

# Moral Landscape of Creation

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

**BAYLOR**  
UNIVERSITY

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# Additional Resources

These study guides, available by free download from our Web site, [www.ChristianEthics.ws](http://www.ChristianEthics.ws), integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in this issue.

## EDEN: A MORAL LANDSCAPE

In that most familiar of all biblical landscapes, Eden, we are made from and called to serve the arable land. How might our view of our place in the creation be challenged and enriched by recovering the values of dependence and interrelationship present in the Eden narrative?

## STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

As God's stewards we are not to exploit, but to exercise care and responsibility for God's domain particularly in the interest of those who are poor and marginalized. What are the contours of stewardship in the Bible? How do they shed light on our work as we grapple with the earth's ecological crisis?

## GOD'S MEASURE OF CREATION

When God speaks to Job, he realizes that God delights in a wild creation that exceeds the vision and interest of humans. Understanding our place in the creation requires that we see it in terms of God's intention and scale. Reducing it to the scale of human significance invariably results in pain to ourselves and in death to creatures around us.

## TWO LANGUAGES

The speech of creation is a kind of "sign language" and very different from the language of torah which instructs us in the wisdom of the LORD. From Psalm 19 we learn that one language interprets the other, yet both point to the same God.

## BECOMING BETTER GARDENERS

After careful theological reflection on the Christian theology of creation, we must act on our responsibilities. Several organizations are ready to help us become better "gardeners," wise and committed environmental stewards who keep and serve God's creation.

## TEACHING CHILDREN THE STORY OF CREATION

Children should not merely appreciate the majestic drama of creation, but understand *their role* in this story "that gives us breath and life." Do we encourage them to be good stewards of the earth, or stifle their curiosity about the physical world by signaling that it doesn't belong at church? It is time to inventory how we teach children the story of creation.

# Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

In the biblical creation stories we catch a glimpse of the good world that God intended. Under their influence we begin to notice, by contrast, ways in which our lifestyles are sinful and our physical world is distressed. Guiding us through the moral landscape of these stories, our contributors lead us to see ourselves as creatures responsible to one another and toward the earth.

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**T**he biblical creation stories and hymns richly shape us. They are the fertile landscape in which our Christian moral vision finds a place to flourish. They teach us to see God as creator and sustainer of all that exists, heaven and earth as God's creation, and ourselves as creatures responsible to one another and toward the earth.

To put it another way, these stories and hymns of creation point us toward "the way things *ought* to be." In them we catch a glimpse of the good world that God intended. Under their influence we begin to notice, by contrast, some ways in which our lifestyles and culture are sinful and our physical world is distressed. This is what we mean by discerning the *moral landscape* of creation.

In this issue of *Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* we discuss stories and hymns in Genesis, Job, Psalms, and Isaiah, and further echoes of their creation themes in the preaching of the prophet Hosea, the Gospel of John, and Revelation. We only can begin to explore the resources of the Bible, so we hope to inspire you to read it further with fresh eyes, noticing the rich texture of the creation theology throughout Scripture.

Throughout our reflections we share both our delight in the creation and our concern for the degradation of the earth that is largely due to our

abuse. It would be wonderful if your reading inspired you to follow a mockingbird's song up into the branches of a live oak, marvel at the blooms on a Christmas cactus, or pull on your boots to traipse through a bog. Or perhaps you will recycle newspapers from last week, phone your representative about environmental legislation, or tell a grandchild what you love about bugs. We hope that you will share your Christian faith with others by delighting in and caring for God's beautiful creation.

In perhaps the most familiar of all biblical landscapes, the Garden of Eden, we human beings are described as farmers called to *serve* the arable land. "How might our view of the earth and our place in it," Ted Hiebert wonders in *Eden: Moral Power of a Biblical Landscape* (p. 9), "be challenged and enriched by recovering the values of dependence on and interrelationship with the land present in the Eden narrative?"

Russell Butkus, in *The Stewardship of Creation* (p. 17), describes the salient features of a biblical theology of creation. He traces the notion of stewardship that occurs throughout the Bible but is most visible in Genesis, the Psalms, and the Wisdom literature of ancient Israel. Human beings, he writes, are to be "living reminders of the Creator who is the King of the universe." Our God-representing dominion, therefore, "does not mean to exploit or destroy but to exercise care and responsibility for God's domain particularly in the interest of those who are poor and marginalized."

We can understand our place in the creation only when we see it in terms of God's intention and scale. Norman Wirzba, in *God's Measure of Creation* (p. 24), finds this teaching is most clear in the book of Job, where the landscape of creation is more dynamic and complex than anywhere else in Scripture. Job discovers that Yahweh is "a wild God who delights in wildness" and therefore he must expand his accounting systems to reflect the diversity and sublimity of creation. "Job's task was certainly counter-cultural in his day; it will be perhaps even more difficult in today's egocentric, consumer-driven culture."

Heidi Hornik centers our attention on the landscape in three creation images in various media: David J. Hetland's *Teeming With Life*, Michelangelo's *The Fall of Man and The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, and Moses Jacob Ezekiel's *Eve Hearing the Voice* (pp. 36-40). From the joyful abundance of the landscape in Hetland's stained glass to its sparse aridity in Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel ceiling painting and Ezekiel's bronze, the artists utilize landscape to express God's goodness and human sin.

Scott Hoezee, drawing on the rich biblical images of creation and the new creation in Christ, leads his congregation to "remember creation" through both worship and environmental action. In our conversation, *The Glory Robe of God* (p. 75), this pastor describes how he brings together his love for the Gospel and childhood enjoyment of the physical world. He

sounds many of our issue themes: tuning our hearts to delight in creation, praising our Creator in worship and architecture, encouraging children's God-given sense of curiosity in the world, and responding to the environmental degradation of the earth.

In his meditation on Psalm 19 (*Two Languages*, p. 30), Greg Earwood advances the theme of tuning our hearts to respond with delight and understanding to the eloquent "sign language" of creation. "Re-sounding the creative words of God, the heavens joyfully proclaim God's glorious work." With the psalmist he urges us to become bilingual in the two languages of creation and torah, or God's teaching in Scripture.

Ragan Courtney guides us in adoring God as Creator through a service of worship (p. 46). Its prayers and readings may also be used for personal and study-group devotion. Though its suggested hymns may be found in several hymnals—for sources, see the most current ecumenical hymnody list compiled by Michael Hawn in *The Hymn* (July 1997), pp. 25-37—we reprint by permission of Hope Publishing Company the two recent hymns, "Stars and Planets Flung in Orbit" by Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr. and "The God Who Set the Stars in Space" by Timothy Dudley-Smith (pp. 42-45).

Taking her cue from Hoesee that "among the many holy tasks of Christians is to foster, nurture, and develop children's God-given sense of curiosity" about the world, Andrea Moore recommends creative ways to move beyond the ordinary church classroom setting when we teach children the story of creation (p. 60). A companion piece, *Our Two Gardens* (p. 72), reviews Web and print resources for "greening" the church classroom.

