

GOD'S ENVIRONMENTALISM: A STUDY OF BIBLICAL ECOLOGY

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## ABSTRACT

For the past half century, the philosophies of environmentalism and ecology have powerfully influenced the passage of international and domestic legislation, the writing of curricula for every stage of learning, and the shaping of the morals and ethics of society at large. Since 1966, when Lynn White first placed the responsibility for the modern environmental crisis at the doorstep of Christianity, scholars have studied the Bible through the lens of environmental thought. For many of these scholars, the conclusion has been that Scripture needs to be revamped, reinterpreted, or altogether tossed out as a basis for learning environmental responsibility. This paper will view environmentalism through the lens of Scripture. It will argue that God's Word does not need to be revamped nor reinterpreted through an ecological lens. Instead, this paper will present God's environmentalism: an ecological theology in which humans are bound to nature in the context of each of the four great events in salvation history: Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and the Last Day.

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“Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,  
nothing is going to get better. It's not.”  
— Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*

In a vacuum, this quotation could serve its purpose admirably; it could inspire and motivate people to act for the noblest purposes. However, this quotation was not composed in a vacuum, nor was it read and heard by millions around in the country in a vacuum. *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss was adapted as a feature-length movie by Universal Pictures and released on March 2, 2012. The theme of this children’s book and movie is ecological at heart. The premise is a world where creatures (resembling humans) have so devastated earth’s natural resources that the only livable place is a sealed city where clean air is sold in five gallon bottles and the trees are manufactured in factories. The words above were quoted several times by different characters attempting to motivate others to care enough about the planet’s resources to do something about it, to strive to *save* the planet. To be clear, this was a movie aimed at children; aimed, moreover, at influencing children to care enough about the environment to do something to save it from wicked industry, wicked fossil fuels, wicked capitalism, etc..

For this writer, the above quotation and movie were not the prime cause but simply one of many motivating factors for addressing the issue of the Green Movement.<sup>1</sup> *The Lorax* is only one example of thousands of children’s movies, books, and curricula (not to mention the body of work aimed at adults) that are clearly designed as propaganda intended to influence a person’s value system in his or her formative years. As such, this and any kind of indoctrination aimed at shaping the moral compass of the people to whom we Christian pastors minister must be vetted and held up to the truth of God’s Word for analysis.

Closer inspection of the vast catalog of research dedicated to a comparison of secular ecology and biblical ecology reveals two basic trends. Some support and defend the biblical record, and others advocate a reinterpretation or even a whole-hearted refutation<sup>2</sup> of Scripture as

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<sup>1</sup> “What does it mean to be green? What is a green world-view? Green is one of those ‘slippery’ words that have an elastic definition; it can be stretched to mean what we want. For the majority it is erroneously seen as a synonym for environmental however, it means, much more than that. Jonathan Porritt, until recently director of Friends of the Earth, states that ‘Whereas concern for the environment is an essential part of being green, it is...by no means the same as being green’. (*Seeing Green*, p. 19) Central to green thinking and politics are what Capra and Spretnak call the ‘four pillars’ (*Green Politics* Hutchinson, 1984 p. 30): ecology, social responsibility, grassroots democracy, and non-violence.” Bishop, Steve. 1991. “Green Theology and Deep Ecology: New Age or New Creation?” *Themelios* 16 (3): 8-14

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for examples

being of any value for determining how humans should live within the environment of this creation. However, a survey of dozens of essays, books, and theses from each side of the debate makes it clear that one question remains unanswered in a satisfactory way: what does the Bible actually teach about humans, creation, and ecology?<sup>3</sup> In a time when many scientists and theologians claim that the Bible needs to be reinterpreted or altogether ignored because it is insufficient and even harmful for addressing the modern “ecological crisis” between man and nature, this paper will demonstrate that Scripture teaches a theology of nature<sup>4</sup> in which man and nature are inextricably bound 1) in perfection at creation 2) in sin after the fall 3) in justification in Christ’s redemption, and 4) in renewal/restoration on the last day.

## **Creation**

Any attempt to define a Scriptural ecology must begin where creation does: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Ge 1:1). This single verse teaches two basic, yet fundamental truths of a biblical ecology: the earth belongs to God because he created it, and creation has intrinsic value because God owns it.

God created everything that exists and he created it from nothing. The simple Hebrew verb בָּרָא explains that everything that exists came from nothing but the word of God.<sup>5</sup> Prof. Lawrenz notes, “*Bara* is used in the Old Testament only for divine creative activity. God is exclusively the subject. It always expresses the idea of producing something new and extraordinary, something epoch-making. (cf. Numbers 16:30) It implies effortless production by word and volition, as only the almighty God can do it.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. J. Berry, however, does offer a helpful list of the components of a theology of nature from the point of view of a Christian scientist.

<sup>4</sup> Or ‘Theology of nature’ as defined by Colin Gunton: “a theology of nature is the gift of biblical revelation, for it teaches us that the unity of things is upheld neither by the formal causality of the Greeks nor by the supposed omnipotence of human reason, but by the incarnate Lord whose work on earth was achieved in the power of Spirit and in weakness.” (59) Gunton, Colin E. *A Brief Theology of Revelation*. Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2005. Print.

<sup>5</sup> “He moreover teaches by the word “created,” that what before did not exist was now made; for he has not used the term *yatsar* which signifies to frame or form, but *bara* which signifies to create. Therefore his meaning is, that the world was made out of nothing.” Calvin, John. 1979. *Genesis*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House Company: 70

<sup>6</sup> Lawrenz, Carl J., and John C. Jeske. *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004. Print. 35

God's involvement in creation gives it value above and apart from anything mankind might do or think about it:

The whole bedrock of environmental care is that God is the creator of heaven and earth (Gn. 1:1). The whole creation is an expression of God, so as we begin to understand the creation we can begin to get an idea of the creator; that is why the apostle Paul declares that God's eternal qualities can be understood from what he has made (Rom. 1:20). However, God is not to be identified with his creation: God is distinct from, and yet involved in, his creation. Two theological points need to be stated: the Christian concept of creation is (i) theistic and (ii) *ex nihilo*.<sup>7</sup>

One must be careful not to say too much here: creation does not have value in and of itself. Nature, and the creatures that roam the seas, land, and skies are not intrinsically valuable except that God created them and continues to care for them. God's continuing relationship with his creation and creatures will be examined further, but the rationale for assigning value to creation is simple: creation has value because God values it.

It is not necessary here to address the obvious discrepancies between the biblical record and the origins of the universe as taught by the heirs of Darwin. However, there is one branch of theology that must be addressed because it provides the foundation for so many of the authors who write on the subject of biblical ecology. Process theology and process theologians essentially teach that God must be fully involved in and affected by temporal processes. "This idea contrasts neatly with traditional forms of theism that hold God to be in all respects non-temporal (eternal), unchanging (immutable,) and unaffected by the world (impassible). Process theism does not deny that God is in some respects eternal, immutable, and impassible, but it contradicts the classical view by insisting that God is in some respects temporal, mutable, and passible."<sup>8</sup> Steve Bishop, a contributor to the theological journal *Themelios*, identifies two distinct problems with process theology's take on creation:

- 1) God is not distinguished from his creation. Traditional Christian theism is displaced by pantheism: all matter/events are in God, he is not external to them.
- 2) It is a denial of *creation ex nihilo*. Creation is, for the process theologian, *ex material* and out of God. This then leaves us with the conclusion that matter is pre-existent, eternal; it has become as God. The picture has become the artist.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bishop 2

<sup>8</sup> *Process Theism* (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Pub. Oct. 6, 2008. Accessed 10.11.12); <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-theism/>; Internet.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop Op Cit 3

There is no place for panentheism or pantheism in any kind of scriptural ecology, and yet, we will see that these two worldviews are fundamental to many published “biblically” ecological authors.

When God concluded his creating activity on the sixth day, he evaluated his work: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Ge 1:31). Genesis is the only place in the Old Testament where טוב מְאֹד are used in succession. God did more than an above average job when he created the earth. He did not create the earth with all of the problems and decay that we see around us today. When God finished creating the universe, it was perfect. John Calvin, influential French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation, expounds: “But now, after the workmanship of the world was complete in all its parts, and had received, if I may so speak, the last finishing touch, he pronounces it perfectly good; that we may know that there is in the symmetry of God’s works the highest perfection, to which nothing can be added.”<sup>10</sup> Instead of the apparent discord and violent natural catastrophes that affect life today, at Creation the earth, the universe, and all their systems were in perfect harmony.

The highest perfection of God’s creation lay in that all of the individual perfect works formed a harmonious whole. That God’s creation was initially perfect in every way, just as God intended it to be, is a very definite emphasis of the creation account. Thereby, it stands in bold contrast to an evolutionary understanding of the origin of all things. Evolution asserts initial imperfection followed by very gradual improvement involving vast periods of time.<sup>11</sup>

There was no room for improvement. Because of the immutable perfection of its Creator, Creation itself was perfect.

As his concluding act and crowning achievement, God created man. To man God gave this command: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Ge 1:28). This is arguably the most-quoted and yet most misinterpreted verse in all of Scripture concerning the role of man in creation. In his oft-quoted and infamous 1967 essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, historian and ecological proponent Lynn White argues that this

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<sup>10</sup> Calvin 100

<sup>11</sup> Lawrenz, Carl J., and John C. Jeske. 2004. *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House: 80

single concept of dominion is the reason why “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt”<sup>12</sup> for today’s “ecological crisis.” He argues:

Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes...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.<sup>13</sup>

And Lynn White is not alone in accusing Christianity of advocating an exploitation of nature. D.G. Horrell, New Testament professor at the University of Exeter, offers a catalog of several authors who hold the same view:

Howard Wallace, for example, is unconvinced by attempts to recover a positive reading of Gen. 1:28: ‘The roots of any modern ecological problems to which an emphasis on Gen. 1.28 and human domination of creation has contributed, would thus seem to be embedded in the biblical text itself and its own internal means of interpretation.’ Keith Carley reads Psalm 8 as ‘an apology for human domination’, a text which does not take account of the interests of the Earth and thus does not conform to the ecojustice principles. The model of domination which the psalm presents and legitimates – ‘a classic expression’, Carley suggests, ‘of the dominating male ego’ – has been a cause of suffering for too long, and needs to be rejected.<sup>14</sup>

Some eco-theologians clearly think they have found in the biblical concept of dominion a strong basis for attacking Christianity. However, what these people are lacking is any exegetical evidence that sinful exploitation is what is meant by the Hebrew words *כָּבַשׁ* and *רָדָה*.

BDB translates *כָּבַשׁ* as “subdue, bring into bondage.”<sup>15</sup> TWOT submits a similar translation and notes that “this verb and its derivative occur fifteen time in the OT...in the OT it means ‘to make to serve, by force if necessary’ ...Therefore ‘subdue’ in Ge 1:28 implies that creation will not do man’s bidding gladly or easily, and that man must now bring creation into submission by strength. It is not to rule man. However, there is twistedness in humanity which causes us to perform such a task with fierce and destructive delight.”<sup>16</sup> This interpretation by

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<sup>12</sup> White, L. 1967. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science (New York, N.Y.)* 155 (3767) (March 10): 1203–7. doi:10.1126/science.155.3767.1203. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17847526>.: 6

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>14</sup> Horrell, D. G., C. Hunt, and C. Southgate. 2008. “Appeals to the Bible in Ecotheology and Environmental Ethics: a Typology of Hermeneutical Stances.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21 (2) (August 1): 219–238.

doi:10.1177/0953946808094343. <http://sce.sagepub.com/cgi/doi/10.1177/0953946808094343>. :227

<sup>15</sup> BDB

<sup>16</sup> TWOT 951

TWOT plays into the hands of those who wish to blame God for placing creation into the hands of perverse mankind. But theirs does not appear to be a faithful interpretation; it seems to be an interpretation of God's command before the fall as if it had occurred after the fall. There is no evidence that nature rose up in rebellion against man in the perfection of Eden. In fact, there is evidence as to the opposite: the animals willingly came before Adam to be named in Genesis 2:19.

