibility to live peaceably, justly and caring for creation. Instead, heaven means the place where God rules. And God's rule will one day be fully revealed on Earth. And because we too will be raised from the dead, no deed of peace, justice or creation care we do now is in vain (I Corinthians 15:58).

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 63-65

### **Matthew Sleeth**

When asked, Jesus said that even he did not know when the end would come. Instead, he cautions us to conduct our lives in a way we would not be ashamed of if the world ended today. We must always be ready for the end (Mark 13:32).

Because none of us knows the number of our days, we are to keep the commandments, and love God and all God loves, regardless of how much time is left. For example, suppose we heard that a fiery meteor was going to hit the earth in seven days. Would this news of disaster be an excuse for us to forgo following God's commandments? Would imminent destruction of the earth be a green light to steal, horde food, burn every forest and ignore the poor?

...knowledge of an end time reminds believers to double their efforts to do the will of God. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's kingdom to come on earth. Knowing that God promises to restore the earth is a reminder for us to do our part every day to help.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 37-38

### **John Smith**

The Bible does not give us any charter for sitting back in our evangelical armchairs and waiting until Jesus comes back, notching up each new tragedy in society as another of the marks of His second coming.

- *Advance Australia Where?*, 1988: 223

## **OBJECTION 8**

## IT'S NOT PART OF THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Caring for creation isn't in the Great Commission. It isn't part of the church's mission.

*See also Objection 2.*

### Phillip Donnell

Creation care has historically been integral to the church. Very early in the life of the church, theologians were advocating that humans must exercise stewardship over the natural world to ensure that they did not efface or erase the marks of its Designer. From the outset, there was an awareness that God's missional intent is not confined to homo sapiens. It is comprehensive and holistic. He is thoroughly committed not only not only to the continuity of the present material universe but also to the transformation of that material.

If God is currently in the business of renewing human beings, why would we imagine that God is not also currently in the business of renewing the rest of creation? The scope of our mission must be the same.

Creation care is a major means/mode of mission in the modern world and it has never been more timely.

Mission is a word often used but it is not easy to find a concise definition of it, let alone one on which everyone can agree. Mission has many elements to it.

Decades ago, the Anglican Consultative Council identified five strands to mission which have since gained wide acceptance:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
  - To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
  - To respond to human need by living service
  - To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
  - To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
- (Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6:49; Mission in a Broken World -1990 ACC:10)

It was entirely appropriate that this attempt to define mission was broad in scope because Jesus signified there is Good News to be proclaimed not only to humans but indeed to the entire created order. In Mark 16:15, he commanded his followers: *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the **whole creation.**"* (ESV, emphasis mine).

The nature of that Good News is fundamentally the same for both people and nature, namely the hope and assurance that they will remain in existence (material continuity) and be set free from all that currently blights and limits them (redemption, restoration and renewal). It is a message that Paul unpacks cogently in Romans 8:18-25, and which finds



expression in Isaiah 65:17-25, Ezekiel 47:1-12, Colossians 1:15-20, and Revelation 21-22.

The breadth of this commission has been recognised in recent years by the Lausanne Movement. Its Cape Town Commitment (2011) stated:

*"Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, **and** for society, **and** for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people."*

*(The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and A Call To Action, Lausanne Movement, 2010: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011: I-7-A.)*

This was followed by their ground-breaking Jamaica Consultation in 2012, where delegates agreed that "environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches in our generation". They encouraged the church to promote "environmental missions" as a new category within mission work.

According to Edward Brown (2008: 156-160), the biblical goal of *shalom* is bigger than the truncated view of mission as just a simple message of salvation. In countries where mission has been carried out for over a century, environmental degradation is reaching the point of endangering much of what has already been accomplished. Moreover, we are commanded to love our brothers and sisters, which increasingly means helping them to cope with degraded environments. The opportunities for this are both global and local.

How does all of this translate into our backyard? A friend I occasionally used to fish with would climb into his waders and boots, gather up his gear, sit on the tailgate of his truck and scan the river for 15 minutes or more, looking for rising fish. "No use fishing where they ain't," he would say. Sometimes we fish for souls where they ain't, but they are certainly present when you get involved in environmental projects.

Citizens of the kingdom of God yearn for *shalom*, but non-Christians often yearn for it too, and sometimes work so tirelessly for this that they put Christians to shame. Creation care furnishes an immediate point of mutual interest, shared vision, identification and commonality. It also provides a context in which to forge meaningful relationships as a prelude to evangelistic influence. For this reason, Christian environmentalism is currently the fastest growing missional enterprise in the global church.

In microcosm, if a local church engages in a practical environmental project, it raises the question among the neighbouring people, "Why are they doing this?" It gives opportunities for them to find out that their ecology is based on the gospel and their gospel is centred on the Lord Jesus Christ. As the life and light of Christ is gradually expressed through us, others are drawn to him.

Creation stewardship integrated with evangelism is a new frontier, wide open for exploration, and filled with opportunities as numerous as they are exciting. This is a field ripe for the harvest. If every congregation in New Zealand actively engaged in caring for the non-human creation as a witness to the human creation, and also as a way of increasing the

wellbeing of both, the beneficial results would be barely imaginable!

### **Thomas Berry**

...we can no longer have missions simply to humans, whether they be political missions, economic missions, or religious missions. We cannot aim our efforts precisely, and certainly not exclusively, to the human community, because the human is an abstraction if this designation is taken in isolation from its larger context. There is no such thing as "human community" without the earth and the soil and the air and the water and all the living forms. Without these, humans do not exist.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 43

### **Lowell Bliss**

As for the theological underpinnings of environmental missions, environmental missionaries embrace the theology that Jesus is 'the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all creation'. In the words of theologian Chris Wright, the gospel that environmental missionaries preach is 'good news for the whole creation'.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 56

...the work of environmental missions is 'akin in function to medical missions'.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 59

### **Dave Bookless**

The past contribution of evangelical mission agencies to creation care has been fairly peripheral. However, both biblical theology and evangelical culture provide solid foundations and good reasons why evangelicalism should engage with creation care as mission - as well as evidence that it is beginning to do so... The next few years will be critical as to whether the world's 600 million evangelicals accept the challenge to rethink and rework mission to take God's creation seriously, and to take God's Word seriously when it states that 'The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed' (Rom 8:19).

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 100

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

...our relationships with God, ourselves, others, society and Creation are broken. It is God's mission, through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to bring salvation and healing to *all* of these relationships. To be sure, evangelism is part of God's mission and the gospel of Jesus but so are earthkeeping and the struggle for ecojustice. These enlarge our perspective and experience of poverty and shalom, brokenness and salvation, enabling us to participate in the whole mission of God on earth.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 234

### **Partha Dasgupta and Veerrabhadran Ramanathan**

Finding ways to develop a sustainable relationship with nature requires not only engagement of scientists and political leaders, but also moral leadership that religious institutions are in a position to offer.

- "Pursuit of the Common Good" in *Science*, 19 September 2014, Vol.345, No.6303, p. 1457.

### **Claire Dawson**

The church has missed a vital opportunity to demonstrate radical faithfulness and love, and to lead the world in bringing positive and necessary change. (page 108)

When it comes to the climate crisis we now face, the church has largely been both complacent and complicit. It is our conviction that there are several important facets to this tragedy. We begin with these six:

1. Firstly, we have been **unfaithful to our God**: as stewards and caretakers of his good creation, and as those who have been blessed to be a blessing.
  2. Secondly, we have **failed in our proclamation of the Gospel** to present a message of reconciliation that includes the mending of our broken relationship with creation.
  3. Thirdly, we have **damaged our witness** to those earnestly searching for a hope-filled faith that cares deeply for the natural world. An other-worldly Church that is disinterested in urgent matters of *this present world* can present a significant obstacle to those with deep environmental and social concern.
  4. Fourthly, we have **accommodated almost completely to the secular materialism of our era**, including the idolatry of rampant consumerism. We have failed to adequately take to heart Jesus' warning to watch out for greed, and his timeless wisdom that tells us that "life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15).
  5. Fifthly, we have **rarely presented a holistic and hopeful Gospel** that fully captures people's affections and imagination. Are we genuinely excited about the restoration of all things? Do we really believe that we will witness - indeed, see, hear, taste, touch and smell - the renewed Earth, where we finally know the abiding presence of Jesus with us and partake in the wondrous reconciliation of all things?
  6. Sixthly, through wilful ignorance and inaction, we have been **neglectful in our love of our neighbour**, particularly of those who will bear the brunt of a disrupted climate: the world's most poor and future generations.
- (pages 164-165)

Activists and scientists are seeing that people of faith and religious institutions are a vital part of the way forward. Despite some obvious and significant differences in worldview, many are now seeking to partner with Christians and churches to make a difference. (p.166)

So, as we move into a critical era in the history of the Earth and of humankind, there is tremendous opportunity for a courageous Church that has a clear sense of calling to lead, to challenge, to encourage and to act. Rather than limiting opportunity for service and mission and straining our already over-stretched budgets, engaging in creation care and climate change action will actually remove significant barriers for the Church as it engages with an increasingly conflicted, desperate and hopeless humanity.

There are plenty of people 'out there' who have a deep concern for all that God has made (including people, cultures, flora, fauna, natural wonders) who at present find the church inhospitable and, to be honest, incomprehensible. And there are people among those we consider to be the 'least reached' who will connect immediately with concepts of ecological concern and care. Conversely, they would be right to be suspicious of a Gospel of good news that is brought from an idolatrous and indulgent Western Church that hasn't even begun to tidy up its own back yard! (page 174)

Meanwhile, the Western Church faces its own demise with more congregations closing each week, lacking relevance to connection with the local communities of which they are part. The question is: can we reorient ourselves and our churches as communities of genuine care and concern for both people and planet?  
(pages 174-175)

One tremendous opportunity for the Church is that those involved in non-faith-based spaces are seeking out people and organisations to work alongside in moving forward - including Christians and the Church. It has taken far too long to come to this point, but we are gradually coming to terms with the huge challenge before us. In taking the next steps, wherever possible we should explore possibilities to collaborate with others in order to maximise our effectiveness. This should certainly include partnership with those who act toward the same ends but for different reasons...

The Christian Church has infrastructure, she has purpose and she has good intention. She has leaders of character and influence, and she has people infused with the Spirit of the living God. Just imagine what a blessing we could be to the nations if we could step up and share the role of leading the world toward a safer, more just and more hope-filled future?  
(pages 234-235)

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 108, 164-165, 174-175, 234-235.

### **Susan D. Emmerich**

The relationship of creation care to the gospel stems from God's concern for the reconciliation of *all things* in Christ - including not only the reconciliation of individual persons to God, but also of persons towards each other, and the reconciliation of the whole creation with God. Our human ministry of reconciliation flows out of God's work and includes each of these dimensions - the spiritual, the social and the ecological. This in turn enables effective healing for all manner of brokenness...

...how can the practice of creation care as a three-fold ministry of reconciliation contribute to the concept of *environmental missions*?

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 275-276

'We love the story the gospel tells', the *Cape Town Commitment* declares. It concludes with a reference to reconciliation in not one, but three, dimensions:

*God accomplished the reconciliation of believers with himself and with one another across all boundaries and enmities. God also accomplished his purpose of the ultimate reconciliation of all creation, and in the bodily resurrection of Jesus has given us the first fruits of the new creation. "God was in Christ reconciling the world (kosmos) to himself" ( a reference to 2 Corinthians 5:19).*

Hence the three-fold ministry of reconciliation is with God, with our neighbours and also with creation. 'We love the mission of God', the *Commitment* also declares. Under this heading it states:

*The whole Bible reveals the mission of God to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity under Christ, reconciling them through the blood of his cross. In fulfilling his mission, God will transform the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation in which there is no more sin and curse.*

In two statements about the core values of the Lausanne Movement - the gospel and the mission of God - creation care is included and reconciliation is the framework... *integral missions* today should seek not only to reconcile or restore individuals' relationship to God, but also to one another and to the creation 'as all three are broken and suffering because of sin...and must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people'.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 279

### **Ken Gnanakan**

Creation is a powerful starting point for mission: the church's redemptive mission is built upon the foundation of God's creative handiwork. God has given us charge of all he has created. From here we see our mandate for mission, a mandate which incorporates socio-political, environmental, and every other kind of engagement in his world. If we exercise God's mission, bringing the whole gospel to the whole world, we must not fail to grasp the total scope of redemptive activity, which impacts everything that God has created.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 294.

Starting our theology of redemption from the fall in Gen.3 we have limited ourselves to God's redemptive work only with humankind. When we start our theology from creation, God's mission becomes an all-embracing mission with a concern for all of humanity within the framework of creation. We speak of holistic mission but do not seem to have a whole. Creation is where we must begin so that we can capture the scope of this completeness. For there, evangelism and social action don't become two poles, but two essential aspects of mission within this wide framework. And even more, when we start from creation it is not just social action but also environmental action that becomes an integral part of God's total mission.

- *God's World*, 1999: 41.

An even greater hindrance is with Evangelicals who have narrowed the Christian life to preaching the gospel. Reference is made particularly to Matthew 28 as being obligatory for every Christian. The debate over the past decades has exposed the great need for a holistic understanding of the Christian life. To be clear, everyone who takes the Bible seriously will find it hard to deny the primacy of evangelism. But to deny that there are other priorities alongside this is to truncate the entire truth of the Bible...

Even the so-called 'Great Commission' does not negate any involvement in God's wider purposes. First, Jesus says: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' (Matthew 28:18), and this must refer to the totality of God's influence. And then, the command is not to 'preach' but to 'make disciples', that is prepare those who will 'obey everything' Jesus has commanded (v.20). The implications are wider than many have made them out to be.

- *God's World*, 1999: 99-100

The same Jesus Christ who is responsible for creation is now responsible for the redemption of all things. Redemption becomes a personal concern for Jesus Christ. It is his creation that has suffered and hence through his sacrifice he now personally ensures that redemption is available. But the important thing is that this same Christ is the head of the Church, his Body.

In making this link, Paul ensures that the community of Christ carries on the mission of its head. Energized by his continuing presence, the Church must demonstrate more and more of the saving work of Christ, not only to humankind but to the total scope to which his headship extends - all the universe.

- *God's World*, 1999: 105

### **John Houghton**

An unmistakable challenge is presented to the worldwide Christian church to take on the God-given responsibilities of caring for creation and caring for the poor. It provides an unprecedented mission opportunity for Christians to take the lead and demonstrate love for God, the world's creator and redeemer, and love for our neighbours wherever they may be - remembering the words of Jesus, 'From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded' (Luke 12:48).

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 143

### **Jonathan Merritt**

When the church starts preaching and promoting the stewardship principles found in Scripture, humanity can really begin to solve our environmental problems.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: xiv

Creation care speaks to people in developing nations where people have a greater connection to nature in everyday life. Creation care is a bridge to the gospel in these places. But it also bolsters the gospel in the Western world where many people know of, if not respect, Jesus... When the world sees the Christian community perpetuating systems of wealth and waste, it damages our witness. When they see us living compassionate, sustainable lives, our witness becomes authentic and convincing.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 91

### **Jurgen Moltmann**

Finally, I should like to know how we can 'evangelize' today, and that means: how can we help men and women and our world to open themselves for God's future? *For the invitation to the new creation of all things has to be different from the self-propagating ecclesial Christianity we have known hitherto.*

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 132 (emphasis mine)

What has the gospel got to do with the future? Jesus brings God's future to us human beings, and we are invited to God's future. This is a new angle on things, and it requires a new kind of practical application. Up to now we have known evangelization only as the spread of the present into the future, not as an actual anticipation of the future itself. Up to now, the purpose of evangelization was either to extend Christian civilization, or to propagate the church, or to spread one's own experience of faith. This was not mission in the perspective of the end – not the mission of God's kingdom – not an invitation to God's future. That is why Christian missions have done more to bring Christian denominationalism into the world than to prepare the way for God's kingdom.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 144

The gospel is the invitation to God's future. People who believe the gospel experience the

powers of the future world (Heb.6.5). They move into the springtime of the new creation...

How does this invitation to God's future differ from mission through the dissemination of Christianity as it is now is? To put it simply: it differs through its hope for what is new. We don't want to spread western civilization. We want to invite people in all civilizations to the new creation of all things... We want to experience the new creations of God's Spirit in other cultures... The new creation is as rainbow-hued and diversified as creation at the beginning.

The kingdom of God isn't there for the sake of the church. The church is there for the sake of the kingdom. So...all the church's own concerns and interests must be subordinated to Jesus' concern for God's kingdom. The church's concern is not the church. It is more than that. The church has to do with God and his future for all men and women. *It has to do with the new creation of all things for eternal life.*

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 146-147 (emphasis mine)

### **Jonathan A. Moo**

We must also be wary of the language of prioritization of gospel proclamation versus care for the poor and care for the earth, as if one did not enrich the other... The *good news* revealed to us in the New Testament is that in Jesus...God has defeated the powers of sin and death and inaugurated his restored rule over all of his creation... This good news is for the whole of the earth, because it reveals the way in which God's purposes for all of creation are accomplished in Christ - the means by which a world wracked by sin and corruption is renewed and restored to its creator.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 40

### **Mick Pope**

How can we go about saving souls while our very lifestyle's threaten people's wellbeing? Will they listen to us? Will our words be full of meaning and love for our hearers, like a beautiful song - or will it sound hypocritical and shallow. The Bible calls us to holistic mission: to speak and live the Gospel, practising peace, justice and creation care.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 44

### **Craig Sorley**

*Creation care and the Great Commission: a field ripe for the harvest*

Joseph Sittler urges that we adopt something new into our traditional mode of advancing the gospel. There is a new tool we need in our toolbox...

As environmental concerns gain more attention...how seriously has the evangelical church considered the beauty of integrating two things into one cohesive whole? What if we combined efforts to fulfil the Great Commission with efforts to bring healing to creation as well? In my own thinking, this concept bursts forth with beauty...

A passion for Christ must include a commitment to care for everything he has made.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 75

## **OBJECTION 9**

## NEXT WE'LL HAVE TO ACCEPT ABORTION

**To reduce the world's population, before you know it, we'll have to support abortion.**

### **Randy Alcorn**

#### **The Wrong "Solution"**

It's true that among pro-lifers there is honest debate about contraceptive use and the degree to which people should strive to control the size of their families. But on the matter of controlling family size by killing a family member, we all ought to agree. Solutions based on killing people are not acceptable.

Having endorsed abortion as a means of decreasing the number of young, will society be compelled to use euthanasia as a means of reducing the old? If back in the 1980s the governor of Colorado could tell old people they have a duty to "step aside" (die), what will happen twenty years from now? If the elderly don't step aside, will society begin setting them aside? (That's an honest concern about today's so-called "death with dignity" laws, pushing physician-assisted suicide in several U.S. states.)

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop publicly stated his fear that mandatory euthanasia would eventually result from the unwillingness of the younger generation to support the elderly. He said, "My fear is that one day for every Baby Doe in America, there will be ten thousand Grandma Does."

We should recognize that human beings are responsible for stewarding the earth and the natural resources we have available to us. So by all means, let's pursue smarter, better ways for people to wisely manage their resources, produce food, and reduce poverty. But let's not buy into the lie that killing unborn children is the solution for our world's future.

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<http://www.lifesitenews.com/resources/abortion/pro-life-101-the-ultimate-guide-to-why-abortion-is-wrong-and-how-to-fight-for-life/part-8-we-need-abortion-because-the-world-is-too-overpopulated>. Accessed 7 March 2019.

### **Wendell Berry**

The "population problem," initially, should be examined as a problem, not of quantity, but of pattern. Before we conclude that we have too many people, we must ask if we have people who are misused, people who are misplaced, or people who are abusing the places they have... I would argue that it is not human fecundity that is overcrowding the world so much as technological multipliers of the power of individual humans. The worst disease of the world now is probably the ideology of technological heroism, according to which more and more people willingly cause large-scale effects that they do not foresee and that they cannot control.

- *Home Economics*, 1987: 149-50

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**



Human population growth is a critical factor in assessing the groaning of the earth. Creatures human and nonhuman are imperiled, in some instances, simply because there are so many of us humans. But as Berry reminds us, both affluence and technology play crucial roles in determining environmental impact.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 27

### **Paul Collins**

Despite its importance, population is a difficult issue to discuss in polite society... discussion of population and the carrying capacity of different ecosystems offends the political correctness on both the right and the left. For the right it suggests that you favour abortion, contraception, fertility control and sterilisation, especially in developing countries, and that you want to limit the rights of couples to decide the number of children they wish to have. For the left, it smacks of neo-colonialism and paternalism; you are accused of dictating population size to developing countries and of distracting attention from social justice... The issue is double-headed: it is both absolute human numbers and the insatiable human demand for ever-higher standards of living.

- *Judgement Day*, 2010: 70,71-72

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *Because of the relationship between environmental degradation and growing human population, we will soon find ourselves having to accept abortion as a solution to environmental problems*). Our obligation and privilege to care for God's creation does not give us licence to use any means at our disposal to address environmental problems. The fact that many people justify abortion as a population-growth control does not mean that people who are convicted of a God-given responsibility of stewardship should not work to care for the earth, including its population problems.

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 118

### **Life Charity Organisation, UK**

#### **Overpopulation and Abortion**

A popular argument in favour of abortion is that the Earth is overcrowded, that current population growth is unsustainable, and that this is contributing to environmental, social and economic problems. The implication, presumably, is that if every pregnancy resulted in a birth, we would have even more people than we have at present. How do pro-lifers respond to this?

First of all, we acknowledge that it is a serious point. Space and resources are finite. South-east England, for example, is now the most densely populated area of Europe.

However, at Life we are committed to the value and dignity of individual human beings. The perceived needs of "humanity", as an abstraction, should not be allowed to undermine the rights of actual individual human beings. The philosopher Immanuel Kant, one of the key thinkers of the modern age, argued for what he termed a "kingdom of ends" ; that is, a society in which each individual was treated as a valuable person in his/her own right, and never as an end to some greater project or hare-brained scheme. If respect for human life means that all of us have to make do with less, then so be it.

There is a global problem with certain kinds of environmental degradation and it would

seem that human carbon emissions are affecting the climate. But there are many better solutions to environmental problems than disposing of “unwanted” humans.

The “green case” for abortion is fundamentally dishonest, because its proponents do not truly believe in the basic principle behind it. In fact, it is the old, old argument against the humanity of the unborn child – in a fashionable green disguise. If we did want to reduce the human population, why start with the innocent unborn? Why not murderers and rapists? Why not the disabled, the elderly, the weak and the unproductive? Why not the stupid and the criminal and the insane and the useless?

If this sounds distasteful, then good. It should do. It is distasteful and wrong to kill people in the service of that fine-sounding but hollow abstraction, “humanity”.

In China, the One Child Policy (OCP) – now updated to the Two Child Policy – was supposed to limit population growth. There have been numerous credible reports of abuses associated with the OCP, such as forced abortions, forced sterilisations and harsh financial penalties on law-breakers. In the past the US government has withdrawn funding from the United Nations Fund for Population because of its complicity in the OCP . One of the bravest Chinese campaigners against the OCP is Chen Guangcheng, a heroic defender of human rights now forced into exile in the United States. Chen was, beyond any shadow of a doubt, a political prisoner.

Coercive population control is creeping back into fashion. The Optimum Population Trust (whose long term aim is to reduce the British population by half) has commented in the past that “Governments may be forced to introduce compulsory limits to family size if urgent action is not taken to restrain population growth through voluntary family planning”.

Dr Chris Rapley, a leading academic, once head of the British Antarctic Survey and former Director of the Science Museum, suggested a few years ago that the optimum global population was around 2-3 billion people . Now according to UN projections, by 2050 the global population will begin to plateau at between 9 and 10 billion people . Basic arithmetic suggests that Dr Rapley seems to have set himself the task of eliminating, in one way or another, some 6 or 7 billion people. And he is not alone. The American academic Jeffrey Sachs raised the issue in his 2007 BBC Reith lectures, perpetuating the notion that the world is overcrowded and that further population growth is unsustainable.

If we read between the lines of these and similar pronouncements, there is a disturbing anti-human subtext. There is much vague talk of “humanity”, but it can seem as though the authors see little value in individual human beings, except as beads on some vast utilitarian abacus measuring rates of poverty or sickness. Dr Chris Rapley has said that “the truth is that the [polluting] contribution of each individual cannot be reduced to zero... only the lack of the individual can bring it down to nothing”.

In closing, it is important to note two final points:

Firstly, the rapid population growth of the last 150 years is unlikely to continue beyond the mid-21st century. As noted above, the UN estimates that world population will stabilise at 9 or 10 billion as the developing world becomes more prosperous and average family size

declines, (the decline of fertility in parallel with female education and economic growth is a well-known phenomenon among demographers).

Secondly, population growth, and a large population, are definitely not in themselves barriers to economic development or an inevitable cause of environmental degradation, famine and conflict. As American economics professor Dr Jacqueline Kasun points out in her very readable book *The War Against Population*, “the world’s food problem does not arise from any physical limitation on potential output or any danger of unduly stressing the environment. The limitations on abundance are to be found in the social and political structures of nations”.

In his famous and prophetic book *The Ultimate Resource*, the economist Julian Simon made a similar argument, showing that a growth in population need not lead to unmanageable pressure on resources, and in fact will eventually lead to a better quality of life for everyone, because there will be more people to develop new ideas and new solutions to the problems faced by humanity .

- <http://lifecharity.org.uk/news-and-views/overpopulation-and-abortion/> Accessed 7 March 2019

### **Jonathan Merritt**

If you consider yourself a conservative, you can remain a solid supporter of biblical values like the sanctity of life, but you should expand your political interests to include historically progressive issues like global poverty, human rights, and aggressive care of God’s creation.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 85

### **Caroline Pomeroy**

...population has always been a political ‘hot potato’, rarely mentioned in the sustainable development agenda. Opposition has come from the Catholic Church and the American religious right, from NGOs nervous about coercion and control, and from politicians and economists convinced that technological advances and economic growth will enable us to feed an ever-growing and increasingly wealthy global population.