With words that echo the prophecies in Isaiah and Hosea, Raymond Bailey challenges us to end the pollution of the environment that is killing our children. "Little things mean a lot," he reminds us in his call to action (p. 52). Teresa Morgan, in *Becoming Better Gardeners* (p. 66), outlines our practical responsibilities to care for the environment and introduces six organizations that are ready to help us, in churches or as individuals, to meet them.

In a review essay, *God's Delight and Covenant* (p. 82), Edwin Bagley brings together the themes of enjoyment and responsibility toward creation. "Anyone seeking a standard of righteousness that takes the created order seriously," he promises, "will discover rich advice and practical examples in these three books from an engaging pastor, a group of theologians, and four practicing scientists."

Finally, Steven Bouma-Prediger's *The Biblical Landscape* (p. 88) reviews three biblical studies that shaped our thinking in constructing this issue of *Christian Reflection*. About these books which display the ecological wisdom of Scripture, he writes, "No one reading them can legitimately claim, as one contemporary theologian recently did, that we ought to put the Bible on the shelf for twenty or thirty years." We promise, we won't. ☸



# Eden: Moral Power of a Biblical Landscape

BY THEODORE HIEBERT

The most familiar of all biblical landscapes, the Garden of Eden, offers wisdom to reshape our values toward nature. No other story in our religious heritage so clearly shows that we are linked to our landscapes and that our work is to be in the service of nature's needs and orders.

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**T**he stresses of the landscapes in which we live are forcing all of us, regardless of our hometowns and politics and religions, to reconsider our actions and the impact they have on our neighborhoods. We have begun the search for a style of life that will restore these landscapes to health and sustain them so that we, our children, and our grandchildren will thrive in them. For us as Christians, such a search for a new way of being in the world—though it will involve the best science, politics, and public policy—can be aided greatly by a reexamination of our biblical landscapes. In the stories of these landscapes and the people that inhabit them lie values that have shaped us and that continue to challenge and remake us.

But before looking at how one of these biblical landscapes—the Garden of Eden—might influence and enrich our search for the proper human role in the environment, I want to mention a powerful and noble movement in biblical interpretation that has inadvertently muddled the waters of this search. Dominant throughout the twentieth century, this way of reading the Bible might be called the “sacred history” perspective. Its proponents have claimed that the genius of biblical faith is that it separated God from the processes of nature, with which the surrounding pagan religions associ-

ated God, and connected God instead with the processes of human history. Viewed from this perspective, biblical landscapes became merely the stage on which the great drama of human redemption was played out. They were not considered an essential participant in the biblical story.<sup>1</sup>

This is a noble movement because its goals are so admirable. By its stress on history, it has aimed to show the biblical God's infinite care for humanity, its well-being, and its future. It has stressed that God is not an abstraction but a living presence within the ambiguities of human experience. It has freed God from human theological systems and emphasized God's freedom to act in new ways and to create new futures. Above all, it has identified God with social change, recognizing God's activity in historical events that dismantle repressive regimes and liberate the oppressed.

Unfortunately, the fine goals of this interpretive movement have been pursued at nature's expense. By playing history against nature, the historical contours of this perspective could be put into sharp focus and clearly delineated, but the moral landscape of creation was consequently neglected or wrongly devalued. Almost every biblical commentary and every biblical theology available in bookstores now shares this "sacred history" perspective to some extent. As a result, when environmental ethicists and theologians first turned to the biblical tradition to look for resources for a new ecological way of thinking, they were led to believe that biblical faith was essentially bankrupt in this regard.<sup>2</sup> And the Bible still has this reputation in many circles today. So when we reexamine our biblical landscapes we face two major challenges: understanding the original biblical environment and also reading against the grain of a century of well-intentioned but one-sided biblical interpretation of it.

To take up these challenges in a modest way, I would like to take a new look at one of the most familiar of all biblical landscapes, the Garden of Eden. Attributed to an anonymous author whom scholars have named the Yahwist, because of his preference for the divine name Yahweh (rendered LORD in the NRSV), this account of creation is widely regarded as the older of the two accounts at the beginning of Genesis. Because of its age and its place at the beginning of the Yahwist's narrative, it plays a foundational role in Israel's self-consciousness and in biblical theology. The questions I want to put to this particular story first are, what is the actual landscape that the story teller has in mind here and what is the human role in it? Only then can we say more about the values toward nature that are embedded in the account.

A good place to start such an investigation is the point in the story when God assigns the first human his first task on earth: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Apparently the first human occupation is farming, to cultivate and take care of the garden. In fact this view of who humans are and

what they do runs through the entire story (and those that follow it). Assuming that human life and farming go hand in hand, the narrator describes the time before creation as the time when there were no farmers: “There was no one to till the ground” (2:5). Furthermore, the narrator recognizes that farming is to be the occupation—could we say, vocation?—of the human race from this time forward, even outside the garden: “The LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken” (3:23; cf. 3:17-19).

We have before us then what appears to be an agricultural landscape, in which the natural world and the human role in it is understood from the perspective of the ancient Israelite farmer.<sup>3</sup> This agricultural landscape becomes more vivid, as a matter of fact, in other details in the story. One of these details is the creation of the first human being. God makes this first human “from the dust of the ground” (2:7). Biblical Hebrew, in fact, possesses different terms for different kinds of land; the term here translated “ground” is *adamah*. *Adamah* is always used by the Yahwist in this story (and in those that follow it) for arable land, the ground cultivated by Israelite farmers (e.g. 2:6, 9; 3:17, 19, 23). Thus humans are by nature, so to speak, farmers. They are made out of the very soil they cultivate.

After making the first human from topsoil, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,” and the human being came to life (2:7). This colorful image itself likely comes from life on the Israelite farm, as was suggested to me once by

Richard Austin, author of *Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible*, and a farmer himself.<sup>4</sup> In the moments after a lamb or a kid or a calf is born, if it cannot start breathing on its own, the farmer blows into its nostrils to bring it to life. Thus this narrator describes God’s own behavior when God first brought humans to life in terms of an experience with which Israelite farmers were intimately familiar: breathing life into the newborn.

Typical Israelite farms were nowhere nearly as lush and fertile as the Garden of Eden. Perched on rocky mountain slopes, they were small subsistence farms combining the cultivation of grains and fruits with the raising of sheep and goats. Life on them was difficult and precarious, limited as they were by too little good soil and unpredictable rainfall. When

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the author of the Eden narrative describes this primeval garden, he is therefore describing the Mediterranean farmer's ideal landscape, a landscape with a constant source of water (2:6), plenty of fertile soil, and every species of fruit tree imaginable (2:9). But even in this idealistic setting and the story about it, the actual agricultural perspective of the story teller is present. So too are the values toward nature cultivated in that agricultural

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For a translation of the creation of *adam* from *adamah*, I suggest "farmer" from "farmland," since in this story *adamah* is arable soil and the human, *adam*, is a farmer. I know of no statement in our entire religious heritage that so categorically asserts that we are linked to our landscapes and this linkage is a part of the divine order of creation.