The other key word is  $\text{הָרַךְ}$ , translated by BDB as “have dominion, rule, dominate” and by TWOT as “dominion.”<sup>17</sup> This root is used elsewhere in the OT to restrict the rule of slave owners over fellow Israelites (Lev 25:46); to explain the rule of a king (Nu 24:19; 1 Ki 5:4); to describe the job of the officials who oversaw Solomon's building projects (1 Ki 9:23; 2 Ch 8:10); and to describe God's rule over both creation and Zion (Ps 72:8; 110:2). These other references do not describe an aggressive or sinful ruling; they simply acknowledge the fact that a person or being (God) has authority over someone or something else. Donald Gowan (Emeritus Robert Cleveland Holland Professor of Old Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Presbyterian pastor) notes that even in Eden, man's dominion is not absolute, “For there is a limitation in the sweeping blessing which God pronounced over man at his creation: he can't eat meat; it is a vegetarian Paradise he lives in. So it is clear that man has not been given complete freedom to do as he pleases. He is under a divine commandment.”<sup>18</sup> Adam is not given absolute sovereignty over creation: he is to rule over it as God's representative – a representative created in God's holy, loving, righteous image. Steve Bishop notes that there are two things to keep in mind when interpreting the kind of dominion God gave to Adam:

- 1) The cultural mandate. [The context of Ge 1:26-28] is the call for humanity to develop and unfold the creation as the image-bearers of God. If we compare the mandate given to humanity with that given to the rest of the animals (Ge 1:22), it is clear that subduing and ruling are one facet of being the image of God, and thus an essential part of what it means to be human. Subduing and ruling the creation, then, are to be done as God's representatives: he is our role model. Barr suggests that humanity's role is ‘less exploitation and more leadership.’
- 2) The creation story. Opening up the context a little more places the subduing and ruling in the Hebrew record of creation. One thing is immediately obvious: creation is

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<sup>17</sup> TWOT 2121a

<sup>18</sup> Gowan, Donald E. 1958. “Genesis and Ecology: Does ‘Subdue’ Mean ‘Plunder’?” 1189

not merely for humanity. The world exists for the glory of God: creation is not anthropocentric, it is theocentric. All things exist for and have their meaning in God.<sup>19</sup>

Creation does not exist for man to do with as he pleases; it exists to God's glory, and man should rule it as God's representatives and in harmony with God's will.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, it is clear that God did form the trees and the animals for man's use – to provide both sustenance<sup>21</sup> and work.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, nature has a dual purpose: to glorify God and to serve man. Francis Schaeffer, the late American Evangelical Christian theologian, philosopher, and Presbyterian pastor, aptly sums up man's God given role in perfect Eden:

When we have dominion over nature, it is not ours, either. It belongs to God, and we are not to exercise our dominion over these things as though entitled to exploit them, but as things borrowed or held in trust, which we are to use realizing that they are not ours intrinsically. Man's dominion is under God's Dominion and under God's Domain.<sup>23</sup>

While Genesis 1:28 primarily addresses man's *office* regarding the rest of creation, we look to Genesis 2:15-17 for man's *function* in that office. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" Again, two key Hebrew verbs give us the substance of God's command to Adam and Eve. עָבַד, "work, serve,"<sup>24</sup> may describe service "directed toward things, people, or God."<sup>25</sup> וּלְשֹׁמְרָהּ, "keep, watch, preserve,"<sup>26</sup> has the basic root idea "to exercise great care over," "take care of," or "guard"; this involves keeping or tending to things such as a garden.<sup>27</sup>

Two things should be noted with regard to Adam's *function* in the garden. First, creation did not resist Adam's efforts to draw sustenance from nature. Second, God did not command

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<sup>19</sup> Bishop Op Cit 5

<sup>20</sup> "Coupled with the ordinance to 'have dominion' (Gen. 1:28) which implies loving care in the pattern of the shepherd-kingship laid upon Israel, and does not support the common assumption that 'dominion' authorizes despotic plunder, this gives rise to 'stewardship' – characterized better by the Benedictine Rule rather than by the over-reverential approach perceived of Francis of Assisi." (16) Berry, R. J. "Eden & Ecology: Evolution & Eschatology." *Science & Christian Belief* 19.1 (2007): 15–35. Print.

<sup>21</sup> Ge 1:29

<sup>22</sup> Ge 2:5

<sup>23</sup> Schaeffer, FA, and UW Middelmann. 1992. *Pollution and the Death of Man*. Crossway Books. 70

<sup>24</sup> BDB

<sup>25</sup> TWOT 1553

<sup>26</sup> BDB

<sup>27</sup> TWOT 2414

Adam to pillage and plunder that which He had given Adam to serve (nor did Adam do so). Prof.

Lawrenz notes:

This much is certain, wearisome and burdensome toil were not involved to obtain the necessities of life. This aspect is described in Genesis 3:17-19 as an evil consequence of sin. If it were important that we fully understand just what man's task in the garden entailed, God would undoubtedly have given us additional enlightenment. Since that is not the case, we are encouraged to direct our attention to the fact itself that the LORD God gave man, even while he was still perfect, an assignment in his initial wonderful home.<sup>28</sup>

When interpreting the ecology of Genesis 1-2, one must always keep in mind that the state of creation was something modern man cannot even begin to imagine. There were no weeds, droughts, or pests. The relationship between Adam and nature was perfect; as noted above, animals came without coercion to be named,<sup>29</sup> and nature provided for Adam's needs without resistance. Care must then be taken in using today's terms to describe Eden's perfection. Neither man nor nature is perfect any longer; their mutual relationship has been perverted by sin. Nature doesn't willingly serve man's needs, nor does man responsibly care for nature.

Michael Bullmore, Senior Pastor of CrossWay Community Church in Bristol, WI, disregards this analytic principle as he attempts to translate Eden's principles into today's terms. He correctly states that man's *role* "is to act as the head of the household and is responsible to see that the household runs well and that all members of the household continue to function according to their God-appointed roles." However, he falls into error<sup>30</sup> when he alludes to a backwards comparison first made by William Dryness.

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrenz 110

<sup>29</sup> Ge 2:19-20 "It wasn't necessary for God to tell him to name them. The LORD knew that if he brought the animals to the man in the garden, the man would be deeply interested in becoming acquainted with them. Having been appointed to be their lord and master, the man would carefully study each creature's nature so that he might give each a name that was in keeping with its divinely endowed characteristics." (Lawrenz, 119)

<sup>30</sup> Although he later seems to recover from this bad interpretation in his summary of Gen. 1-2:

- a. The contribution of Genesis 1-2 might be summarized as follows:
  - i. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.
  - ii. All that which God created he pronounced good, i.e., it existed exactly as he intended it.
  - iii. Of all his creation God created only man in his own image, thus causing man to occupy a position distinct from and above the rest of creation.
  - iv. God blessed both human and non-human creation by imbuing both with powers of procreation and encouraging both to exercise those powers liberally.
  - v. God gave to mankind the responsibility of mastery over non-human creation, and he commanded him to exercise that mastery toward the preservation of, and fuller realization of, creation's goodness. (Bullmore, MA. 1998. "The Four Most Important Biblical Passages for a Christian Environmentalism."

Theologian and OT scholar William Dryness has provided helpful direction in our effort to define human dominion...Second, he explores the meaning of the command to "rule" by comparing it to the demands placed on Israelite kings...Then, bringing his two ideas together, he summarizes: If my thesis—that human dominion is best seen in the ideal rule of Israel's king—is valid, then we should expect that the righteous rule of the king would issue in a productive and fruitful environment, both human and nonhuman.<sup>31</sup>

One cannot draw parallels between life before the fall and life after the fall. When Adam lost God's image, everything was thrown into confusion – there was no more perfect order in creation. In addition, the comparison falters because the kings of Israel were by no means perfect overseers of their people. Solomon fell to the allures of wealth, women, and power. Saul was seduced to worship false idols. David was guilty of the gross public sins of adultery and murder. This is not the idea of dominion that God gave to Adam, nor is it the ideal for which Christians today strive in their interactions with nature.

At the same time, modern Christians can learn from Adam's role and function in Eden.

Bishop explains:

The opening chapters of Genesis show that humanity's relationship with the rest of creation is ambiguous: we are part of it and we are above it. We are part of the earth and we are to rule over it. We are creatures of God and made in the image of God. It is these truths held in tension that keep Christianity free of the extremes of biocentrism and anthropocentrism (i.e. the reducing of humanity to grass and the deification of humanity). Christianity, contrary to Lynn White, Jr, is neither anthropocentric nor biocentric: it is theocentric. Our solidarity with the rest of the creation should serve to keep us from an oppressive rulership.<sup>32</sup>

Bishop notes the uniquely Christian way of seeing the relationship between man and nature. Man is equal to nature in the sense that both are creations of God. Man is superior to nature in the sense that God created man in his own image. And, as Bishop demonstrates, this uniquely ambiguous Christian view is the only one that avoids both bio-centrism (a pitfall for too many environmentalists) and anthro-centrism (a pitfall for too many misguided or misinformed Christians). Man's function in his office over creation is to serve and work creation for the benefit of both. Thus, with respect to their relationship to God at creation, man and nature were

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*Trinity Journal* 19 (2): 139–162.

<http://content.ebscohost.com/ContentServer.asp?T=P&P=AN&K=ATLA0000983820&S=R&D=rfh&EbscoContent=dGJyMMv17ESeprY4zdneyOLCmr0qeprZSs6q4SbWWxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMOzpr0ivqbJOuePfgex44Dt6fIA> 150)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 155

<sup>32</sup> Bishop Op Cit 5

bound together: both were created at God’s command, both were under God’s dominion, and both were to give glory to God by serving him in their unique roles.

## **Fall**

The perfection in which God created man and nature did not remain intact for long. In fact, just six verses after Genesis reads, “the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (2:25), Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent to disobey God’s will and eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>33</sup> The repercussions of the fall were deep and widespread. Genesis 3:7 explains that Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened to see their nakedness and they were filled with shame. Professor Lawrenz notes the deep impact of the fall on man’s will: “After having lost God’s image, after having become sinful human beings, Adam and Eve no longer had full control of their impulses. Selfish, inordinate desires concerning the use of their impulses began to assert themselves.”<sup>34</sup> No longer would the sexes live in perfect harmony with one another; instead, God’s curse on Eve plagues mankind to this day: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”<sup>35</sup>

Every relationship created by God was disrupted in the fall. Man had fallen from a perfect working relationship with God. Man and woman could no longer live together in perfect harmony. And, most pressing for our purposes here, the relationship between man and nature also fell under sin’s curse:

Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it  
all the days of your life.  
<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.  
<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;

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<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that all parts of creation – human, creature, and nature – were involved in the fall into sin: Satan manipulated a serpent (creature) to tempt Adam and Eve (humans) to eat fruit (nature) from one of God’s created trees.

<sup>34</sup> Lawrenz Op Cit 140

<sup>35</sup> Ge 3:16

for dust you are  
and to dust you will return.<sup>36</sup>

One curse, contained in three verses of Scripture, is arguably the most important revelation in the whole Bible for a correct understanding of man's relationship with nature today as well as for an understanding of the state of nature itself.

The curse pronounced by God on the אָדָם הָאָדָם was of immediate and universal impact. Every instance of nature's rebellion against man is a result of this curse. Every hurricane, tornado, and tsunami that destroys property and takes life is a result of this curse. Every example in which animal turns against man is a result of this curse. Every solar event, every particle of ozone, and every instance (real or imagined) of climate change is tainted by sin. Already in the sixteenth century, John Calvin expressed appreciation for this correct understanding, as well as recognition of errors in this regard:

And he assigns as the reason, that the earth will not be the same as it was before, producing perfect fruits; for he declares that the earth would degenerate from its fertility, and bring forth briars and noxious plants. Therefore, we may know, that whatsoever unwholesome things may be produced, are not natural fruits of the earth, but are corruptions which originate from sin...It has been falsely maintained by some, that the earth is exhausted by the long succession of time, as if constant bringing forth had wearied it. They think more correctly who acknowledge that, by the increasing wickedness of men, the remaining blessing of God is gradually diminished and impaired; and certainly there is danger, unless the world repent, that a great part of men should shortly perish through hunger, and other dreadful miseries<sup>37</sup>... Moses does not enumerate all the disadvantages in which man, by sin, has involved himself; for it appears that all the evils of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the fruits of sin.<sup>38</sup>

Here again, the relationships between man and nature and God come into play. Even after the fall, man remains in a position of authority over the rest of creation: he is not the same as the grass. At the same time, man no longer has perfect authority over creation: God remains in control, but nature rears up in rebellion against man. The relationships have been tainted by sin, but they remain effective in spite of sin.

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<sup>36</sup> Ge 3:17-18

<sup>37</sup> Calvin 175

<sup>38</sup> Ibid 177

A correct understanding here is necessary to avoid the errors Richard Neuhaus battled in his *In Defense of People*. While Neuhaus, the late prominent Christian cleric (first as a Lutheran pastor and later as a Roman Catholic priest) and writer, occasionally exhibits an anthropocentric leaning, he emphasizes that policies and regulations that benefit nature cannot come to the detriment of mankind. He notes the frequent accusation of extreme ecologists and their biocentric trending: “It is all spoiled when you get closer. People are the problem, with their grubby passions, opinions and politics. People are the ultimate pollution. And only man is vile.”