In 2012 there have been signs that the tide is beginning to turn. April saw the publication of the Royal Society’s ‘People and the Planet’ report, which concluded that ‘Population and the environment should not be considered as two separate issues...

The report presents evidence to show that providing contraception to the 222 million women in developing countries who do not have access to modern family planning will result in women choosing to have fewer children. This is a ‘double win-win’ situation: with smaller families, parents can afford to feed and educate their children better, women have more time to work so can produce more food and/or earn an income, maternal and child mortality rate fall and pressure on the environment is reduced. At *no point* does the report advocate coercion or heavy-handed policies to bring about smaller families; it simply urges the provision of universal access to family planning so that women can choose when to have children and how many...

(She refers to the first London Summit of Family Planning in July 2012, then says)

At a post-summit meeting of faith-based organisations, John Guillebaud, Emeritus Professor of Family Planning and Reproductive Health at University College London and a practicing Anglican, pointed out that ‘the biblical commandment to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” could now be said to have been obeyed. The earth with 7000 million humans rising by 84 million per year, is now surely “full”! God did not command that the earth be over-filled...’

The ‘People and the Planet’ report makes it clear that access to contraception is an issue of social and environmental justice, and we cannot run away from it. But for many Christians, this is a highly sensitive topic and raises hugely challenging questions...

The issue will continue to generate fierce debate, both in the Christian community and outside it. But what there’s also no doubt about is that it’s a debate we must have... We can’t ignore the elephant in the room.

- “People and the Planet” in *A Rocha*, Autumn/Winter 2012, pages 4,5,7.

### **Mick Pope**

Finally, we need to acknowledge that population is not the only driver of environmental or creation harm. There is a well-known equation in sustainability circles known as IPAT: impact = population x (level of) affluence x technology...

Population is perhaps one of the most difficult issues within the discussion of climate change, particularly when different faith perspectives and worldviews are involved.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 32



## OBJECTION 10

### GOD GAVE US THE EARTH TO RULE AND USE

**God told us to ‘fill the earth and subdue it’ and to ‘have dominion’ over it. So aren’t the earth and its creatures simply there for our use and enjoyment?**

**Corollary: Isn't the church to blame for the environmental crisis? Haven't Christians got an appalling track record in caring for creation, and isn't that all based on what the Bible teaches?**

**After all, hasn't Christian theology regarding man's supremacy over nature been the justification for much of the environmental destruction in recent centuries?**

#### **Phillip Donnell**

The “dominion” theory that gives humans total domination over creation is a theological view based on Genesis 1:28. It was interpreted during the 19th century to promote the Industrial Revolution and its desire to use the earth as malleable clay that humans could pound and shape into whatever they wanted. Wolfhart Pannenberg notes that it was only at the beginning of the nineteenth century that the dominion command was interpreted in terms of absolute human power over nature – just at the time “*when modern humanity in its self-understanding was cutting its ties with the creator God of the Bible.*” (1985: 78)

In 1967, Lynn White Jr. published an article called 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' in the *Science* journal. It argued that the application of the ‘dominion’ theory in the past is the cause of our ecological challenges in the present. This provocative article has become the most cited piece of writing within theological debate about the environment.

White argued that the Western Christian worldview supports and encourages humanity’s aggressive project to dominate and exploit nature. Previously, people had believed that spirits lived in objects such as trees and so thought that nature was sacred. Christianity swept away pagan animism and replaced it with the idea that all things were made for humanity’s ‘*benefit and rule*’ (p.1205). Humanity came to be seen as uniquely made in the image of God and as having ‘dominion’ or control over all the creatures of the earth (Genesis 1:26-30). Christianity, he asserts, normalized exploitation of the natural world because:

1. The Bible asserts humanity’s dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism.
2. Christianity makes a distinction between humans (formed in God's image) and the rest of creation, which has no "soul" or "reason" and is thus inferior.

He says:

*“...[Christianity] not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends... .. Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects... Man’s effective*

*monopoly...was confirmed and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled"* (p.1205).

White argued that "[Western] *Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen*" (p.1205). He concludes that the modern technological conquest of nature has engendered the ecological crisis, and that this has, in large part, been made possible by the dominance in the West of this Christian world-view. At various times this view may have been held by the majority of Christians. Christianity therefore *'bears a huge burden of guilt'* (p.1206). Many pundits believe that such indifference towards nature continues to impact in our industrial, "post-Christian" world.

However, White does not think that secularism is the answer to our environmental problems. He does not want to reject Christianity but rather to radically change it. What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion. *"More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."* Indeed, *"We shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man"* (p.1207). It is humanity's fundamental ideas about nature that must change; we must abandon *"superior, contemptuous"* attitudes that make us *"willing to use it [the earth] for our slightest whim."* (p.1206).

White (pp.1206-1207) appeals to the figure of Francis of Assisi as a potential *"patron saint for ecologists"*. He suggests adopting St. Francis of Assisi as a model in imagining a *"democracy"* of creation in which all creatures are respected and human rule over creation is delimited. In this way, White points to the potential for a renewed kind of Franciscanism - a spirituality that focuses on humanity's kinship with all other creatures in a community of creation.

White's ideas galvanized interest in the relationship between history, nature and the evolution of ideas, thus stimulating new fields of study like environmental history and eco-theology. They set off an extended debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West's destructive attitude towards the exploitation of the natural world. Some biblical scholars have questioned whether the technological developments that led to nature's exploitation were really encouraged by the Christian world view.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (1988: 33) delineates three flaws in White's argument. These flaws are outlined by Bouma-Prediger (2010: 66-67): his summary of biblical teaching about the environment is selective and highly distorted, his contention that Christianity paved the way for the scientific and technological revolutions is questionable, and his assumption that environmental destruction has flowed solely from the mindset of western culture and not from others is dubious.

Alister McGrath believes that:

*Lynn White is completely right when he argues that human self-centredness is the root of our ecological crisis, but quite wrong when he asserts that Christianity is the most*

*anthropocentric religion the world has seen. The most self-centred religion in history is the secular greed of twentieth century Western culture, whose roots lie in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and whose foundation belief is that humanity is the arbiter of all ideas and values (2002: 54).*

Equally, however, many saw his argument as a direct attack on Christianity and other commentators think his analysis of the impact of the Bible, and especially Genesis is misguided. They question whether the crucial texts in the Bible (especially in Genesis 1-2) really suggest the idea of human domination. They argue that Genesis provides man with a model of "stewardship" rather than dominion, and asks man to take care of the world's environment. Such dominion is to be exercised with a responsibility to God and to be informed by love.

Pope Francis I is a case in point. In chapter 2, Sections 66-68, of his landmark 2015 Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, he sees the "dominion" view of Genesis 1:28 as distorted. It *"has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him [man] as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church."* Christians, he urges, *"must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures."*

Instead, Pope Francis does an exegesis of Genesis 2:15 telling Adam to till and tend the garden of the world. *"Tilling,"* writes Francis, *"refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving."* As a result, *"Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations."* He notes that the Sabbath was a day of rest not only for humans but also for "your ox and your donkey" (Exodus 23:12). *"Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropo-centrism unconcerned for other creatures."* In fact, the psalms tell us that creatures by their very existence bless and give glory to God. God loves the work of his hands and saw that it was good even before man and woman were created.

Francis' reflection on Genesis leads him to see that *"human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the earth itself"* These relationships are ruptured by sin, *"by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations."*

In short, humans have overstepped the mark and usurped prerogatives that they were never given. It sometimes comes as a surprise to politicians, businesspeople, and other would-be claimants, to learn that we don't actually own the earth. They may act as though "This place is ours. We're in charge!" but they are mistaken. Psalm 24:1 says: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." God owns it. What he said way back in Genesis 1 was this: "Okay, I own it, but I'm going to give you a certain amount of control and jurisdiction over what I own". That's why you find words those words "dominate, subdue, rule over". However, as we have seen, they don't mean "Treat it in whatever way you please."

As pointed out by Pope Francis, in Genesis 2 God went on to define the nature of that jurisdiction. God took the man (representing humans) and put him in the Garden of Eden (representing the natural world) *"to tend and keep it"* I echo Pope Francis by again

emphasising that “tend” means to cultivate, look after, dress, adorn. “Keep” means to exercise great care over, guard, preserve. It was very much a nurturing role.

In other words, right from the outset, humans were given permission to use the earth, but not to abuse it. We were appointed stewards. i.e. managers, caretakers, custodians. God took a risk. He entrusted what he had made to us and put us in charge of developing all the potentialities he built into it – wisely, faithfully, and in a timely manner. It is a God-given commission. And with that commission comes great responsibility – one day he will hold us accountable for how well we have carried it out.

To sum up, it is essential that we understand the concept of dominion in context. Ken Gnanakan helps us to do this by explaining that God sanctioned a *dominion in love*, within a commonality, with creativity, in servanthood, with stewardship, with respect and in justice (1999: 54-56). Dominion cannot be equated with either domination or exploitation. It is therefore incumbent on us as individuals, and as communities of faith, to carefully examine which agenda we are actually fostering and following, perhaps unwittingly. Is it one of domination and exploitation of the earth, or one of stewardship and sustainability? If the former, we must modify our behaviour accordingly and urgently.

### **Michael Abbate**

...this line of reasoning basically lays out like this: Since God created the world and then man and told the first man to be fruitful and multiply, this planet is just like a giant bank account of natural resources that God gave us access to. We didn't deposit the equity in the account. But it is here for our use and enjoyment. Therefore we don't need to worry about protecting it... Creation, according to this view, is a no-strings gift for human kind; we can do whatever we want with it...

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 92-93

But is this what God had in mind when he gave us responsibility for gardening Eden? Did He intend that we should take whatever we want rather than what we need? Did he give people unlimited sovereignty with no strings attached, or was it His intent that we demonstrate responsibility with accountability?...

God did create this planet to support humans and all other living things. He did give us the right to use the resources here to meet our needs. However, the “us” is all of humankind – past, present and future – with each individual generation receiving from its predecessors the responsibility to care for and steward this planet on behalf of untold succeeding generations. What my generation does with creation may greatly affect what future generations are left to steward. We can't disrupt nature without impacting people...

We are a “needy” people; but the concept of “needs” has mushroomed in our day and age... When we are honest, we admit that we often have trouble differentiating between wants and needs...

We have grown accustomed to mortgaging the future for the pleasures of today... I'd say many of us are addicted to a lifestyle predicated upon:

ME      MORE      NOW



In our hearts we know that this is wrong. We acknowledge that, although God gave us the vast resources of this planet to meet our needs, He expects us to practise restraint and willingly make sacrifices that will provide benefits for others, today and in the future.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 97-98

Our instinct (human nature) tells us to get what we can, right now. Our faith teaches us we should sacrifice for others and trust God for the future. Wisdom requires us to view the created world and all its resources as gifts, treasures that we want to ensure are available for our great-great-grandchildren's great-great grandchildren. If we discipline ourselves in the way we utilize the resources of the planet, we will be seen as wise and effective caretakers by future generations, as well as by the Creator. If we don't, we will leave a damaged garden to the generations that come after us and will be held accountable.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 95

God reserves a special place for the people he placed on this earth, but with this honor he expects humility. Our elevated status comes with something not expected of creation at large – responsibility. Once again, this expectation is similar to what God expects of parents who have been given “dominion” over their children.

We are held accountable by how we fulfil our responsibilities; if we are poor stewards of creation, God will not be pleased.

- *Gardening Eden*, 2009: 101

### **Thomas Berry**

We have to live on the planet, on the planet's terms and not on our terms. Living in the natural world on its terms is hard for us. We want the planet to exist on our terms. At last we are realizing that we had better find out right away what the planet's terms are. We must accept life, the human mode of being, within the conditions of the natural world that brings us into being. We were brought into being by the natural world, and we must survive on its conditions. In our resistance to these conditions, we have evolved a pathology of destruction in our consumer-oriented society.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 45-46

### **Wendell Berry**

*Countering the view that Genesis 1:28 gives unconditional sanction to humanshe writes:* Such a reading of Genesis 1:28 is contradicted by virtually all the rest of the Bible, as many people by now have pointed out. The ecological teaching of the Bible is simply inescapable: God made the world because he wanted it made. He thinks the world is good, and He loves it. It is His world. He has never relinquished title to it. And he has never revoked the conditions, bearing on His gift to us of the use of it, that oblige us to take excellent care of it. If God loves the world, then how might any person of faith be excused for not loving it or justified in destroying it?

- *What Are People For?* 1990: 98

### **Dave Bookless**

This misunderstanding has often been present in western Christian thinking, and has caused untold damage both to the planet and the reputation of the gospel. In fact, the Bible is very

clear that it is God's world, not ours (Psalm 24:1; 50:10-11) and that it was created ultimately for Jesus (Colossians 1:16). We are permitted to use and enjoy creation as its tenants (Leviticus 25:23) and caretakers (Genesis 2:15), but not in a way that is careless, greedy or destructive. We are answerable to the owner: God. In fact, the word in Genesis 1 for 'subdue' should be seen as 'manage' or 'bring order to', and the word 'dominion' is about ruling over in a way that reflects God's gentle and just rule. In the light of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, we can describe this as servant kingship.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 147

There is no denying that Christians have often been guilty of allowing and even encouraging the misuse of God's creation. Many environmentalists see Genesis 1:26-28 ('subdue', 'have dominion', 'image of God') as putting humanity on a pedestal above other species and laying the foundation on which aggressive industrialisation and unsustainable living have been built. However, there are three important things this ignores:

- It is not only Christianity that has been guilty of causing environmental disaster.

Atheistic communism, aggressive secular capitalism and Islamic imperialism have all done the same. Any world view that exalts human beings above other species, and forgets our interdependence with them, will lead to environmental disaster.

- The track record of Christianity is far more positive than some have realized.

Alongside the many failures are inspiring examples of sustainable living and creation care, such as St Francis of Assisi, early Celtic Christianity, Benedictine monasticism in the Middle Ages and the Amish in America. It is when Christians have become captives of a human-centred culture, rather than allowing God's word to transform their culture, that greed, exploitation and carelessness have caused damage to creation.

- The Bible does not teach that the world exists simply for humanity to use or abuse.

Every major theme in Scripture shows us that God's world is precious and worthy of our care and respect. God himself is committed to sustaining and renewing creation, and has entrusted its care to humanity. Understood in context, Genesis 1 and 2 clearly teach that it is God's world (not ours!), that humanity is as much part of creation as called apart to be God's image, and that 'dominion' and 'ruling over' are about our exercising God's just and gentle rule: working to preserve the earth and its creatures.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 149-150

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

With respect to what we are supposed to do, the Hebrew verbs in Genesis 1:26-28 indicate that one dimension of the human calling is mastery. The earth-creature is called to subdue (*kabas*) and have dominion over (*rada*) other creatures. We are called to dominion. But what does this mean? Does dominion, as is often assumed, necessarily mean domination? A larger canonical perspective sheds light on this important question. For example, Psalm 72 speaks most clearly of the ideal king – of one who rules and exercises dominion properly. The psalm unequivocally states that such a ruler executes justice for the oppressed, delivers the needy, helps the poor and embodies righteousness in all he does. In short, the proper exercise of dominion yields shalom – the flourishing of all creation. This is a far cry from dominion as domination. And Jesus, in the Gospel accounts, defines dominion in terms clearly contrary to the way it is usually understood. For Jesus, to rule is to serve. To exercise dominion is to suffer, if necessary, for the good of the other. There is no question of domination, exploitation, misuse. Humans, therefore, are called to rule, but ruling must be understood rightly.

- *For The Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 64

### **Edward Brown**

Knowing that we have to live our lives and that we have to use creation to do so, some turn to the “dominion” teaching of Genesis 1 as the guiding rule of our behaviour toward creation... This has been used by some Christians to justify abuse of nature and by some non-Christians to accuse us of the same – sometimes justly, sometimes not... But let’s take a step back and think again.

Our desire as stewards is to appreciate what God’s own goals for his world are, and the goal of our stewardship is, or should be, to make God’s goals our own. Dominion – our rulership over the rest of creation – is simply the tool God has given us by which we can accomplish God’s goals, not our own, in creation. When we understand God’s purposes in creation properly, the conflict disappears.

- *Our Father’s World*, 2008: 50

Our rule as God's image-bearers...finds its model in the self-sacrificial love of God displayed in Christ. To suggest that our Genesis-ordained role as subduers of the earth justifies exploiting creation, merely to satisfy our greed, is utterly to reject God's purposes for us and for his creation in Christ.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 34

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

As individuals *and* as communities, followers of Christ are called to repent, to change our minds about our dominant position in the web of Creation.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 139

### **Thomas Clarke**

I personally feel that we humans, we Westerners, we North Americans, we Christians have to ask for the grace to be ashamed of ourselves.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 120

### **Herman E. Daly and John B.Cobb Jr**

The problem is that the idea of dominion has been misunderstood by the readers of the Bible. It has been forgotten that in God’s economy the ruler rules for the sake of the ruled. Dominion has been taken to justify exploitation of those over whom it has been exercised. There is no doubt that the biblical call for dominion has been responsible for much unjustified cruelty and destruction. But the way forward is to understand it more deeply and more responsibly. The best exercise of dominion now possible would be to make more space for other species to live their lives without human interference. This, in fact, is what many mean by renouncing dominion. But this policy would still come about through human decision and would thereby reflect our dominion.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 393-394

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *I think the Bible says we have the right to destroy things that get in our way; that’s what dominion is all about*). Many people have pointed to Genesis 1:28 to show that

they have the licence to do whatever they please with creation (e.g. air pollution, the loss of animal species). But dominion as outright oppression is not advocated or condoned by Scripture. First, Genesis 1:28 gave the blessing and mandate to people *before the fall into sin*. Second, this passage must be understood not in isolation, but in the context of the rest of the Bible, which shows that dominion means responsible stewardship. God gave humans a special role and responsibility as stewards of his creation. Having dominion over creation is an important aspect of being made in God's image, as we reflect his presence on the earth. Part of our human dignity is tied to God's entrusting us with stewardship over creation. When God gave humans dominion over creation, the intent was not for us to destroy creation, but to preserve and care for it so it could benefit all people and creatures for generations to come.

- *The Green Bible*, 2008: 1-26

### **Roger Gottlieb**

For the most part, the industrialized world views nature as a resource to be exploited: a mass of animals and plants, minerals and water, whose purpose is to serve humanity. This fundamentally human-centered...perspective on nature, many theologians believe, is at the core of the crisis.

- *A Greener Faith*, 2006: 21-22

### **David N. Livingstone**

White traced this exploitative attitude to the triumph of Christianity over paganism... Christianity, he insisted, told people that humans had the *right* to dominate nature...

White's arguments have been widely criticized, of course. In 1970, historian Lewis Moncrief expressed misgivings about looking for single causes for the environmental crisis. Instead of pinning blame on Judeo-Christian dogma, he blamed a range of cultural factors. Two especially prominent were democracy and the American frontier experience.

The work of Chinese-American geographer Yi-fu Tuan throws doubts on White's thesis in a different way. Tuan scrutinized the environmental situation in Asia and discovered that, despite its different religious traditions, practices there were every bit as destructive of the environment as in the West.

From a different perspective, philosopher Robin Attfield insisted that the idea that everything exists to serve humanity is not the biblical position. As the rise of science and technology brought about profound environmental changes, Christian clergy and scientists alike outlined strategies to moderate damage to the natural habitat (here he cites the work of John Evelyn, John Graunt and John Calvin)

Cultural changes during the eighteenth and nineteenth century drove people...to question the idea that the world existed solely for human benefit. To the extent that the church has failed to take concern for the environment seriously, it must accept its share of the blame.

Attending to these hidden riches within the Christian heritage can do more than clear our name. They might well provide the impetus for changing world-wide environmental behaviour.

- *Christianity Today Study Series: Creation Care*, 2008: 43-45

### **Jonathan Merritt**

Genesis 1:28 gives humans a monarch like role over nature...

What was the role of a monarch in the Old Testament context? An Israelite king wasn't to rule oppressively or be greedy. He was to remain a servant and subject of Almighty God (Deut.17:16-20). When an Israelite king abused his dominion...God would judge and punish him...

As God gave dominion to Israelite kings, we have been given limited authority over the natural world. We don't have *carte blanche* power, but rather the privilege of responsibly enjoying the earth's many benefits and resources. This earthly domain is to be a place where God reigns above all. Every creature is to be treated with care. Humans are given the task of ruling the earth with "benevolent care..."

Genesis 1:28 does not give us licence to treat animals cruelly or use the earth however we wish as long as humans benefit from it. Abuse and neglect oppose the role God has given us...

Dominion as stewardship becomes clear in the second chapter of Genesis. We are told to "work" and "take care of" the earth.

Of the verbs in Genesis 2:15, Loren Wilkinson writes: "The significant thing about both words is that they describe actions undertaken not primarily for the sake of the doer, but for the sake of the object of the action. The kind of tilling which is a *service* of the earth. The keeping of the garden is not just for human comfort, but is a kind of preservation..."

Dominion isn't our "Get Out of Stewardship Free" card. Dominion *is* stewardship. When we carry out this sacred task properly, we engage an ancient act of worship and place God where he deserves to be: above all else.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 45-48, 53-54

### **Jurgen Moltmann**

Naturalizing our civilization means the ecological reform which is so urgently needed today. Up to now the aim of civilization has been to subjugate nature and make it of utility to human beings. A future civilization will have to integrate itself in the cosmic conditions which are the framework of the earth, and will have to observe the rights of fellow creatures and created things too, if humanity is to survive. The natural world in which we share must be protected against the rapacious and destructive grasp of human beings, for their own sake. It sounds like a paradox but it is simply true to say that it is only if human beings cease to be the centre of their civilization that humanity has a chance to survive.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 27

Early on, the churches of the West made a distinction between nature and grace which resulted in a contempt for nature which had fateful consequences, leading first to the modern subjugation of nature and then, in our own day, to its destruction.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 90

**Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

*(referring to the echo of Genesis 1:26-28 in Psalm 8:3-4)*

...the outsized role of human beings on earth has become so evident that some scientists have dubbed our age the “Anthropocene,” or age of humanity. But for the psalmist (and for us too, if we are honest...), there is an inevitable gap between lived reality and the assertion of faith in a God who intends human beings for such an exalted role. The gap...is finally bridged...only by Jesus... As Christians, we will finally only understand what humanity’s role ought to look like by focusing on Christ... As we consider what it means to have dominion over other creatures, we must always keep in view both our place as members of the community of creation and God’s place as the ultimate ruler over all things, the one to whom the earth belongs and to whom we will finally answer for how we have exercised his rule in his kingdom

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 72

To be human is to be known and loved by God as his image bearers, and we are intended to reflect that love as we reflect his image and rule in the community of creation.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 75

...the commission to subdue the earth and to rule over other creatures is given uniquely to humankind... In the context of Genesis 1...the charge...suggests at a minimum the active work of bringing the earth under the appropriate rule of those who bear God’s image... hard work will be required...

If we ask what such subduing and ruling looks like, we could do no better than to begin with the way humanity’s role is explained in the very next chapter of Genesis. In Genesis 2, we find a way of expressing God’s purpose for humankind that moves from what is potentially abstract and general to rooted and local: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (v.15)... Our human vocation is to work and take care of the place where God has planted us, to serve him in our rule of creation as priests in his temple. Caring for the earth is not, in this light, a peripheral biblical theme; it is central to our identity as God’s image bearers. The purpose of the dominion that we are given over other creatures is the peace and blessing that God intends for us and all his creation.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 76-78

*(commenting on Psalm 72:1-6’s description of the role of a ruler):*

Such a biblical understanding of kingship makes impossible any interpretation of *dominion* in Genesis 1:26-28 as *domination*, and it rules out any notion that God’s entrusting of other creatures into our care means that we may use them or the rest of creation however we like...

Our reign in God’s creation is subsumed under the reign of God and it is his rule that defines for us the priorities and purposes of the derivative powers he has granted us. How, then, can we rule as God’s image bearers and not also seek to be “good to all” as he is, to provide as we are able for the thriving of all his creation, and to be rulers whose governance is life-giving and a cause for celebration.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 79

If we then look to Jesus to know what it is to rule as God's image bearers, what do we discover? We see one who has compassion on all who are helpless, ill and suffering (Mark 6:34; Matt.9:36; 14:14; 15:32;20:34) and who acts to restore and heal them. We see one who refused to exploit his power and divinity, who laid down his life for others, who "made himself nothing" (Phil.2:7) and went willingly even to death on a cross. We see the one who reveals to us what love is and who demonstrates God's own love for the whole of the cosmos (John 3:16). The example of Christ thus rules out any triumphalist, exploitative, domineering or selfish exercise of our authority over others or over God's creation. We are called instead to live in the world, in all that we do (including the stewardship of creation), in love, as Jesus did.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 120

The question, then, is not *whether* humans will "rule" the earth, it is *how* they are to do it. Again, we recall our discussion of Genesis 2, where the "ruling" mandate of chapter 1 is unpacked in terms of caring for the temple-like place of God's presence in the world.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 182

### **Jonathan A. Moo and Robert White**

Historians have sometimes blamed Christianity for our environmental crises, claiming that the Christian view of "dominion" means that we have treated creation as something that exists only to serve our own needs and desires. It is worth speculating whether there would be any basis for such a critique if the Christian church had always managed to live faithfully and consistently the sort of life that Christ tells us God's kingdom consists in – even *apart* from any explicit recognition of our responsibility to care for God's creation.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 138

Our God-ordained "rule" over other creatures and "subduing" of the earth (Genesis 1:26-28) has of course sometimes been interpreted in purely exploitative terms. Yet such an interpretation runs counter to the way kingship is conceived of in the Old Testament, where the ideal king rules as the first among equals and for the benefit of those ruled. To rule over all other creatures in this way is God's intention for humankind, reflecting our proper place within creation as the bearers of his image.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 143

### **Francis Schaeffer**

Since the Fall, man has exercised his dominion wrongly. He is a rebel who has set himself at the center of the universe. By creation, man has dominion, but as fallen creature, he has used that dominion wrongly. Because he is fallen, he exploits created things as though they were nothing in themselves, and as though he has an autonomous right to them.