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world. Let us take a look at two of those values.

The first is a deep belief in the interrelationship between people and their landscape. The most vivid expression of this value is the creation of humans from the very landscape they inhabit (2:7), which we have just examined above. The point of this account, that humans and their landscape are part of one common reality, is clear in English but even more obvious in Hebrew. As we have already seen, the Hebrew term for the

arable ground out of which the first human is made is *adamah*. If we recognize as well that the Hebrew term for the human made out of *adamah* is *adam*, then we can see how the Hebrew language itself expresses the very identity between the landscape and its people that this creation story narrates.

Recent interpreters have tried to capture in an English translation this connection in the Hebrew language between *adamah* and *adam*, between the landscape and its people. For the creation of *adam* from *adamah*, they have suggested "earthling" from "earth" or "human" from "humus," both appealing attempts to relay this original sense of relationship. To these I would add "farmer" from "farmland," since in this story *adamah* is after all arable soil and since the human, *adam*, is after all a farmer. I know of no statement in our entire religious heritage that so categorically asserts that we are linked to our landscapes and this linkage is a part of the divine order of creation.

The same kind of close interrelationship between people and their landscape described in this image is seen by the Yahwist also in the relationship between people and the other life with which they share their

landscape. This connection is made clear when God creates all other kinds of life out of the same stuff, *adamah* (arable land), from which God made humans: first the plants (2:9), and then the animals (2:19). By these parallel creative acts, the story links all of life to its landscape and to each other. All life has its origin and basic nature in the same stuff, and that stuff is the arable land, which lay at the heart of the Yahwist's agricultural landscape.

The common nature shared by people and animals in the Eden narrative is again partly lost to us in our English translations. Only this time the reason is not the limitations of our English vocabulary but the powerful influence of the recent "sacred history" movement of biblical interpretation. The very same Hebrew phrase, *nephesh chayyah*, is used to describe the human being at creation (2:7) and the animals at creation (2:19). Yet our translators render this phrase "living being" when used of humans and "living creature" when used of animals (NRSV). The difference here is toned down considerably from the KJV's "living soul" and "living creature," but it still draws a clear line between humans and other life that the biblical author did not draw. And the only explanation I can give for this line is that our modern translators want to make a distinction between humans and the natural world that biblical writers themselves did not want to make. As a result we have introduced our own "sacred history" theology into the biblical text itself.

The special relationship shared by humans and the animals after creation is described further when God identifies the animals as helpers and brings them forward to be named (2:18-20). Life on the typical Israelite farm would have been inconceivable without the wild and domestic partners of the animal world. Oxen plowed, donkeys carried heavy loads, and sheep and goats provided wool and milk. Much has been made of humans asserting power over the animals by naming them, but namers in the Bible can be either more or less powerful than those they name. The naming described in Eden is the naming that is possible only when living shoulder to shoulder with the animal world, as did the ancient Israelite farmer. The closest modern example I can give for the kind of intimate knowledge of, and respect for, the animal world upon which the naming in the garden of Eden depends are the essays of a contemporary farmer, David Kline, in *Great Possessions* and *Scratching the Woodchuck*.<sup>5</sup> These vignettes of the profuse animal life on a 120 acre farm in northeastern Ohio are expressions of reverence and humility, not power. They serve to remind most of us modern readers how much we have lost the sense of our interrelationship with nature, which was simply part of being human in our biblical heritage.

A second foundational value expressed in the story of the Garden of Eden is the dependence of human life upon the landscape in which it lives. The points in the story where such dependence is most directly expressed are those places where the task of farming is mentioned: God appoints hu-

mans to “till” the ground (2:5, 15, 3:23). Here again, I am sorry to say, our English vocabulary fails us. For in fact the Hebrew word translated “till” is the ordinary Hebrew word meaning “serve.” It is used throughout the Bible for the work people render to their superiors: servants serve masters, subjects serve kings, and people serve God. So, literally, the farmer “serves” (tills) the arable land.

How it is that such a word was selected in the mists of history as the word for cultivation is a question in which no commentary on Genesis is much interested, as far as I am aware. But it has intrigued me for some time. Such choices can hardly be accidents, and the use of “serve” for cultivation must reflect the biblical farmer’s real sense of his relationship to the land he farms. Just as servants are dependent upon masters, subjects upon kings, and people upon God, so the farmer must have sensed his absolute dependence upon the soil. He knew his health and life and those of his family and animals were tied directly to the soil’s fertility and bounty. In the land’s health lay the human future. Thus the biblical farmer believed his work, the human’s work, to be in the service of nature’s needs and orders.

This view of the human role in the world has been practically forgotten, lying as it does in the long shadow of the beautiful and regal account of creation in Genesis 1 that precedes it. In that companion account of creation, long attributed by scholars to Israel’s priests, humans are, as almost everyone knows, told to “have dominion” over the animal world and to “subdue” the earth (1:26-28). These words put humans in just the opposite position in their landscape when compared to the account of creation in the garden of Eden. Instead of serving their landscape, they are instructed to rule it. The terms “have dominion” and “subdue” are used elsewhere in the Bible primarily for the rule of kings and of those who exercise authority and power over others. Examples can be given of such rule exercised kindly or harshly, but regardless of its character, such dominion views humans as their landscape’s rulers rather than its servants.

For most people the image of dominion in Genesis 1 is *the* biblical teaching about the human role in the natural world. The question for them is not whether other biblical perspectives might be considered, but how this single teaching is to be understood and followed. In the intense study of Genesis 1 undertaken to answer this question, the English word “steward” has been chosen to represent and explain the role assigned people in Genesis 1. Though it does not itself occur in this creation text, the term “steward” does capture its central idea: humans are created as God’s representatives to oversee the world of nature. As stewards, they are to exercise authority as God directs them to do so.

There are so many appealing things about this image that the words “steward” and “stewardship” have become the primary way of talking

about the human role in nature, both in the church and in society.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, many good works and new initiatives have been launched under the banner of stewardship. But the notion of stewardship, and its view of the human role in the natural world, is not the whole biblical testimony about creation. How might our view of the earth and our place in it be challenged and enriched by recovering the values of dependence and interrelationship present in the agricultural perspective of the Eden narrative?

First, the Garden of Eden story reminds us that we were created as a part of an interconnected web of life. Preindustrial biblical farmers, who lived in intimate contact with their landscapes, recognized in their own way a basic principle emerging from the best ecological science today: people are part of complex ecosystems in which all forms of life are interrelated and, together with the environment in which they live, function as a unified whole. The Yahwist's view that all life is linked by its very nature to the land and to other life provides us with an integrative way of thinking about our place in the world much different from the "sacred history" theology that has controlled so much recent biblical study and interpretation.