<sup>39</sup> This failure to acknowledge that creation is as tarnished by sin as man is leads scientists to some frightening conclusions. An example is found in *Human Ecology: Problems and Solutions*. This book’s opening words are illustrative of authors’ false, anti-Scriptural leanings:

Human values and institutions have set mankind on a collision course with the laws of nature. Human beings cling jealously to their prerogative to reproduce as they please – and they please to make each new generation larger than the last – yet endless multiplication on a finite planet is impossible. Most humans aspire to greater material prosperity, but the number of people that can be supported on Earth if everyone is rich is even smaller than if everyone is poor.<sup>40</sup>

God placed no such restriction on his command to Adam to “multiply and fill the earth.”<sup>41</sup> God did not leave it up to man to determine how many humans are too many for this earth, and God remains the author of life.<sup>42</sup> It follows that environmental scientists who refuse to acknowledge their creator would dedicate an entire chapter of their book to “population limitation.”<sup>43</sup> The chapter examines and evaluates the effectiveness of various forms of birth control. It was against heartless pagans such as these that Neuhaus wrote:

We have met the enemy and he is us.” This observation by Pogo is frequently encountered in ecology meetings and literature. Sometimes it really means us and refers to our failure to toilet-train our consumer society. More often, however, the “us” means “people” or, as it is more impersonally put, “population.” Needless to say, the population that is usually considered the problem is not “us” but “them.” The heart of the crisis, we are told, is population. Radicals who profess to be in search of authentic personhood and who protest the dehumanizing influences of technology learn to speak with earnest innocence about human beings as “pollution units.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Neuhaus, R. 1971. “In Defense of People.” *America* 126 (2) (January): 24

<sup>40</sup> Ehrlich, PR, AH Ehrlich, and JP Holdren. 1973. “Human Ecology. Problems and Solutions.” 3

<sup>41</sup> Ge 1:28

<sup>42</sup> Acts 3:15

<sup>43</sup> Ehrlich, PR, AH Ehrlich, and JP Holdren: 225

<sup>44</sup> Neuhaus Op Cit 126

The effects of this anti-human biocentrism are all around us: falling birth rates worldwide, policies that perpetuate a state of poverty, and the prevalence of abortion, to name a few. Humans and creation are equally affected by sin, but the solution does not lie in reducing or eliminating the human population; it will not be found in man's confession to nature that he has sinned grievously against it. Today's "ecological crisis" *should* lead men to confession, but of a different sort. As Neuhaus properly states, "The very real ecological damage that has resulted is a prophetic warning – coming, as most prophetic warnings do, from unexpected sources – prompting man to repentance. But repentance does not mean getting right with nature but getting right with God."<sup>45</sup> Man and nature are together bound up in sin – this is true – but the answer to sin is never to be found in something sinful. The answer to sin is only found in a Redeemer from sin – in Christ.

Paul graphically describes how creation and mankind have been bound together in a state of sin since the fall:

<sup>19</sup>The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.<sup>46</sup>

Three exegetical questions must be considered for this passage to be understood correctly. First, to what does 'creation' refer? Κτίσις is found nineteen times in the New Testament and is translated as "creation, creature, created, and authority" in the NIV. In this instance, the term is "concrete: the creation as reflecting the act, i.e., the creature world. This abstract term used concretely is comprehensive: 'all creation'...Here the context limits 'the creation' to the irrational world of creatures, excluding angels, godly men, and also ungodly men."<sup>47</sup> William Hendriksen adds: "It cannot include the good angels, since they were never subjected to futility (vs. 20)...Satan and his demons are also ruled out, for they will never be set free (this holds also for all those people who will never be saved). And the elect are not included *here*, for they are here treated as a separate group...With the exclusion of all these four groups,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid 182

<sup>46</sup> Romans 8:19-22

<sup>47</sup> Lenski, R.C.H. 1945. *Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press. 532

what is left is the animate and inanimate irrational creation. One might call it the sub-human creation or simply Nature.”<sup>48</sup>

Second, what does it mean that creation was subjected to frustration? Louw Nida notes that ματαιότητι means “pertaining to being useless on the basis of being futile and lacking in content—‘useless, futile, empty, futility.’”<sup>49</sup> Hendriksen expands: “Note the expression, “The creation was subjected to futility.” A.V. reads “to vanity.”... The word used in the original does not refer to ambitious display. It indicates that since man’s fall Nature’s potentialities are cribbed, cabined, and confined. The creation is subject to arrested development and constant decay.”<sup>50</sup>

Finally, what does it mean that “the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth”? William Hendriksen explains: “Paul compares the earnest yearning and eager forward looking of creation to the groaning of a woman who is in the process of giving birth to a child. To be sure, such groaning indicates suffering, but it also implies hope. As Calvin reminds us, these groans are birth-pangs, not death-pangs. The addition ‘with one accord’ or ‘together’ indicates that every division of this ‘whole creation’ participate in these birth-pangs.”<sup>51</sup>

This passage establishes a basic foundation that Christians must have in evaluating any natural event that God allows to occur. Paul is explaining that all of creation (here, excluding mankind, angels, demons etc.) is bound up with man in sin. This leads to the inevitable result that creation does not function as God had initially designed it to: it falters, fails, and decays. As a woman groans in child-birth, creation groans and waits for its restoration – a restoration that only God can provide. R.C.H. Lenski perhaps sums it up best:

The tremendous thought being unfolded here is that all God’s inferior creation was from the start bound up with man, was not independent but wholly dependent. And now, since the fall, the creature world, in its ultimate destiny, is bound up, not with the ungodly who shall perish in hell, but with the godly and with their coming revelation of glory in heaven.<sup>52</sup>

If Christians desire to establish any kind of environmental ethics, they ought to begin with this passage in mind. Paul explains that nature is bound up in sin and bound to decay

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<sup>48</sup> Hendriksen, William. 1981. *NTC: Romans*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic. 266

<sup>49</sup> LN 65.37

<sup>50</sup> Hendriksen 268

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 268

<sup>52</sup> Lenski Op Cit 532

because God cursed it – not simply because man has been a poor steward (although in many cases this also is true). Man does not have an intrinsic responsibility to honor and serve nature apart from the fact that God created it, and God created man to care for it. Finally, and perhaps most important, creation will remain in a state of decay until Christ returns to summon believers to his side in heaven. Man is no more responsible for saving creation than he is for saving himself, because both are utter impossibilities. Thus man’s primary purpose on this earth is not merely to serve and preserve creation, but to serve and worship God. The fact that both man and creation are to look to God for salvation is also emphasized by Paul: “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”<sup>53</sup>

The prophet Hosea sheds further light on the disastrous effects of man’s *moral*<sup>54</sup> sin on the environment:

4 Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites,  
because the Lord has a charge to bring  
against you who live in the land:  
“There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.  
2 There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
3 Because of this the land mourns,<sup>[b]</sup>  
and all who live in it waste away;  
the beasts of the field and the birds of the air  
and the fish of the sea are dying.”<sup>55</sup>

Hosea and Paul agree that nature does not suffer in decay because of its own choice or fault, but as a direct result of man’s sins against God. Nature suffers because God uses it as a way of judging man for his wicked ways. Theodore Laetsch emphasizes this point:

Already the consequences of this dreadful depravity are evident in the form of God’s judgments. The earth mourns, because drought and locusts or warfare destroy its crops (cp. Is. 24:4, 7; 33:9; Jer. 12:4, 11; Joel 1:10). All the inhabitants of the land languish, are weakened, enfeebled from lack of proper nourishment. Not only the sinners, but all creation suffers for man’s sin (Gen. 3:17; 5:29; Rom. 8:19-22). What a wicked thing is

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<sup>53</sup> Ro 8:21

<sup>54</sup> Emphasis mine to preclude any notion that Hosea is narrowly referring to man’s sins against nature.

<sup>55</sup> Hosea 4:1-3

sin, so dear to man! What wickedness on the part of man to drag all nature, beasts, and birds, and fish, the inhabitants of earth and sky and sea, into his own well-deserved punishment!<sup>56</sup>

It is a failure to live up to God's demands, not exploitation that crushes nature and causes it to mourn. It is striking that every time a natural disaster (like Superstorm Sandy) occurs, widespread cries for reform follow.<sup>57</sup> Repentance, a change of ways, and confession are summoned, but in a warped fashion. The call for repentance is directed at large corporations for their polluting practices. The desired change of ways is specific to the type of car or energy efficient home a person owns. The espoused reformation is a reformation of behavior, not a reformation of heart. It is striking that the natural law imprinted on the hearts of humans is alive and active enough to manifest itself in media proclamations and doctoral theses, but those proclamations and theses are misdirected. Calls for modern day sacrifices and "green" burnt offerings are as futile for pleasing God now as they were in David's time: "You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings, the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."<sup>58</sup>

The account of Cain and Abel<sup>59</sup> provides an example of this exact sort of work righteous heresy, along with its ecological implications. Both brothers brought to God externally similar sacrifices, yet God judged one with favor and the other with contempt. God was judging the heart, not the sacrifice, and Cain's failure to approach God with a penitent heart as well as his refusal to repent for murder had ecological implications for the rest of his life: "When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you."<sup>60</sup> This cause and effect relationship between sin and nature's condition is one that modern Christians would be wise to ponder. Calvin notes this in his commentary on Genesis:

For...generally God causes his sun daily to rise upon the good and the evil, (Mt. 5:45) yet, in the meantime, (as often as he sees good) he punishes the sins, sometimes of a whole nation, and sometimes of certain men, with rain and hail, and clouds, so far, at least, as is useful to give determinate proof of future judgment; and also for the purpose

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<sup>56</sup> Laetsch, Theodore. 1956. *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House. 43

<sup>57</sup> For one example of such cries: Anon. "Superstorm Sandy—a People's Shock? | The Nation." <http://www.thenation.com/article/171048/superstorm-sandy-peoples-shock#>

<sup>58</sup> Psalm 51:16-17

<sup>59</sup> Ge 4:1-12

<sup>60</sup> Ge 4:12

of admonishing the world, by such examples, that nothing can succeed when God is angry with and opposed to them.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately, at least one modern commentator sees the example of Cain and Abel as a source of “ecological crisis” rather than as a description of sin’s side effects. While David Crownfield specifically aims his attacks at Calvinism, he faults greater Christianity for today’s ecological problems:

The key to Calvin’s contribution to our conception of the world and of our role in it lies in two related attitudes. One attitude is that this world is here for men’s respectful but vigorous and temporary use; the other is that Christian faith has implications for every aspect of individual and social behavior. The natural world is secular, instrumental, free of inherent values, and temporary: yet it is the scene and raw material for human faithfulness and diligence in making the most, and the best, of our temporary sojourn here. It is therefore to be used to the utmost. Calvinism thus obligates men to graze this earthly pasture to its roots. Only by the fullest use of this temporary stopping-place do we show our readiness to migrate to our true home. This is a profoundly creative and powerful conception in relation to social order, economic growth, and technological development. Whether it is cause or ideological reflection of the dynamic of the modern Western world, it gives voice to its deepest sources. But, despite its ethical and political dynamism, it is aesthetically, emotionally, and ecologically catastrophic. The Calvinist is always busy doing, never sensually or tranquilly enjoying. His relation to the earth is to dominate, exploit, and extract, rather than to coexist in the closed circle of our common life.<sup>62</sup>

Crownfield’s argument hinges on the notion that God preferred Abel’s sacrifice to Cain’s because Abel was properly demonstrating a nomadic exploitative lifestyle, while Cain was striving to conserve and preserve nature by his sacrifice of the fruits of the soil. In Abel, Crownfield sees all that is ecologically evil about Christianity as a religion:

I am not here laying at the door of Calvinism alone the responsibility for the present crisis. I focus on Calvin because Calvinism plays a major part, though not the only one, in incorporating into the roots of modern consciousness the God who prefers Abel’s sacrifice to Cain’s, who is known in the contingent drama of survival of ecologically-destructive semi-nomads, and who calls on all his creatures to regard this world as a pasture, to be grazed to its roots and then abandoned to the desert.<sup>63</sup>

Crownfield’s blundering attempt at interpretation finally leads him to this sad conclusion:

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<sup>61</sup> Calvin Op Cit 210

<sup>62</sup> Crownfield, David. 2012. “The Curse of Abel : An Essay in Biblical Ecology CROWNFIELD THE CURSE OF ABEL An Essay in Biblical Ecology Arm , and Gently Lead Those That Are with Young .” *The North American Review* 258 (2) (July): 58–63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25117459>. 60

<sup>63</sup> Ibid 60

At any rate, we had better not worship any god who prefers the sacrifice of Abel to that of Cain, for he leaves the mark of his curse on us as well. If we are to look to gods at all, it must be to one that teaches us to seek the welfare of the place where we find ourselves, for only in its welfare will we find our welfare.<sup>64</sup>

At the root, Crownfield's problem is not so much that he misinterprets Scripture (since it doesn't seem that he really tries to interpret the words on the page), but that he imposes his biocentric worldview on God's word. Sadly, that same worldview is spreading throughout Christianity. For example, Harper Bibles' *The Green Bible* seeks to legitimize the biblical ecology of "green" Christians. More than a light-hearted attempt at catering to the tastes of modern culture, this bible edition is a serious attempt to manipulate Scripture. "The Green Bible is meant to 'equip and encourage [readers] to see God's vision for creation and help [them] engage in the work of healing and sustaining it.' Emphasizing what the publishers see as the Bible's message on the environment, all passages mentioning the environment are printed in green ink to draw the reader's attention."<sup>65</sup> Interpreting the Bible from a historical critical vantage point is not new; reading a Bible with green letters is. God in Scripture does not lay down a set of rules for how man is to interact with nature. God desires not only a change of behavior from fallen mankind, but a change of heart. This truth is ignored by Crownfield and by all who read the Bible with his eco-critical mindset.