- As quoted in Merritt, *Green Like God*, 2010: 53

### **John E. Silvius**

Genesis says that God gave humans "dominion" over the created world (1:28). This dominion is not licence to abuse animals and animals' habitats but is characterized by

"tilling" (or serving) and "keeping" (or preserving the ongoing fruitfulness of") the Earth (2:15). Here, we discover the biblical roots of true conservationism: as we serve creation, creation serves us (i.e. conservation, or "serving with" creation).

- *Christianity Today Study Series: Creation Care*, 2008: 67

### **Matthew Sleeth**

Contrary to some popular beliefs, the first commandment in the Bible is not "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 9:7 NLT), but rather to "tend and watch over" (Genesis 2:15 NLT). Yes, we were given permission to *use* the earth, but not to *abuse* it. As a sojourner on earth, we are entrusted to leave the earth in as good or better shape than when we arrived.

When we drop off children at kindergarten, we cede dominion over them to the teacher. Without this partial transfer of responsibility, chaos would reign in a classroom, and no child would learn to read or write. At the end of the day, when we pick up our children from school, we expect to find them in the same or better condition as when they arrived. We would not tolerate finding them battered or less intelligent at the end of the day. Similarly, dominion over nature does not translate to neglect, licence, or destruction... I suspect that if we lent our car to a friend (i.e. gave him dominion over it), we would be very unhappy to get our car back dented, dirty and with an empty tank... Surely we must value the loan of God's earth at least as much as we value the loan of an automobile, for God's earth is only on loan to each generation...

When the passenger pigeon became extinct, God took note. When we exterminate a species, we forever lose dominion over it. We cancel God's blessings on a species when we destroy it. Furthermore, God placed these creatures at the service of humans, which is to say they are meant to aid and sustain us. When we kill of a species we go against God's dual blessings. We cancel the life God gave to the species, and we forever lose the benefits of that species to humanity. When we ignore a blessing, we show a lack of respect for God. Disrespect is blasphemous. Let us keep in our hearts this thought: God created the earth, and if we do not respect the earth and all of its creatures, we disrespect God.

Indeed, God retains ownership of the earth (Psalm 24:1-2). Human ownership is an illusion. How can creatures that die own anything? No matter what you temporarily lay claim to or control, one thing is certain: In one hundred years you will no longer own it. God introduces this concept to his people early on (Leviticus 25:23).

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 35-37

11



**OBJECTION**



## THERE'S NO URGENCY

**What's the hurry? We've got plenty of time. These problems won't become serious until after I die, or even later. Let's just wait and see.**

### Phillip Donnell

Colin Gunton rightly points out that care for creation does not require a crisis to be justified (1992: 105). Nevertheless, the objection cited above is patently wrong, and if we do not recognize the error of it, the impact on our descendants will be serious.

In the 2011 reprint of his book *Collapse*, Canadian professor Jared Diamond argues that environmental degradation has been a common strand in the implosion of human societies throughout history. He then identifies twelve sets of major environmental problems facing modern societies. Four revolve around the loss of natural resources: habitats (forests, wetlands, reefs), wild foods (especially fish and shellfish), species, and soils. Three more concern ceilings on energy sources, freshwater, and photosynthetic capacity. A further three problems focus on harmful things that we produce or move around, namely toxic chemicals, alien species, and atmospheric gases. Finally, he explores the related issues of population growth, and the implications that will have on consumption of resources and generation of waste. These problems are all linked: one exacerbates another or makes its solution more difficult.

Diamond concludes his study with some sobering words: "Our world society is on a non-sustainable course, and any of the 12 problems of non-sustainability would suffice to limit our lifestyle *within the next several decades*. They are like time bombs with *fuses of less than fifty years*." He continues: "...because we are rapidly advancing along this non-sustainable course, the world's environmental problems *will* get resolved, in one way or another, *within the lifetimes of the children and young adults alive today*. The only question is whether they will become resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice, or in unpleasant ways not of our choice, such as genocide, starvation, disease, epidemics, and the collapse of societies" (2011: 498, emphases mine).

In Diamond's opinion, at current rates most or all of the 12 sets of environmental problems will become acute during the lifetimes of humans who are now alive. It is a fairly pessimistic message, and if it was merely being voiced by one expert, it could be easily dismissed. It is a lot harder to ignore, however, when such a view is attested by hundreds (like Christ's resurrection - I Corinthians 15:6).

In 2007, 390 scientists from around the world produced the *Global Environmental Outlook Report (GEO4)* for the United Nations, containing over 500 pages of detailed analysis. It painted a very bleak future for humanity: a picture of a planetary population living well beyond its means, and crises brewing everywhere one chooses to look. It showed that our current use of natural resources is unsustainable. It warned that it's not just other species

that are now in danger, humans are too! It said that the human population of planet Earth is, in effect, maxed out on its credit cards and soon will have problems paying the mortgage. And it stated emphatically that unless concerted global efforts are made now to address these mounting problems, we shall, *within 50 years*, pass the point of no return – when the planet no longer has sufficient capacity to repair and heal itself. Its regenerative and restorative processes will not be enough to cope. That situation has never arisen before in human history. It is the great new challenge of our time. The scientists actually said (in 2007): “We’ve got about 10 years to get this right – and we should have been moving five years ago.”

In June, 2012, *GEO5* appeared, reviewing progress made. It concludes that *“the currently observed changes to the Earth System are unprecedented in human history. Efforts to slow the rate or extent of change including enhanced resource efficiency and mitigation measures – have resulted in moderate successes but have not succeeded in reversing adverse environmental changes. Neither the scope of these nor their speed has abated in the past five years. As human pressures on the Earth System accelerate, several critical global, regional and local thresholds are close or have been exceeded. Once these have been passed, abrupt and possibly irreversible changes to the life-support functions of the planet are likely to occur, with significant adverse implications for human well-being.”*

The World Economic Forum’s *Global Risks Report 2019* presents the results of its latest Global Risks Perception Survey, in which nearly 1,000 decision-makers from the public sector, private sector, academia and civil society assess the risks facing the world. Nine out of 10 respondents expect worsening economic and political confrontations between major powers this year. Over a ten-year horizon, extreme weather and climate-change policy failures are seen as the gravest threats. The report declared that humanity was ‘sleepwalking its way to catastrophe’ as extreme weather, failure to act on climate change, and natural disasters topped the list. The report also painted a worrying portrait of the deep interconnections between these environmental risks and the level of human health, economic growth, and security. It was published against a backdrop of worrying geopolitical and geo-economic tensions. If unresolved, these tensions will hinder the world’s ability to deal with a growing range of collective challenges, from the mounting evidence of environmental degradation to the increasing disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Both Diamond and the various reports believe that the environmental degradation around the world is not yet irretrievable. However, in more recent times, a few scientists have begun to say just that. Books like James Hansen’s *Storms of my Grandchildren* are even more gloomy. He doubts that we can avert run-away global heating later this century (his grandchildren’s lifetime) now that the melt of ice sheets is accelerating and methane releases are well underway. The truth of the situation probably lies somewhere between the two perspectives: some things we may still be able to change, but others are fast closing in on an inexorable chain of events.

In her 2014 ground-breaking book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein quotes Fatih Birol, the IEA's chief economist: *“The door to reach two degrees is about to close. In 2017 it will be closed forever.”* In short, Klein says, *we have reached what some have started calling ‘Decade Zero’ of the climate crisis. We either change now or we lose our chance* (pp.23-24). She

continues: *The nature of the moment is familiar but bears repeating: whether or not industrialised countries begin deeply cutting our emissions **this decade** will determine whether we can expect the same from rapidly-developing nations like China and India next decade. That, in turn, will determine whether humanity can stay within a collective carbon budget that will give us a decent chance of keeping warming below levels that our own governments have agreed are unacceptably dangerous. In other words, **we don't have another couple of decades** to talk about the changes we want while being satisfied with the occasional incremental victory...the fact that our current road is headed toward a cliff...tells us that we had better start making that sweeping turn, and fast. There is **just enough time**...* (pp.153,155,459 - emphases mine).

Whatever view we take on such issues as climate change, Matthew Sleeth is right when he says: *"A problem exists as real and meaningful as a sinking ship with billions of people on board. The earth is our ship, an ark for everything that lives. It is the only vessel available to carry humans through the ocean of space, and it is rapidly becoming unseaworthy"* (2006: 16). I seem to remember the Old Testament telling the story of a seriously-miffed God flooding the world, and Noah building a wooden mono-hull to save each species. This time it won't be an act of God, but a pickle of our own making, and the planet is the only ark we have.

In his book *Creation Untamed* (2010), Terence Fretheim says that God first assessed his creation to be "good", but not static. He reckons that creation is a process, undergoing ongoing improvement and development. God's creation he says, is a dynamic reality and is going somewhere, a long-term project ever in the process of becoming. Put another way, God did not exhaust his divine creativity in the first week of the world; he continues to create and chooses to work with others in creating. Certain constraints are in place: seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day (Genesis 8:22). But beyond that, the future of the world is characterized by a remarkable open-endedness, in which more than God is involved. What human and non-human creatures do in creation counts with respect to the emergence of ever-new creations; they make a difference to the shape that the future of creation takes. The Spirit, working in and through existing matter and creatures, enables genuine novelty to emerge. We need, he asserts, to be cooperating with God in his work of "creating futures" – for the natural order and for generations to come.

I am blessed by having three children and ten grandchildren. Most of us who have children consider the securing of their future as the highest priority to which we devote our time and money. We pay for this, that and the other with the goal of helping them enjoy good lives. Before the birth of my children I could not take seriously any event (like global warming or the end of the tropical rainforests) projected for the year 2035. I shall probably be dead before that year and even the date struck me as unreal. However, when my children were born between 1979 and 1984, and my wife and I started going through the parental obsessions I have alluded to, I realized with a jolt: 2035 is the year in which my kids will be in their 50's, and my grandchildren in their 20's. It's not an imaginary year! Such a realization received another shove when the next generation began to arrive from 2005 onwards!

I began to ask myself some probing questions: What legacy are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? What kind of world will we bequeath? What situation will they grow up into?

What are we doing to secure or to jeopardize their future? Do those yet to be born warrant an effort or sacrifice on the part of us who are older? What's the point of willing our property to our kids if the world will be in a mess then anyway! Does it make any sense to do so while simultaneously doing things undermining the world in which they will be living 50 years from now?

I began to realize that to do nothing about growing environmental problems is actually to sleepwalk into a crisis which my loved ones will have to wear. In other words the party's over, the bill has arrived, and now we need to settle up! It was time to wake up and smell the carbon. I could not press the snooze button, roll over and go back into dreamland. I needed to get real about the challenge. Such notions were a key factor in my decision to take environmental stewardship seriously and integrate it into my Christian life. They also motivated me to get involved in the Christian environmental movement.

The Bible provides a fitting summation. In Exodus chapter 3 God designates himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." In short, he is the God of successive generations. Psalm 89:1 highlights his "faithfulness to all generations". It seems that God is greatly interested in continuity and concerned that his blessings should be expressed to, and experienced by, one generation after another. The created order is a key means to this end, and that is why we need to be in tune with what God is doing today to ensure that those downstream from us in time do not inherit a dying planet and a world very different from the one we know.

### **Bell, White and Brown**

Alas, creation is, in fact, in crisis - a fact that informs the *Call to Action's* second conviction: 'We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and must be solved in our generation.'...

One of the mysteries we wrestle with is how this crisis could become so serious without anyone noticing... this is one area where the more you know, the more fearful you are about the future. Many of the rest of us have blithely gone about our business, like cars on a highway driving into a fog bank at top speed, unaware or unconvinced that they should have been slowing down long before.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 3

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

Our conviction is that time is limited for engaging the predicament in which our planet is immersed, that we cannot flee the "inescapable," and that God has situated us in this place "for just such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). In memory and honor of those who have gone before us, and in love for Creation and for all those inexorably affected by our decisions, both now and in the future, the time has come for Christ-followers to "re-vision" their history, study reflectively, think imaginatively, pray humbly and act boldly.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 94

### **Herman E. Daly and John B.Cobb Jr**

Our actions now may determine whether the deterioration of the planetary environment can be slowed and stopped at a level that will allow much of the biosphere to survive.

The recognition of possibilities gone forever inspires us with a sense of urgency. Delay is costly to us and even more to our descendants and to the other species with which we share

our planet. It is already very late. It is hard to avoid bitterness about what might have been done and about the additional missed opportunities each day. It is hard to avoid resentment toward those who continue so successfully to block the needed changes.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 405-406

### **Claire Dawson**

We have no time left for failed attempts and second-best efforts, or for the wasted time and energy that result from turf wars and power games.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 234

### **John Houghton**

I now address those who argue that we can wait and see before action is necessary. That is not a responsible position. The need for action is urgent for three reasons. The first is scientific... even if all the carbon dioxide emissions were terminated tomorrow, the atmosphere and oceans would continue to warm for many decades into the future, a warming that would be virtually impossible to reverse...

The second reason is economic. Energy infrastructure...lasts typically for 30 to 50 years. It is much more cost effective to begin now to phase in the required infrastructure changes rather than having to make them much more rapidly later...

The third reason is political... Until developed countries...show some real leadership and a much greater degree of commitment to effective action, it is unrealistic to expect from countries like China and India more than they are already doing.

- in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 139

### **Naomi Klein**

On one issue I know a fair amount about, climate change, humanity has a finite window in which to act, after which protecting anything like a stable climate becomes impossible. And...that window is closing fast.

- *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, 2017: 18

Because of this campaign of misinformation, promoted by the entire fossil fuel sector, humanity has lost key decades when we could have been taking the actions necessary to move to a clean economy.

- *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, 2017: 67

The wealthy governments of the world have procrastinated for so long, and made the problem so much worse in the meantime, that the arc has to bend very, very fast now – or the shot at justice is done for good. We are almost at midnight on the climate clock.

- *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, 2017: 70

We are, it bears repeating, out of time. We've been kicking the can down the road for so many decades that we are just plain out of road. Which means if we want a shot at avoiding

catastrophic warming, we need to start a grand economic and political transition *right now*.  
 - *No Is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need*, 2017: 235

### **Matthew Sleeth**

Selfishness, unlike wine...does not age well. Yet there are people alive today who have lived long enough to see the loss of the American chestnut and the American elm. They've seen the sky turn a purple-grey haze, streams become undrinkable (even unswimmable!), wells poisoned, and the death of half the world's birds. After describing these losses, I've heard many sadly say that they're glad they won't be around to see the outcome of another fifty years of business as usual. This group absolves itself of any responsibility for setting things on a better path. It is as if all the little children being born do not warrant an effort of sacrifice on the part of us who are older. Retirement from morality is not mentioned in the Bible. John the Evangelist wrote the last book of the Bible at age ninety while on an island prison.

As Christians, we pray that God's concerns become our concerns – no matter what our age. God is intensely concerned with the needs of the next generation. We who are older and have a greater understanding of the negative changes occurring in nature must be bold (Psalm 92:12-14 TNIV)

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 41-42

### **Greta Thunberg**

"I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic ... and act as if the house was on fire."

- *Speech at World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos, January 2019*

### **David Wallace-Wells**

The slowness of climate change is a fairy tale, perhaps as pernicious as the one that says it isn't happening at all...

Some amount of further warming is already baked in, thanks to the protracted processes by which the planet adapts to greenhouse gas. But all of those paths projected from the present – to two degrees, to three, to four, five or even eight – will be carved overwhelmingly by what we do now... if we do nothing about carbon emissions, if the next thirty years of industrial activity trace the same arc upward as the last thirty years have, whole regions will become unlivable by any standard we have today as soon as the end of this century.

- *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019: 3,15

**OBJECTION**



**12**

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY WILL SAVE US

Science will find a solution. Green technology will come to the rescue.

### **Phillip Donnell**

We should avoid imprudent notions such as having an improper faith in the power of technology to save us from the perils ahead. You can't change the basic laws of nature.

### **Kevin Anderson**

We don't need to concern ourselves too much with geo-engineering in the future, we just need to stop getting fossil fuels out of the ground today.

- Kevin Anderson (Tyndall Centre, UK) in an interview with Rob Hopkins (Transition Culture)

### **Thomas Berry**

If we think we can replace the functioning of natural processes by genetic engineering and other such mechanistic control of biological processes, as we are now attempting, we are mistaken. There are certain things that can at times be done by our scientists and technologists, but we must resist their leading us into a Disney World.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 103

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

...we in western culture have made technology into a god... If you doubt the veracity of this claim, simply eavesdrop on any conversation about environmental degradation or world hunger. Without fail someone will opine that while we have serious problems, technology will save us...

The power to shape and form culture is a God-given dimension of human existence. Technology is an inescapable feature of human life, often producing much good. The question is not whether we use technology, but what kind of technology, how much, for who, and at what cost...

It can be both a blessing and a bane. Insofar as we give our ultimate allegiance to technology and its products, we have misplaced our faith and engaged in idolatry.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 78-79

### **Kenneth Brower**

The notion that science will save us is the chimera that allows the present generation to consume all the resources it wants, as if no generations will follow. It is the sedative that allows civilisation to march so steadfastly towards environmental catastrophe. It forestalls the real solution, which will be the hard, non-technical work of changing human behaviour.

- 'The Danger of Cosmic Genius' in *The Atlantic*, 27 October, 2010: 48-62

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

For all the good that science has accomplished in our world, it has repeatedly failed to

motivate the kind of expansive change needed to make a significant impact on the ecocrisis. It is our conviction that Christianity provides the coherent framework we need to integrate our experiences of the natural world with the values of our faith to foster such a transformation.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 34

### **Wesley Granberg-Michaelson**

Our culture adheres to a blind faith in technological progress as the means to resolve environmental problems and the maldistribution of world resources.

- *Ecology and Life*, 1988: 37

### **Naomi Klein**

...if we wait for what Bows-Larkin describes as "whiz-bang technologies" to come online "it will be too little too late."

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 90

"...the mere suggestion of an emergency techno-fix" feeds "the dangerous but prevalent belief that we can keep ramping up our emissions for another couple of decades."

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 261

Geoengineering might do something far more dangerous than tame the last vestiges of "wild" nature. It may cause the earth to go wild in ways we cannot imagine...

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 267

Boosters of Solar Radiation Management tend to speak obliquely about the "distributional consequences" of injecting sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere, and of the "spatial heterogeneity" of the impacts. Petra Tschakert, a geographer at Penn State University, calls this jargon "a beautiful way of saying that some countries are going to get screwed." But which countries? And screwed precisely how?

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 269

...you could not conduct meaningful tests of these technologies without enlisting billions of people as guinea pigs - for years. Which is why science historian James Fleming calls geoengineering schemes "untested and untestable, and dangerous beyond belief."

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 270

...geoengineering will certainly monsterize the planet as nothing experienced in human history. We very likely would not be dealing with a single geoengineering effort but with some noxious brew of mixed-up techno-fixes - sulfur in space to cool the temperature, cloud-seeding to fix the droughts it causes, ocean fertilization in a desperate gambit to cope with acidification, and carbon-sucking machines to help us get off the geo-junk once and for all... The earth - our life-support system - would itself be put on life support, hooked up to machines 24/7 to prevent it going full-tilt monster on us.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 279

...turning whole nations, even subcontinents, into sacrifice zones, is a decision our children may judge as humanity's single most immoral act.



- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 284

**Jonathan A. Moo and Robert White**

Repeatedly in the past, humankind has gotten itself out of trouble through technological solutions...

It is...likely that new technology will have to be part of any “solution” to climate change. Energy supply is of course one of the main areas in which technology can play a role... we will need to invest heavily in methods of using renewable sources... The other side of the coin, of course, is to find ways that enable us to use less energy...

What might we do if all the above are insufficient? Some people are beginning to talk about massive planetary-scale intervention, such as... spraying particles into the stratosphere to reflect some of the sunlight... or seeding the ocean to increase biological productivity...

Such last-ditch attempts to avert temperature rise are frightening to contemplate. They are likely to have dramatic and unpredictable side effects and may well produce cures that are worse than the disease. Nevertheless, it is probably important to start research into them now and – if appropriate – to attempt small-scale experiments simply so that we know a bit more about such options. The problem with all the interventions proposed thus far is that they would almost certainly have profoundly negative effects for some portions of the planet, even if on balance they had the positive effect of slowing the earth’s warming. Who would control the decisions to launch such efforts? What provision would be made for the people and lands affected? At the moment, the uncertainty and the likely human and environmental costs of any such interventions are far, far higher than the costs of reducing our emissions.

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 73-74.

**Neil Postman**

Most people believe technology is a staunch friend. There are two reasons for this. First, technology is a friend. It makes life easier, cleaner and longer. Can anyone ask more of a friend? Second, because of its lengthy, intimate and inevitable relationship with culture, technology does not invite a close examination of its own consequences. It is the kind of friend who asks for trust and obedience, which most people are inclined to give because its gifts are truly bountiful. But, of course, there is a dark side to this friend. Its gifts are not without a heavy cost. Stated in the most dramatic terms, the accusation can be made that the uncontrolled growth of technology destroys the vital sources of our humanity. It creates a culture without a moral foundation. It undermines certain mental processes and social relations that make human life worth living. Technology, in sum, is both friend and enemy.

- *Technopoly*, 1993: xii

**Matthew Sleeth**

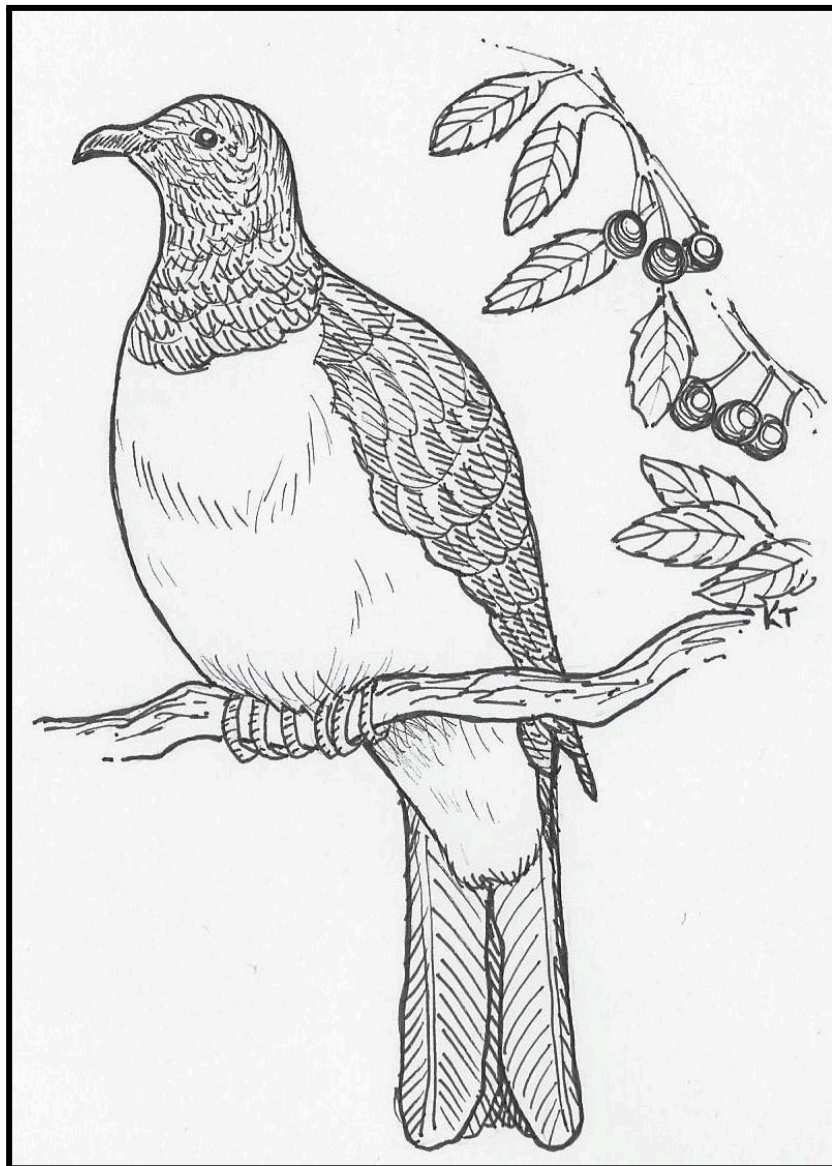
They might, but that hope should be tempered with the understanding that science brought us ethyl gasoline, which was supposed to stop engine knock but gave children brain damage. Science invented spray deodorants to keep teens from sweating; however, these aerosols ate a hole in the earth’s protective ozone.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 44

**David Wallace-Wells**

...staying below 2 degrees probably requires not just carbon scale-back but what we call “negative emissions.” These tools come in two forms: technologies that would suck carbon out of the air and new approaches to forestry and agriculture that would do the same, in a slightly more old-fashioned way.