Second, the Eden narrative repositions us within this web of life, at least when compared to the priestly account of creation that is so much more familiar to us. It tells us that humans are their ecosystem's servants rather than its managers. It emphasizes human dependence over human dominance. The great value of this perspective is that it takes the natural world (the whole ecosystem) rather than us humans (a single part of it) as its point of orientation. It claims that our well-being depends upon behavior that serves the needs, requirements, and well-being of the whole environment of which we are a part. This is a central theme running through the literature and language of the ecologists I most admire. "Creation provides a place for hu-

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How might our view of the earth and our place in it be challenged and enriched by recovering the values of dependence and interrelationship present in the agricultural perspective of the Eden narrative?

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mans, but it is greater than humanity and within it even great men are small," writes Wendell Berry. "Such humility is the consequence of an accurate insight, ecological in its bearing, not a pious deference to 'spiritual' value."<sup>7</sup> The ever present, though perhaps not inevitable, danger of the image of ourselves as stewards is that, regarding ourselves as dominant, we lose this sense of humility and dependence and of the restraint demanded of us by our landscapes.



Finally, the agricultural perspective of the garden story brings back to our attention the fact that we are all farmers, not by our occupations but by our consumption. We all live by what farmers grow. A friend of mine, Tim Weiskel, reminds us that there is no such thing as a post-agricultural society.<sup>8</sup> Should not our meal to meal dependence on what our farmers grow demand of us all more thoughtfulness about the way we eat, about the health of our agricultural economy, and about the well-being of our farmers and our farming communities? We shall not all become farmers like our biblical ancestors, but our lives, no less than theirs, depend upon our collective support for a wise, productive, and sustainable agriculture.

## NOTES

1 Two influential spokesmen for this movement in biblical theology and interpretation were G. Ernest Wright (e.g. *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* [London: SCM Press, 1952]) and Gerhard von Rad (e.g. "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other essays* [London: SCM Press, 1966], 131-143).

2 Two very different examples are George Hendry's opening chapter in *Theology of Nature* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980) and an article by Kenneth Woodward in *Newsweek* magazine (June 5, 1989).

3 I have tried to lay out the details of the agricultural landscape of the Yahwist in the Garden of Eden and the stories that follow in *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

4 Richard Cartwright Austin, *Hope for the Land: Nature in the Bible* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988). This suggestion was made in a personal communication.

5 David Kline, *Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), *Scratching the Woodchuck: Nature on an Amish Farm* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1997).

6 An example is the study on human responsibility in nature that John Douglas Hall wrote for the National Council of Churches's Commission on Stewardship, entitled *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986).

7. Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), 98.

8. Tim Weiskel is the director of the Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values.



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# The Stewardship of Creation

BY RUSSELL A. BUTKUS

Viewed through the lens of Scripture, the environmental crisis is best understood as creation-in-crisis, which elevates the significance of our situation to the very heart of God. We are called to have dominion over the earth; this does not mean to exploit, but to exercise care and responsibility for God's domain particularly in the interest of those who are poor and marginalized.

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**T**he earth and its natural systems are in serious jeopardy. Ecologists and other environmental scientists indicate that the earth's ecosystem, the parts of it where creatures can live, is at risk from:

- ♦ The reality of global warming and the very real specter of global climate change and its consequences for disrupting natural and social systems;
- ♦ Continued deterioration of stratospheric ozone and its resulting impact on human and planetary health;
- ♦ Deforestation, particularly of tropical rain forests, and the consequential collapse of biodiversity;
- ♦ Pollution of earth's systems (land, water, and air) through the creation of toxic, nuclear, and hazardous waste with the resulting accumulation of these in living organisms;
- ♦ Burgeoning human population growth, currently at 6.2 billion and possibly headed toward a cap of around 10 billion by 2050;
- ♦ Continuing depletion of natural resources through over-harvesting and over-consumption;

- ♦ The continued global disparity and maldistribution of socio-economic goods and services.

The environmental crisis is self-evident to anyone who is willing to engage the overwhelming scientific evidence. But what should we as Christians make of this scenario? Environmental degradation resulting from our activities is one of the major “signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3) that requires Christians to take stock and respond. Further, this crisis, which from a scientific view is a crisis of *nature*, is an opportunity for us whose lives are shaped by biblical faith to rediscover nature as *creation*.<sup>1</sup> The environmental crisis moves us to affirm the theology of creation resident in the biblical tradition. This theology reminds us that creation continues to unfold and therefore God’s self-disclosure in creation continues as well. The divine self-disclosure is available to us just as it was to the ancient sages and poets of Israel’s wisdom-creation hymns found in the Psalms and the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. We, too, have the capacity to be awe-inspired and marvel at the beauty and sublimity of creation. The environmental crisis raises a third observation. When viewed and interpreted through the lenses of biblical creation theology, perhaps the ecological crisis is best understood as *creation-in-crisis*, which elevates the significance of our current situation to the very heart of God.

Consider for a moment the scope and range of the crisis. It is global and universal. There is not a species, ecosystem, or human society on the planet that is unaffected; the entire ecosphere of the earth is threatened. Moreover, it is a crisis of geologic history, for we are witnessing a collapse of biodiversity the likes of which the planet has not experienced in the last 65 million years. By some estimates this process of extinction related to human activities may result in the loss of 27,000 species a year.

The ecological crisis is also a crisis of human history and society. We are shockingly aware that our whole consumer-driven manner of living upon the earth is unsustainable. We are forced to re-evaluate the social, political, and economic institutions that in large measure have caused this crisis. In other words, the dominant paradigms of human existence to which modernity gave birth are in the process of being subverted.

The good news is that within this milieu of crisis, Christians have responded. Many denominations have issued policy statements, declarations, resolutions, and pastoral letters to provide a theological foundation for Christian ethical response. Central to these writings is the idea that God has appointed us to be “caretakers and stewards” of creation. For example the American Baptist *Policy Statement on Ecology* (1989) states, “Our responsibility as stewards is one of the most basic relationships we have with God. It implies a great degree of caring for God’s creation and all God’s creatures.”<sup>2</sup> More recently the Catholic Bishops in the northwestern U.S. wrote, “Stewardship is the traditional expression of the role of people in

relation to creation. Stewards, as caretakers for the things of God, are called to use wisely and distribute justly the goods of God's earth to meet the needs of God's children."<sup>3</sup> These and similar statements indicate that the stewardship of creation is a necessary and adequate foundation for a Christian environmental ethic. From this foundation we can then engage in conversation with the natural sciences, philosophical ethics, and the emerging discussions on the meaning of sustainability. What are the contours of stewardship within the biblical tradition, and how do they shed light on our work ahead as we grapple with the ecological crisis?