The Biblical ecologist might suggest that humans clash with nature because they haven't paid attention to the Bible's "environmental" passages. But God forewarned that humanity would be subject to a combative relationship with nature. He said to Noah: "The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything" (Ge 9:2-3). Professor Lawrenz comments on the ecological impact of God's words:

When we compare the blessing God spoke after the flood with the blessing he spoke in the Garden of Eden, however, we note one specific omission. God told the first two perfect people to "Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves upon the ground" (Ge 1:28). God did not repeat that to the people standing outside the ark. The two people who once

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid 62

<sup>65</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Green\\_Bible](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Green_Bible)

possessed the image of God could use their complete dominance over the creature world to the glory of God; they would not abuse that high privilege. God now knew, however, that he could not entrust such dominance to people who entered this world as rebels divorced from God, without love for him and without respect for his holy will... The shattering of God's original creation design in the fall had a disastrous effect not only on God's two human creatures; it isolated and alienated the animals from man as well. The fall into sin brought about disruption and dislocation not only in the relationship between human beings and God, but also in the relationship between human beings and animals. From now on animals would pose danger to humans. After the flood, therefore, God announced that, from now on, fear would dominate the animals in their relationship to man.<sup>66</sup>

God ordained nature to live in fear of man. When nature rises up against man today, it is not because man has not been kind enough to creation. Writes Michael Bullmore, "If it tells us anything, Gen 9:8-17 tells us that in God's covenantal economy, the destiny of every living creature is somehow linked with ours."<sup>67</sup>

Examples of how man's sin affects nature abound in Scripture. In Genesis 19, God finally ran out of patience with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed them with burning sulfur. The people and buildings of those cities were destroyed in the fire from heaven, and, the end of verse 25 adds, "He overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities – *and also the vegetation in the land.*" According to Kiel-Delitzsch's commentary on Genesis, the destructive fire from heaven was God's final and perpetual judgment not only on the people of the region, but on nature as well: "Even to the present day the Dead Sea, with the sulphureous vapour which hangs about it, the great blocks of saltpeter and sulphur which lie on every hand, and the utter absence of the slightest trace of animal and vegetable life in its waters, are a striking testimony to this catastrophe, which is held up in both the Old and New Testaments as a fearfully solemn judgment of God for the warning of self-secure and presumptuous sinners."<sup>68</sup>

Nature suffers alongside man because of sin; moreover, it convulses and rejects man because of his sin.

<sup>24</sup> Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. <sup>25</sup> Even the land was defiled; so I punished

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<sup>66</sup> Lawrenz Op Cit 282

<sup>67</sup> Bullmore Op Cit 159

<sup>68</sup> Keil, C.F., and F. Delitzsch. 1991. *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 236

it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things,<sup>27</sup> for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled.<sup>28</sup> And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.<sup>69</sup>

Kiel-Delitzsch explain that although creation is subject to the effects of sin, it is not a willing partner to sin:

In the concluding exhortation God pointed expressly to the fact, that the nations which He was driving out before the Israelites had defiled the land by such abominations as those [see previous vss] that He had visited their iniquity and the land had spat out its inhabitants, and warned the Israelites to beware of these abominations, that the land might not spit them out as it had the Canaanites before them...The land is personified as a living creature, which violently rejects food that it dislikes.<sup>70</sup>

With such evidence on hand, a preacher may wish to spout condemnation on the latest locality to be repulsed by nature. Once again, descriptive episodes in Scripture cannot serve as law for modern Christians. The will of God is hidden in wind and wave; one should not read more into a cataclysmic event than he ought.

Broadly, natural catastrophes can be viewed in two ways: as creation's revulsion at witnessing the sin of man, and as God's judgment on sin. If we see decay and destruction in creation, it is because of sin:

Why should the Lord visit the earth with such judgment? Isaiah pictured the earth as a wasteland. The hot wind dries it up and sucks the life from it. Even those with high stations in life languish. Why? "The earth is defiled by its people." The beauty of God's great creation has been fouled by the rebellious and sinful people of the earth...In spite of the wonder of God's created world, which proclaims the goodness and power of the Creator, humans do not seek God but become greedy, cruel, rebellious, and arrogant. They multiply sin and evil in the world. Clearly, human sin pollutes the wonder of creation.<sup>71</sup>

Sin has had disastrous effects both on man and on creation. Often, when rational people think about how God created perfection, and how man ruined it with his sin, they are led to ask, "Why didn't God just scrap it and start over?" The answer is simple. "God is love."<sup>72</sup> God loved mankind too much to push the reset button. And this love that God showed in preserving man he

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<sup>69</sup> Lev 18:24-30

<sup>70</sup> K-D 418

<sup>71</sup> Braun, John A. 2000. *Isaiah 1-39*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. 244

<sup>72</sup> 1 Jn 4:16

extends to the rest of creation. Even though nature bears the deep stain of sin, God continues to care for it. He does this because he is the benevolent creator; he is the owner, the caretaker, the provider. To motivate the Israelite people to love and serve God, Moses described this benevolent creator: “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.”<sup>73</sup> As King David collected offerings for the building of the temple, he declared that God is at work in creation for his saving purposes: “Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.”<sup>74</sup>

Scripture gives examples of God’s continuing love for his creation. After the world was deluged in the Flood, God made a covenant with both man and nature: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you *and with every living creature that was with you* – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you – *every living creature on earth.*”<sup>75</sup> God had formed a covenant with man before (Ge 3:15), but this was the first covenant God made with all of his creatures. This is significant:

The named beneficiaries of God’s covenant are, first of all, people – the ones who had just left the ark and their descendants – and that seems only natural. Ordinarily, covenants are between people. That’s why it may at first strike us as strange to hear God announce that his covenant is also between him and *every* living creature that came out of the ark with Noah. Clearly this is no ordinary covenant. It involves the continuance of the life of *humanity and of the animals* until the end of the world.<sup>76</sup>

Once again, man and nature are bound together; this time by God’s covenant, his promise to never again destroy the earth in a flood. Given this grand statement of love, it comes as no surprise that God would show concern even for the lowliest of creatures.

<sup>6</sup> If you come across a bird’s nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground, and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young.

<sup>7</sup> You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, so that it may go well with you and you may have a long life.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Dt 10:14

<sup>74</sup> 1 Chr 29:11

<sup>75</sup> Ge 9:9-10

<sup>76</sup> Lawrenz 290

<sup>77</sup> Dt 22:6-7

This mandate, which is included in a list of various regulations, is noteworthy because of the promise attached to it. The promise is found only one other place in Scripture, in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.<sup>78</sup>

The affectionate relation of parents to their young, which God had established even in the animal world, was also to be kept just as sacred. If anyone found a bird's nest by the road upon a tree, or upon the ground, with young ones or eggs, and the mother sitting upon them, he was not to take the mother with the young ones, but to let the mother fly, and only take the young...The commandment is related to the one in Lev. 22:28 and Ex. 23:19, and is placed upon a par with the commandment relating to parents, by the fact that obedience is urged upon the people by the same promise in both instances.<sup>79</sup>

God is profoundly concerned for his creation, human and animal alike. He is concerned enough to attach the same promise of blessing to those who imitate his concern for parents and wildlife.

Arguably the most extensive list of the ways in which God cares for creation is found in the words of Psalm 104. This hymn to the Creator not only extolls God for his creative power, but also for his continuing preservation of creation. Psalm 104 might be summarized as follows:

- i. God created the earth and all things in it, and he continues to sustain the earth and all things in it by the loving exercise of his sovereign power.
- ii. The earth and all things in it belong to God by virtue of his creative work, and all things find their reason for being fundamentally in relation to him.
- iii. The earth and all things in it were created perfectly – each creature in itself and the entire creation in its interrelatedness.
- iv. Even after the entrance of sin into the created order this perfection still shines through so as to be perceivable by man. Thus, creation continually bears witness to the perfections of God and promotes in man praise toward God.<sup>80</sup>

Lacking from the psalmist's hymn to God is any mention of gratitude that God would provide nature specifically for man's use and benefit. Throughout the psalm, the author praises God simply for creating and preserving nature. Bullmore sees significance here:

Nature certainly was made with man in mind but man's needs are an insufficient frame of reference entirely to explain creation. Only God can supply such a frame of reference. Our psalm [104], along with other passages (Job 38-41 in particular), speak to the fact that creation does not exist solely for the sake of man. In his speech to Job, God clearly implies that some creatures exist simply for his own delight.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Dt 5:16

<sup>79</sup> K-D 410

<sup>80</sup> Bullmore 143

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 145

There appears to be no reason why Bullmore cannot be right in this assessment. Throughout history men have wondered why God made some creatures that appear to be nothing more than pests and nuisances to mankind (i.e. gnats, mosquitos, locusts). And even though science continues to uncover the magnificence of God's created order, some things will always be hidden from human understanding. There seems to be no reason to think that God somehow loves mankind *more* than he loves nature. God does not have a limited supply of love; he is love. However, this does not mean that man is on the same level as the grass of the field or the fish in the sea. God has given mankind a special place in his creation, a place of responsibility and honor that should be preserved even in a world of sin.

Further evidence of God's concern for man and nature even after the Fall is found in the civil and ceremonial laws that governed daily life in Israel.<sup>82</sup> On this theme, Hareuveni, Nogah, and Helen Frenkley argue that the Feast of Booths<sup>83</sup> was of ecological importance for the people of Israel.

It is not enough to know that the Israelites were commanded to dwell in booths as a remembrance of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. It is of ecological importance to know that the booth is a very special structure and symbolizes also the relationship of man to his environment, specifically to the date palm, which always grows near water and bears its ripe dates in the desert even though other vegetation is very scarce. The date palm provides its fronds for shelter, but also its dates for a high energy food, its husks for camel fodder, its fibers for the weaving of baskets and rope... When Jews build SUKKOT today to carry out the Biblical command for the celebration of the Festival of Booths, they remember the booths in which their ancestors dwelt while, at the same time, they express symbolically one of the Bible's important ecological truths.<sup>84</sup>

While living in tents certainly would have reminded the Israelites of their relationship with nature, ecological awareness is not the point of this festival. God states his purpose clearly: "So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> N.B. These laws/ordinances are reviewed for descriptive not prescriptive purposes

<sup>83</sup> Lev. 23:39-43 - <sup>39</sup> "So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Lord for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. <sup>40</sup> On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days. <sup>41</sup> Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month.

<sup>42</sup> Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths <sup>43</sup> so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

<sup>84</sup> Hareuveni, Nogah, and Helen Frenkley. 1974. "Ecology in the Bible": 34

<sup>85</sup> Lev 23:43

Of decidedly greater interest for revealing God's ecological concern are the Sabbath Days and Sabbath Years that God ordained for his chosen people. God showed his concern for both man and nature one day out of every week. "There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD."<sup>86</sup> God knew that the toil and hardship his people would endure to bring forth a crop from the land would eventually take its toll on them physically and spiritually. The Sabbath Day was a day of physical rest and spiritual rejuvenation. Jesus affirms that God created the Sabbath out of concern for man: "Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."<sup>87</sup> As a result of man's abstaining from work, the domesticated oxen, mules etc. would be given a day of rest as well.

God's concern for the land in particular is more overt in the celebrations of the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee. For the land, the Sabbath year had a dual purpose: to allow the land the rest, and to permit the land to give glory to the LORD.

When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord.<sup>3</sup> For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops.<sup>4</sup> But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.<sup>5</sup> Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.<sup>88</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch note the significance of this year of rest for both the land and the people:

From this, Israel, as the nation of God, was to learn, on the one hand, that although the earth was created for man, it was not merely created for him to draw out its powers for his own use, but also to be holy to the Lord, and participate in His blessed rest; and on the other hand, that the great purpose for which the congregation of the Lord existed, did not consist in the uninterrupted tilling of the earth, connected with bitter labour in the sweat of his brow (Gen. 3:17,19), but in the peaceful enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, which the Lord their God had given them, and would give them still without the labour of their hands, if they strove to keep His covenant and satisfy themselves with His grace.<sup>89</sup>

David Crownfield sees further significance in the Sabbath concept. He argues that the Sabbath regulation proves that God never intended for man to exploit the fruits of the earth, but rather that both land and man needed time to revive and recuperate from constant work. "Sabbath is a concept of relaxing, of freeing, of recycling, of allowing the over-burdened earth and

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<sup>86</sup> Lev. 23:3

<sup>87</sup> Mark 2:27

<sup>88</sup> Lev. 25:2-5

<sup>89</sup> K-D Op Cit 457

overburdened people a time of grace to recover.”<sup>90</sup> This Sabbath concept was expanded in the Year of Jubilee. After seven Sabbaths of years, the land was to be given an entire year to recover. “The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines.”<sup>91</sup>

An example of this Sabbath concept is related in 2 Chronicles 36: “The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”<sup>92</sup> The situation of the people stands in stark contrast to that of the land during this period of time. The Israelites were in exile in Babylon. Their temple, homes, and cities had been destroyed. Nebuchadnezzar’s army had mercilessly killed the people of Israel. Young men, women, and the elderly—none were spared. Yet the Chronicler writes that “the land enjoyed its Sabbath rests.” The Concordia Study Bible offers an explanation for the author’s surprisingly positive tone:

The writer(s) of Samuel and Kings had sought to show why the exile occurred and had traced the sad history of Israel’s disobedience to the exile, the time in which the writer(s) of those books lived. With the state at an end, he could still show God’s faithfulness to his promises to David (2 Ki 25:27-30) by reporting the favor bestowed on his descendants. The Chronicler, whose vantage point was after the exile, was able to look back to the exile not only as judgment, but also as containing hope for the future. For him the purified remnant had returned to a purified land (vv. 22-33), and a new age was beginning. The exile was not judgment alone, but also blessing, for it allowed the land to catch up on its Sabbath rests (Lev. 26:40-45).<sup>93</sup>

Prof. Wendland notes the spiritual overtones of this Sabbath rest for the land:

In the meantime, God gave rest to his land, the land he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the land so dear to each believer’s heart as a foreshadowing of our heavenly home. God himself was purifying the land “all the time of its desolation,” making it ready for the return of his people by allowing it to enjoy its Sabbath rests (see Leviticus 26:34,35). He freed the land from man’s constant digging in its dirt and searching to amass its store of treasure that had taken precedence over thought for God. He gave it a rest from the trampling of man’s restless, sinful feet, which roamed here and there in a futile quest to find comfort in idols. Through his prophet God had predicted all this: “seventy years,” Jeremiah had said – the span of one person’s life (Jeremiah 25:11,12; 29:10). For 70 years the land would enjoy its rest until it was ready to serve as home once more to God’s people. God’s promise through Jeremiah did not fail.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Crownfield Op Cit 61

<sup>91</sup> Lev. 25:11

<sup>92</sup> 2 Chr 36:21

<sup>93</sup> Concordia Study Bible: 668

<sup>94</sup> Wendland, Paul O. 1994. *1 Chronicles*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House: 430

The mutual purification that occurred during the Babylonian exile is interesting to note. The sinful idol worship of the Israelites was a stain not only on the people but also on the land. The very soil of Israel was repulsed by the misuse of its precious metals for idol worship. The failure of the Israelite people to honor God's ceremonial decrees had exploited the land's resources. Man and nature both needed to be purified from the pollutant of sin, albeit in distinct ways; the people were reconciled to God by being taken from their homes, the land was reconciled to God through seventy years of rest.