According to a raft of recent papers, both are something close to fantasy, at least at present.  
- *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019: 45



## OBJECTION 13

# THE NEW CREATION IS NOT FOR THE HERE AND NOW

**The new creation promised by God is something in the future.  
It is not something that should concern us in the here and now.**

*See also Objection 1.*

### Phillip Donnell

In Galatians 6:15, Paul writes "*what matters is new creation*" (KNT). He seems to indicate that the new creation is something that should concern Christians from then to now. This is in tune with the tenor of Scripture:

- *God's ultimate goal is to "make all things new" - a new creation* (Revelation 21:5; Romans 8:17-25). This encompasses both humans and non-human phenomena.
- *Part of the reason Jesus died was to overcome everything that might hinder this purpose from being realised* (John 12:31-32; Acts 26:16-18; Galatians 1:3-4/4:3-5, 8-9; Colossians 1:19-20/2:14-15).
- *The new creation began with the resurrection of Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:12-28; Colossians 1:18). It was the daybreak of new creation and introduced a totally new state of affairs.
- *People who put their faith in Christ become "new creations"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). They begin a new life, but the process of transformation is ongoing (Romans 6:4, 8:29; Ephesians 2:10, 4:24; Colossians 3:1-11).
- *God also desires to redeem and restore nature - to bring a "new heaven and a new earth" into being* (Isaiah 65:17,66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).
- *We can participate in renewing both people and nature in the here and now* (Mark 16:15) If God is currently in the business of renewing human beings, why would we imagine that God is not also currently in the business of renewing the rest of creation, and that God chooses to involve us in advancing both those goals? One can be a means to the other. Cosmic renewal is a solid basis for both evangelism and environmental stewardship by Christians today! We can partner with God in a process which he will ultimately bring to complete fulfilment. We can make new creation happen in today's world!

### Phillip Donnell again

"*what matters is new creation*" (Galatians 6:15 KNT)

Several years ago, I came across a little book by a Dutch Christian, Wim Rietkerk, called *The Future Great Planet Earth*. He argued that creation was to be renewed and that the replacement theology of dispensationalists and others was based on poor interpretation of a few difficult verses rather than on the Bible's overall message. It does not take a lot of research to find that he is right. Scripture holds together into a single, grand, cohesive story of God interacting with people to bring healing from the devastating effects of sin. Individual

stories form the plot of the single Big Story with reoccurring themes and complex tensions.

Katangole and Rice are of the view that the movement from old creation to new creation is the crux of this plot. They write:

*Scripture is neither a catalogue of spiritual insights nor a collection of moral guidelines and principles. It is a story. As a story, Scripture can be read through the central plot of Creation, Fall, Promise and Restoration - a plot that is in essence the movement from old creation to new creation... The story of Scripture hangs on this theme of new creation (2008: 63-64).*

God intends to restore a creation blighted by angelic/human rebellion to what it was in the beginning, and to give back everything given away. Paradise lost. Paradise regained.

#### NEW CREATION COMMENCED IN THE PAST

This unifying strand, the progression from old creation towards new creation, stretches from Genesis to Revelation, gaining momentum in the New Testament. It quickens and deepens with the appearance of Jesus on the world stage.

In Revelation 3:14 Jesus describes himself. Depending on the translation, he says that he is the beginning, origin, source or ruler of God's creation. The Greek word can mean first in point of time ("beginning") or first in rank ("ruler"). The NLT adds a different layer of meaning by saying that Christ is *the beginning of God's new creation*.

Romans 8:22 says: *"We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now."* The *Earth Bible Team* (2002: 7) sees considerable significance in the last word of that text. They ask: *Does this text promote a view that God's incarnation is an audacious and challenging event that forever changes the way things are?* They continue: *In God's eyes, everything is intrinsically valued as 'very good', and will experience a 'setting free' and participate fully in the 'freedom of glory'. And the implication in the text is that the 'now' of the incarnation has already changed creation's groaning into celebration.*

The above analysis is symptomatic of a growing number of theologians who believe that the coming of Jesus made a decisive difference for the whole creation, both human and non-human. In particular, his resurrection began a new order of things, not ruined by sin but renewed by the Spirit. For example, Tom Wright develops the restoration scenario, pointing to Easter as a key argument. He asserts that the Christian hope for "new heavens and new earth" has already come to life in Jesus, whose resurrection is *"the utterly characteristic, prototypical and foundational event within the world as it has begun to be"* and constitutes *"not an absurd event within the old world, but the symbol and starting point of the new world"*. It *"inaugurates God's new creation right within the middle of the old one"* (2007: 78, 80).

Similarly, Jürgen Moltmann argues in *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (1994:83), that according to the New Testament, Christ's suffering, death and resurrection is not only a historical event. It is not just the new covenant God once signed to guarantee forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who accept Christ as their Saviour. Moltmann says: *There can be no redemption for human beings without the redemption of the whole of perishable nature.* He clearly sees the resurrection of Christ as the first instalment of the new creation, the present tip of a future iceberg. He continues: *We also have to understand it [Christ's resurrection] as*

*the first act in the new creation of the world. Christ's resurrection is not just a historical event. It is a cosmic event too.* The fact, which is often overlooked, is that the bodily resurrection of Christ points to our own, and carries with it also the guarantee of the redemption of the whole physical universe. When Christ rose from the dead, as the "first fruits" of many more, the movement towards new creation gained impetus, and we have a part to play in its gradual realization...

#### NEW CREATION CONTINUES IN THE PRESENT

It is fairly obvious to most people that something is wrong with the world we live in. It is in bad shape. What is not so obvious to many is that God has long been in the process of putting it right. Ever since sin entered the human experience, God's intention has been to transform *people* by drawing them to faith in Jesus, the Saviour he has provided. The Bible says, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!*" (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT). The moment you enter into a relationship with Christ, you begin the journey of becoming a new person. In the New Testament, I have discovered at least 66 different things that change either immediately or in due course after a person comes to faith. The way God looks at us radically alters and the process of helping us to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29) gradually unfolds.

It is also clear that God wants to transform the *rest of creation*, the natural order. Creation groans, but at the same time waits expectantly for healing and repair (Romans 8:20-22). God is grieved by what humans have done to what he has made, and is well aware that the damage has now reached crisis proportions. Accordingly, he is calling his Church to re-discover its important leadership role in environmental stewardship and to give it legs in the here and now. Such actions as rescuing a species from extinction, restoring a habitat, and eco-friendly lifestyle choices, contribute to growing the new creation just as much as evangelism.

I believe that the biblical mandate to care for what God has made is very strong. It is something that God calls and commissions us to do (Genesis 2:15). Accordingly, once people have come to know Jesus, we can encourage and empower them to make creation care an integral part of their discipleship, an ongoing practical expression of what it means to love and follow him. It is part and parcel of obeying him, representing him and witnessing to him, in this world.

In "Simply Christian" (2011: 99,186-202), Tom Wright puts forward the idea that Christ's resurrection is a cogent incentive and inspiration for us "to go and *make new creation happen in the world*". He goes on to speak of "*the launching of the new creation in the present*". Christians, he asserts, should be "practising *in the present* the tunes we shall sing in God's new world". We are "called to be *part* of God's new creation, called to be *agents* of that new creation *here and now*... called to *model and display* that new creation... new creation has *already begun*" (emphases mine). For Wright, the goal of the Christian life is not to go to heaven but to bring heaven to earth.

God's agenda to renew both people and nature is not hard to integrate. Christians and churches can become involved in environmental restoration and utilise it as a means of mission. By joining with others from our community in efforts to improve environmental

health, we form friendships which may eventually allow us to touch lives and share the good news of salvation. Our individual and collective involvement with people in restoring nature gives us a grand opportunity to influence them towards, and ultimately introduce them to, the Creator.

In short, transforming the non-human creation can be a vehicle for transforming the human creation and vice-versa! Both are intrinsic to making the new creation a reality. In so doing, we are not oiling the wheels of a machine that is about to fall over a cliff. We are accomplishing something which will be carried over into the new order and preserved into eternity...

#### NEW CREATION CULMINATES IN THE FUTURE

When Jesus refers to the culmination of history, he speaks of the *"renewal of all things"* (Matthew 19:28 NIV). Sometimes this is depicted through the metaphor of fire, which speaks of refining and purification (e.g. 2 Peter 3:10-13). In the book of Revelation (21:5) God promises that ultimately he will make *"all things new"* (i.e. existing things will be renewed). Notice that it does not say that he will make *"all new things"* (i.e. existing things will be replaced).

The tenor of Scripture is not the replacement of what already exists, but its complete renovation and restoration. God will make sure that what he originally purposed for his creation, sometimes called the *"peaceable kingdom"*, will in the end return and triumph. (Isaiah 11:6-9, Romans 8:18-25). In Katangole and Rice's words: *"The end toward which the journey of reconciliation leads is the shalom of God's new creation - a future not yet fully realised, but holistic in its transformation of the personal, social and structural dimensions of life"* (2008: 148).

We are on the way, but God himself will culminate and complete the process. The story of our journey on this earth ends with the vision of a new earth devoid of everything that plagues us in this life, and also the natural world restored to its former glory (Romans 8: 19-25). God's Holy City descends to this planet after the wicked have been put out of their misery, whereupon tears, death, mourning, crying and pain are no more, *"for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:2- 4 NIV). The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap, the mute speak, and water flows in the desert (Isaiah 35:5-6). Inhabitants build houses, plant trees, and benefit from the fruit of their labours (Isaiah 65:21-22). The wolf and lamb feed together, and lions eat straw (Isaiah 65:23-25). Disease, disability, ageing, scarcity, cruelty, inequality and slavery no longer exist as God permits us to enjoy the things that bring us the deepest satisfaction and bring the highest honour to his name.

Such passages stir our emotions because the memory of Eden is in every human heart. We instinctively remember that there's something better. But note that there is nothing ethereal in these biblical descriptions. The next life will be as real as the present one. The Bible doesn't say anything about people floating around on clouds with harps. It has no mention of ghostly apparitions or mysterious realms in which there'll be no physical existence. We will live, work and build, and we'll enjoy life to the fullest. It's all explained in very real terms for a very real, physical future. God is even now rebuilding a real home for us, populated by real people engaged in real lives.

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To sum up, just as God recycles broken, messed-up people into 'new creations in Christ' so he also wants cleanse the whole weary and polluted creation of all the sin and corruption that have affected it, resulting in an entirely new state of affairs centred on Christ.

God's invites us to cooperate with him in fulfilling his renewal agenda for both people and nature. That is the grand project in which we are all invited to participate. It is a matter of promoting and nurturing this renewal, of *fostering and facilitating the new creation* in our day and age. We can partner with God in the transformation of the entire created order, both people and nature. It is not a case of either/or but both/and.

Having examined Matthew 6:25-34 in some depth, Adrian Leske concludes that "*considering the prophetic background to these verses, the further implication is that members of the kingdom of God are called to share in the renewal process of all creation and thus to do the will of their Father in heaven (Matthew 7:21). Ecojustice is an integral part of the will of the Creator*" (in Habel and Balabanski, pp.26-27).

What a process to be actively involved in, and what a goal to work towards!

#### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

Eschatology means learning to live on Earth as it is in heaven. It does not promise that we will live to see this new future fulfilled, but it means we participate in the work of creating the future in *this* moment.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 141

#### **George Caird**

The pastoral relevance of the new Jerusalem to the needs of the seven churches becomes still clearer when for the first time since the opening of the visions we hear the voice of God. John is told to **write this**, because this voice from the ultimate future has something urgent to say to the critical present: **'I am making all things new.'** This is not an activity of God within the new creation, after the old has been cast as rubbish to the void; it is the process of re-creation by which the old is transformed into the new. In Smyrna and Thyatira, in Sardis and Laodicea, in all places of his dominion, God is forever making all things new, and on this depends the hope of the world.

- *Revelation of St John the Divine*, 1966: 265-266

#### **John Brownlow Geyer**

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more.  
Embraced by death he broke its fearful hold;  
And our despair he turned to blazing joy. Alleluia!

A new creation comes to life and grows  
As Christ's new body takes on flesh and blood.  
The universe restored and whole will sing. Alleluia!

- Hymn 296 in *The Hymnal 1982: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church*

#### **Jurgen Moltmann**

With the resurrection of the crucified Christ the rebirth of the whole tormented creation begins. So remain true to the earth. For the earth is worth it.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 20

Some people imagine that the kingdom of God will be a different world, which will come about when this one ends. Some people imagine that eternal life will be a different life, a life after death, which will follow when this life is finished. But this puts us on the wrong track and leads us to undervalue God's creation.

The new creation is not a different creation. It is the new creation of this deranged world.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 22

It is one thing to see Christ's resurrection in the perspective of history. That inevitably brings us up against the question: is this a historical event or an interpretation of faith? But it is another thing to see history in the perspective of Christ's resurrection. Then the question facing us is the eschatological one – the question, that is, about the end of this world's history of suffering, and the world's new creation.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 76

The raising of Christ is not a phrase describing a past happening. It is the name for a confronting event in the past which in the Spirit determines the present because it opens up the future of eternal life... So in talking about Christ's resurrection we have to talk about a *process* of resurrection. This process has its foundation in Christ, its dynamic in the Spirit, and its future in the true new creation of all things.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 81

The resurrection of Christ qualifies world history, making it end-history, and sets the spaces and sectors where we experience history against the horizon of expectation of the new creation.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 82

If we look at Christ's resurrection from this standpoint, we can see that we shall have to transpose modern 'historical' christology, or understanding of Christ, into a new *ecological* christology... there can be no redemption for human beings without a redemption of the whole of perishable nature. So it is not enough to see Christ's resurrection as 'God's eschatological act in history'. We also have to understand it as *the first act in the new creation of the world*. Christ's resurrection is not just a historical event. It is a cosmic event too... We have to grasp this cosmic dimension of Christ's resurrection in a new way.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 83

Christ was born of Mary in a cave hollowed out of the earth; out of a grave in the earth he was born again to eternal life through the Spirit. With Christ's rebirth, the rebirth of the whole cosmos begins, not just the rebirth of human beings (Matt,19.28). His dying and his coming alive again represent a transition, a transformation, a transfiguration, not a total breach and a radical new beginning.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 84

Hitherto, cosmic Christology has shared the one-sidedness of the traditional doctrine of



creation. That is to say, it understands by creation only creation-in-the-beginning, not continuous creation as well, and not the consummated new creation of all things. Creation and redemption then cleave apart and become two separate things. Either creation is down-graded into a preparation for redemption, or redemption is reduced to the restoration of creation-in-the-beginning. In order to acquire a comprehensive concept of creation, we have talked about a unified creation process, which begins with creation-in-the-beginning, continues in the history of creation, and will be perfected in the new creation of all things. In a similar way we shall interpret Christ's mediation in creation in three separate strands or movements:

1. Christ as the ground of the creation of all things (creation-in-the-beginning);
2. Christ as the driving power in the evolution of creation (continuous creation); and
3. Christ as the redeemer of the whole creation process (the new creation).

By proceeding in this way we are really doing no more than taking up the old Protestant doctrine about Christ's threefold kingly office, developing it in the context of today's recognition: Christ rules in the realm of nature, in the realm of grace, and in the realm of glory.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 94

If we think about the preservation of the world in the context of the future, then continuous creation doesn't just mean that the original creation is secure because God holds it fast. Continuous creation is already at the same time *the anticipation of the new creation* of all things. Continuous creation is creation's ongoing history. In this 'historical' creation God 'renews the face of the earth' (Ps.104.30), looking towards the final new creation of all things.

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 98

### **Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

Just as the Kingdom of God can be both presently enjoyed (e.g. Col.1:13-14) and yet will be inherited in the future (e.g. Gal.5:21), so "new creation" refers to the totality of God's redemptive and transformative work, experienced now in renewed individuals and renewed relationships and to be climaxed in the eschaton in a renewal of "all things" (Acts 3:21; cf. Col.1:20)...

As redeemed "image bearers," *God enlists his people in the work of prefiguring and preparing* for the work of ultimate transformation that he will accomplish in the last day. Therefore, perhaps more as a matter of *working toward* rather than divine accomplishment, the transformation of the natural world inherent in "new creation" *has a present aspect*.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 144 (emphases mine)

### **Jonathan Moo and Robert White**

It is in Christ that God's promises reach their fulfilment, in Christ that the future is secured and in Christ that the new creation begins to break into the old...

The biblical narrative draws us into a drama in which the climax has already been reached in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is here that God's purposes for us and his love for his creation are revealed definitively and absolutely...

- *Let Creation Rejoice*, 2014: 85

**Francis Schaeffer**

On the basis of the fact that there is going to be total redemption in the future, not only of man but of all creation, the Christian who believes the Bible should be the man who – with God's help and in the power of the Holy Spirit – is *treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be then*. It will not be perfect, but it must be substantial, or we have missed our calling... we should exhibit substantial healing here and now, between man and nature and nature and itself, as far as Christians can bring it to pass.

- As quoted by McGrath, *Reenchantment of Nature*, 2003: 51 (emphasis mine).

**N.T. Wright**

Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfilment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this - the finding, the saving, the giving of new life - in Jesus. He has done it. With Jesus, God's rescue operation has been put into effect once for all. A great door has swung open in the cosmos which can never be shut, It is the door to the prison where we have been kept chained up. We are offered freedom: freedom to experience God's rescue mission for ourselves, to go through the open door and explore the new world to which we now have access. In particular, we are all invited - summoned actually - to discover, through following Jesus, that this new world is indeed a place of justice, spirituality, relationship and beauty, and that we are not only to enjoy it as such but *to work at bringing it to birth on earth as in heaven*.

- *Simply Christian*, 2011: 79 (emphasis mine)

The whole point of Jesus' work was to bring heaven to earth and join them together for ever, to bring God's future into the present and make it stick there.

- *Simply Christian*, 2011: 87

...as the Eastern Orthodox churches have always emphasised, when Jesus rose again God's whole new creation emerged from the tomb, introducing a world full of potential and possibility. Indeed, precisely because part of that new possibility is for human beings to be revived and renewed, the resurrection of Jesus does not leave us passive, helpless spectators. We find ourselves lifted up, set on our feet, given new breath in our lungs, and *commissioned to go and make new creation happen in the world... God's future has arrived in the present. Instead of mere echoes, we hear the voice itself: a voice which speaks of rescue from evil and death, and hence of new creation*.

- *Simply Christian*, 2011: 99-100 (emphasis mine)

Christian ethics...is about practising, in the present, the songs we shall sing in God's new world. The whole world is now God's holy land, and God will reclaim it and renew it as the ultimate goal of all our wanderings... It is a matter of glimpsing that in God's new creation, of which Jesus' resurrection is the start, all that was good in the original creation is reaffirmed. All that has corrupted and defaced it...will be done away with. Learning to live as a Christian is learning to live as a renewed human being, anticipating the eventual new creation, with a world which is still longing and groaning for that final redemption... Somehow we have to work out which styles of life and behaviour belong with the corrupting evil which must be rejected if new creation is to emerge, and which styles of life and behaviour belong with the new creation which must be embraced, struggled for and celebrated.

- *Simply Christian*, 2011: 189-191

...God did for Jesus at Easter what he is going to do for the whole of creation... We are called to be *part* of God's new creation, called to be *agents of* that new creation here and now. We are called to *model and display* that new creation in symphonies and family life, in restorative justice and poetry, in holiness and service to the poor, in politics and painting.

- *Simply Christian*, 2011: 201-202

What I am saying is, think through the hope that is ours in the gospel; recognise the renewal of creation as both the goal of all things in Christ and the achievement that has already been accomplished in the resurrection of Jesus; and go to the work of justice, beauty, evangelism and the renewal of space, time and matter, as the anticipation of the eventual goal and the implementation of what Jesus achieved in his death and resurrection. That is the way both to the genuine mission of God and to the shaping of the church by and for that mission.

- *Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 282

The resurrection of Jesus has brought about a new state of affairs in cosmic history and reality. God's future has burst into the present...

- *Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 284

When Paul wrote his great resurrection chapter, I Corinthians 15, he didn't end by saying 'So let's celebrate the great future life which awaits us.' He ended by saying 'So get on with your work, because you know that in the Lord it won't go to waste.' When the final resurrection occurs, as the centrepiece of God's new creation, we will discover that everything done in the present world in the power of Jesus' own resurrection, will be celebrated and included, appropriately transformed.

- *Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 306

*What matters is new creation* (Galatians 6:15)

All of this only makes sense, of course, if in the resurrection the new age has already come to birth... the death of Jesus, as Israel's Messiah, was the means of abolishing the power of the old world...and those who belong to Jesus are now part of the "new creation"...

The divine initiative to send both Jesus and the Spirit was the action that turned the corner, bringing the world as a whole and the Messiah's people in particular into the new world in which the power of evil had been dealt a fatal blow.

- *The Day the Revolution Began*, 2016: 236,237

## OBJECTION 14

## JESUS NEVER MENTIONED CARING FOR CREATION

If creation care is so important, why didn't Jesus speak about it?  
Would he support our involvement in it?

*See also Objection 13.*

### Phillip Donnell

I believe that Jesus was a "greenie", that is, he took delight in all things natural and was very concerned about preserving the natural environment. I base my contention on three major lines of evidence. It is impossible to read the Bible without learning that Christ was not only involved in bringing creation into being, but he is also pivotal to nature's redemption and ongoing existence. Further, even though Jesus did not explicitly address environmental ethics, creation theologians, such as Sean McDonagh, say it was through events and incidents in his life involving nature, and references to nature in his teaching, that Jesus showed his followers that he had concern for the environment. As you read the gospels, you very much sense an intimate connection between Jesus and the natural world.

### **1. Jesus is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer of Creation**

Jesus was the Divine Agent of creation. As the Second Person of the Godhead, He was personally involved in the whole process of bringing the world and its ecosphere into existence (John 1:1-3,14; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2-3). He was, as John 1 puts it, the Word who existed from the very beginning, who spoke creation itself into being. Creation is literally a vast collection of "Master-pieces".

Colossians 1 presents him as the cosmic Christ, the One by whom and for whom all things were made:

*We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels—everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.*

*He was supreme in the beginning and—leading the resurrection parade—he is supreme in the end. From beginning to end he's there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.*

vs.15-20 TM

*...for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible,*

*whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

vs.16-20 NRSV

We find Christ presented in this passage as:

- The Source of creation: “By him all things were created” (v.16)
- The Sustainer of creation: “In him all things hold together” (v.17)
- The Saviour of creation: “through whom God is pleased to reconcile to himself all things” (v.20).

If you’ve made something, keep it in existence, and are prepared to die to redeem it, you have a deep attachment to it and appreciation of it.

Reflecting on the ramifications of this passage, Michael Lloyd asserts that creation is there **for** the Son:

*It is appropriate that what creation is for is not a thing but a Person. Its purpose is not ultimately functional but relational... The word translated 'for' might actually be translated 'to'. In other words, the whole of creation is orientated towards the Son of God who became human in Jesus of Nazareth. Just as a flower is made for sunshine and cannot flourish or indeed survive without it and therefore reaches out towards the light, so creation is made for the Son and only flourishes in so far as it is reaching out towards and opening itself up to Him. It depends upon him for its original existence, for its present flourishing and for its future fulfilment. It is for him in the sense that it needs Him in order to be fully itself. It is for Him in the sense that it is the Father's gift to the Son. And it is for Him in the sense that it exists for relationship with Him and to bring Him glory.*

(2009: 20-21)

Brian McLaren refers to *the Spirit of Jesus, to whom the poor and the sick and the sparrows and salamanders are all precious, each in a unique way* (2004: 269).

Dave Bookless also carefully explores some of the mysteries of this passage (2008: 63-73). Here is a summary of his insights. Though Jesus was fully human, he is over, above, superior to and beyond creation. His ministry was, in a real sense, divinity itself fixing things that had gone wrong with his creation. If the whole creation is in need of healing, who better to put things right than the one who made it. The gospels show not only Jesus' power over creation, but also his intimacy with creation - artists know their work better than anybody else. He cares and protects what belongs to him, holding everything together by curbing the forces of chaos and maintaining the systems for life. Because he is the heart of creation, he is committed to it and will not abandon it, choosing to work in partnership with us in serving and preserving the earth. Only through Jesus is there hope of salvation for people and for nature because his death on the cross was in order to restore all relationships that had been broken by past evils and his resurrection guarantees that the whole created order can also be transformed and renewed.

In Revelation 3:14, Jesus actually describes himself. Depending on the translation, he says

that he is the beginning, origin, source or ruler of God's creation. The Greek word can mean first in point of time ("beginning") or first in rank ("ruler"). The NLT adds a different layer of meaning by saying that Christ is *the beginning of God's new creation*.

## 2. Events and Incidents

Consider the events and incidents in the life of Jesus which involved natural elements:

- He is born in a manger surrounded by some of the animals he had originally created (Luke 2:7,8,12,16).
- His first visitors are shepherds who have come to seek the Lamb of God, a title later used by John the Baptist.
- Angels speak of bringing 'peace on earth' – literally, God's *shalom* throughout the created order. His birth means all material creation is blessed.
- The wilderness is the place of Jesus' struggle against temptation, during which he is "among the wild animals and angels took care of him" (Mark 1:13 NLT).
- After his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon him like a dove.
- From what we know of Jesus and his posse, they were a gang of transient foragers and fishers and gleaners, at least as comfortable sleeping and eating outside as they were under the roofs of people. This was not new; he was following in the footsteps of his tradition, a people who always found God revealed in untamed spaces.
- Jesus is called the Good Shepherd of the sheep.
- In calming the storm, he shows his authority over natural forces. Storm and tempest were symbols of God's wrath towards the wicked, but the calming of natural elements was a sign of God's blessing.
- He gets his taxes out of the mouth of a fish.
- He loves the wilderness and the mountains often retreating there to commune with his Father (Matthew 4:13; Mark 1:35,3:13,6:31-32 and 46; Luke 5:16).
- He takes delight in the flowers of the field and the birds of the air.
- He rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.
- His death and resurrection are accompanied by an eclipse and earthquakes, as creation reacts to the Creator overcoming death and decay, and to the hope that creation itself would be set free from those things.
- His death and resurrection defeat the laws of entropy and decay, and inaugurate the new creation.