### THE STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Our notion of stewardship comes from biblical creation theology, distributed throughout the Bible but most visible in Genesis, the Psalms, and the Wisdom literature of ancient Israel. This body of theology, as it receives renewed attention by biblical scholars, has important implications in our attempt to interpret and respond to the environmental crisis. "The recovery of creation as the horizon of biblical theology encourages us to contribute to the resolution of the ecological crisis," writes Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann. "New investigations in creation faith and its complement, wisdom theology, suggest that the environment is to be understood as a delicate, fragile system of interrelated parts that is maintained and enhanced by the recognition of limits and givens and by the judicious exercise of choices."<sup>4</sup>

Here are the salient features of biblical creation theology:

- ♦ The entire created order has its origins in the sovereign, creative and sustaining power of God. In other words, creation is centered on God, or it is theocentric.
- ♦ Creation is not a singular event; it is an on-going process requiring the continual sustaining power and presence of God.
- ♦ Central to the biblical notion of creation is the idea of order. God creates order out of primordial chaos. This order is moral as well as physical; it requires ethical behavior to maintain the harmonious working of creation.
- ♦ Creation, as heaven and earth, is a relational entity, a harmonious whole in which creatures fulfill their appointed places and functions

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God is the primary author of the meaning and value of creation. It's inherent goodness and beauty is a consistent theme in ancient Israel's theology of creation. Moreover creation discloses both the nature of God and the human vocation within God's world.

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within a grand design.

- ♦ As the Creator, God is the primary author of the meaning and value of creation. The inherent goodness and beauty of creation is a consistent theme in ancient Israel's theology of creation.
- ♦ God is transcendent yet also immanently present within creation. Moreover, creation discloses both the nature of God and the human vocation within God's world.

Within the terrain of this theology, stewardship points to the purpose and role of humanity in creation. A beautiful example of this is in Psalm 8, a hymn of praise that links God's self-disclosure in creation with our vocation. Why do human beings exist, and what is our role? The psalmist answers by appealing to the royal model of stewardship (8:5-8).

The Bible contains twenty-six explicit references to the steward or stewardship. In the Old Testament the term is used in a technical fashion to denote a specific office or a vocation in society. According to Douglas Hall, "the steward is one who has been given the responsibility for the management and service of something belonging to another, and his office presupposes a particular kind of trust on the part of the owner or master."<sup>5</sup> The term became linked with Israel's king, who ruled the chosen people as God's steward and so was accountable to God. This royal interpretation of stewardship helps us to understand the first chapter of Genesis.

The biblical text that most shapes—and perhaps clouds—our interpretation of stewardship is the controversial and widely misunderstood Genesis 1:26-28. This passage, part of the account of creation that scholars attribute to Israel's priests, must be read against the backdrop of ancient Israel's attitude toward kingship. It says that humans, created in the image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*) of God, are to subdue (*kabash*) and have dominion (*radah*) over the earth. Two brief remarks are in order. First, "image" and "likeness" are used in a technical fashion here to refer to a statue or some other physical representation of themselves that monarchs erect to remind their subjects of who is in power. Genesis 1:26-28 says that human beings are living reminders of the Creator who is the King of the universe. As Eugene March insists, this "means that human beings have been given the responsibility of representing God in the midst of God's creation."<sup>6</sup>

"Dominion," from the Hebrew *radah*, meaning to tread down, also requires a brief comment. It is perhaps the most significant term here because in popular usage it suggests the domination of the earth. We should bear in mind that Israel's king had covenantal responsibilities to care for those over whom he ruled. Dominion, therefore, does not mean to exploit or destroy but to exercise care and responsibility for God's domain particularly in the interest of those who are poor and marginalized. This royal model of stewardship is retrieved in this passage from the Presbyterian policy statement, *Hope for a Global Future* (1996): "While dominion has been inter-

preted as a divine grant to prey on the rest of nature without restraints, we regard dominion to mean the entire stewardship of nature. . . . A careful exegesis of Genesis 1 does not suggest domination or despotism.”<sup>7</sup>

Another Old Testament image of stewardship is found in the Yahwist’s account of creation in Genesis 2, which Theodore Hiebert interprets in “Eden: Moral Power of a Biblical Landscape” in this issue. That image of our vocation provides a more organic and less monarchic interpretation of stewardship; it stresses our common bond with the rest of creation insofar as all creatures share the source of coming “out of the ground” (*ha adama*). “The whole account stresses the interrelatedness of creation,” notes James Limburg. “The plants, the animals and human beings are all made from the same raw material.”<sup>8</sup> In this context our role in creation is not characterized by royal dominion but by the vocational activity of farming or shepherding. In Genesis 2:16 the human beings are to cultivate (*adad*) and care (*shamar*) for the garden. The language is clearly agricultural in context. The verb *abad* means to serve and it implies respect and even reverence for the landscape. On the other hand, *shamar*, meaning to keep or care, is an act of protection. The stewardship of creation, interpreted through the view of the Yahwist, implies that we should be earth keepers who care for and protect the only home we share with all life.

As Christians we reflect further on the royal stewardship of creation in light of our New Testament faith. The ideas of “image of God” and “dominion” found in Genesis 1 receive considerable development in the New Testament. Thus, *Hope for a Global Future* says, “Christ is the perfection of the image and the paradigm of dominion” that we should emulate. “This means to live out the image and the responsibility with nurturing and serving love.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, we interpret the stewardship of creation in light of Jesus’ proclamation of the Reign or Kingdom of God. In this time of environmental crisis, we remember that the Kingdom of God is the primary symbol of death and resurrection; as such, the Kingdom not only offers salvation to humanity but points to the future renewal and restoration of all creation. Interpreted through this horizon of faith, the stewardship of creation is the calling to participate in the salvific future of God and an anticipatory ethic that seeks to protect, sustain, and restore creation.

## FROM STEWARDSHIP TO SUSTAINABILITY

The stewardship of creation is the foundation and framework for a Christian ethical response to earth’s environmental crisis. Yet before we act, we must refine and enlarge our understanding of stewardship in conversation with additional sources of human wisdom, particularly the natural sciences, environmental ethics and the emerging vision of sustainability. Here are five points we might learn from that conversation.

*The Christian ecological vision must draw upon the organic model of stewardship.* This interpretation of stewardship recognizes the inextricable

relatedness of life and seeks to preserve and sustain this balance. As stewards we are commanded to respect and care for the richness and diversity of life and promote the flourishing of human and non-human forms of life. This corresponds to the scientific insights that life is a biotic community of interdependence and that everything is interconnected. The stewardship of creation must include the non-living components of creation (land, water,

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Our vision of stewardship can never only be environmental. It also must address social injustice and poverty, the suffering of all creation, and seek to expose the intrinsic link between the oppression of people and the oppression of all creation.

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and air) that are essential for life and consequently must be preserved.

*The stewardship of creation must recognize that humans are special, being members of earth's biotic community who are given the capacity for conscious self-reflection. This distinctiveness has two aspects: on one hand, with a God-human relationship we represent*

the divine as God's responsible steward; on the other hand, with a human-earth relationship we recognize that we share the same organic source with all living creatures. This corresponds to the view of some philosophers that humans have exceptional characteristics yet remain one among other species and evolved from earth as all life did.

*The Christian vocation of stewardship requires that we value creation in its own right independent of its instrumental value for fulfilling human needs.* "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), and our valuations must follow suit. However, the Christian vision of stewardship can never only be *environmental*. It also must address the systemic links between environmental degradation and the social injustice and economic poverty that have become institutionalized at local and global levels. The Christian steward must respond to the suffering of all creation and seek to expose the intrinsic link between the oppression of people and the oppression of all creation.