Both man and nature need purification from the pollution of sin, and parity between the two extends even beyond this need: both man and nature have the same purpose for existence, and that is to praise God. Peter explains man's role in the fourth chapter of his first epistle, which is summarized in verse eleven: "So that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."<sup>95</sup> This theme is echoed by Paul in his letter to the Christians in Corinth: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."<sup>96</sup> The Psalms speak of nature's role in serving and praising God:

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, our Lord,  
    how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory  
    above the heavens.  
<sup>2</sup> From the lips of children and infants  
    you have ordained praise<sup>[b]</sup>  
because of your enemies,  
    to silence the foe and the avenger.  
<sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens,  
    the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
    which you have set in place,  
<sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him,  
    the son of man that you care for him?  
<sup>5</sup> You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings<sup>[c]</sup>  
    and crowned him with glory and honor.  
<sup>6</sup> You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
    you put everything under his feet:  
<sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds,  
    and the beasts of the field,

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<sup>95</sup> 1 Pet 4:11

<sup>96</sup> 1 Cor 10:31

<sup>8</sup> the birds of the air,  
and the fish of the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.  
<sup>9</sup> O Lord, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Nothing else exists which receives praise and honor from both the lips of infants and from the deepest expanses of the universe – and for the *same reason!* God as the Creator and Preserver of all things receives praise from the most majestic elements in nature and from the most humble of infants. Professor John Brug offers this insight:

The Lord our God is praised by huge galaxies and by tiny babies. The sun, the moon, and the stars testify to the majesty, power, and wisdom of God (Ps 19:1-5; Ro 1:20). Astronomers claim that there are one hundred billion galaxies and that each galaxy has more than one hundred billion stars. Each of these stars was hung in its place by the Creator who determined its number and calls it by name (Ps 147:4). Their testimony to God’s power is awesome... More precious than the testimony of countless galaxies are the simple prayers and songs of one little child.

Not a single author of all of the essays, books, and theses surveyed for this thesis noted that humanity and nature alike exist to serve and to praise God. None of the men and women who have dedicated their lives to studying and writing about biblical ecology saw fit to examine this greater purpose of both entities. The majesty, grace, and love of God that inspire believers are invisible to even “biblical” ecologists, because a God who would murder his own son is “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”<sup>97</sup> Apart from the Word and the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith, biblical ecology is just one of dozens of different philosophies for approaching human-nature-divine relations.

Christians look to Psalm 19 to understand the mysteries of nature.

<sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
<sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.  
<sup>3</sup> There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> Their voice<sup>[b]</sup> goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> 1 Cor 1:23

<sup>98</sup> Psalm 19:1-4

The mysteries and majesties of nature are truly a double-edged sword. For the Christian, they serve to expand and solidify one's faith in God the Creator. For the pagan, they either reduce man to the same status as grass, or they falsely elevate man to the role of God.

The beautiful, orderly universe which the Lord created and which he still maintains gives silent testimony to the power and wisdom of its Creator. The majesty and orderliness of the stars are a silent rebuke to all who deny the glory of their Creator. The pagan who worships the stars instead of their Creator, the astrologer who seeks wisdom from the stars instead of from their maker, and the atheistic evolutionist who worships the order of the cosmos instead of the divine Creator who established that order are all condemned and left without excuse by the silent testimony of the universe (Ro 1:18-24). By night and by day, from one end of the world to the other, the stately procession of the heavenly bodies declares the power and wisdom of their Creator. Everyone who has eyes should be able to read this testimony. Although this testimony of the stars is silent, it reaches every person. Even though the stars give no audible sound, their testimony is heard throughout the world ...<sup>99</sup>

Within this section's context of the fallen state of man and nature, the issue of the idolatrous worship of nature must be addressed. Much of modern ecological philosophy is grounded in the belief that apart from the evil machinations of mankind, nature is pure and worthy of devotion for its own sake. Far from being a revolutionary concept (as it seems to be in the minds of many ecologists), creation worship is as old as sin and was specifically addressed by the apostle Paul.

<sup>18</sup>The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup>since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.<sup>100</sup>

The fact that Paul addressed these words to first century Romans shows that they were cognizant of the relationship between mankind and nature. But their appraisal of this relationship was erroneous. They ignored the Creator and instead worshipped the creation. Because of this, Paul says "the wrath of God is being revealed."

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<sup>99</sup> Brug 259

<sup>100</sup> Romans 1:18-25

What is meant is that this wrath is revealed *in action*; for example, by means of the deluge (Gen. 6-8), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), the plagues upon Egypt (Exod. 6-12), and the bowls of wrath (Rev. 16). In each case Scripture shows that these manifestations of wrath have their origin in *heaven*. It is God, dwelling in heaven, who vents his wrath upon the perpetrators of “ungodliness and unrighteousness.”<sup>101</sup>

The root of creation’s struggle with sin is the fall of man, but the source of specific catastrophes and events is God. It was God who placed his curse upon creation, and Paul’s words reveal that it is God who orchestrates natural catastrophes. If there is a climate crisis; if hurricanes and tsunamis occur, these are calls to change. Not to change one’s behavior toward nature, but to repent before God. This call to repentance was misunderstood in Paul’s time and is misunderstood today.

By his whole work of creation, by countless beneficent providences, by ever-renewed retributions, and by man’s own mind, especially by his moral nature and his conscience, God made manifest and most clear what is known concerning him by the world of men. God made all this so clear in order that men should seek God, feel after him, and find him, Acts 17:27. But in their *αδικία* men go counter to this mass of truth regarding God, reject this right norm and principle for their hearts and lives and invent ungodly and wicked norms instead.<sup>102</sup>

Since time began, people have observed the mysteries and majesty of creation. This is how God designed it to be. These observations can teach man about God. This is natural theology. The natural law written on men’s hearts teaches them that they are sinful. The theology of nature can teach man that God is almighty. But neither can reveal that God created a solution to the sinful status of both man and nature. Natural theology is insufficient to save and cannot be an end in and of itself.

We see the things made, see them with our physical eyes, but they convey more to us than their own undeniable existence; having a mind, by mental perception and by means of the visible we fully see the invisible, God’s omnipotence and divineness. This is natural theology which is universal in scope. The Scriptures record its contents in many places, one of the most notable being Acts 17:24-29. What men do with this theology and how they render it ineffective Paul proceeds to state most fully.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Hendriksen 70

<sup>102</sup> Lenski, R.C.H. 1945. *Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*. Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press. 96

<sup>103</sup> Lenski 99

God endowed nature with a stated purpose and ability: “God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him...”<sup>104</sup> Nature’s purpose is to lead men to God. This is what makes the worship of nature so heinous. “By their worship they made the creature what it is not and abandoned the Creator as being what he is. This was the great double lie.”<sup>105</sup> Nature worshippers of all ages want to believe that freedom from the effects of sin can be achieved if “Mother Nature” is satisfied. This Mother Nature idol has been given different titles throughout the ages. In the Old Testament, it was called Baal. The Greeks and Romans of Paul’s day divided Mother Nature into many different gods, each of whom was thought to provide unique blessings for mankind. Today she is simply called Nature, the Environment, or Planet Earth. Richard Neuhaus notes how this earth worship infiltrates and replaces the worship of the true God then and now.

The “Return to Nature” theme has deep religious roots, as witness biblical and American history, and political consequences beyond measure, as witness the Third Reich. First, the religious roots. Bailey warned against the idolatry of the things of our hands, but the biblical warnings against idolatry are much more centered on the temptation to worship nature. The Baalim, the gods of ancient Israel’s neighbors, were nature gods. Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the Lord of history. He is the creator of nature, including man, but he is not coterminous with nature. Therefore he was a harder God to serve than were the Baalim. He was not predictably tied to cycles and seasons; he acted independently, sometimes he ‘repented,’ changed his mind, about past decisions. He would not be what the people projected on to him; he could not be domesticated as were the Baalim; he spoke back and he acted in judgment. The crisis of biblical man was posed by the challenge to historical existence. The neighbors of Israel were soothed by the belief that “all is one; man, nature, the gods.” Biblical man had to deal with contingency, paradox, or, as we might say today, historical dialectic. There was an “otherness,” an “over-againstness,” about God, the ultimate reality. The gods of their neighbors were gods of stasis. The servant of Yahweh was not part of an eternally recurring pattern but an agent of free will, responsible for his decision for or against the will of Yahweh. Contingency brings with it anxiety. As Yahweh called the people of Israel to venture forth into an unknown future they became more and more fearful, more and more eager to embrace the predictability of the Baalim. In the uncertainty of their wilderness wanderings they murmured against the Lord who had brought them out from the security of Egypt. Even if the security had been an oppressive bondage, at least they knew what to expect from it. But as for this Yahweh and his middleman Moses, who knows what they will think up next? Even when the people were finally in Canaan, Yahweh did not give up his troublesome ways. Judges and prophets disturbed the peace with insistent demands for justice, with inconvenient dreams of the politics of a new order that would be worthy of

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<sup>104</sup> Acts 17:27

<sup>105</sup> Lenski 109

the name of Yahweh. Again the gods of Canaan's neighbors began to infiltrate themselves into the piety of Israel. The very rich, the friends of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, were especially eager to promote the worship of Baalim among the masses. The prophet Elijah was officially persecuted, as were others who recalled Israel to historical faithfulness to Yahweh. The more confused and disjointed the times became, the more the people yearned for the stability of the Baalim. The Baalim were the gods of law and order. Yahweh was the God of justice. As one theologian remarks, "The gods of nature had their appeal both as an escape from the rigors of historical existence and as a refuge, for poor and wealthy alike (although for different reasons), in a time of socio-religious fragmentation."<sup>106</sup>

Simply put, worship and self-dedication to nature are more attractive than worship and dedication to God because nature worship requires only a change of outward behavior – the heart remains untouched. Change of behavior is exactly what the *opino legis* desires. Change of behavior is exactly what the eco-alarmists want to see.

The danger that earth worship poses to Christians is terrifying because it can appear so innocent and subtle. It starts with green recycling bins and hybrid cars. Earth days and carbon credits mask the self-sacrifice and total dedication required to serve Mother Earth. But perhaps the greatest danger lies in earth worship's ability to knit biblical terminology and ethics into its theology. Al Gore acts as the pope of this quasi religion.<sup>107</sup> His ability to weave Christian themes into ecological rhetoric is as masterful as it is dangerous. Gore recently compared watching images of extreme weather on the evening news to "taking a nature walk through Revelations each night."<sup>108</sup> Another famous figure, Michael Crichton, observes how easily eco-idolatry and Christianity can be melded:

There's an initial Eden, a paradise, a state of grace and unity with nature, there's a fall from grace into a state of pollution as a result of eating from the tree of knowledge, and as a result of our actions there is a judgment day coming for us all. We are all energy sinners, doomed to die, unless we seek salvation, which is now called sustainability. Sustainability is salvation in the church of the environment. Just as organic food is its

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<sup>106</sup> Neuhaus Op Cit 148

<sup>107</sup> Environmentalism lines up readily with both of those accounts of religion. As climate change literally transforms the heavens above us, faith-based environmentalism increasingly sports saints, sins, prophets, predictions, heretics, demons, sacraments, and rituals. Chief among its holy men is Al Gore — who, according to his supporters, was crucified in the 2000 election, then rose from the political dead and ascended to heaven twice — not only as a Nobel deity, but an Academy Awards angel. He speaks of "Creation care" and cites the Bible in hopes of appealing to evangelicals. (Garreau 67)

<sup>108</sup> <http://blog.nwf.org/2012/08/facing-the-reality-of-climate-change-my-day-with-al-gore/>

communion, that pesticide-free wafer that the right people with the right beliefs, imbibe.  
<sup>109</sup>

Even as environmentalism takes on a distinctly religious mode of operation, it claims to remain above religion, to be “all about the science.” Whereas religion creates dissension and divides people, environmentalism claims to be the great unifier and peacemaker. Environmentalism is a philosophy in which all can participate and upon which all can agree. Joel Garreau comments on this uniting element of environmentalism:

And the ethics of environmentalism are fundamentally sound. Scientists and economists can agree with Buddhist monks and Christian activists that ruthless destruction of natural habitats is evil and careful preservation of birds and butterflies is good. The worldwide community of environmentalists — most of whom are not scientists — holds the moral high ground, and is guiding human societies toward a hopeful future. Environmentalism, as a religion of hope and respect for nature, is here to stay. This is a religion that we can all share, whether or not we believe that global warming is harmful.<sup>110</sup>

The danger is not simply that on the surface, environmentalism appears to be beneficial for all – because there are in fact many places where Christians do agree with environmentalists. The danger is that environmentalism determines to repeal and replace Christianity and God as the way to salvation. Environmentalism teaches that the way to salvation is to be found in obeying a set of rules and ordinances that will preserve the health of the earth. Preservation for the earth, therefore, means salvation for mankind. In this way, modern environmentalism is no different than the Baal worship of the Old Testament and the Pharisaism of the NT – the depravity of the heart can be ignored as long as outward works are present. In this way, environmentalism is no different from any other false religion that has ever existed.