It is salient to observe how Jesus exercised his authority over creation. He did so by bringing it back into order, caring for it, healing the sick, raising the dead, undoing all that mars it and prevents it from being itself. His nature and healing miracles show us that he was opposed to disease, danger or death deforming his creatures or defiling his world. Christ was not entirely at peace with nature because he had not built such things into its original blueprint and whenever he had the opportunity he sought to redress the symptoms of its tragically imperfect state.

Jesus fulfilled the Genesis vision of humanity, reflecting God's image in his relationship with creation. Just as the first Adam (literally 'made from earth') was told to tend and keep the garden, so Jesus, the Son of Man (or second Adam) truly appreciated and cared for it. As the final Adam, Jesus puts right the damage done by the first Adam, bringing life and restoration (Romans 5:12-17).

Michael Lloyd suggests that the God-given vocation of Adam and Eve was to **subdue** the earth, to rid it of the pain and suffering that have crept into creation as a result of the angelic Fall...putting right what went wrong. And if you want to see what it would have looked like for them to have responded to that vocation and taken up that task, then **look at the person of Jesus**. Here at last is a human being fulfilling the human vocation...doing what human beings were intended to do: subduing the earth, stilling the storm, healing the sick, dealing with demonic distortion, raising the dead. Here at last the effects of the angelic Fall were being undone, and creation restored. Here at last was the (beginning of the) solution to the problem of evil (2009: 87, emphasis mine).

### 3. References in his Teaching

It's not just what he did, and who he was. It's what Jesus proclaimed in his teaching. Jesus and his disciples had no New Testament. They looked to nature, personal experience and their tradition of Judaism to find God's good way.

Jesus did not mention creation care specifically because he took it as read. Jonathan Merritt highlights this point:

*We have to remember that Jesus came to earth in first-century Palestine where he ministered in a Jewish context. The people in Jesus' world were acutely aware of all the Hebrew laws and Scriptures that protected God's creation... Furthermore, first-century Palestine was largely an agrarian society in which sheer survival depended on sustainable practices and proper cultivation. Stewardship was assumed. So it isn't fair to fault Jesus for failing to offer answers to questions that the culture wasn't asking... (2010: 94-95)*

Nevertheless our Lord's teaching shows that he knew the details, patterns and rhythms of creation inside out. It is hardly surprising that he taught about God by asking people to look at their familiar surroundings:

- Jesus treated the Old Testament as God's word. He never revoked the creation command to look after God's world and its creatures.
- He said 'Look at the birds; look at the flowers.' In other words, earnestly study nature to discover your place in God's world. Learn from God's book of works. He called the attention of his hearers to the delicate beauty that was all around them.
- He told us to pray that God's will be done 'On earth as in heaven.' - The Lord's Prayer teaches that God's Kingdom rule is to be earthed in the realities of this physical world.
- He based most of his parables on nature's wisdom, building on the Psalms, Proverbs and Job in seeing nature as a commentary on scripture. His parables and illustrations reveal a thorough understanding of the natural world, from which he drew spiritual lessons, from the farmer working on different soils, the mustard seed, the lost sheep, the fig tree and lightning (Matthew 13:31-32, 24:32; Luke 8:4-8, 15:3-6, 17:24).
- Think about how many times Jesus uses natural objects to illustrate his teachings: salt, light, mustard bushes, yeast, fish, foxholes, figs, grapes, lilies, sheep, goats, cedars, palm trees, olives, mountains, rivers, sparrows, sand, stone, sea, wheat, watering holes, ditches, donkeys, camels and more. He was educating people about God and Spirit through nature.
- He pictured God's intimate knowledge and care for his creation in terms of his being cognisant of the death of a sparrow and the number of hairs on our heads (Matt.10:29-31).
- He acknowledged, through a parable and a miracle, the actions of an evil agent that had

distorted the original harmony and wholeness of creation (Matthew 13:24-28).

- He exhorted us to 'Proclaim the gospel to the whole creation' (Mark 16:15 ESV). The Good News for people is also good news for nature. Good News, as demonstrated in Christ's miracles of healing, obviously means bringing (back) into good order, which has rich possibilities when applied, with awareness, to the fullest extent of the disorder (see Loader in Habel, 2002: 42). Our mission is to proclaim Jesus' Lordship so that all creation acknowledges him as Creator and Saviour (a theme reiterated in Revelation ch. 4 and 5).

Even the general principles that Jesus taught have profound implications for the way we treat the environment - if you really think about it!

- In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said, *Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you*. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. This "Golden Rule" has always been a basic part of the Bible's message.

- In Matthew 22:39 he said that the second most important commandment (after loving God) is to love your neighbour as yourself.

These commandments encompass not only how we treat other people directly, but how we treat them and other organisms indirectly through our effects on the environment. How can we love God and our neighbour without caring for creation, especially if our lifestyle and actions are detrimentally affecting people in other parts of the world? Loving God means loving all that God created and sustains in love. Loving our neighbour means nurturing the good earth on which human flourishing depends. Moreover, God's concern for justice is also, in part, an environmental concern.

Brian McLaren extends the "love your neighbour" principle into the future. Referring to those downstream from us in time, he asks: *Do we want to leave them a world even less in balance than our world today? Is that neighborly? The more we as Christians follow Jesus by thinking of our duty to our neighbours "downstream" in space and time, the more we will take our stewardship of creation seriously* (2004: 273).

These precepts make it clear that greed, exploitation and indifference to the needs of others are personal sins and social evils. They point us *away from any individualistic ethic to a community foundation where we see the needs of others as being as important as ours. Broadened to its fullest implications, this must apply from community to community, and nation to nation*. (Gnanakan, 1999: 174)

### **Conclusion**

According to Romans 8:29, God loves us just the way we are but he refuses to leave us that way. He wants us to be just like Jesus and to model our lives on the example of Jesus. If that is God's agenda, caring for creation will be part and parcel of what that means to be a Christian (a Christ-follower). Caring for the earth rests in the heart of God, and was certainly in the heart of his Son. In caring for creation, we truly reflect the mind and actions of Christ.

### **Dave Bookless**

"If creation care is so important, why didn't Jesus speak about it?" The question wrong-footed me at first: after all, when Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets he said, 'Love God and love your neighbour', not 'Go hug a tree'!



However, the deeper I look at the Gospels, the more convinced I've become that it's the question that is wrong-footed. Here are four rapid reasons:

- *How can we love God and our neighbour without caring for creation?* Loving God means loving all that God created and sustains in love. Loving our neighbour means nurturing the good earth on which human flourishing depends.
  - *Things Jesus never talked about:* Jesus was silent on many subjects Christians treat as important: attitudes to abortion and homosexuality (Jesus never addressed either directly), democracy, slavery... The point is, Jesus treated the Old Testament as God's word, and so should we. He never revoked the creation command to look after God's world and its creatures. Rather, he fulfilled the Genesis vision of humanity reflecting God's image in our relationship with creation. Just as the first Adam (literally 'made from earth') was told to tend and keep the garden, so Jesus, the Son of Man (the son of, or second Adam) appreciated and cared for creation's gifts. He based most of his parables on nature's wisdom, building on the Psalms, Proverbs and Job in seeing nature as a commentary on scripture.
  - *It's not just what Jesus said, it's what he did, and who he was.* In calming the storm, Jesus showed his authority over nature's forces. He was, as John 1 puts it, the Word who existed from the very beginning, who spoke creation itself into being. He was, as Colossians 1 reminds us, the One by whom and for whom all things were made. No wonder that his birth was accompanied by shepherds leaving their sheep to worship one whom the angels spoke of bringing 'peace on earth' – literally, God's shalom throughout the created order. No wonder that his death and resurrection were accompanied by earthquakes, as creation reacted to the Creator overcoming death and decay, and to the hope that creation itself would be set free from decay (Romans 8).
  - *Actually, Jesus did talk about creation!* A few examples:
    - *'Look at the birds; look at the flowers.'* Earnestly study nature to discover your place in God's world. Just as Adam took each species and named it, so the second Adam urges us to learn from God's book of works.
    - *'God so loved the...?'* Whilst theologians argue about the exact meaning of 'world' in John 3:16, there's no argument that God's love encompasses all creation and Jesus died and rose so that all things in heaven and earth might be reconciled to God.
    - *'On earth as in heaven.'* The Lord's prayer teaches that God's Kingdom rule is to be earthed in the realities of this physical world.
    - *'Preach the Good News to all creation.'* Mark 16:15's version of the Great Commission couldn't be clearer. Our mission is to proclaim and demonstrate Jesus' Lordship so that all creation points to him as Creator and Saviour.
- Following Jesus is about letting him be Lord of all. His birth means all material creation is blessed. His death and resurrection defeat the laws of entropy and decay, and inaugurate the new creation. Creation care is essential to following Jesus.
- Posted on his *Planetwise* blog 31 July, 2012

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

Creation is not a lost cause. God's Son has himself entered God's own creation to redeem it and us. By undoing the degrading works of Adam and his followers, and by leading us in

doing what Adam was supposed to do, Jesus reconciles all things to God (see Rom.5:8-11; 2 Cor.5:17-20; Col.1:20), renewing the life of the earth. Jesus is the hope of the world, and we follow him. All the principles on creation care that we have gleaned from Scripture originate, reverberate, and find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. And so we pray his prayer to our Father: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth...' (Matthew 6:10).

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 92

### **Jonathan Merritt**

Should we conclude that Jesus didn't care about this issue? Was He sending a message through His example that there are more important things to worry about?

We have to remember that Jesus came to earth in first-century Palestine where he ministered in a Jewish context. The people in Jesus' world were acutely aware of all the Hebrew laws and Scriptures that protected God's creation... Furthermore, first-century Palestine was largely an agrarian society in which sheer survival depended on sustainable practices and proper cultivation. Stewardship was assumed. So it isn't fair to fault Jesus for failing to offer answers to questions that the culture wasn't asking...

Keeping these things in mind so that we evaluate our Lord fairly, we still find that His life and ministry powerfully bolster the divine plan for our planet. Jesus aligns with creation care in at least four ways.

Jesus is the Creator-God.

Jesus Entered Creation.

Jesus Taught with Creation.

Jesus Will Redeem Creation.

He stands above creation as its Inventor, He exists throughout Creation as its Sustainer, he walked into Creation as its Savior, and one day Jesus will return to creation as its Redeemer.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 94-100.

### **Jurgen Moltmann**

In Paul's own epistles we already find him touching on the cosmic Christ when he is talking about Christ's mediation in creation. In I Cor.8.6 he says 'For us there is only one God, the Father, *from whom* are all things and *for whom* we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* are all things and *through whom* we exist.' If all things are 'from' God the creator, and 'through' Christ the Lord, then Christ is here interpreted as 'the creator-mediator' and identified with the Wisdom who was beside God *before* the creation of this world and *through whom* God made all things (Prov.8)

- *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 1994: 90-91

### **Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A. Moo**

...one of the central motivations for creation care is the gospel imperative that we "love our neighbors". To love our neighbors must include doing what we can to enable this world to sustain the flourishing of our fellow human beings. The second "great commandment" requires us to assess our lifestyles and priorities in *light of the interests of all our "neighbors" – those who live next door and those who live on the other side of the earth.*

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 25-26

*In chapter 7 of their 2018 book, the Moos discuss "Jesus and Creation". They explore seven*

aspects:

- *The Significance of Jesus' Incarnation*
- *The Peaceable Kingdom of God's Messiah*
- *Looking to Jesus to Learn What It Is to Be Human*
- *Looking to Jesus to learn What It Is to Rule*
- *Looking With Jesus At Creation*
- *Looking to Jesus for Creation's Goal: Resurrection and New Creation*
- *Creation's Response to Jesus*

They then summarise as follows:

In the incarnation of Christ, we have the strongest confirmation possible of the goodness of creation – a theme that is found throughout the Old Testament. In Christ, we see the breaking in of God's kingdom on earth, a kingdom in which old enmities are abolished and peace is established between God and humanity, humanity and the earth and human beings and each other. In Christ, we learn truly what it is to be human, to accept both our limitations as creatures who are not gods and also our high calling as obedient children of God. In Christ, we learn finally what it is to rule as God's image bearers, as those who in sacrificial love are willing to give of ourselves on behalf of those we rule. We also see in Jesus' teaching and life something of the priorities of God's kingdom, a kingdom of abundance and compassion and generous grace. In Christ's life and death and resurrection, we discover the breadth of God's concern and the cosmic scope of his love.

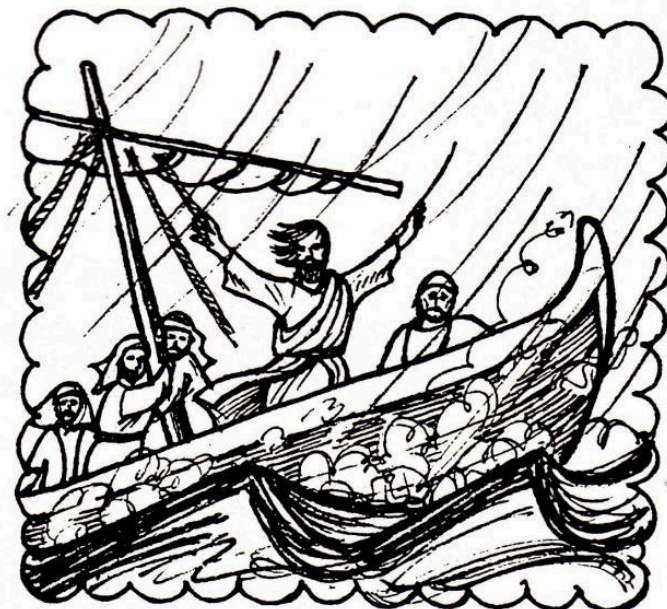
Above all, in Christ we encounter our Lord and Savior who alone can reconcile us to God, renew us in his image, and enable us to be his faithful servants – including in how we relate to and care for the earth that belongs to him.

- *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, 2018: 125

### **Christopher Wright**

Since creation forms the platform of all God's mission in history, as well as being the final eschatological beneficiary of all God's redemptive intention, the centrality of Christ in that great mission of God within and for creation is clearly focused.

- *The Mission of God*, 2006: 113



## OBJECTION 15

# ECONOMIC GROWTH IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR WELL-BEING

**Economic growth is necessary for human well-being.  
Creation care and economic growth are incompatible.**

### Phillip Donnell

We frequently hear politicians waxing eloquent about how they have or will achieve economic growth. The need for, and nature of, such growth will be treated as givens. However, that is no longer the view expressed by an increasing number of voices raising concerns about growth's inexorable momentum. They point out that our present economic system hasn't delivered, has in many ways brought us to the current ecological crisis, and needs to be called into question.

As early as 1973, E. F. Schumacher raised a red flag against the "bigger is better" philosophy, calling for the end of classic consumption. He argued that the modern economy was unsustainable and that nature's resistance to pollution was limited as well. He concluded that government effort must be concentrated on sustainable development, because relatively minor improvements would not solve the underlying problem of an unsustainable economy. Schumacher's philosophy was one of "enoughness", appreciating both human needs and limitations. We needed to build our economies around community, not corporations.

Jane Kelsey's exploration of the effects of globalisation on the New Zealand economy was eye-opening when published in 1999. She offered a trenchantly expressed response to the neoliberal slogan of the time, 'There is no alternative.' She showed that after a period of grumbling acquiescence, more New Zealanders had begun to fight back and demand a different path to the free-market agenda that had come to rule their lives. Kelsey's analysis remains a critical yardstick for current policies and an alternative perspective on the development of global relationships.

In 2007, the long-standing presumption that "more" equals "better" in economic growth was also questioned by Bill McKibben, who asked if in fact this idea was valid. McKibben also suggested that unfettered growth is not a realistic, sustainable goal. According to McKibben, the invention of the steam engine and the Industrial Revolution in 1712 resulted in a mindset which rapidly altered expectations of economic growth. He was of the opinion that current political assumptions ignored both the problems of resource depletion and inequity, which leads to human unhappiness." In its place, McKibben suggested that the focus should be on "deep economy", which includes, rather than constant growth, a consideration of human satisfaction.

A year later, James Speth expressed similar misgivings. He examined the close correlation between measures of economic development and measures of environmental degradation since World War 2 (see graphs below). He emphasised that unless we rapidly decoupled economic growth from physical resource use, we would push the Earth beyond its capacity to sustain us. Speth did not mince words: *"modern capitalism is destructive of the environment, and not in a minor way but in a way that profoundly threatens the planet"* (2008: 194)

The publication of Tim Jackson's *Prosperity Without Growth* (2009) was a further landmark in the sustainability debate. It was a piercing challenge to conventional economics, questioning the continued pursuit of exponential economic growth. It provoked controversy, inspired debate and led to a new wave of research investigating its findings and conclusions. It courageously proffered an alternative approach, calling for an economy that creates community and ennobles our lives, one based on wellbeing as its primary indicator.

Naomi Klein is perhaps the latest author of note to pick up this theme. She pointed out that *"... our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature"* (2014: 21). Klein is under no illusions. Efforts to solve climate change are failing because they come second to preserving the economy and we have lost the tools to respond to a crisis that demands collective action. To her, we're all in the sacrifice zone now (Macfie: 19,24).

A 2016 advertisement in the *Australian* newspaper intrigued me. Businessman Dick Smith asserted that perpetual exponential growth in a finite world was impossible, we must live in balance, and that voters should select a political candidate who wanted to change the form of growth - *"towards quality and not quantity, a growth in efficiencies and removing waste, not consuming more and more and never-ending population increase."*

There's good news in all this. We've all been so effectively sold the line that endless growth is essential to maintain and improve our quality of life. This couldn't be further from the truth. Wilkinson and Pickett's 2010 book *The Spirit Level*, as well as a host of other reputable studies around the world, show that life satisfaction does not increase with average income or GDP per capita. Although incomes are rising, individual and social well-being are not improving. Apparently, material prosperity has diminishing returns when it comes to happiness and fulfilment. Once we have good access to food, shelter, healthcare and other basic material things, the nature of the community in which you live and the quality of your relationships is the best predictor of wellbeing. More stuff only makes a very marginal difference.

However, a post-growth economy need not be a no-growth one. The key is that working life, the natural environment and the public sector will no longer be sacrificed in order to push up the rate of growth. Real growth is promoting the well-being of people *and* nature. Good growth is growth with equity, employment, environment and empowerment. The development of new eco-friendly technologies, capping throughput at a sustainable level, discouraging overconsumption, ceasing special treatment for the owners of capital, and keeping corporates accountable will all help.

Ecological problems are now sufficiently widespread and serious to constitute an acid test for all actual and proposed public policy settings and for all processes of institutional reconstruction, be they incremental or revolutionary. As Edward O. Wilson has said: *“Destroying a rain forest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.”* The short-term gain results in long-term loss.

To sum up, the endless pursuit of economic growth is making us unhappy and risks destroying the Earth’s capacity to sustain us. The widespread obsession with it seems to be a fetish, that is, an inanimate object worshipped for its apparent magical powers. It is tantamount to a secular religion, but more and more people are now viewing it as a false religion, no longer worthy of blind obeisance. Increasingly, they are seeing through the reductionist policies and slogans that speak of a “better future” based narrowly on economic planning and business as usual. They are realising that fundamentally it is greed that exploits the planet’s resources beyond the minimum necessary for meeting human needs, and to the utmost possible for maximising profits.

Further, there is a growing awareness that development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic it has to promote the good of *every* person and the *whole* person. The planet is not a mere quarry for one-dimensional economic purposes. It is also our human habitat, intended to meet other no less important needs, especially the need for self-transcendence through the experience of beauty, wonder, stillness and silence, the presence of God and communion with one another.

Pope Benedict points that *“economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to be directed towards the pursuit of the common good.”* (2009: Section 36). Building up other people is not something that is for *after* we have achieved economic success; it is something we need to do *within* the processes of economic activity. The practice of gratuitousness, generosity, giving, forgiving and compassion needs to be a stronger part of economic life (2009: Sections 37-38 and 46).

In short, the problem, is not simply economic; it is moral and spiritual. The crisis affecting the environment did not start with the environment. It started in human hearts. It resulted from the kind of economic activities we initiated and built. A solution at the economic level will only eventuate if we undergo, in a most radical way, an inner change of heart which can lead to a change of lifestyle and sustainable patterns of consumption and production. Self-interest must become secondary to social responsibility. That is where religious faith assumes great significance because it, more than anything else, has the power to change the way we think and act.

In 2012, the Lausanne Movement’s *Jamaica Call to Action* enunciated the challenge that is still before us, namely an economy that works in harmony with God’s creation:

*“We call for an approach to economic well-being and development, energy production, natural resource management (including mining and forestry), water management and use, transportation, health care, rural and urban design and living, and personal and corporate consumption patterns that maintain the ecological integrity of creation.”* (Section 8).

It is a worthy and timely aspiration for all who have the courage to promote and pursue it.

### **Salient Ideas**

- Do something about the price of housing, or adopt fresh approaches to financing (such as savings pools - see [www. le.org.nz](http://www.le.org.nz)), so that people are freed from decades of debt peonage to banks, or relentless renting.
- Live with enough, not always more.
- Promote the value of leisure.
- Expose the lack of benefit we get from material consumption. Retail therapy only ever works in the very short term. Real friendships work for life.
- Push for a shorter working week and longer vacations.
- Work for or set up not-for-profit cooperatives where the workers own the business and can spread the benefits any way they see fit.

### **Thomas Berry**

...the human is derivative, the earth is primary. All the professions must be realigned to reflect the primacy of the earth. Economics. For example, must have as its first priority the economic well-being of the planet. As long as the economy of the planet is integral, humans need not worry. The earth will produce and we will find a sufficiency in our existence. But the most absurd thing for us to believe is that we can have an expanding human economy with a diminishing earth economy. Our human corporations cannot survive if the earth corporation becomes bankrupt.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 97.

Progress, to be valid, must include the entire earth in all its components. To designate human plundering of the earth as "progress" is an unbearable distortion. Yet that is precisely what we have been doing. What is necessary is for the water and air to be pure, to be more integral with themselves, for everything to "be itself" in an increasingly integral way.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 99.

When we consider the industrial world, the managerial profession, education, and economics, we find that they all support the process whereby the greatest possible amount of natural resources is put as quickly as possible through the processing-consumer economy and then thrown onto the waste heap. The faster this process goes, the more the natural world is consumed, the higher the Gross National Product (GNP), the happier we are supposed to be. That is the myth of our times. We do not see, we do not observe, the rising junk, the expanding garbage heaps, the increasing amount of radioactive refuse. We are fixed in a state of denial.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 108

The industrial order itself is inherently decaying. Nature renews itself. We can survive only within the ever-renewing processes of nature. We are making ourselves slaves to renewing industrial structures that cannot be sustained.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 113

### **Steven Bouma-Prediger**

...there is not always more. Apart from our energy income from the sun, the world is finite. Numbers of individual organisms may seem limitless, but they are not. Species may appear

to be beyond counting, but they are finite in number. Our life support systems (soil, water and air) may seem beyond abuse, but there are limits to what they can bear. Like it or not, we are finite creatures living in a finite world.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 20

...the earth and its creatures are finite. Thus, we must live within our means, conserving and preserving our resources by exercising self-restraint and living frugally. In so doing, we show hospitality.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 153

Or one could refer to informed and sophisticated proposals to rethink our economy in ways that are more conducive to the health of the planet, especially in light of "the end of oil." For example, in *The Bridge at the End of the World*, James Speth outlines in considerable detail the opportunities we have for a "new consciousness" and a "new politics" in a large-scale transformation from a form of capitalism blind to the natural world to one that takes ecological sustainability as a given. And in *Deep Economy* Bill McKibben offers a compelling case for moving beyond an economy in which growth is the paramount ideal to an economy characterized by genuine wealth and, as the subtitle indicates, a durable future.

- *For the Beauty of the Earth*, 2010: 176

### **Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser**

To the extent people prioritize values and goals such as achievement, money, power, status and image, they tend to hold more negative views towards the environment, are less likely to engage in positive environmental behaviours, and are more likely to use natural resources unsustainably.

- *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity*, 2009: 10

### **Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb Jr**

Our response is to leave GNP alone as the proper measure of *economic* success and seek to counterbalance its influence by pointing to social and ecological indicators as of equal or greater importance.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 377

We believe that it is urgent to replace the GNP with a measure that does not increase the growing gap between the rich and the poor and that encourages unsustainable economic practices.

The growth economy is faltering. There are massive threats to human life, and now it appears that the very growth in which such pride has been taken is the cause of the threat to its continuance.

- *For The Common Good*, 1994: 402

### **Claire Dawson**

We live in an age of rampant consumerism, akin to an epidemic disease.

Seeking to satisfy all our wants (rather than needs) is openly encouraged: in fact the 'growth'



in our modern market economy depends on it.

Our measure of national progress - GDP - is flawed and misleading.

With the able assistance of the fossil fuel industries, by failing to act on climate change we have jeopardised our very means of survival.

The idolatrous goal of 'economic growth at all costs' in no way reflects personal happiness or the achievement of human flourishing. It is far from the biblical model of love of neighbour, generosity and sacrificial love...

A crucial point that is made often in environmental circles is that it is highly illogical, irrational and fundamentally unsustainable to pursue an agenda of *infinite growth on a finite planet*. There is only so much plundering and polluting that can be done before planet earth caves in under the strain. The planet itself would survive, but many of its precious species would not - perhaps even a significant proportion of humankind. However, our collective attachment to growth is so strong that we find it hard to think seriously about the reality and ramifications of such claims.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 124, 129

### **The Diakonia Council of Churches**

The challenge confronting the people of God at this time is to reclaim economics as...the management of God's household. It is not the preserve of professionals and academics. It is the heart of what it means to live on the earth, and it is the heart of what the Bible has to teach.