*The stewardship of creation must include developing general norms for ethical behavior.* Some work in this regard has already been accomplished. A good example is the Roman Catholic pastoral letter on the Columbia River that outlines ten "Considerations for Community Caretaking."<sup>10</sup> But more needs to be done in this area. For each environmental problem summarized in the introduction of this essay Christians need to develop the necessary general norms for ethical response. Here is an example: the stewardship of creation would require us to engage in ethical action aimed at the reduction and eventual elimination of those human practices responsible for producing

global warming and global climate change. These general norms of stewardship would then need to be specified and applied according to regional and local circumstances.

*The stewardship of creation must be defined by a vision of sustainability.* From the vantage point of biblical stewardship, sustainability means the practice of restoring and maintaining the integrity of creation in the hopeful anticipation of the coming of God's Reign.<sup>11</sup> Sustainability unites the work of social and ecological justice. Essentially it is an ethical practice grounded in the hope of God's final renewal and restoration of creation. The stewardship of creation informed by the practice of sustainability is an ethic that says life, together with all that supports and sustains it, is fundamentally good.

## NOTES

1 An important distinction exists between the concepts of nature and creation. There is no concept of nature in the Old Testament. *Nature*, derived from the Greek worldview, is by scientific definition a self-sustaining system replete with its own internal laws. *Creation*, a biblical-theological concept, recognizes that creation is not self-sustaining but is continually dependent on the presence of God.

2 *American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology: An Ecological Situational Analysis*, General Board of the American Baptist Churches (1989), 3. ([www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/ecology.htm](http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/ecology.htm))

3 *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Region (2001), 7.

4 Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53 (1996): 188.

5 Douglas John Hall, *The Steward*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 32.

6 W. Eugene March, *Israel and the Politics of the Land: A Theological Case Study*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 88.

7 *Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development*, Presbyterian Church USA (1996), 62-63.

8 James Limburg, "The Way of an Eagle in the Sky: Reflections on the Bible and the Care of the Earth," *The Catholic World* 233:1396 (1990): 151.

9 *Hope for a Global Future*, 63.

10 *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, 13-17.

11 Russell A. Butkus, "Sustainability: An Eco-Theological Analysis," in *All Creation is Groaning*, eds. Carol J. Dempsey, OP and Russell A. Butkus (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 161.



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# God's Measure of Creation

BY NORMAN WIRZBA

When God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, he realizes that God delights in a wild creation that exceeds the vision and interest of humans. Understanding our place in the creation requires that we see it in terms of God's intention and scale. Attempts to reduce it to the scale of human significance invariably result in pain to ourselves and in death to creatures around us.

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Our working assumption for centuries has been that even if the earth does not exist exclusively for us, it is proper that we use it to serve our needs and wants. Our needs take precedence over the needs of the rest of creation. We say that when it comes to choosing between human flourishing and the flourishing of other members of creation, the choice is obvious: human need is of the greatest importance. We even may believe that the whole of creation serves as the backdrop for the execution and satisfaction of human dramas. After all, isn't the biblical plan of salvation devoted exclusively to *our* salvation?

There are many reasons for thinking that this view of creation is misguided and naïve. For starters, there is clear evidence that whenever we turn creation primarily toward human satisfaction we invariably destroy or maim the creation we deem to be beneath us. Rampant environmental destruction, both in the past and more clearly in the present, shows that inattentiveness to the integrity of the wider creation has serious effects for human and non-human populations. Ecologists, the scientists who study the interrelationships of living creatures, clearly demonstrate that we cannot separate ourselves from or live at the destructive expense of the rest of creation. Our health and fate depend directly upon the creation's health



and fate.

The book of Job offers an equally compelling reason to rethink the significance of creation and our place within it. Job learns from God that the creation does not exist for him. While it may be true that creation, for the most part, is exceptionally well suited for satisfying human beings' needs and desires, it is false to think that the scale of creation may be reduced to our conceptions of fairness and use. In other words, Job learns that the scope of creation exceeds any human measure of right or wrong, useful or useless, and beautiful or ugly. An adequate understanding of creation and an honest estimation of our place within it require that we see creation in terms of God's intention and scale. Attempts to reduce creation to the scale of human significance invariably result in pain to ourselves and in death to creatures around us.

Job is the quintessential person: he is blessed with family, wealth, and the respect of his peers. He is morally virtuous and spiritually pious (Job 1:1-5). We might say he is living an ancient version of the American Dream: after working honestly and hard he now enjoys the just rewards that come from his labor. The assumption that runs through the early chapters of Job is that God has ordered the world so that if we do our part, then God will protect and guarantee a safe outcome for us. As the drama unfolds, however, we see that it is precisely this assumption that will be put to the test.

God permits Satan to inflict terrible suffering on Job, first by taking away his family and wealth, and then by afflicting him with terrible sores that cover him from head to foot. Not yet having cursed God for his calamity, Job wishes he were dead. Job's friends, noticeably disturbed by this cry, plead that Job is being rash in his speech. God is on the side of (humanly conceived) justice, they say; therefore if Job has done justly, he will be dealt with in a just manner. But Job will have none of their response. Job declares that he is blameless. God is at fault for destroying the blameless as well as the wicked (9:21-22). Alluding to the covenantal conception of creation in which God is morally bound to preserve and protect the creation, Job exclaims: "Your hands fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again?" (10:8-9) Job suggests that his suffering indicates a capricious, cruel creator and a meaningless creation. In short, creation is not working out the way Job believes it should, and it is God's fault.

Job's friends turn against him for turning against God. They sense that they are at the limits of meaning here, for if their world-view and assumptions of justice are false, then the whole world will come tumbling down. Job, however, has traveled farther than they down this road toward despair. His view of himself and the universe is now in shreds. He does not know how to think or speak. He feels abandoned by God and hounded by

his peers. He is now completely vulnerable, knowing that the conventional responses to suffering and justice will not do. What he desires is an honest accounting, an authentic understanding of the creation and his place within it before the creator: “let me be weighed in a just balance...” (31:6). With this request Job announces that he is willing to see things differently and ready to be instructed about the true character of creation. His instruction will come from God.

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Whereas Job was inclined to view the creation through the prisms of his own success (the world is a just place) or his own misery (the world is an unjust place), God forces Job to take a wider and more honest view of the universe. Creation is far more than Job can comprehend, imagine, or control since it is framed to the divine rather than a human scale.

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God challenges Job with a series of questions in chapter 38: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” “Have you commanded the morning since your days began?” “Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?” The effect of these questions, William Brown notes, is “to challenge Job in his creaturely status and finite experience as well as broaden the horizons of

his moral worldview.”<sup>1</sup> In the encounter with God, Job learns about the inadequacy of the self-serving, human-centered views he and his supposedly wise peers held. He learns about the injustice of his moral, spiritual, and economic measures.