There are certain characteristics of heathen or false religions which are essentially alike all over the world, though they appear in a thousand different forms...righteousness and pride...The good citizen who lives an outwardly respectable life may appear to be poles apart from the cannibal or head-hunter. But both follow the same principle; for the cannibal, when he eats his enemy, regards it as a good work by which he gains for himself the strength and virtue he needs for this life and the next, even as the Pharisee does his good works to earn eternal life.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Garreau, Joel. 2010. “Environmentalism and Religion.” *Redalyc.uaemex.mx*: 61–75.  
<http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/1694/169420685011.pdf>. 61

<sup>110</sup> Ibid 66

<sup>111</sup> Lange, Lyle W, and G. Jerome Albrecht. 1991. *Our Great Heritage*. Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House. The Religions of the Heathen World. 264

Up to this point, environmentalism has been compared to various work-righteous religions of the past. But one element that must be present to make a religion as opposed to a secular philosophy or world-view is the element of faith. Baal worshipers had faith that their worship would compel their god to cause rain to fall and fields to flourish, and Pharisees believed that their works would earn them eternal life. True earth worshippers must have faith as well. They must believe that they can preserve the earth or even bring it to a Utopian state by their actions. Henry Lamb, a pronounced global warming skeptic, demonstrates how Al Gore's version of environmentalism demands faith:

Al Gore has reduced the science of global climate change to a religion constructed on the theology of global warming. There is no way to prove, positively, that acceptance of and commitment to Al Gore's theology of global warming will insure the utopian ecological future he envisions. It is simply "faith" that compels people to accept Gore's claims and commit to the laundry list of behavioral guidelines he prescribes – unless, of course, Al Gore's behavioral guidelines are translated into law.<sup>112</sup>

Even here – even in the misuse of nature as an object of worship – man is bound up with nature. Idol worship saves neither the worshipper nor the idol – both remain where they began – covered in sin and destined for damnation. And yet there is a distinction. Just as nature had no active role in the Fall, it was simply dragged down by man's sin; so even in the idol worship of environmentalism, nature has no active role – it is elevated to the role of god apart from any activity on its part.

## **Redemption**

In the Fall, man and nature were bound together under the tyranny of sin. Both were subjugated to the rule of sin and destined to an ongoing existence of pain and decay and a gloomy future of death and destruction. But one event in God's plan of salvation changed everything. When God sent his only Son into the world to take on the flesh of man, walk the dust of this earth, and pay the price of sin, he acted for the salvation of man and for nature as well. Both man and nature were corrupted by sin, and Christ came to this earth to remove not only the

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<sup>112</sup> Anon. "Henry Lamb Columns in 2006." <http://sovereignty.net/Library/Text/2006.pdf>. 45

effects of sin, but sin itself. To the same Romans who were surrounded by creation worship, Paul wrote these words, linking mankind and nature in the redemption of Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> The creation (τῆς κτίσεως) waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation (ἡ κτίσις) was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that<sup>[1]</sup> the creation (ἡ κτίσις) itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation (ἡ κτίσις) has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. <sup>113</sup>

One exegetical question must be asked and answered before this passage can be properly interpreted: To what does τῆς κτίσεως refer in these verses? Κτίσις is used nineteen times in the New Testament. It can refer to both the moment and duration of time God spent forming creation (Mk 10:6; Ro 1:20; Mk 13:19; 2 Pe 3:4); it can be a comprehensive term for everything God created (Mk 16:15; Ro 8:39; Co 1:15; Co 1:23; Heb 4:13; Heb 9:11; Rev 3:14); it is used to denote authority over creation (1 Pet 2:13); and it can refer to the new man created by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). The context offers several helpful clues for interpretation. Κτίσις is distinguished from “the sons of God” here – so believers should not be included. Angels were never subjected to frustration, and the devil and his angels have no hope of redemption. Those who persist in unbelief have no hope for redemption either. That leaves the things of nature: inanimate and animate creation.

Of further interest in these verses is how Paul personifies ἡ κτίσις. ἡ κτίσις: “waits in eager expectation,” “was subjected to frustration,” “will be liberated,” and “has been groaning.” This personification of nature, which is seen elsewhere in Scripture (e.g. Ps 96:12; Ps 98:8; Isa 35:1; Is 55:12), links nature and mankind on a much deeper level than simply as things created by God. Both suffer the frustration of sin, both groan as in childbirth, and most importantly, both yearn for that day when they will be “liberated from...bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” The New Testament commentator, William Hendriksen, considers this connection between man and creation in redemption:

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<sup>113</sup> Romans 8:18-25

So, since creation's humiliation was not its fault, as the passage specifically states, it will certainly participate in man's restoration. Nature's destiny is intimately linked up with that of "the sons of God." That is why the whole creation is represented as craning its neck to behold the revelation of the sons of God."<sup>114</sup>

R.C.H. Lenski adds,

The tremendous thought being unfolded here is that all God's inferior creation was from the start bound up with man, was not independent but wholly dependent. And now, since the fall, the creature world, in its ultimate destiny, is bound up, not with the ungodly who shall perish in hell, but with the godly and with their coming revelation of glory in heaven.<sup>115</sup>

Christians may here find common ground with environmentalists: salvation is the goal of both groups. The espoused means to salvation, however, are vastly different. Environmentalists find salvation in the purification of the earth. Christians, however, build on the foundation of natural knowledge provided by the heart and by nature and extend that knowledge to the plan of salvation God has laid out in Scripture. Pastor David Russow spelled out this connection in his essay to the Colorado Conference:

Delivery is from the Deliverer. "The best foundation for saving the creation is by worshipping and obeying the Creator revealed in Jesus Christ." Even better stated, "The environmental problems with which we are faced are not because man had abandoned the creation, but because man has abandoned the Creator. The solution to these problems does not lie with man serving the creation but rather serving the Creator." "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him," Hebrews 11:6.<sup>116</sup>

The effects of sin are apparent in man and nature alike. Both are in desperate need of a Savior. It is the height of ignorance and arrogance for man to make himself the savior of nature when he is helpless to even save himself. Man can but stand with nature and look to the cross of Christ for salvation, for it is in Christ's sacrifice on the cross that the only true utopia, the only true peace can be found. Luther picked up on creation's longing for salvation in a sermon on these verses from Romans:

This is a fine and comforting thought of the apostle's, that all creatures are martyrs, having to endure unwillingly every sort of injustice. The creatures do not approve the conduct of the devil and of the wicked in their shameful abuse of creation, but they

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<sup>114</sup> Hendriksen Op Cit 268

<sup>115</sup> Lenski Op Cit 533

<sup>116</sup> Russow, David P. "RussowEcology.pdf (application/pdf Object)."  
<http://www.wlssays.net/files/RussowEcology.pdf>. 13

submit to it for the sake of him who has subjected them to vanity, at the same time hoping for a better dispensation in the fulfillment of time, when they shall again be rightly received and abuse be past. Hence Paul points to another life for all creation, declaring it to be as weary of this order as we are and to await a new dispensation. By his reference to the earnest expectation of the creature he means that it does not expect to remain in its present condition, but with us looks toward heaven and hopes for a resurrection from this degraded life into a better one where it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption, as he says later.<sup>117</sup>

Francis Shaefter connects the final redemption of Christ to God's redemption of Israel from Egypt in the Passover:

What Paul says here is that when our bodies – bodies of men – are raised from the dead, at that time nature, too, will be redeemed. The blood of the Lamb will redeem man and nature together, as it did in Egypt at the time of the Passover, when the blood applied to the doorposts saved not only the sons of the Hebrews but also their animals.<sup>118</sup>

Here again Christians and environmentalists can agree: there is hope for this earth. The hopes of both man and nature are bound up in the cross of Christ. Vivid evidence of this connection is offered in the Gospels. When Jesus announced the completion of his sacrifice for sin, nature issued a chorus of recognition. “The earth shook and the rocks split” (Mt 27:51) and “the sun stopped shining” (Lk 23:45) when its Savior died.

In Ephesians 1:7-10, Paul gives further evidence that nature and man are linked in Christ's cross:

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace<sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. <sup>9</sup> And he<sup>d</sup> made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things (τὰ πάντα) in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

What exactly are τὰ πάντα that are brought together under Christ? According to Prof. Habeck, the answer is all-inclusive:

So according to God's revealed plan everything is to be summed up under the Christ. He specifies things in heaven and things on earth. There are those who suppose Paul is here referring to the church, to the unity of the church militant with the church triumphant,

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<sup>117</sup> Luther, Martin. “SERMONS OF MARTIN LUTHER - FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.” [http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/129luther\\_h8.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/luther/129luther_h8.htm). (11.25.12)

<sup>118</sup> Schaeffer, FA, and UW Middellmann. 1992. *Pollution and the Death of Man*. Crossway Books. <http://www.amazon.com/dp/0891076867>. 65

under Christ as head. This is indeed part of the picture, but not the whole picture. *The all* is broader. We may include animate and inanimate creation under it. In Romans 8:19-22 we are told that all creation is waiting for the time when God's plan will be fully carried out. Furthermore all human beings stand in some relation to the Christ, either for or against. There is no neutral ground. According to his plan God will manage the course of history in such a way that the Christ will ever remain the focal point of history.<sup>119</sup>

The sun shines, the earth rotates, the grass grows, man goes about his labors, and the birds chirp – with purpose: it is God's will that they do so. And more than that, the future of all created things is in Christ. As Prof. Koehler puts it “All of this too finds its destiny in the death of our Redeemer on the cross.”<sup>120</sup> The destinies of man and nature are bound together in the cross of Christ. Apart from Christ, neither man nor nature has any purpose. Apart from Christ, there is no reason for a person to care about the people or nature around him, because it was God who initially gave creation value and Christ who paid the ransom to redeem creation. Thus only Christians can truly be God-pleasing environmentalists: they are people who value nature for the sole reason that God gives it value, people who treat nature with care because God cares for it, people who see earth's destiny and their own as bound up in Christ and his sacrifice for sin.

Paul makes perhaps his strongest argument that man and the rest of creation are bound together in Christ's redemption in Colossians 1:15-20.

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (κτίσεως). <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things (πάντων), and in him all (πάντα) things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάξαι) himself all things (πάντα), whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace (ειρηνοποίησας) through his blood, shed on the cross.

The Fall corrupted the perfection and disrupted the harmony that God had created. The effects were threefold: First, man could no longer be in God's presence. (Ge 3:23; Ps 51:3-4) Second, people no longer lived in harmony with one another. (Ge 4; 9) Third, nature was cursed by God

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<sup>119</sup> Habeck, Irwin J. 1985. *Ephesians: Amazing Grace*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. 23

<sup>120</sup> Koehler, John Ph. 2000. *Paul's Rhapsody in Christ: A Commentary on Ephesians*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. 221

to rebel against man's attempts to subdue it. (Ge 3:17)<sup>121</sup> The universal *shalom* that God had created was gone. Christ came to repair and restore the lost *shalom*. Paul's argument can be boiled down to several key terms and phrases.

- 1) Κτίσεως – Christ is the head of every created thing.<sup>122</sup>
- 2) Πάντα (16 a, b, 17b, 20) – Christ is the Creator of everything and everything is for him. “In the absolute sense of the whole creation *all things, the universe*.”<sup>123</sup> Nothing which had been created was excluded from Christ's work of reconciliation.
- 3) ἀποκαταλλάξαιτο – *reconcile* “The universe is to form a unity, which has its goal in Christ.”<sup>124</sup> “To reestablish proper friendly interpersonal relations after these have been disrupted or broken.”<sup>125</sup>
- 4) εἰρηνοποιήσας – “*make peace*”<sup>126</sup> “to cause a state of peace or reconciliation between persons—‘to make peace, to make things right.’ εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ αὐτοῦ ‘(God) made things right between himself and people through (his Son's) death on the cross’ Col 1:20. εἰρηνοποιέω is closely related in meaning to the series in 40.1 in that the making of peace or reestablishing peace between persons is a distinctive feature of reconciliation, but the focus in εἰρηνοποιέω seems to be upon the resulting state rather than upon the process.”<sup>127</sup>
- 5) εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς – *whether the things on earth or the things in heaven*. Paul emphatically and repeatedly speaks of the inclusiveness of the reconciliation that Christ came to bring.