- *The Oikos Journey: A Theological Reflection on the Economic Crisis in South Africa*, 2006: 33

### **Paul Ehrlich**

One could, of course, draw the conclusion that a basic flaw lies in a capitalist economic system that emphasizes perpetual growth and profit over compassion.

- Ehrlich and Tobias, *Hope on Earth: A Conversation*, 2014: 19

I would certainly subscribe to any campaign that aspires to promulgate the appropriate messages for our time; the right narratives that might hope to get us off this perpetual population and economic growth machine; this endlessly increasing per capita consumption mindset. As long as we're doing that, as long as the population is growing and per capita consumption among the rich is growing, we better take pause, all of us, because there are no easy mythic or ideological fixes to make it right.

- Ehrlich and Tobias, *Hope on Earth: A Conversation*, 2014: 119

...ecologically speaking, it is no longer appropriate to be continuing to build a consumer society, since what we all want and what we're all doing is totally out of sync with sustaining a livable world. The totality does not mesh.

- Ehrlich and Tobias, *Hope on Earth: A Conversation*, 2014: 147

### **Clive Hamilton**

There has been one, and only one, reason for the reluctance of the rich countries of the world to reduce their emissions and so help to stave off environmental catastrophe - the

perceived impact of reducing emissions on the rate of economic growth and especially the growth of a handful of powerful industries. *This has been enough to jeopardise the future of the world.*

- *The Growth Fetish*, 2003: 182 (emphasis mine)

### **Tim Jackson**

The conventional view is that economic expansion will lead to rising prosperity. Higher incomes mean a better quality of life. This equation seems both familiar and obvious. But it's also clear that, on a finite planet, there must be some limits to material expansion. A rising population with insatiable material aspirations sits uneasily with the finite nature of our earthly home.

In the face of those limits, we're left with just two possibilities. Either we must progressively squeeze the material content out of economic expansion, so that we can continue to grow our economies without trashing the planet, or we must learn to find prosperity without relying on economic growth to deliver it for us.

- *Prosperity Without Growth*, 2017: xxvi

...living well on a finite planet cannot simply be about consuming more and more stuff. Nor can it be about accumulating more and more debt.

Prosperity, in any meaningful sense of the term, is about the quality of our lives and relationships, about the resilience of our communities and about our sense of individual and collective meaning. What this revision shows, even more clearly than before, is that the economics for such a vision is a precise, definable and meaningful task.

- *Prosperity Without Growth*, 2017: xxviii – xxxix

In short, we have no alternative but to question growth. The myth of growth has failed us. It has failed the 3 billion people who still live on little more than the price of a skinny latte from the café next door. It has failed the fragile ecological systems on which we depend for survival. It has failed, spectacularly, in its own terms, to provide economic stability and secure people's livelihoods.

The uncomfortable reality is that we find ourselves faced with the imminent end of cheap oil, volatile commodity prices, the degradation of air, water and soil, conflicts over land use, resource use, water use, forestry and fishing rights, and the momentous challenge of stabilizing the global climate. And we face these tasks with an economy that is fundamentally broken, in desperate need of renewal.

In these circumstances, a return to business as usual is not an option. Prosperity for the few founded on ecological destruction and persistent social injustice is not foundation for a civilized society...

Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times.

- *Prosperity Without Growth*, 2017: 21-22

**Lausanne: Capetown Commitment**

The gospel challenges the idolatry of rampant consumerism. We are called, as those who serve God and not mammon, to recognise that greed perpetuates poverty, and to renounce it. At the same time, we rejoice that the gospel includes the rich in its call to repentance, and invites them to join the fellowship of those transformed by forgiving grace.

- cited in Bell and White (eds), 2016: 65.

**Jonathan Merritt**

We fail to connect consumerism with creation's woes, but when you find one, the other is usually not far away...

The human tendency to pursue more and better is impossible to reconcile with the divine plan...

The Scriptures remind us that we can't take any of these things with us into the afterlife. Instead of seeking more and better things, let's strive to be more content with what we have and cautious about what we buy.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 130,132,133

**Mick Pope**

Economic growth is often made into an idol; one which damages creation and humans.

Economic systems, ancient and modern, have been shown to damage creation.

The Gospel opposes empires in all forms, and this can include their economic aspects.

When society idolises money, it distorts the true nature of humanity and expands to overwhelm creation, becoming a self-destructive machine.

The Lordship of Christ addresses the modern myths of western society, including the narratives at the centre of the societal machine.

One of the unchallenged assumptions of today's society is that of economic growth. In a neo-liberal worldview, which is the dominant political view in the West, the economy is placed above the welfare of individuals, ultimately of society as a whole, and the environment. This is not to say that there is anything inherently wrong with trade, buying and selling, making money and so on. It is because at some point the economy has ceased to be something that operates for people but instead becomes something that enslaves them. This happens when we effectively worship the economy and capitalism becomes what Brian McLaren calls "theocapitalism".

Jesus presents us with another way of exercising power that challenges all systems that put profit and the raw exercise of power above God, people and creation: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

We might be happy to tell our children not to steal or lie, but what of those who steal from the poor and future generations, and lie about it not being their own fault. The central theme of books like *Merchants of Doubt* is that a minority of special interest groups have borne false witness to the effects of cigarettes, acid rain, the ozone layer and global warming for the sake of maintaining corporate profit or advancing an ideological agenda...

It appears that greed often takes priority over corporate responsibility. Christians are meant

to discover the truth and tell it, to uncover lies and expose them.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 46-47, 53, 59

### **Jay Ruka**

Our economic expectations, including our expectations for the farming industry, must be restrained by our natural world environment. If economic interests destroy that which God created, then we have a problem.

- *Huia Come Home*, 2017: 122

...somehow, both in our Christian theology and our economic practice, we have lost the worldview that sees finance and its systems linked to not just human communities but also the environment. Finance can either foster the wellbeing or degradation of land and society. Economy, ecology and ecumenism are meant to function in a symbiotic relationship. To have a healthy economy is to have healthy human communities in unison with a healthy environment.

To be guided by the huia is to listen to our ancestors, observe the past, and learn from their successes and mistakes. To learn from the huia is to ponder the way they became extinct because of the demands of fashion and farming, and then ask for the path that enables us to farm, clothe and produce wealth that protects our indigenous life, because our distinct sacred space needs caring for with a vision beyond single-minded economic gain. Let's not diminish our "100% New Zealand Pure" nation with private handshakes with corporates or countries.

- *Huia Come Home*, 2017: 139

### **David Wallace-Wells**

The heavier impacts await us. And if, in the past, the promise of growth has been the justification for inequality, injustice and exploitation, it will have many more wounds to salve in the near climate future: disaster, drought, famine, war, global refugeeism and the political disarray it unleashes. And, as a salve, climate change promises almost no global growth; in much of the world hit hardest, in fact, negative growth...

Which makes...the entire history of civilization...an anomaly, or blip. And makes industrialization and economic growth, the tow forces that really gave the modern world the hurtling sensation of material progress, a blip inside a blip. A blip inside a blip that has brought us to the brink of a never-ending climate catastrophe.

- *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019: 166,199.



# 15 MINOR OBJECTIONS

**OBJECTION 16**

**IT'S NOT BIBLICAL TO BE GREEN**

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**Creation care and environmental stewardship are not taught in the Bible.**

**Phillip Donnell**

Philosopher and theologian Thomas Berry says that people in our society have a sensitivity to suicide, homicide and genocide, but they commit biocide (the killing of the life systems of the planet) and geocide (the killing of the planet itself) simply because they have no morality to deal with it (1988:77; 2006: 52,66-68). In other words, because humans have chosen to ignore God's parameters for relating to the environment, they are confused, lost or anything goes. As Pope Benedict observed in his Inaugural Mass in 2005: "the external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast."

Christians, however, don't have that excuse, because the Biblical mandate for creation care is very clear and unequivocal. Caring for creation is something *God* wants us to do. If I asked you to do it, you would have every right to ignore me, but if it's something *God* tells you to do, that puts a new complexion on things.

One of the best hopes for resolving current environmental challenges is that the global church will recover its earth-keeping vocation. That is more likely to happen if Christians become convinced that God wants them to care for what he has made, i.e. that creation care is a right response to God. Our behaviour is rooted in our deepest ethical values and spiritual convictions. We change our ways if we're persuaded that something is a divine calling and commission to us. That is where the teaching of Scripture comes into focus.

During my twenty years as a pastor/teacher in local churches, people often said to me, "Show us where it is in the Bible, and we will believe it. Not only that, we'll do it!" It was a valid request. Scripture is indisputable and preaching has little authority or power unless it is based squarely on God's Word, so that is where any case to care for creation must be sourced.

Until a few years ago, I did not realise that pretty well every book of the Bible has something to say about the Creator, creation, or caring for creation. Then someone gave me *The Green Bible* - where every such reference is highlighted in green print! We are wise, then, to search the scriptures to better understand the heart of God in relation to what he has made. When we do, we discover that Scripture really does present creation care as a God-given responsibility, and that responsibility arises from seven significant signals. For ease of memory, I have titled each of them using the letter "S".

**1. Stewardship.**

STEWARDSHIP: Genesis 1:28-30, 2:15; Exodus 19:5; Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 24:1; Matthew 25:21; I Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 3:23-24.

God owns the planet, but appointed us to be faithful managers and custodians, with the

right to use but not abuse.
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As far as our world is concerned, the biblical emphasis is on stewardship, not ownership - that the earth remains the Lord's and does not belong to its human inhabitants (Exodus 19:5; Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 24:1). God owns it. He still holds the title deeds to the planet.

What God said way back in Genesis 1 was this: "Yes, I own it, but I'm going to give you a certain amount of control and jurisdiction over what I own". That's why you find words there such as "take dominion", "subdue" and "rule over" (v.28). Unfortunately, those words have made some people think that God has given us the go-ahead to exploit, conquer and pulverise nature, but that's not the idea at all. Those terms do not mean "Treat it in whatever way you please."

In Genesis 2:15, God went on to spell out what our role involves, the nature of our jurisdiction. We read that God took the man (representing humans) and put him in the Garden of Eden (representing the natural world) "*to tend and keep it*" (NKJV). The original word for "*tend*" (Hebrew *abad*) means "to work or serve," so if you apply it to the ground, it can be defined as "to till or cultivate." Another nuance of the word is "to dress", implying adornment, embellishment, and improvement, meeting the needs of the garden of creation so that it will persist and flourish.

The original word for "*keep*" (Hebrew *shamar*) means "to exercise great care over." It expresses God's wish that humanity look after, guard, and watch over the garden. A caretaker maintains and protects his charge so that he can return it to its owner in as good or better condition than when he received it. The essential concept here is the faithful preservation of it as a trust. For example, every time we, as humans, drive a species to extinction, we are, in fact, intimating 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 see in this verse that right from the outset humans were appointed as caretakers, managers, and benevolent custodians of what he has entrusted to us. It is very much a loving, sustaining, nurturing role. From the dawn of history, humans were given permission to use the earth but not abuse it. God took the risk of putting us in charge of developing all the potentialities he built into the natural world – wisely, faithfully, and in a timely manner (Matthew 25:21; I Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 3:23-24). Environmental stewardship is not just some issue that we can choose to address if it's our thing. Our caretaking of the Earth proclaims to God and to the people around us that we accept his commission and take it seriously.

Responsibility implies accountability. One day God will hold us accountable for how well we have fulfilled our role as custodians of this planet (Isaiah 24:4-6; Jeremiah 2:7; Ezekiel 34:1-20; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:1-13; James 1-5; Revelation 11:18). In Matthew 25, Jesus told the Parable of the Talents. You know the story. A man was going on a long journey, so he called three of his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. When he returned, he called them to give an account of how they had used his money. He rewarded two who had honoured his trust and berated the one who had abused his trust. I cannot see it being any different in relation to how we treat the resources God has bestowed upon us in

creation. What I want to hear when God assesses my use of it is: *"Well done, good and faithful servant!"* (v.21).

## 2. Sanctity

SANCTITY: Genesis 1:1,3:8; Numbers 35:33-34; Deuteronomy 4:39; Psalm 19:1-6, 96:9, 139:7-10; Jeremiah 23:24; Romans 1:20.

Because God made, inhabits, sustains and reveals himself through creation, it is sacred and therefore worthy of great respect.

Sanctity means "the state or condition of being holy or sacred, and therefore deserving of the utmost respect" – as in "the sanctity of human life". It can also mean "holiness". The two concepts are closely linked, for if something is holy, it is indeed worthy of respect and reverence. It's akin to the Maori concept of *tapu*.

Wendell Berry, the great American conservationist, says:

*...we and all other creatures live by a **sanctity** that is inexpressibly intimate, for to every creature, the gift of life is a portion of the breath and spirit of God... The Bible leaves no doubt at all about the **sanctity** of the act of world-making, or of the world that was made, or of creaturely or bodily life in this world. We are holy creatures living among other holy creatures in a world that is holy* (1993: 95, emphasis mine)

Tony Campolo shares the same conviction about the natural world when he writes: *Only those who sense nothing **'holy'** about the forests and the plants can destroy them with little concern*" (1992: 29, emphasis mine)

Creation is sacred for four reasons...

- God *made* it.

The Bible opens with the words: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* All three members of the Godhead were involved. That's a far more viable option than blind chance. The mechanism God used to create, and how long he took to do it, are very interesting questions for another time. Regardless of how he did it, he is the one who brought it into being and sustains it in existence (Job 12:10; Psalm 104:24,30; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). Every organism has inherent value because God made it, not because of what we can get from it. And inasmuch as this earthly stuff is valued by God, it should unquestionably be valued by human beings.

- God *inhabits* it.

The Bible speaks of God being omnipresent, which means that the Lord our God is everywhere at once. Paul Little states that "God is not a substance spread out in a thin layer all over the earth; all of Him is in Chicago, in Calcutta, in Cairo, and in Caracas, at once and the same time" (2009: 37). The writer of Psalm 139 asks: *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* The Psalmist (who is probably David) declares that there is nowhere that we can hide from God, that even in the remotest parts of the universe God is there. It isn't that God gets there ahead of us, but that God is both there and here



with us simultaneously. (compare Jeremiah 23:23-24, I Kings 8:27).

- God *sustains* it.

Just as humans cherish and nurture what they create, so too God. All of it is precious and therefore the object of his love and nurture. From Genesis we learn that God created the different species of plants and animals (1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25). He then blessed them (1:22), protected them (6:19-21, 7:8-10), and made a covenant with them (9:8-17). According to John 3:16 he loves the *cosmos* – referring to the whole created order – to the point of enormous sacrifice. Numerous Scriptures describe how he delights in everything he has made and provides for its health and well-being (Deuteronomy 32:1-2; Job 37:14-18; Psalm 96:10-13, 104:25-29; Isaiah 43:20-21; Matthew 6:26). Such is the depth of his care that he is aware of the death of even a single sparrow (Matthew 10:29-31). Moreover has in mind a day when creation will be set free from its bondage and corruption (Romans 8:20-25).

- God *reveals* himself through it

According to Psalm 19, God shows himself to us through the Word (special revelation) and the world (general revelation). Romans 1:20 tells us that nature is an ongoing testimony to a supreme deity and his attributes. It declares: *For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature* (see also Joshua 2:10-11; Psalm 104:24). The world bears witness to the diversity and inexhaustible richness of the divine, and God teaches us through it (Job 12:7-9; Isaiah 11:9, Mark 11:12-25). Aquinas said the world and its species are icons of God. Everything that exists shows something of the image of God, and to lose any of it is to lose something of our revelation of, and contact with, him.

These four truths make it clear that the whole of creation is integrally linked to its Creator. In that sense it is sacred. It has an innate sanctity. Frederick Buechner comments: *“Moses at the burning bush was told to take off his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy ground (Exodus 3:5), and incarnation means that all ground is holy because God walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it”* (1993: 52).

Like any sacred place, creation should therefore be treated with the utmost respect. To live and act in ways that harm it, is a sign of huge disrespect. The English poet John Drinkwater wrote:

*When you defile the pleasant streams  
And the wild bird's abiding place,  
You massacre a million dreams  
And cast your spittle in God's face.*

More than that, you are guilty of desecrating something that is sacred, an act which is sinful, sacrilegious and needs to be repented of.

### 3. Sustainability.

SUSTAINABILITY: Exodus 20:8-11 & 15; 21:33-34, 23:10-12; Leviticus 19:23-25, 22:28, 25:1-54; Deuteronomy 20:19-20, 22:6-7; Psalm 45:17, 71:18, 78:4, 89:1; Isaiah 58:13-14. God is concerned to preserve the fruitfulness and productivity of the earth as part of extending and expressing his faithfulness to all generations.

Sustainability simply means “the capacity for continuance into the long-term future.” In this regard, the biblical metaphors and practices for keeping nature fertile and productive, quickly come to mind.

Many eco-friendly laws are dotted throughout the books of Moses, such as not taking eggs from a bird's nest, or not using newborn animals and their mothers for sacrifices, or not cutting down trees in times of siege. To expand on one of these, Deuteronomy 22:6 says: “*If you come across a bird's nest beside the road...and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young*” In other words, while we can use the natural world for sustenance, we must preserve its capacity to reproduce.

A key one is the *Sabbath-keeping principle*: the Sabbath day, the Sabbath Year, and the Year of Jubilee in Exodus 23 (vs.10-12) and Leviticus 25. The idea was for both people and nature to have "time off" to rejuvenate and recover. Leviticus 25: 24 says, “*You must provide for the redemption of the land*”, a statement which grows in meaning the more we ponder it!

Such counsels were all designed to ensure that Israel would be a society without permanent poverty. They are a far cry from the raping and pillaging of the earth in our day, which is prompted by short-term gain but results in long-term pain.

Beyond that, we live on what some have termed “the Goldilocks planet”. God’s faithfulness in maintaining the synchronized and finely-tuned forces that support life on earth, such as night and day, thermo-regulation, the rhythm of the seasons, atmospheric circulation, the water cycle, gravity, etc., are evidence that he designed the earth to express his faithfulness and blessings to “all generations” (Psalm 45:17, 71:18, 78:4, 89:1). Tim Flannery, a world-renowned Australian paleontologist and specialist in the evolution of mammals, suggests that “living sustainably does not involve any particular morality beyond an extension of the Eight Commandment: Thou shalt not steal - even from future generations” (2009: 4). In his eyes, failing to live sustainably is akin to intergenerational theft.

God expects us to maintain the productivity and fruitfulness of the natural world. Unfortunately, much human activity today appears to work against that expectation rather than in synergy with it. Numerous investigations and analyses over the past two decades have shown that our current use of natural resources is unsustainable. In this respect, we are maxed out on our credit cards and soon will have problems paying the mortgage. This has major implications, especially as developing countries with huge populations aspire to western standards of living.

It is time for us to realise that people around the globe are paying for the unsustainable lifestyle that we may consider normal, and one day our descendants will pay for it as well. We measure our stewardship not merely by healthy ecosystems but also by sustainable, responsible consumption, and for many of us that may entail a fundamental change of lifestyle! God wants us to obey him in our lifestyle choices, which are not to be driven by greed, acquisitiveness, or self-interest (Leviticus 26: 3-6; Luke 12:15-23). We need to resist the relentless pressure to consume and make living sustainably more of a priority, because it

is clearly important to God.

#### 4. Similarity

SIMILARITY: John 1:3, 13:15-17; Romans 8:29; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:2-3; I Peter 2:21; I John 4:17.  
 Jesus had a deep love for, and connection with, creation, and God's intention is that we should be like him.

As noted above, the Bible asserts that Jesus was an active participant in the whole process of creation (and still is!). John chapter 1 says of Jesus: "*nothing was created except through him*". Hebrews 1 says that: "*through the Son*" God "*created the universe*." If you've made something (let alone everything that exists!), you treasure it and look after it. That is surely the desire and approach of Christ.

Colossians 1 presents him as the cosmic Christ. He is the Source of creation: "*By him all things were created*" (v.16); the Sustainer of creation: "*In him all things hold together*" (v.17); and the Saviour of creation: "*through whom God is pleased to reconcile to himself all things*" (v.20).

In the fullness of time, Jesus actually entered his own creation. He chose to become flesh - which tells me that matter matters. While he was here, he had a deep attachment to, and appreciation of, the natural world. We see this in the way he loved the wilderness and the mountains, and the way he took such delight in his surroundings: the flowers of the field and the birds of the air - which tells me that he really cares about the physical, material earth, not just human souls.

Creation theologians, like Sean McDonagh, say that Jesus showed a deep connection to the environment in two ways:

1. Through the many *events and incidents* in his life involving nature (such as being born with animals, calming the storm, getting a coin out of the mouth of a fish, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, or frequently heading into the wilderness to commune with His Father).
2. Through frequent references to natural objects in his *teaching* (such as salt, light, birds, flowers, seeds, mountains, rivers, fruit, trees, sand, stone wheat, vines, sheep, goats, and water).

Even some of our Lord's *general principles*, when you think about *them*, are highly relevant to environmental issues. For example, "*Love your neighbour as yourself*" or "*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*."

My view is that conservation springs from the very heart of Jesus. I would even go so far as to say (respectfully!) that Jesus was a greenie in the best sense of the word!

All that being said, according to Romans 8:29, God's ultimate desire is for us is "*to become like his Son*" (NLT). I Peter 2:21 says of Christ: "*He is your example, and you must follow in his steps*." I John 4:17 says: "*As he is, so are we, in this world*." God loves us just the way we are

but he refuses to leave us that way. He wants us to be just like Jesus. We are called to imitate him. Relationship implies resemblance. We're to be mimics and mirrors.

If God's agenda is to gradually make us like Jesus, and for us to follow the example of Jesus, caring for creation will be part and parcel of what that means. When we care for creation, we truly reflect the mind and actions of Christ. It should be an integral part of our discipleship, of what it means to follow our Lord.

## 5. Showing Honour

SHOWING HONOUR: I Chronicles 16:29-34; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 1:8-9, 29:1-2, 148:10, 150:6; Isaiah 55:12-13, 66:1-2 (c.f. Acts 7:48-49, 17:24-25); Revelation 5:13.  
 Creation a *context* for worship, and a source of *inspiration* for worship, as well as comprising the *very phenomena* that God created to *render* worship. Caring for creation protects all of these aspects and is also an act of worship because it blesses and gives pleasure to God.

John's gospel chapter 4, Jesus tells us that God actually seeks our worship (v.23). The word "worship" conjures up very diverse thoughts, not all of which are accurate or healthy, but the Bible gives us clear indicators about its nature. One is found in Psalm 29:1-2:

*Honour the Lord, you heavenly beings; Honour the Lord for his glory and strength.*

*Honour the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*

From this scripture, we learn that the essence of worship is simply giving God the honour he is worthy to receive. Rick Warren says "anything we do that gives God *pleasure* is an act of worship" (2002: 64). So worship is not a "Bless me" exercise. It's a "Bless God" exercise.

Nature, of course, is a place where we can worship God. Stephen in Acts 7 and Paul in Acts 17 liken it to a huge temple not made with hands. But they, in turn, are simply echoing what God himself said in Isaiah 66: "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Could you build me a temple as good as that?" (v.1). Personally, I have met with God many times in the cathedral of the outdoors, just as Moses did in the burning bush, or Elijah in the earthquake, wind and fire.

I have always found it easier to encounter God in a natural setting than in a church building. Myra Perrine's book *What's Your God Language* helped me to understand this. She outlines nine ways that people connect with God, and for me nature is the primary one. That's how I'm wired. God communicates most deeply to my heart through the beauty, grandeur, space, silence, symbolism and parable of the natural world.

It is salient to note that worship is not an activity confined to humans (I Chronicles 16:7,29-34; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 8:1-9, 19:1; Isaiah 55:12-13; Revelation 5:13). God intends *all* of creation to render praise and glory - mountains and hills bursting into song; trees of the field clapping their hands, stones crying out, seas roaring, wild animals/cattle/ birds (indeed everything that has breath) joining in. I notice that this list incorporates animal, vegetable and mineral elements.

All of this, for me, is a key reason why I want to preserve and protect the natural world. The way we treat nature either facilitates or frustrates worship. We either help it or hinder it. When we damage the environment, we are damaging not only a *context* for worship, and a source of *inspiration* for worship, but also some of the *very phenomena* that God created to *render* worship.

I actually regard caring for creation itself as an act of worship. It is as much worship as what goes on in a church building, because those caring actions bring God honour and pleasure. Conversely, when we fail to care for creation, treating it casually or destructively, we dishonour God, and cause him great *displeasure*.

## 6. Salvation

SALVATION: Genesis 6-9; Isaiah 11:1-9; Matthew 19:28; Mark 16:15; John 3:16; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:18-25; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20; 2 Peter 3:9-13; Revelation 21:5.  
God wants to redeem, restore and renew both the human and the non-human creation.

Here is something that really blows my mind: *Jesus loves Earth so much that he died for it!* When John 3:16 declares "God so loved the world", the word "world", in the original biblical language, is the word "cosmos", referring to everything in the universe. Mark 16:15 tells us to "*proclaim the good news to the **whole** creation*". Acts 3:21 says Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to "*restore **everything**, as he promised long ago...*" (TNIV).

Ephesians 1:10 reveals that God's plan, which he "*will complete when the time is right, is to bring **all creation** together, everything in heaven and on earth, with Christ as head.*" There is a similar emphasis in Colossians 1:19-20 again: "*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself **all things**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*" (NIV)

Sometimes we think that God's rescue plan applies only to humans. Not so. There's no doubt in Scripture that the cross and the resurrection were designed to benefit the whole created order, human and non-human. That's the scope of God's redemptive programme. It is comprehensive and wholistic! God's purpose is to reverse the curse *wherever* it has reached. It's not just a case of saving souls. As far as he is concerned, it's also a case of saving seals.

We see this very strongly in the story of Noah's Ark. Who was included in God's saving purposes on that occasion? Only eight human beings, but countless other species. And afterwards he sent a rainbow as a sign of his saving covenant not just with Noah and his descendants but with "*every living creature on earth*" (Genesis 9:10).