Whereas Job was inclined to view the creation through the prisms of his own success (the world is a just place) or his own misery (the world is an unjust place), God forces Job to take a wider and more honest view of the universe. Comparing the creation to the building of a temple, God says that when the cornerstone was laid “the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy” (38:7). There is beauty and sublimity in the created order that far exceeds what Job, because of his arrogance, is prepared to accept. God describes in detail the attentive care required to fashion and maintain the natural processes that sustain life. Moreover, all of this meticulous work is not for Job’s benefit since God causes rain to fall on deserts devoid of human life and interest (38:26). Creation is far more than Job can comprehend, imagine, or control since it is framed to the divine rather than a human scale.

The world appears here to be more dynamic and complex than any-

where else in Scripture. It is not the orderly world of the Priestly account in which humanity sits proudly above the rest of creation (Genesis 1). God's world, as revealed in the questioning of Job, contains forces of chaos that are not entirely subdued but instead are given a limited freedom to exercise their power. God sets bounds to the chaotic waves without obliterating them altogether (38:8-11). This is a wild God who delights in wildness: "Can you hunt the prey for the lion, or satisfy the appetite of the young lions, when they crouch in their dens, or lie in wait in their covert? Who provides for the raven its prey, when its young ones cry to God, and wander about for lack of food?" (38:39-41) This is a wild creation that exceeds the vision and interest of humans. Job learns that its value and significance do not end with his own being. God reveals a "world without dominance and subservience, filled with unique identities and intrinsic worth," Brown writes. "Each species is an indispensable thread woven into the colorful fabric of life. And Yahweh proudly points to each of them in order to recontextualize the provincial world of Job and his friends."<sup>2</sup> Whereas Job sees in wildness the marks of fragility and impoverishment, perhaps even cruelty and capriciousness, God sees dignity and strength.

So God's questioning of Job changes his understanding of himself and the creation. Job's view, which was the received wisdom of the day, had been that the creation and its creator, though not existing for the exclusive benefit of human interests, were in clean and stable alignment with human flourishing. To be sure, Job's peers insisted that his flourishing depended on Job acting justly. What they failed to perceive, however, was that their conception of justice was too centered upon human beings, or too anthropocentric. They failed to consider whether or not their perceptive and evaluative faculties were naïve or self-serving.

One of the most important lessons Job learns is that creation must be perceived as centered upon God, or theocentrically. All creation, even those elements that are of no interest or benefit to us, has value to its creator. God notices every creature and enjoys their activities even when they verge on the chaotic (38:8-9). In the speeches from the whirlwind God says that creation has an integrity all its own (38:1-41:34). The parts and processes of creation form a dynamic whole in which chaos and order, work and play, and life and death together contribute to the glory of God. Moreover, God does not rule creation with an iron fist. God extends to it a fair measure of freedom, like a mother watching over her sometimes obedient, sometimes rebellious, child. There is, in other words, an openness and unpredictability that follows from its divinely bestowed freedom and integrity. Creation does not exist solely to suit or benefit us. It has a sublime character that can stun and amaze us, if we care to look. It also can cause us pain.

Following God's speeches from the whirlwind Job can offer only the

response of one who is properly humbled. The dramatic portion of the text ends with the enigmatic words: “therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:6). This verse is notoriously difficult to translate. It could also be rendered “I retract [my case or complaint against you] and give up my dust and ashes,” or as Stephen Mitchell suggests, “Therefore I will be quiet, comforted that I am dust.” Mitchell’s translation may well be

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Job is illuminated by the greater light of creation. No longer lord and master, or sole beneficiary, of the created order, Job survives his plight as one prepared to surrender his life to the wisdom of God and the larger drama of creation.

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the most appropriate since it makes the best sense of Job’s experience. Job does not despise himself, for he has learned that God created him with the same care as the rest of creation. To despise himself would be to insult God directly. Nor should Job consider himself a complete fool because, unlike his friends, he was prepared to see that

human justice may be naïve and short-sighted. He spoke more truthfully of God than his friends (42:7). What Job does learn, however, is that his complaint was misplaced and misinformed.

Job is illuminated by the greater light of creation. No longer lord and master, or sole beneficiary, of the created order, Job survives his plight as one prepared to surrender his life to the wisdom of God and the larger drama of creation. Having seen God and no longer relying on what he merely has heard about God (42:5), Job has been introduced to a much larger vision of the world. His perception has been altered to sense in all things the majesty of God, a majesty that encompasses suffering and joy, benefit and loss. He undergoes the shift from an anthropocentric to a theocentric understanding of the cosmos. “It is as if the world we perceive through our senses, that whole gorgeous and terrible pageant, were the breath-thin surface of a bubble, and everything else, inside and outside, is pure radiance. Both suffering and joy come then like a brief reflection, and death like a pin.”<sup>3</sup> He is but dust and ashes, and for him, particularly when creation is understood in terms of its divine scale, that is enough. His own mortality, rather than being a curse, is no less a part of God’s plan than the calving of the deer and the hunger of young lions.

Job’s new vision of justice based in the sublimity of creation leads him to a transformed engagement with the world. In the epilogue to the story God restores and even doubles Job’s fortunes. He receives comfort and new sons and daughters. But Job no longer deals with these gifts in the way that he previously did. Significantly, we are told the names of Job’s

three daughters and that they are beautiful (an indication of Job's welcoming the goodness of blessing). More importantly, the daughters are given a share in the inheritance as are the sons. This gesture would have been unheard of in ancient Israel given its patriarchal assumptions and institutions. Job now is ready to welcome the world on its own good terms rather than in terms of the conventional understanding that relegated daughters to a subordinate role. His welcome reveals his newly found compassion and delight in creation that are grounded in God's own compassion and delight. Job emerges from his long plight ready to embrace the creation with the selfless care and joy that marks God's own involvement with the world.

Job now will risk mirroring in his own life the creation and Creator newly revealed to him. It will be difficult for him to live in a manner fitting with a dynamic world that is not geared to suit human ends exclusively. Job must reshape his identity and vocation so that they promote the well-being of the whole creation, rather than simply his own interests and concerns. He must expand his accounting systems so that they reflect as much as possible the diversity and sublimity of creation. Job's task was certainly counter-cultural in his day; it will be perhaps even more difficult in today's egocentric, consumer-driven culture.<sup>4</sup>

## NOTES

1 William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 91.

2 Ibid., 97.

3 Stephen Mitchell, "Introduction" to *The Book of Job*, tr. Stephen Mitchell (New York: HarperPerennial, 1987), xxviii.

4 Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), relates the lessons of Job to our contemporary ecological context.



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# Two Languages

BY GREG C. EARWOOD

We must become bilingual, fluent in the two languages of creation and torah. The speech of creation is visual, a kind of “sign language.” In very different language the torah instructs us in the wisdom of the LORD. From the psalmist we learn that creation and torah join together in testimony to the LORD God. They speak different languages, but have the same intent. One interprets the other, yet both point to the same God.