On the cross, Christ restored *shalom* between God and people, between peoples, and between people and nature. Paul did not neglect any created thing when he spoke of the peace that Christ came to win. William Hendriksen comments on the restored relationships:

The real meaning of Col. 1:20 is probably as follows: Sin ruined the universe. It destroyed the harmony between one creature and the other, also between all creatures and their God. Through *the blood of the cross* (cf. Eph. 2:11-18), however, sin, in principle, has been conquered. The demand of the law has been satisfied, its curse born (Rom. 3:25; Gal. 3:13). Harmony, accordingly, has been restored. Peace was made. *Through Christ*

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<sup>121</sup> First of all, my division from God is healed by justification, but then there must be the “existential reality” of this, moment by moment; second, there is the psychological division of man from himself; third, the sociological divisions of man from himself; and last, the division of man from nature, and nature from nature. In all of these areas we should expect to see substantial healing. (Schaeffer 68)

<sup>122</sup> BAG 455d

<sup>123</sup> BAG 633b

<sup>124</sup> BAG 92c

<sup>125</sup> L-N 40.1

<sup>126</sup> BAG 228a

<sup>127</sup> L-N 40.4

*and his cross the universe is brought back or restored to its proper relationship to God in the sense that as a just reward for his obedience Christ was exalted to the Father's right hand, from which position of authority and power he rules the entire universe in the interest of the church and to the glory of God.*<sup>128</sup>

By his life, death, and resurrection, Christ restored humanity and the rest of creation to peace with God. But just as the justified believer must daily continue to struggle with a sinful nature,<sup>129</sup> so the curse that God placed on the rest of creation will linger until the end of time. Humans have no power to restore creation to its former pristine form; it will continue to yearn to be free from the curse of sin. This was Paul's point in Romans 8, and it bears repeating: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Perfect sanctification remains out of the grasp of humans for now, and this earth cannot be restored to perfection no matter the human effort put into attaining that goal. This does not mean, however, that we cannot work toward that goal during the time of grace given us. Francis Bacon notes how man and nature are bound up in the new life offered by Christ: "Man by the fall fell at the same time from his state of innocency and from his dominion over nature. Both of these losses, however, even in this life, can in some part be repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences."<sup>130</sup> While Bacon's concept of justification could be more strongly focused on Christ, he understands that perfection is out of the question on this earth.

Steve Bishop perhaps describes this renewal of the earth:

The cross dethrones the powers. The powers that lie behind the orders, structures and institutions of society, which were originally created by and for Jesus (Col. 1:16), were in some way corrupted through sin and became demonized. Now, however, through the cross he stripped them, exposed them to ridicule and led them out as a conquered enemy in a victory parade (Col. 2:15). They now have the potential to be transformed to the order they were intended to have. These powers which contribute to the pollution and rape of the earth no longer have to do so because the cross has dethroned them. The work that Jesus began in redemption on the cross, he will finish at his parousia. The earth is involved in redemption, and it too will be involved in the consummation. The earth is never seen as a machine or as raw material, but as the scene of God's redemptive action,

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<sup>128</sup> Hendriksen, William. 2007. *NTC: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic. 82

<sup>129</sup> As Paul says in Romans 7:18-20: <sup>18</sup> I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. <sup>19</sup> For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

<sup>130</sup> Schaeffer 68

and as such it will be renewed at the parousia: redemption includes a transformation of the earth.<sup>131</sup>

The central focus of all Scripture is Christ and his redemptive work for the salvation of all people. These examples from Paul's letters show that the rest of creation is not excluded from the redemption picture. However, while we wait for Christ to return and usher in the glory of heaven, man and creation are bound up in a struggle against the curse of sin. This leads into our fourth and final part of God's plan of salvation: the Last Day. Scripture is explicit about what the Last Day holds for believing and unbelieving people,<sup>132</sup> but what does the Jesus' Second Coming mean for creation? What has God planned for creation in the future?

## **Last Day**

The majority of lectures, papers, and books on the subject of ecology deal with the future.<sup>133</sup> Environmentalists warn that the earth will become uninhabitable unless humans refrain from exhausting its natural resources. This cry has popularized the environmental movement; it has motivated countries throughout the world to turn away from fossil fuels to "green" energies. Fear and dread are powerful human emotions. Therefore the rising crescendo of environmental panic has swept across the globe like few messages, religions, or philosophies ever have.

But we are interested in what God has to say about the end of this earth. The cry of the alarmists should be tempered and evaluated in the light of God's Word. To summarize their message: *We (humans) have the power to control the future of earth; humans have the power to either destroy or save the planet.* While there is no telling what might happen if an all-out nuclear war were to become a reality, we do have words of promise and insight from the one

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<sup>131</sup> Bishop Op Cit 11

<sup>132</sup> Mt 25:31-34; 41 - <sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

<sup>133</sup> To list just a few journal articles that were surveyed for this project that fall into this category: David J. Hawkin: *The Critique of Ideology in the Book of Revelation and its Implication for Ecology*. Douglas J. Moo: *Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment*. Bron Taylor: *A Green Future for Religion?* Alan Drengrson and Bill Devall: *The Deep Ecology Movement: Origins, Development & Future Prospects*. Bron Taylor: *From the Ground Up: Dark Green Religion and the Environmental Future*. Thomas O'Loughlin: *Ecotheology and Eschatology*.

who has shown his ability to destroy all life on earth. These are God’s words of promise to Noah and all of creation immediately after the Flood:

<sup>21</sup> The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though<sup>[a]</sup> every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

<sup>22</sup> “As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night  
will never cease.”

Scripture supplies a response to the dread predictions of global warming and nuclear winter alarmists. God’s clear words promise that until he decides it is time for the earth to pass away, the seasons, the temperatures, even the cycle of night and day will endure. It does not lie within man’s scope of authority to decide the future of creation – that is up to God. Thomas Nass, professor at Martin Luther College, gives further commentary on these verses of Genesis:

Doomsday prophets have predicted that the earth may turn into an eternal summer or an eternal winter, but we know that, by God’s grace, this won’t happen. Currently, global warming is a major concern of many. What can be said? Certainly, if we are doing things that are detrimental to the world God gave us, we Christians should be concerned. We want to practice good stewardship of the world entrusted to us. But we know, because God promised it, that there will always be “cold and heat, summer and winter.”<sup>134</sup>

Humans don’t have sovereign control over the future of this planet any more than they can fully control what happens in their daily lives.

God has revealed in Scripture that the heavens and earth as they presently exist will come to an end. Of the Bible passages that furnish a general picture of the Last Day, Isaiah 24 perhaps describes this end most vividly and comprehensively. Isaiah 24 teaches four key things about God’s final judgment of man and creation:

1) The scope of God’s judgment will be equal for people of all walks of life:

See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth  
and devastate it;  
he will ruin its face  
and scatter its inhabitants—  
<sup>2</sup> it will be the same  
for priest as for people,

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<sup>134</sup> Nass, Thomas P. 2011. *End Times: Jesus Is Coming Soon*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House. 81

for master as for servant,  
for mistress as for maid,  
for seller as for buyer,  
for borrower as for lender,  
for debtor as for creditor.

2) The earth and its unbelieving inhabitants will be destroyed. Only a remnant of believers will remain:

<sup>5</sup> The earth<sup>135</sup> is defiled by its people;  
they have disobeyed the laws,<sup>136</sup>  
violated the statutes  
and broken the everlasting covenant.<sup>137</sup>  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore a curse<sup>138</sup> consumes the earth;  
its people must bear their guilt.  
Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up,  
and very few are left.

3) The troubles that the earth presently exhibits can be seen as shadows of its final destruction:

The floodgates of the heavens are opened;  
the foundations of the earth shake.  
<sup>19</sup> The earth is broken up,  
the earth is split asunder,  
the earth is thoroughly shaken.<sup>139</sup>  
<sup>20</sup> The earth reels like a drunkard,  
it sways like a hut in the wind;  
so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion  
that it falls—never to rise again.

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<sup>135</sup> *Casus pendens* – “what receives the emphasis here is *the earth*, and what is of supreme importance is that the earth has become profane. (Young, Edward J. 1969. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah*. Vol. II. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 156)

<sup>136</sup> Revealed and Natural Law (Ibid 156)

<sup>137</sup> Possibly but unlikely referring to the Noahic covenant of Ge 9:11. More likely “God has given His Law and ordinances to Adam, and in Adam to all mankind. These ordinances involve a positive glorying in God in all one’s ways.” (Ibid 158)

<sup>138</sup> “It is a curse that comes from God, for it is the consequence of the transgression of His laws. It is not, however, limited to the Israelites, but, inasmuch as the inhabitants of the entire earth have transgressed, affects the whole world. It is the same curse that lies over fallen mankind in the picture given by the Apostle (Ro 1:18-3:20).” (Ibid 159)

<sup>139</sup> “In the description there appears to be an ascending gradation of thought. The first verb implies a breaking or shattering, as though pieces of the earth were broken off; it is probably onomatopoeic. The word is suitable for describing an earthquake or some great convulsion that breaks the earth in pieces. The second verb is probably stronger, and suggests that the earth is actually divided by being split through; while the last verb denotes a violent or great shaking of the earth. Quite possibly the imagery or figure of the earthquake lies at the basis of the portrayal, but Isaiah’s purpose is not to describe an earthquake; rather he is pointing to a tremendous shaking of the earth that will come when the punitive judgment of God strikes.” (Ibid 176)

4) This *will* happen and God will reign with believers in the end.

<sup>3</sup> The earth will be completely laid waste  
and totally plundered.

The Lord has spoken this word.

<sup>23</sup> The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed<sup>140</sup>;  
for the Lord Almighty will reign  
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem,  
and before its elders, gloriously.

Isaiah made the point above that the inhabitants of this earth would be burned up, an apparent reference to the unbelievers God will condemn to the fires of hell.<sup>141</sup> 2 Peter 3 also mentions that fire is in store for man and creation. “By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare...That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.”<sup>142</sup> As Peter pointed out in the verses preceding those above (3:5-7), God destroyed both the godless people and cursed creation of the first world with a deluge of water. It is fitting that God has reserved similar destruction for both at the end of this present world.

### **Annihilation or Renewal**

To what extent God will destroy this present creation by fire? Does annihilation or renewal lay in the future for the remnants of this heaven and earth? Scripture does not specifically answer this question, and Lutheran theologians are not in agreement as to how to further define the passing away of this creation. In his *Christian Dogmatics*, Francis Pieper lays out the Old Lutheran theologians who stand on both sides of the discussion:

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<sup>140</sup> The sun and moon will be abashed or ashamed because “the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” (Rev 21:23)

<sup>141</sup> Mt 5:21-22 <sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder,<sup>[a]</sup> and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother<sup>[b]</sup> will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,<sup>[c]</sup>’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

<sup>142</sup> 2 Pe 3:7;10;12

Luther<sup>143</sup>, Brenz, Althammer, Ph. Nicolai, and others teach a transformation, principally on the basis of Rom. 8:21: “The creation itself also shall be freed from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” Most of the earlier Lutheran theologians join Gerhard, Quenstedt, and Calov in assuming that the world will perish *quoad substantiam*.<sup>144</sup>

This continues to be considered an open question because there appear to be valid Scriptural arguments on both sides. The annihilationist might reference the following passages: “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (Lk 21:33); “They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment” (Heb 1:11); “We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth” (1 Pe 3:13); “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea” (Rev 21:1).

“Others hold that the ‘fashion’ of this present world will certainly be destroyed by fire, but its fundamental substance will not be destroyed...”<sup>145</sup> Those who hold to a view of renewal would cite the following passages: “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things” (Mt 19:28); “He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets” (Ac 3:21); “in the hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Ro 8:21); “For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Co 7:31). Edward Koehler aptly summarizes an appropriate approach to this discussion: “That the world will be destroyed by fire is clearly taught in the Bible; but we may not charge a person with heresy who holds that this destruction will be either an annihilation or renovation.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> “Luther: “It is quite comforting to hear Paul draw in the whole creation and make of it a person one with us in the desire to leave this life for another. He wants us to become sure that our present life is not yet our destiny, but that we are to expect another life, which is to be our true life. Just as the sun is waiting for a new attire to be given it, and the earth and all other creatures; a cleansing from the misuse by the devil and the world. This, he says, will come to pass when the children of God are made manifest. Even now, here on earth, they are truly God’s children, but they are not yet in their glory. Just as the sun is not yet in its true glory because it is subject to vanity; but it is awaiting the end appointed, when its servitude shall have an end. For this it is waiting together with all creatures and all saints, with much sighing. Meanwhile it remains subject to vanity, that is, to the devil and the wicked world, solely because God has subjected it; however, in hope that this is not to continue forever.” (St. L. XII:729: Erl., 2d ed. 9, pp. 117, 108f.)” Pieper, Francis. 1953. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol. III. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House. 543

<sup>144</sup> Ibid 543

<sup>145</sup> Koehler, Edward W. A. 1971. *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*. Ed. Alfred W. Koehler. 2nd Revise. Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House. 310

<sup>146</sup> Op. Cit. 311

## Paradise Restored

Whatever form the new heavens and new earth take, believers can be assured of one thing: they will be perfect and free from any kind of ecological crisis. Isaiah describes this return to *shalom* in the animal kingdom:

<sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will yield them. <sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. <sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>147</sup>

Isaiah's description asserts that the harmony between man, nature, and the rest of creation will be restored to its pre-Fall state. Just as Adam had perfect harmony with God, with Eve, and with the rest of creation, so God will restore *shalom* in heaven between himself, believers, and the created world. In heaven, Isaiah's prophecy will reach its ultimate fulfillment.