Study Romans 8 (vs.19-25) and you will find the redemption of the human and the non-human creation are integrally linked. One impinges on the other. One is contingent on the other. Paul argues that since the angelic/human fall into sin affected not only us but the rest of creation as well, redemption from sin must also involve the *totality* of God's creation. Just as nothing in creation remained untouched by sin after Eden, so nothing in creation can

remain untouched by God's redemption after Christ's victory on the cross.

This has big implications for how we think this world will end. According to some Christians, the earth is nice, but not very important. Our real home is heaven, so one day we'll all get whisked away from this broken temporary planet. Then God will destroy the earth in a blaze of pyrotechnics. If that's true, the implications are stark. There's no point taking care of the planet. It's all going to be destroyed, so why polish the brass on a sinking ship?

The problem is that while a few Bible verses might seem to support such a view, the tenor of Scripture is actually against it:

- Isaiah 65 describes a peaceable kingdom in which the lion lies down with the lamb, which to me sounds incredibly like this current earth *renewed* rather than this current earth *replaced*.

- According to Romans 8, God's desire is for the entire present creation to be restored to what he originally intended it to be, free from all limitation, futility, decay and death.

Every blight, curse and evil has to be eradicated, otherwise Satan wins.

- Many commentators now say that 2 Peter 3 is the most serious case of mistranslation, misinterpretation and misunderstanding in the New Testament: the fires mentioned there are not fires of destruction and annihilation, but fires of refining and purification - because God's ultimate plan is not only material continuity, but also the redemption of that material.

- In Matthew 19, v.28, Jesus refers to "*the renewal of all things*" (NIV).

- Those words are echoed in Revelation 21, where the one who is seated on the throne says, "*Behold, I am making all things new*" (v.5). Notice he does not say "all new things".

- Jesus taught us to pray "*Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven*" - which doesn't make a lot of sense if there's no earth left for it to come to.

Hans Kung says : *God's kingdom is creation healed*. All of it. In a word *shalom*.

If God is currently in the business of renewing human beings, why would we imagine that God is not also currently in the business of renewing the rest of creation? God chooses to involve us in advancing both those goals. What I believe God wants us to do today is to *grow the new creation* by redeeming people and restoring nature. It's not a case of either/or. It's a case of both/and. We can cooperate with him in rescuing both. We simply have to work out: "What constitutes "the good news" for people?", and "What constitutes "the good news" for nature?" We can renew both. The two can be integrated and they can be done simultaneously. Indeed, environmental mission is the fastest-growing and most productive form of evangelism and outreach in the world today. The participation of Christians in conservation is a means of ultimately restoring *both* the human and non-human parts of creation. Humans are made in the image of God, and arguably hold a special place, so it is perhaps not reasonable to think that we would devote time, energy and resources equally, but for too many churches the investment in redeeming the non-human creation is non-existent and could certainly be raised.

## 7. Sensitivity

SENSITIVITY: I Chronicles 12:32; Esther 4:14; Ephesians 5:16.

The ecological challenges of our time require sensitivity to current circumstances and to the

Holy Spirit, so that God-inspired wisdom, discernment and leadership can be offered.

Here I am talking about being sensitive to the times in which we live and sensitive to how the Holy Spirit wants us to respond to those times.

Arguably, the defining issue of those times is the environment. A whole raft of environmental and ecological problems are beginning to impact us significantly. The evidence bombards us every day through the media. Pretty well every measure of environmental health, both nationally and globally, is trending downward.

Over the past twenty years, numerous scientific reports, such as the United Nations GEO4 (2007), GEO5 (2012) and GEO6 (2019), have shown that the overall environmental situation globally is deteriorating and the window for action is closing. They have indicated that unless concerted global efforts are made to address mounting problems, we shall, within the next 50 years, pass the point of no return – when the damage will be so great that the planet no longer has the capacity to heal and repair itself. Its regenerative and restorative processes will not be enough to cope. That situation has never arisen before. It is the great new challenge of our time. The scientists actually said (in 2007) that we had about 10 years to get this right – and we should have been moving five years prior. In other words the party was over, the bill had arrived, and we needed to settle up immediately!

In the Old Testament, when the tribes of Israel were rallying to support David as the new king, the tribe of Issachar sent 200 gifted leaders who had one special and outstanding skill. We are told in I Chronicles 12:32 that they had *“understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.”* (NRSV/ESV). The GNB says: *“These men knew what Israel should do and the best time to do it.”* The words used to describe these men indicate that they had deep understanding, keen awareness and discernment, including knowledge derived from a spiritual source - a bit like Daniel. They were like a think tank of divinely-inspired public policy gurus. They were sensitive to the temper of the times and advised King David what should be done in response to what was happening. Our planet today is similarly at a watershed point, and what is most needed is the same kind of leaders "for such a time as this." What we desperately need today is modern-day Issacharians. More necessary than ever is the deep thought and reflection of wise persons in search of a new humanism based on higher values.

Coming to the New Testament, Ephesians 5:15-16 (KJV) says, *“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”* The phrase *“redeeming the time”* is also found in Colossians 4:5: *“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time”* (KJV). In both passages, redeeming the time is related to wisdom in how we “walk,” that is, in how we live. God wants us to live in constant awareness of that ticking clock and make the most of the time we have. In fact, the NIV’s translation of Ephesians 5:16 uses the phrase *“making the most of every opportunity.”* Redeeming the time means that we are careful in how we live. We seek out and employ wisdom (see Proverbs 2:1–15). We seize every opportunity and use it for God’s glory. We think through our plans and make sure they align with God’s will. And we avoid empty, harmful activities or wasteful, frivolous pursuits. Why are we to live this way? *“Because the days are evil”* (Ephesians 5:16). We must overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21, Titus 3:8).

The Christian church is always only one generation away from extinction. While its truths apply to all people in all ages, it must remain relevant to each contemporary set of circumstances if it is not to be regarded as obsolete and out-of-touch. It must continually adjust to the changing and dynamic context in which it ministers. Sadly, the wise input of godly people is in short supply when it comes to countering environmental degradation. If we are sensitive to the times, and have a sincere desire to be actively “redeeming” them, we can no longer afford the luxury of neglecting creation care.

Now more than ever, I believe that it is incumbent on God’s people to be like the men of Issachar – not only in terms of awareness, but also in terms of action. Over the centuries the church has abrogated that role. It is time that we re-discovered it and started to exercise leadership again. It’s time to wake up and smell the carbon, responding in ways that are not only collective but also personal, and in every case specific and practical! We need to get real about the seriousness of the challenge, because Jesus may not come back by the end of this century to sort it all out. And even if he did, that would not absolve us of our current and ongoing moral responsibility for setting things on a better path.

The Christian Church is the largest NGO in the world. It contains 25% of the world's population. It has both the capacity and the moral authority to make a huge difference. If more and more Christians were sensitised and mobilised in this endeavour, imagine what could be achieved, to the glory of God!

\*\*\*\*\*

Stewardship. Sanctity. Sustainability. Similarity. Showing honour. Salvation. Sensitivity. These are seven Scriptural principles which constitute a comprehensive and cogent case for creation care. We cannot avoid the conclusion that caring for what God has made is a significant theological vision in the Bible. It is clearly a responsibility that God has given us. As Christians, we must recognise the current watershed moment of ecological crisis alongside the call to care for creation in the Scriptures.

But awareness is not enough. It must issue in actions. If any context in which we are exposed to truth does not become a laboratory for life transformation, the Bible is not fulfilling its God-intended function in our lives. We must be doers and not just hearers (James 1: 22-25).

Creation is groaning. The groans are getting louder and longer. Evidence for the intensifying degeneration of the natural world is mounting, and bombards us daily via the media. But although the situation is grave, it’s not too late to do something about it. In fact, God calls us, as his people, to be in the vanguard of doing just that! Pope Francis I sums up well:

*...the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of realism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (2015: 140)*



I conclude with a few comments on what might constitute a proper Christian response:

\* I believe we must be utterly realistic, acknowledging the disturbing challenges that confront us. We cannot afford to press the snooze button, roll over and go back to sleep.

\* We must not be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task ahead or paralysed by fear and depression. God has not abandoned us. Jesus says: *"Take courage. I am with you always..."* (John 16:33, Matthew 28:20).

\* We must not be presumptuous, expecting God to save us from our folly. It's up to us to begin to remedy our ways, because doing what is right and responding to the Spirit of God is important and valuable at every point in our lives.

\*We should avoid having an improper faith in the power of science and technology to save us from the perils ahead. You can't change the basic laws of nature. Nor should the ecological crisis be welcomed as some kind of signal of the imminent return of Christ or of some new flowering in the long evolutionary journey of our biosphere.

\*And we must remember that our efforts to conserve, heal and restore God's creation will never be in vain. (I Corinthians 15:58). They will have effects that will be preserved in the new creation which God will one day bring to its culmination and completion (Rev. 21:1).

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

I am amazed to hear Christians sometimes say that biblical faith has little in common with the environmental cause... My experience has been very different. For over fifty years I have been inspired and awed by God's creation. From keeping a painted turtle in a tank at age three to caring for a backyard zoo during my youth, I gained deep appreciation for God's creatures... All creatures were God's - his masterpieces.

As a youth I savoured Article II of the Reformed tradition's Belgic Confession. In answering "By What Means Is God Made Known To Us?" the first part affirms "by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to see clearly the invisible things of God."

The theme of how creation tells of God's glory and love is echoed throughout Scripture. God lovingly provides the rains and cyclings of water, provides food for creatures, fills people's hearts with joy, and satisfies the earth (Ps. 104:10-18; Acts 14:17). It is through this manifest love and wisdom that creation declares God's glory and proclaims the work of the Creator's hands (Ps.19:1). Creation gives clear evidence of God's eternal power and divinity, leaving everyone without excuse before God (Rom.1:20).

- *Christianity Today Study Series: Creation Care*, 2008: 45-46

## **OBJECTION 17**

## **I DISAGREE WITH THE SCIENTISTS**

**I disagree with what some environmentalists and scientists say will happen.  
Climate change is not only a hoax but also a myth.**

**Phillip Donnell**

The best place for those who discount the science on environmental degradation to look is their daily television news. It will reveal that much of what the scientists predicted in the past is now coming to pass.

If global warming and climate change are doubted, I suggest strongly that you go to **www.skepticalscience.com**. This website describes its purpose as follows: *Scientific skepticism is healthy. Scientists should always challenge themselves to improve their understanding. Yet this isn't what happens with climate change denial. Skeptics vigorously criticise any evidence that supports man-made global warming and yet embrace any argument, op-ed, blog or study that purports to refute global warming. This website gets skeptical about global warming skepticism. Do their arguments have any scientific basis? What does the peer reviewed scientific literature say?*

It then lists 197 climate myths which constitute attempts to undermine what the science says.

Of particular significance is the fact that multiple studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals show that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climate scientists agree: Climate-warming trends over the past century are extremely likely due to human activities. In addition, most of the leading scientific organizations worldwide have issued public statements endorsing this position.

**Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *If I work to care for and heal the environment, I will be supporting people I strongly disagree with*). The first thing to say is that doing what is right and what God calls us to do should not carry a litmus test for who is allowed to do it. Plus, we need to recognize that there are concerted efforts to promote doubt and uncertainty whenever it helps maintain sinful structures and institutions. Just as the tobacco industry is able to promote confusion and distrust of cancer research despite extensive evidence that smoking produces lung cancer and other health concerns, similar efforts have been made to discredit the science of climatology and its findings on global climate change. Promoters of doubt about the findings of climatology and environmental science have become experts in playing on the fears and apprehensions of the public. A major strategy for discrediting this science is to seek any contrary opinions, dress them up in scientific garb, and put them on display and in debate with the findings of science.

- *The Green Bible*, 2008: I-27

**Mick Pope**

Christians shouldn't reject the views of climate scientists simply because some of them don't have a Christian worldview.

A Christian worldview doesn't have to be anti-science or suspicious of climate change science.

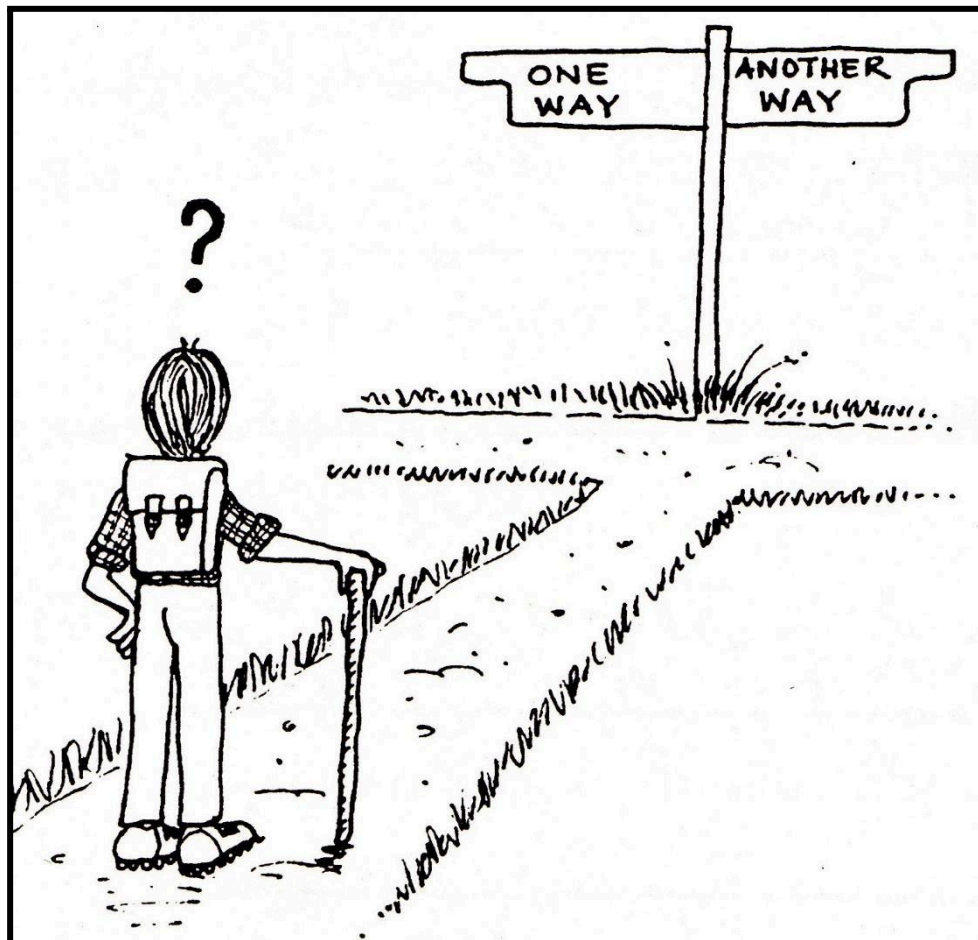
Scientific theories are our working models, not simply guesses to be treated lightly.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change does a good job of synthesising the present science, but science advances rapidly.

...rather than saying, "just trust me, I'm a scientist", what I am asking you to do is what

former Supreme Court Judge David Harper had to do: base your judgements on "a rigorous examination of the evidence."

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 23,71,74



**OBJECTION 18**

**THE GREEN MOVEMENT IS SUSPECT!**



**Ecology and environmental issues are a bit dodgy because the green movement has been infiltrated by anti-Christian philosophies and ideologies. Aren't the underpinnings of the environmental movement in direct contrast with what the Bible teaches? Isn't environmentalism just for tree-hugging, secularist liberals? Is it appropriate to get involved in environmental causes alongside pantheists, New Agers and anti-Christian secularists? Christians should keep well clear.**

### **Phillip Donnell**

Tony Campolo long ago recognized the danger of Christian environmental stewardship erring too far towards the philosophy of the New Age movement. In chapter 13 of his 1992 book *How To Rescue the Earth Without Worshiping Nature*, he put forward four “red flags”:

1. Make sure your spiritual exercises and worship are Christian.
2. There is a vast difference between sensing a unity with nature and advocating union with nature.
3. We must not think that all life is of equal value.
4. Know that God, not humanity, controls the future of planet Earth.

(see chapter 13, pages 173-186)

Campolo sees the church as God's “first and primary means of working to rescue the world from corruption and decay” (page 184). However, to the degree that the church fails to heed God's call to be rescuers of creation, He will use instruments outside the church to carry out his renewal plan for our planet. If we are serious about leading our society in a commitment to saving the environment, it is inevitable that we will have to work with these people and they will have different perspectives, but if we keep our eyes on God and his truth in Scripture, we will not be vulnerable to undue influence.

### **Dave Bookless**

You will certainly find environmentalists who talk of the earth as ‘Gaia’, the ancient mother goddess, and who practice nature worship. You will also find some who are anti-Christian, believing Christianity justifies exploiting nature and is therefore to blame for the environmental crisis.

However, this is a strange reason for Christians to avoid environmentalism. The environment is created by God, not the New Age movement. It's almost like saying Christians shouldn't listen to music because some musicians have dubious beliefs. That may be true but it misses the whole point! Music, like the environment is God's good creation. Actually, many environmentalists are not into New Age, pagan or occult ideas. Many are agnostic or atheist, and a growing number are committed Christians.

Imagine if Jesus refused to mix with people he disagreed with: dishonest tax-collectors, outcast prostitutes, self-righteous Pharisees, argumentative fishermen. He would have had very few disciples. The environmental movement certainly includes people with a very different view of Christianity, but also many who are openly searching for spiritual reality. It's a compelling reason for Christians to get involved.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 13

**Claire Dawson**

The evangelical church has gotten off to a very slow and shameful start when it comes to action on climate change... We have often marginalized and disenfranchised those within and outside the church who have deep concerns for God's good planet, rather than encouraging and commending them.

We need to remember that there are wonderfully committed, concerned, and generous people outside the Church doing a whole lot to make a difference,

One tremendous opportunity for the Church is that those involved in non-faith-based spaces are seeking out people and organizations to work alongside in moving forward - including Christians and the Church. It has taken far too long to come to this point, but we are gradually coming to terms with the huge challenge before us. In taking the next steps, wherever possible we should explore possibilities to collaborate with others in order to maximise our effectiveness. This should certainly include partnership with those who act toward the same ends but for different reasons.

In my own experience, when those working for environmental action within the secular sphere come across ecologically concerned Christians, they have demonstrated an increasing willingness to talk, listen share and to trust... We have no time left for failed attempts and second-best efforts, or for the wasted time and energy that result from turf wars and power games.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 155, 229, 234

**Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *I don't want people to think I'm a New Ager. Isn't concern for the environment and working for a better world what New Age is all about?*). For thousands of years now, believers have looked forward to the coming of the kingdom of God, and that includes the renewal of God's created world (Romans 8:19-22; Revelation 21-22). The Bible also makes clear that human beings are earth's caretakers (Genesis 1:27-30; 2:15). As Christians, we confess that our entire earth belongs to God. It is not the private property of any group.

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 116-117

**Jonathan Merritt**

*Environmentalism* is a dirty word to some people...synonymous with secularism, Gaia worship, New Ageism and politically liberal special interest groups... The "radical left" has commandeered environmentalism partly because the "far right" gave up the moral high ground long ago in its exclusive pursuit of other issues.

My answer is to depolarize and depoliticize environmentalism. Caring for creation is not a right-left issue, but a moral-immoral issue that the people of God have been called to address. If we remain true to God's Word, Christians must with equanimity redeem the cause and make it our own. To leave these issues to secular environmentalists is to abandon our God-given responsibility to care for this planet.

God will not excuse our complacency because of our discomfort in partnering with individuals with whom we part company on other issues. We must make progress where we

agree and be “carefully eager about working with mainstream environmental groups.” We will be forced to develop biblical expressions of the mainstream environmental movement and offer alternative solutions to the problems we face...

A better question to ask is, ‘which *values* am I compelled to support?’

Jesus never sided with the oppressive Roman government or the Jewish politicians... Finding common ground on this issue rather than accepting a left-right polarity breeds hope for the realization of the divine plan.

- *Green Like God*, 2010: 83-85

### **Mick Pope**

We have also earned the disdain of many as we have generally stared at environmentalists across a very wide divide. But need we always view environmentalists with suspicion? And isn't there a solid theology of ecology at the heart of the biblical faith? We believe so, and it lies in the fact that Genesis 1 describes *what* creation is for, rather than precisely *how* it was made.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 28



## OBJECTION 19

# WHY DO WE NEED CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS?

**Why is it necessary to have Christian environmental organisations?  
Shouldn't we just join with others?**

### Phillip Donnell

One of the key ways God works in the world is still through the local church – the body of Christ. The Christian Church is the world's largest NGO and movement – active in every country on the planet, and comprising 25% of the world's population.

Just imagine the potential if the world-wide church, including that in New Zealand, were to more effectively pursue its biblical mandate for environmental stewardship and take its creation care commission (Genesis 2:15) seriously. It would contribute hugely to turning things around.

Paul Cook remarks:

*The church is probably the world's largest civic society organization - present in every nation and every community, and having an immense impact on how people think. If the church can harness this influence to inspire people to care more for creation and to act upon this care, then the world will be a very different place.*

(in Bell and White (eds), 2016: 244)

Dave Bookless highlights the missiological opportunity in influencing the environmental community. He cites a report from the UK Government's Environmental Agency in which 25 leading British environmentalists make a plea for religious leaders to make the planet their priority. They want faith groups to remind their constituencies that we have a duty to restore and maintain the ecological balance of the planet. *"We should not be surprised at this,"* Bookless says. He continues:

*There is a growing awareness among secular environmentalists that technology and education are not enough to solve a crisis that is moral and ultimately spiritual... Environmental issues now provide one of the few areas where an increasingly secular Western worldview is open to spiritual and religious insights... Globally, environmentalism is in search of its soul... Where Christians have sometimes lost their confidence in addressing today's big questions, here is an extraordinary opportunity for mission - an open invitation from the environmental community for a faith-based contribution.*

(in Bell and White (eds), 2016: 98-99)

Many feel that the Christian Church globally is not showing the leadership that it should in the face of the ecological crisis. Granberg-Michaelson believes that *"The Western Church's*

*modern theology has fought between being personalized or politicized, and largely has forgotten the theology of creation as its starting point... in such a mindset, environmental problems are at best nothing more than another issue over which Christians have different opinions, all largely unrelated to the gospel" (1988: 40-41).*

I believe that the care of creation is an area in which the Church of the 21st century should now be leading the way, fulfilling what Paul Santmire defines as four ecclesial callings with regard to the natural world: to cooperate with nature religiously, to care for nature sensitively, to wonder at nature blessedly, and to anticipate the reign of God joyfully (2000: 118-128).

I suspect that God shares my conviction. The Church urgently needs to be mobilized, and God is raising up organizations for that specific purpose. The re-awakening of the sleeping giant is part of God's answer to the global environmental crisis, an important impetus within his ongoing restoration programme. The active involvement of Christians is vital for "such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

I believe that the whole church of Jesus Christ and the ordinary people who are its members are the best and perhaps the only hope for the solution of the global environmental crisis. We are God's special agents in this broken and needy world; people on a mission to bring the good news to the whole creation.

Our individual actions and our commitment to be a new community pointing to God's hopeful future, may seem small, but collectively will have a significant impact and make a big difference to our world.

Currently, I lead an organization called *New Creation New Zealand*. Its aim is not to set up environmental projects but to inspire and equip Christians for creation care. We want Christians to cooperate with God in his renewal agenda for the planet. We want to motivate and mobilise God's people, leaving them to make the choice about which practical initiative they will become involved in, whether of their own making or one already in existence. Not only that, but we want them to see creation care as part of the church's mission to both people and nature.

Santmire concludes with a lofty challenge:

*Life as a Christian has never been easy. Nor should it be any easier today. But, shaped by its ecological and cosmic ritual enactments, and buoyed by its new ecological and cosmic spirituality, this martyr church can rise to this historic occasion today, by the grace of God, to respond to what is perhaps an unprecedented calling, to love God and all God's creatures, as one great and glorious extended family, and in so doing be a light to the nations and a city set upon a hill, whose exemplary witness cannot be hidden (2000: 128)*

### **Dave Bookless**

Christians should indeed be involved in the wide range of conservation and environmental movements that already exist. However, there is a key place for organizations such as A Rocha in educating and challenging churches, and in linking the environment to clearly defined moral and spiritual values. Many conservation organizations have no worked-out



idea of why obscure species matter. In addition, if we believe that caring for creation is part of seeking God's kingdom 'on earth as in heaven', then it should be as natural to have Christian environmental organizations as to have Christian relief and development agencies – they are both an expression of God's love through his people.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 148-149

### **Lausanne: Jamaica Call to Action**

Jesus is reigning as Lord over history and creation, and will come again, restoring all things, and we will dwell with him, not in some disembodied existence, but in an imperishable new creation. Hope in the restoration of all things in and through Christ Jesus is one of the most important, and *distinctly Christian, contributions that the church can give to environmental movements...*

- cited in Bell and White (eds), *Creation Care and the Gospel*, 2016: 13 (emphasis mine).

### **Matthew Sleeth**

As a Christian, I felt a mandate to align my lifestyle with what I was saying. Seeing the spiritual benefits that went along with our lifestyle changes gave me great optimism. I began to have faith that the church would become a powerful part of the solution to global warming and the degradation of the earth. The environmental movement needed new leadership and that leadership had to be motivated by moral conviction. I am convinced that when the church becomes fully engaged in the problems of creation care, we will overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. As the thirty million evangelical Christians – and all those who consider themselves people of faith – grow in their understanding that God holds us accountable for care of his creation, we will begin to see positive changes on an unprecedented scale.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 24



**OBJECTION 20**

## I DON'T WANT TO BE AN ALARMIST OR EXTREMIST!

Is the situation really that bad? I don't want to be seen as an alarmist or extremist.