This *shalom* will reach even beyond the kingdom of creatures. John writes of his vision of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 22:1-5:

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

There will be no curse of sin in heaven. There will be no disease, pestilence, drought, pollution, catastrophic natural events, dangerous extreme weather, or any other harmful effect of sin.

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<sup>147</sup> Is 11:6-9

## Conclusion

The devil is a prowling lion, searching for souls to devour.<sup>148</sup> He effectively draws large numbers of souls into his traps when his temptations to turn from God and his Word are systematized and transformed into a universal “-ism.” Unfortunately, it appears that one of the oldest heresies in Satan’s playbook is once more coming to the forefront. Earth worship was a plague for the Israelites in the Old Testament and for the Greeks in the early Christian church. Today it has surfaced as a secular religion under the title of Environmentalism. Like other effective heresies, it does not appear overtly evil. Caring for God’s creation is something that God’s children *want* to do. It is a part of a Christian’s stewardship of the gifts God has placed into his care. But when environmentalism becomes the consuming philosophy in a person’s life; when it reconstructs God’s Word and God’s Church to serve its own purposes, it becomes a dangerous temptation to believers and unbelievers alike.

The goal of this paper was not to prove or disprove global warming, or to determine whether humans are in fact destroying the planet. The goal of this paper was to demonstrate that the Bible teaches that the existence of mankind and the rest of nature are inextricably bound. In defending this thesis, this paper also demonstrates that God’s Word does not need to be altered or abrogated in order to establish a set of environmental ethics. Everything mankind needs to know about interacting with creation can be found in the pages of Scripture. And more than that, once we realize that our destinies are so closely tied to both God and the creation around us, we Christians will have all the more reason to care for creation – not as a means of earning God’s favor and meriting heaven, but as a means of thanking and praising the God who has given us everything we need for this life and a Redeemer who will carry us into the next. Finally, whatever happens to this planet as a result of mankind’s action or inaction, we know that God is our immutable, all-powerful, loving Lord and Savior. Isaiah puts it best:

Though the mountains be shaken  
And the hills removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken  
Nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.  
- Isaiah 54:10

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<sup>148</sup> 1 Pe 5:8

## Appendix A

A sampling of authors who disregard Scripture or promote a radical reinterpretation of Scripture for use in ecology.

- 1) Christian environmental ethics, and that the regrettably anthropocentric and anti-ecological ideas that have fuelled or colluded with exploitation of the environment stem from a history of skewed interpretation, rather than from the texts themselves. Just as feminist writers have drawn attention to the androcentrism of commentators and translators, and have sought to recover the texts from such misreading, so ecotheological writers have begun to identify the extent to which anthropocentric presumptions have affected the interpretation of the Bible, and begun attempts to recover the texts' ecological potential.

Some examples of this kind of approach may be found in the five-volume Earth Bible series. Fundamental to the studies produced by the Earth Bible team is a set of six ecojustice principles:

- i. 1. The principle of intrinsic worth: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.
  - ii. 2. The principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.
  - iii. 3. The principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
  - iv. 4. The principle of purpose: The universe, Earth and all its components, are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.
  - v. 5. The principle of mutual custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse Earth community.
  - vi. 6. The principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice. In the Earth Bible project, then, we see first and foremost a clear commitment to ecojustice principles, worked out, we are told, 'in dialogue with ecologists' but deliberately not formulated using biblical or theological terms, so as 'to facilitate dialogue with biologists, ecologists, other religious traditions . . . and scientists'.<sup>39</sup> The biblical texts are then read in the light of these principles, and found to warrant positive recovery or negative resistance according to whether and how they cohere with these principles. In ecological hermeneutics, as in other critical perspectives, such as feminist and liberationist interpretation, this stance of ethical resistance – a stance which exposes the problems and dangers of certain biblical texts – is well established in scholarly circles. Less evident in academic scholarship, but worthy of attention for its popular impact, is a different kind of resistance to which we turn next.<sup>149</sup>
- 2) While many of the world's mythologies provide stories of creation, Greco-Roman mythology was singularly incoherent in this respect. Like Aristotle, the intellectuals of the ancient West denied that the visible world had a beginning. Indeed, the idea of a beginning was impossible in the framework of their cyclical notion of time. In sharp contrast, Christianity inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation. By

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<sup>149</sup> Horrell 226

gradual stages a loving and all- powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes. And, although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God's image. Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. As early as the 2nd century both Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons were insisting that when God shaped Adam he was foreshadowing the image of the incarnate Christ, the Second Adam. Man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature. Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except, perhaps, Zoroastrianism), 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.<sup>150</sup>

- 3) We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful master over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology—hitherto quite separate activities--joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.<sup>151</sup>
- 4) The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant. No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. Hence 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.<sup>152</sup>
- 5) There is another practical issue (with political consequences) to be faced when we consider the role of Scripture in developing an environmental ethic. Many Evangelicals, who are heavily immersed in biblical theology and biblical motifs, are now exploring environmental issues (especially global warming). I remember vividly a meeting several months ago with Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals where he told of an emerging ecological consciousness among Evangelicals. This consciousness is deeply rooted in biblical ethics. Evangelicals are needed allies in a wider religious movement of environmental consciousness and environmental ethics. For that pragmatic reason, I would feel more comfortable with a stronger emphasis on 'the Bible alone is inadequate'.<sup>153</sup>
- 6) The Bible is not self-explanatory. There is no direct translation from biblical texts to specific moral issues. We should always remember the context in which it was produced and how dramatically it differed from our contemporary world and experiences. We also need to understand and consider the multiple forces and conditions that shaped the text. In addition, the

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<sup>150</sup> White 4

<sup>151</sup> White 5

<sup>152</sup> White 6

<sup>153</sup> Faramelli, Norm. 2009. "Whither the Bible in Environmental Ethics and Moral Argument?" *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3 (2) (July 22): 266–270. doi:10.1558/jsrnc.v3i2.266. <http://www.equinoxjournals.com/JSRNC/article/view/6455>. 268

biblical narratives grew up as part of a religious community, and that tradition, indeed any specific tradition, affects the way we understand the Bible. Even recognizing all of this, the Bible can be a moral guide. Yes, it can serve as a foundation for our ethical approach, but no, the Bible alone cannot directly provide specific answers to contemporary moral questions.<sup>154</sup>

A sampling of authors who defend Scripture.

- 1) It is one thing to reflect theologically on contemporary events and ideas, but quite another to develop a 'theology of' the current fashion. As distinct from the facile relevancy of 'theologies of', the Christian theologian should be dealing with the material of a particular tradition focused on biblical witness and the event of Jesus the Christ. Christian theological thinking is not simply a style of thinking but also the points of reference, the content, of an identifiable historical enterprise. The content or message of such theology illuminates, refutes, or affirms the subject to which it is directed.<sup>155</sup>
- 2) Too often the theologians who are into the latest item in the Movement market not only fail to challenge the shape of the question as it is put to them by secular proponents but also delight in going beyond their secular fellows. In depicting eco-catastrophe, for example, the religious thinker has available to him the magnificently uninhibited apocalyptic imagery of the Bible which he readily recruits to the cause. Thus one writer in a religious journal discovers that Revelation's "whore of Babylon" refers to the Megachine described by Lewis Mumford, while yet another understands the plagues that accompany "the end time" to be fulfilled in the famines "resulting from the curse of over-population," and still another finds in Paul's admonition to hang loose from worldly things in view of the imminent coming of Christ an endorsement of abortion as a means of reducing population and thus, presumably, reducing the sum total of the world's sinfulness.<sup>156</sup>
- 3) The key move in the ideological chess game of the ecology movement is the relocation of the 'sacred.' The locus of the sacred in the Jewish and Christian biblical tradition is God. The notion of the whole, or righteous, persona and society is one of a theocentric (God-centered) humanity. Man is the agent, the cantor, the steward, the caretaker, the intuiiter of God's will in his creation. By man sin came into the world and by the "New Adam," whom Christians identify as Jesus the Christ, comes the hope of the new creation. Anthropocentric perhaps, but man has been given stage center by the decree of an 'Other.' He is accountable to One beyond himself for his behavior and is punished for his abuses of his stewardship. With the Enlightenment came a more thorough anthropocentrism but even then there lingered an intuition, frequently explicated, of man's accountability to an imperative and ordered will beyond his own. For the purposes of modern political thought, especially democratic thought, it has been thought essential to locate the sacred in man who, if he is not the measure of all things, is at least the measurer of all things. He is the locus of the sacred in a derived but unique sense. That is, of the whole created world man alone is a maker and bestower of values and meanings. In the view of the early nature romanticists who fostered the conservationist movement the sacred was clearly located in extra-human nature. That is sacred which is untainted by human presence or influence. This is a viewpoint characteristic of the bulk of today's ecological writing. In the ecology movement, it is joined with a less ideological passion to preserve the security and privileged position of the people of the developed world. This apparently a-moral and self-seeking thrust within the

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid 269

<sup>155</sup> Neuhaus 179

<sup>156</sup> Ibid 180

movement finds cover under the “revolution in values” achieved by its more philosophically inclined colleagues, although, as is surely the case with Elder, the later may be upset by the purposes to which others put their arguments. The truth is that values and their policy implementation are an emphatically human enterprise. Man may perceive certain truths from the processes of nature, but it is man who does the perceiving and man who draws the conclusions. In the realm of democratic politics (anything that touches the ordering of public life) the location of the sacred in man is the greatest achievement of human history. Upon this foundation rests the whole construct of humanism, including Christian humanism. Our values are human constructs, imposed upon us neither by a deity in the skies nor by the great spirit of the redwood trees. Those who would recenter the source of truth and reality, moving it away from the human phenomenon, only leave the field open for other human beings to fashion new, and probably less beneficent, value systems. Corrupt and perverse though they surely are, there is no alternative to people and no escape from the history in which we act out our awkward and stumbling stewardship of the creation. We may not be the crowning glory of creation but at last report we were the only inhabitants of the planet aware of how far we have fallen short of glory and therefore capable of bringing our behavior under judgment and restraint.<sup>157</sup>

- 4) All philosophical ethical systems are antithetical to biblical ethics. A Christian does not determine what is morally good deontologically or teleologically. One need read only a few pages of some religious legalists to see that we cannot stand on the same ground as they do. We do not believe that performing a duty to a rule, even a rule from above, makes an action morally good. Deontology is contrary to the very nature of the Christian who according to the new man has been freed from all coercion from the law of any kind (Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:15). Nor can we ever establish moral right and good teleologically. Eve determined the propriety of eating the fruit on the basis of consequentialism. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it” (Genesis 3:6) Since the fall we cannot objectively measure what is good for ourselves in any given situation, let alone determine what is best for the human race.<sup>158</sup>
- 5) Man alone among all organisms has confronted his environment in an effort to understand it. His various religious philosophies were efforts to organize his understanding and bring an element of control over his complex environment. However man’s understanding of the interweaving of all the components of nature had to await the appearance of a radical religious belief – monotheism. As presented in the Bible, monotheism sees all the interrelationships of organisms and their environments as forming a unity, created and set into motion by One Singe Power. Awareness of this interrelationship is the key to understanding a little explored and largely unknown field – ecology in the Bible. It is the key, in fact, to understanding the full meaning of “ecology” itself: “a branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.” (Websters Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary)<sup>159</sup>
- 6) But none of us sitting here at the feet of our Lord and Savior can bury our heads in the sand of inattention, and lack of awareness on ecological issues. We and God’s people are surrounded by messages concerning ecology constantly. The topic has become religious and a religion once again. And as Luther once said, “If you don’t teach them, the devil will.” If we hide behind the

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid 197-199

<sup>158</sup> Lange 70

<sup>159</sup> Hareuveni, Nogah, and Helen Frenkley. 1974. “Ecology in the Bible”: 51.

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/9652330000>. 7

claim that addressing ecological issues is not directly part of our Call to proclaim the salvific proclamation, then we've failed to apply some of God's revelation, Holy Scriptures. And if it's true, and it is, that the source of Satan's lies is plethora, found absolutely everywhere, and that the God's truth is found in one and only one place, the Bible; and if it's also true, and it too is, that that Word, God's Word, addresses ecological issues, not in and of and for the issues' sake, but as ecological issues touch us who are in and of and for a relationship with God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctified – or not; then we must address what God addresses in His Word concerning ecology.  
<sup>160</sup>

- 7) Dominion comes to be seen as a 'historical task', with humans charged to 'play the role of God in relation to the world'. Thus, according to Bauckham, '[t]he attitudes that have led to the contemporary ecological crisis can be traced back to this source, but no further'. In essence, the claim here is that the problem lies not with the biblical text but only with the ways it was (mis)interpreted, first through the lens of essentially non-biblical Greek ideas and then much later in the context of Renaissance views of human possibilities and progress. Indeed, Bauckham suggests, biblical themes such as the placing of humanity within the community of creation, and the praise of God by all creation, offer the basis for a positive environmental ethic and a theological framework within which dominion can be much more positively interpreted. <sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Russow 4

<sup>161</sup> Horrell 223

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