### **Thomas Berry**

Yet until people realize that we are in a crash situation, they are not going to do what needs to be done. Only when we realize that we are in a crash situation will we react to it creatively at the proper level of efficacy.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 46

But even with death facing us in the collapse of monumental establishments, we refuse to alter the direction we have chosen.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 51

The addict, in order to recover, has to be sufficiently terrorized by a deadly situation to change, and, at the same time, must be attracted by a dream of what an alternative life can be.

- *Befriending the Earth*, 1991: 109

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *I want to be considered normal and not some kind of prophet of gloom and doom*). Gloom and doom are not necessary components of the message about caring for creation. Frightening ourselves into action is far less preferable than caring for creation out of gratitude and love for God. As for being called an alarmist, is it wrong to sound the fire alarm when a building is burning? In many cases today, it may be necessary to sound the alarm.

- *The Green Bible*, 2008: I-26

### **Greta Thunberg**

"I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic ... and act as if the house was on fire."

- *Speech at World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos, January 2019*

### **David Wallace-Wells**

(speaking about climate scientists)

Unfortunately, worrying so much about erring on the side of excessive alarm has meant they have erred, so routinely it became a kind of professional principle, on the side of excessive caution – which is, effectively, the side of complacency.

- *The Uninhabitable Earth*, 2019: 156

## OBJECTION 21

## IT'S NOT MY PASSION

**Looking after the environment is fine if that's your thing, but it isn't for everybody. I'm glad somebody's caring for the planet, just as long as it doesn't have to be me!**

*See also Objection 3.*

### **Dave Bookless**

...there are many areas of life that only a few people are called to get involved in. However there are also areas right at the heart of the Christian faith which anybody who is a follower of Jesus must take on board. Take prayer, for example... we all know that prayer is an essential part of the Christian life. Some people may be called to a special ministry of prayer – intercessors of prayer warriors – but everybody is called to pray.

As I've re-read the Bible, I've come to realize that...caring for the earth and its creatures is a core part of what all Christians are called to. Concern for the whole of God's creation is fundamental to the God of the Bible and to his purposes for human beings. Just as all Christians are called to pray, meet together, study God's Word, and share the good news, so caring for creation is essential to following Jesus Christ...

We tend to see the Bible as being all about people. Actually it is all about God. Alongside the familiar material about God's dealings with humanity, there's a huge amount about God's dealings with the earth which we've tended to overlook. Most of us have failed to ask what the Bible says about the planet, about God's relationship and ours with it...

We need a change of worldview. We are not the only focus of God's creative and saving love. Rather, God cares about all that he has made. We urgently need to recognize that the earth and the creatures with which we share it are not merely the stage on which we act out our relationship with God. They are the characters in the story themselves.

- *Planetwise*, 2008: 16-17

### **Brunner, Butler and Swoboda**

When it comes to God's beautiful Creation, the problem is that too many of us think someone else is paid to be the housekeeper.

- *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology*, 2014: 16

## OBJECTION 22

## IT'S UP TO THE GOVERNMENT

**It's up to the government to protect us. Let's leave it to them.**

### Claire Dawson

There are many reasons for our inadequate responses to the challenge of climate change, including a profound lack of leadership within broader society.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 103

### Naomi Klein

Climate change has never received the crisis treatment from our leaders, despite the fact that it carries the risk of destroying lives on a vastly greater scale than collapsed banks or collapsed buildings. The cuts to our greenhouse gas emissions that scientists tell us are necessary in order to greatly reduce the risk of catastrophe are treated as nothing more than gentle suggestions, actions that can be put off pretty much indefinitely.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 6

*Speaking of the much-hyped but ineffective 2009 UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen:*

...it was the moment when the realization truly sank in that no one was coming to save us.

The British psychoanalyst and climate specialist Sally Weintrobe describes this as the summit's "fundamental legacy" - the acute and painful realization that "our leaders are not looking after us... we are not cared for at the level of our very survival"...It really is the case that we are on our own and any credible source of hope in this crisis will have to come from below.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 12

The interests of financial capital and the oil industry are much more important than the democratic will of the people around the world. In the global neoliberal society profit is more important than life. Or, as George Monbiot, *The Guardian's* indispensable environmental columnist put it on the twenty-year anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, "Was it too much to have asked of the world's governments, which performed such miracles developing stealth bombers and drone warfare, global markets and trillion-dollar bailouts, that they might spend a tenth of the energy and resources they devoted to these projects on defending our living planet? It seems, sadly, that it was." Indeed, the failure of our political leaders to even attempt to ensure a safe future for us represents a crisis of legitimacy of almost unfathomable proportions.

...we are products of our age and of a dominant ideological project... This project has led our governments to stand by helplessly for more than two decades as the climate crisis morphed from a "grandchildren" problem into a banging-down-the-door problem.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 460

It is slowly dawning on a great many of us that no one is going to step in and fix this crisis;

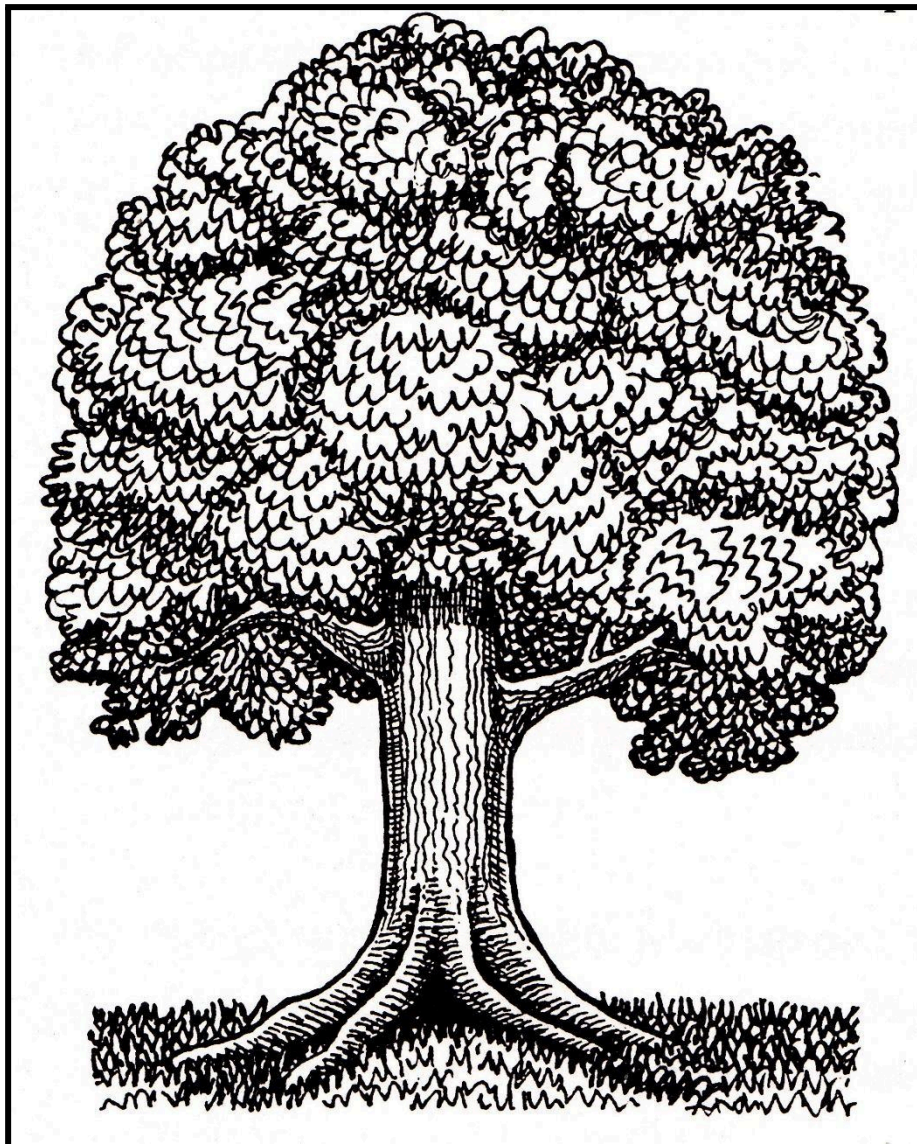
that if change is to take place it will only be because leadership bubbled up from below.

- *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 465

### **Matthew Sleeth**

...our government has a mixed record on protecting our health and the environment. To trust that government or science will fix everything is to abdicate our personal roles as stewards. One of the key features of Christianity is its emphasis on a personal God, personal redemption, and personal accountability. We cannot depend on the state, our church, or science to redeem us today or in the afterlife. The Bible says that each of us will stand before God to give an account of our actions – and our lack of action.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 45



**OBJECTION 23**

## WORLDLY PEOPLE DO IT!

There are too many worldly people out there doing environmental things.

*See also Objection 18.*

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *If people who don't share my beliefs in God are working to save the earth, I know it can't be right for me*). In Isaiah 45:1-6 we read that unbelieving Cyrus the Persian was anointed to do God's work. Often if God's people are unwilling or unable to do God's work, God sees to it that the work gets done anyway. So if there are some worldly people out there doing God's work, let's be glad for the help and not use this fact to excuse ourselves from our God-given task as stewards of God's creation.

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 117-118

### **Matthew Sleeth**

The Bible repeatedly describes nonbelievers whom the Lord uses to accomplish his will. God instructed the prophet Elijah to be fed by (unclean, unkosher) ravens and then by a pagan woman at Zarephath. What if Elijah had refused help from these sources? What if he had told God he didn't like the pedigree of his help?

When Jesus asked the pagan woman at the well for water, an opportunity for ministry presented itself. Because Jesus accepted help from a nonbeliever, many of the woman's town came to know Christ. The same opportunities abound for working with nonbelievers in the environmental arena.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 42-43

## OBJECTION 24



## ARE WE IN DANGER OF NATURE WORSHIP?

**Respecting creation gets us too close to pantheism. People like tree huggers worship nature. I don't want to be involved with them.**

*See also Objection 18.*

### **Calvin B. DeWitt**

(Translation: *If you care for plants and animals, and especially if you value protecting endangered species, you are close to worshipping them as gods*). Surprisingly, pantheism (the belief that God is in all things and that all things are in God) is a growing problem even in our scientific age. In our study of creation we must be careful to worship the Creator, not the creation; we must be clear in conveying the good news that God is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, and that the awe and wonder we develop from the study of creation is praise for the Maker of all things. But this does not mean we may avoid taking care of creation. The example of Noah is instructive: Noah cared for the creatures on the ark, preserving all the species endangered by the flood – not because they were gods but because God required it (Genesis 7:13-16).

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 117

### **Matthew Sleeth**

The problem today is not one of nature worship; instead, it is the worship of all things made by human beings. Ask yourself, “How much time have I spent admiring what God has wrought, and how much time am I spending admiring my possessions?” We have hundreds of magazines devoted to fashion, homes, self-image and cars...

As Christians, we believe that God made the heavens and the earth... heaven is God's throne and the earth is his footstool (Isaiah 66:1). If a person is working to save the Lord's footstool (i.e. an atheist or agnostic), does that mean we should obstruct their labour (stewardship of the created world?)

God prescribes many acts as pleasing to him, among them feeding and clothing hungry children. Not all organizations working to help the poor are Christian. Does that mean that their work should be stopped, or that we should not labor alongside of them?

What would happen if the thirteenth-century person for whom San Francisco and Santa Fe are named were in ministry today? Would the media dismiss Saint Francis, patron saint of animals and the environment, as a tree hugger? Would they try to have him thrown out of church because he took seriously God's commandment to preach the gospel to all creatures?

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 42,44

## **OBJECTION 25**



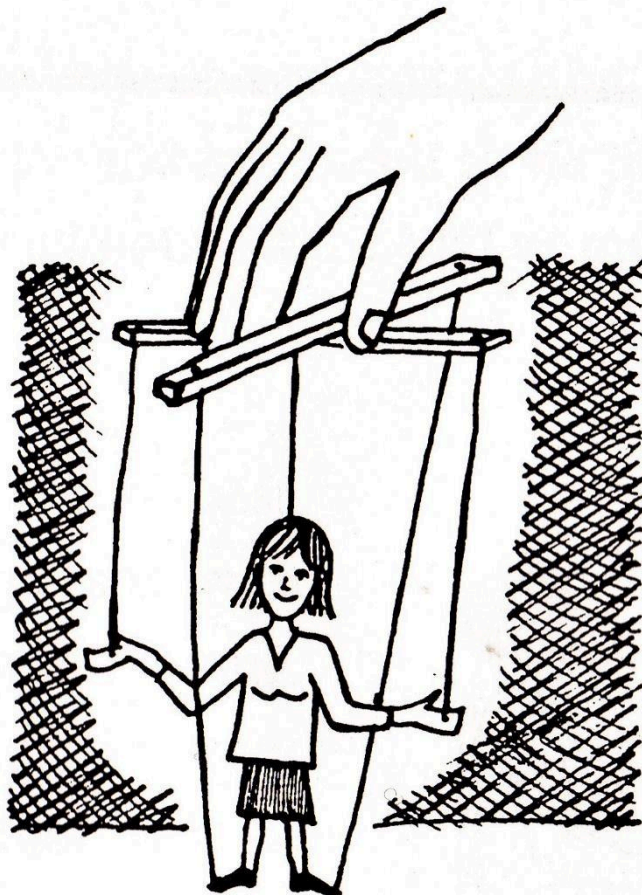
## ISN'T IT JUST POLITICAL CORRECTNESS?

We need to avoid anything that looks like political correctness.

### Calvin B. DeWitt

(Translation: *Being 'politically correct' these days means pro-abortion and pro-environment, and I'll have nothing to do with that*). The Ku Klux Klan, a racist organization in the United States, uses the symbol of a cross in its terrorizing activities. Does this mean that Christians should no longer use the symbol of the cross for their churches? Some alternative religious and lifestyle groups use the symbol of the rainbow in their literature. Does this mean that Christians should stop using this symbol in their educational materials? People who identify themselves as 'politically correct' may advocate for saving certain species from extinction. Does this mean that Christians should not act to preserve God's living creatures? We approach the subject of caring for creation as God's stewards, not as members of a politically correct group.

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 117



OBJECTION 26



## IT'LL LEAD TO WORLD GOVERNMENT!

Caring for creation will lead to world government.

### Calvin B. DeWitt

(Translation: *If we try to tackle global environmental problems, we'll have to cooperate with other nations, and that will help set the stage for world government*). There is no doubt that cooperation (with unbelievers and other nations) will be necessary in order to address many environmental concerns. Migrating birds, for example, do not recognize international boundaries. Their care may involve the cooperation of many nations along their migratory path. Such cooperation does not have to lead to world government. For example, the work of the International Crane Association to care for wetland habitats and birds has been accomplished through cooperation between Russia and China and between North Korea and South Korea. The end result has not been the merging of these nations' governments.

- *Earthwise*, 2011: 118



**OBJECTION 27**

## WEALTH IS OUR REWARD

**Wealth is God's reward to believers. The end justifies the means.**

### Claire Dawson

Those within the evangelical tradition hold strongly to the view that God speaks primarily through Scripture, and there is no shortage of warnings against greed and excess and the danger that awaits those who pursue selfish gain. Take these verses from James for example (*here she quotes James 5:1-6*).

We have certainly hoarded wealth. Undoubtedly for many people wealth exists in the form of various financial assets, but in our era particularly it also exists in the form of more and more 'stuff': we are surrounded by so much stuff that it has become normal, and hardly noticeable. We are slowly becoming aware of how our cheap products often come at the expense of others: people whose land has been despoiled and people whose toil is neither safe, dignified, or adequately compensated...

The ugly underbelly of our consumer societies in the West has gorged on the lives of the poor in the majority poor world - all so our insatiable desires for more cheap stuff can be fed again and again!

There are now a number of very 'smart' products and services that provide social, environmental and financial returns.

-Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 115-116, 202

### Paul Ehrlich and Michael Tobias

PE: All right, consider the issue of whether we all have the right to be rich and consume whatever we want. The Western focus on the individual clearly has some serious downsides – a more socially focused culture likely would be more viable in the world we're creating.

MT: If you have that expectation, then you're not going to settle for anything less than that. Which means that ethical compromise is unlikely to be reached.

PE: It means, in technical language, we're in trouble, no matter whether you are fighting Obamacare or voted for it. Whether you are pro-chicken or eat chicken; pro-End of the world or worried about the end of the world; Darwinian or anti-Darwinian.

MT: If everyone were to maintain the high-end Western consumer lifestyle, the carbon and biological footprint would be disastrous. We know that just to supply that lifestyle to today's seven billion people would require something like four more Earths.

- Ehrlich and Tobias, *Hope on Earth: A Conversation*, 2014: 35

### Mick Pope

Wealth may very well be 'earned' by our hard work, but all good things come from God

(James 1:17) and are not simply for us to hoard. Exactly how economic growth, freedom and justice (e.g. fair distribution of wealth) are achieved is often argued along political ideologies which are labeled as being either 'left' or 'right'. It is time for many of these concepts to be set aside within the Church. Economic growth does not equate with freedom without remainder... the world sees us squabble over how to (or in some cases whether or not to) share our wealth - to the detriment of the Gospel.

- Dawson and Pope, *A Climate of Hope*, 2014: 53

### **Matthew Sleeth**

God promises to reward his followers, but not with material wealth. He will provide for our needs if we dedicate our hearts and lives to him (Matthew 17:27-30). The problem comes when we confuse our needs with our wants. Time and time again Jesus warns of the dangers of having too many possessions. It is not our spiritual longings but our material desires that keep us from a right relationship with God (Revelation 18:13). We are explicitly urged to seek after non-material, eternal rewards: Matthew 6:19-20.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 38





## OBJECTION 28

### IT'S A MATTER OF SAFETY

I bought my SUV because it is bigger, weighs more, sits up higher, and is safer in a crash.  
If I'm going to be in a wreck, I want my family to be safe.

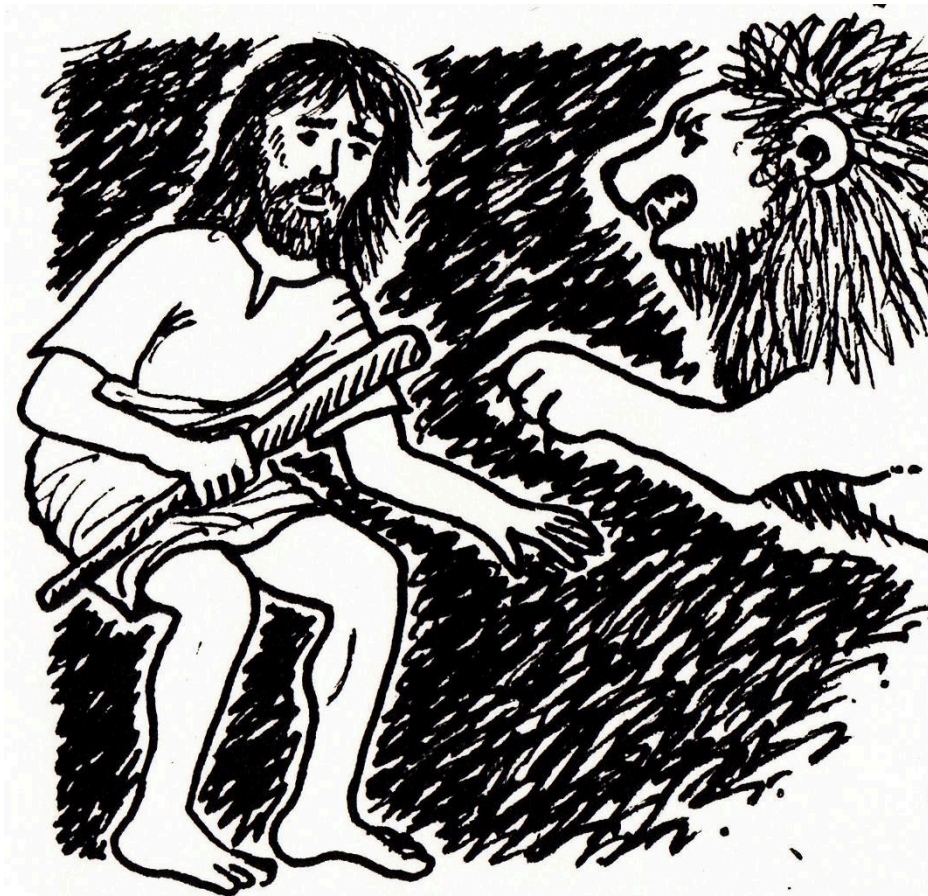
#### Matthew Sleeth

I've heard this line numerous times, which makes me wonder if it isn't on a poster in the back room of SUV dealers. This philosophy is condemned, however, in the Bible. Proverbs 18:11-12 (NLT) says:

*The rich think of their wealth as an impregnable defence; they imagine it is a high wall of safety. Haughtiness goes before destruction; humility precedes honour.*

If we want to experience life to the fullest, we may have to do things that seem, well, scary at first. The worldly hunger for permanence and safety at any cost" is an illusion. It is not a path to God (Mark 8:35-36).

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 38-39



## OBJECTION 29

# I DON'T HAVE TIME TO WORRY ABOUT WORLD PROBLEMS!

I don't have time to worry about world problems. I have enough on my plate already.

### Matthew Sleeth

Jesus directs his followers to minister to the lowest and least of the kingdom. In the parable of the sheep and goats, he warns that he will deny salvation even to those who call him Lord if they have not cared for the least among society. The "least" includes the naked, the hungry, the sick, the homeless, and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46)...

A significant portion of our society is so wealthy that we have no exposure to the one billion people who are in a constant state of hunger. This lack of contact with the poor contributes to two problems: ignorance and a lack of perceived opportunity to help those in need. Environmental concerns are intimately tied to issues of poverty, health and compassion. Ignorance is neither bliss nor an excuse...(Proverbs 15:14 TNIV).

Over and over, the Bible reminds us to educate ourselves about the world's problems and then act on that knowledge. We must actively help those least able to speak for themselves – including unborn generations.

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006, 39-40



## OBJECTION 30

# EVERYONE DOES IT! WHY SHOULD I BE ANY DIFFERENT?

My neighbours all do it. Why shouldn't I?

### Matthew Sleeth

When I was a kid, the “Everybody else is doing it” excuse was the single worst reason we could offer when we tried to argue in favour of one of our childish wants. It was sure to be followed by “If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?”

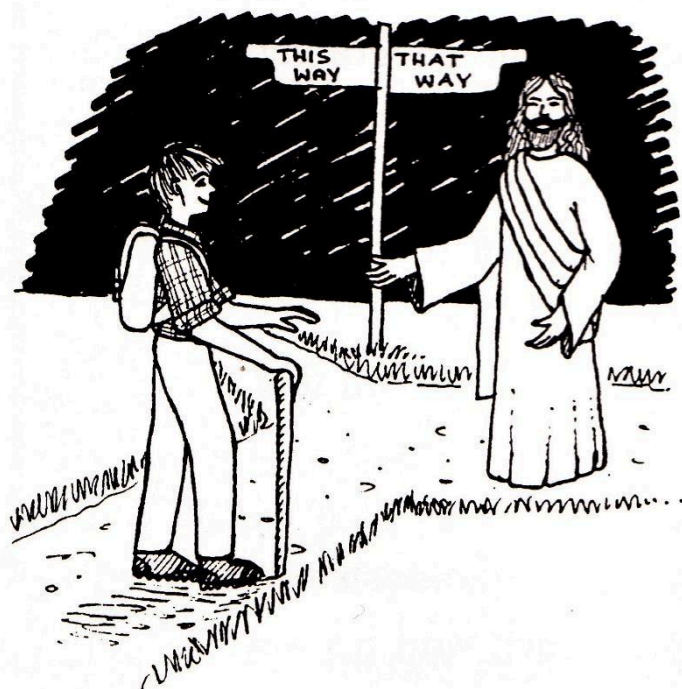
The “I’m doing it just because everybody else is” plea was lame when we used it as kids, and it doesn’t get any better as we age. Pouring chemicals on the lawn that are poisonous to small children is go-along-with-the-crowd reasoning.

One of the dangers of keeping up with the neighbours is that we haven’t aimed high enough. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, Paul says:

*They are only comparing themselves with each other, and measuring themselves by themselves. What foolishness! (NLT)*

Jesus is the one to aim for. Whenever we are uncertain about a particular behaviour, all we need to ask is, “What would Jesus do?”

- *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 40-41



## AN INTERESTING POSTSCRIPT

According to Yale University's Cultural Cognition Project, one's "cultural worldview" (= political leanings, ideological outlook) explains individuals' beliefs about climate change more powerfully than any other characteristic. Naomi Klein explains:

*The Yale researchers explain that people with strong "egalitarian" and "communitarian" worldviews (marked by an inclination towards collective action and social justice, concern about inequality, and suspicion of corporate power) overwhelmingly accept the scientific consensus on climate change. Conversely, those with strong "hierarchical" and "individualistic" worldviews (marked by opposition to government assistance for the poor and minorities, strong support for business and industry, and a belief that we all pretty much get what we deserve) overwhelmingly reject the scientific consensus.*

*What the latter group care about is exposing climate change as a "hoax" perpetrated by liberals to force them to change their light bulbs, live in Soviet-style tenements, and surrender their SUVs. They deny reality because the implications of that reality are, quite simply unthinkable...*

*We do know that having a significant stake in the fossil fuel industry makes one more prone to deny the reality of climate change, regardless of political affiliation.*

*The bottom line is that we are all inclined to denial when the truth is too costly - whether emotionally, intellectually or financially.*

*One of the more interesting findings of many recent studies on climate change perceptions is the clear connection between a refusal to accept the science...and social and economic privilege. Overwhelmingly, climate change deniers are not only conservative but also white and male, a group with higher than average incomes.*

*- This Changes Everything, 2014: 36-37,43,45-46*





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