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## *Psalm 19*

**D**arkness still covered the earth on the mid-October morning and traffic was sparse on the interstate as I drove to preach in the 8:30 a.m. worship at First Baptist Church, London. A small bee hovered close to the Bible lying on the front seat and diverted my attention briefly. Obviously a student of Scripture, the bee seemed to know that God’s words are “sweeter than honey” (Psalm 19:10).

But words other than Scripture were being spoken that morning.

Before I reached the mountains of south central Kentucky, the orange hues of dawn were appearing in the east. The sun peeked over the horizon, rising from its resting place to provide light after the darkness of the previous night. Then in brightness it highlighted the trees in their autumn clothes—yellows, reds, and oranges mixed among the evergreens. Climbing higher, the sun bounced in brilliant reflection off the lake whose waters

ran near the boundary of the roadside. All of this beauty against the backdrop of a cloudless blue sky.

Kathleen Norris, in her book *Dakota*, tells of an elementary school girl who moved from Louisiana to North Dakota and observed, "The sky is full of blue and full of the mind of God."

On my Sunday morning trip the blue sky articulated a message that seemed to originate in the mind of God. "The heavens are telling the glory of God," the psalmist declared long ago, "and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (19:10); their voices join in unison to re-present continuously what God has done. The psalmist affirms that the language of creation is a testimony of praise and wonder, not in the sense of a full revelation of God, but as witness to the Creator.

To describe creation's testimony requires expansive images like those in Psalm 19. Unlike a scientific model that reduces creation to its lowest common denominator, sparse causality, here we find imaginative language: the heavens are a storyteller recounting the splendor of God and the firmament is a preacher announcing God's creative work. Their message resonates with the opening story of creation in Genesis and matches its poetic rhythm, symmetry, and intent. In the worship liturgy of Genesis 1, God used speech to create the cosmos:

*Words bringing order out of disorder,  
Separating light from darkness,  
Dividing waters with a dome.  
Words giving names to unnamed,  
Day, Night, Sky, Land, Seas,  
Then plants, lights, creatures, animals.  
Words proclaiming them Good.  
Humankind in the image of God,  
Blessing for filling and tending.  
Words for everything: Very Good!*

In Psalm 19 the created order is delivering an eloquent speech. Resounding the creative words of God, the heavens joyfully proclaim God's glorious work. Day and Night join the ancient liturgy, the Night in antiphonal response to Day: "Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge" (19:2). The orderly routine of Day and Night, Night and Day, expands the testimony toward an awareness of God.

Yet note the difficulty for the psalmist (and for a preacher) in describing how this language functions: "There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (19:3-4). While there are words, they are inaudible to human ears. The speech of creation is visual; it may be



seen as a kind of “sign language.” Its enigmatic presentation is similar to the language of one whose hands and arms form word-symbols for people who cannot hear spoken words. Even those of us who do not know sign language can appreciate its beauty and be uplifted emotionally when we observe a skilled interpreter in worship. But to persons fluent in those signs the beautiful motions communicate meaning and significance.

Signs always point beyond themselves to something or someone else.

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The speech of creation is visual. Its enigmatic presentation is similar to the hands and arms of one who forms word-symbols for people who cannot hear. Even those of us who do not know sign language can appreciate its beauty. But to persons fluent in those signs the beautiful motions communicate meaning and significance.

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Creation’s signs witness to the Creator, not as proofs for God’s existence, but as visual aids. Because creation is being re-presented day by day, we catch a glimpse of the ongoing work of the Creator. The Apostle Paul understood this when he argued, “Ever since the creation of the world [God’s] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Romans 1:20).

The psalmist, like the Apostle, calls for more than creation appreciation and a heightened sense of awe. The psalmist wants us to see creation’s significance in the whole of God’s work. Psalm 19 is not a hymn about *nature*. Heavens telling, firmament proclaiming, daytime speech, nighttime knowledge, words voiced to the end of the world, all of these are the visible world enabling our understanding of the invisible.

The temptation for modern preachers is to go where the text does not go by castigating the congregation for not being more “awe-full” with regard to nature. I am tempted to speak negatively about those who are “deaf” to creation; they are like the man in the car commercial who is engrossed in reading his new car manual while his female companion drives to a picture perfect wonder of nature. But the psalm is a hymn of praise that focuses our attention on the majestic message of creation visible in the celestial realm. Having seen, we are encouraged to join in praise, “This is my Father’s world and to my listening ears all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.”

As I journeyed closer to London, the sun played hide and seek in the mountains. It reminded me of Ken Chafin’s playful and insightful poem, “Multiple Sunrises”:



Today, I watched the sun  
come up six times  
between Louisville  
and Lexington.

It was a ball of orange  
hanging in the mist,  
a picture a child might  
draw with a crayon.

Each time I dipped  
into a dark canyon  
dug by a creek, then  
topped the hill again  
--another sunrise.

I wished for a camera,  
had just these two eyes,  
wished to be a painter,  
have only my memory.

The psalmist saw it this way: "In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat" (19:4b-6). In contrast to the sun deities of ancient (and today's New Age) religions, the psalmist proclaims the God who sets the sun in place for its celebrated arrival and daily run across the sky. Neither the sun nor any part of creation is a god to be worshipped, but all serve their purposes under the direction of the Creator God. The sun, though it is not treated as a god, is personified as a bridegroom and a strong runner.

The dawning sun, like a bridegroom greeting the morning after his wedding in anticipation of a joyful new life, rises eagerly to mark a fresh beginning. Every morning the newness of Genesis 1 is re-created. Sunrise bears witness to the Creator's continuing handiwork; God is present to offer new opportunities, possibilities, and beginnings.

Then the psalmist portrays the sun as a vigorous runner repeating a well-planned workout. In the county park near my home is a two-mile path designed for walkers and runners. Every day folks repeat this circular route for exercise or pleasure, or both. Some run with agonizing pain on their faces, but others with satisfied smiles of joy. So the sun starts its routine and "runs its course with joy." Its daily exercise contributes not only to the beauty of creation, but also to the rhythm of life on the earth; the sun speaks of an orderly world created by an orderly God. As constant as

the sun in coming up and running its course everyday, God is steadfast and persevering in the intentional goodness of creation.

Without warning, the heavenly witness of creation (19:1-6) gives way to the “sweeter than honey” words of torah (19:7-13). In very different language the torah instructs us in the wisdom of the LORD. The majestic “music of the spheres” shifts abruptly to a drum beat cadence in 19:7-9:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes.  
the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

No longer an artistic “sign” language, this is the didactic “legal” language of the Torah. (Rather than the usual translation “law,” I prefer the Hebrew term “torah” which means instruction pointing to the way of life. Though torah may prescribe necessary boundaries, it is not meant to be narrow and restrictive as we usually think of law. The words of torah, though verbal, are expansive like the speech of creation.)

Once again we are invited to march in step with the rhythm of life:

*The instruction of the LORD is complete, renewing our minds.  
The testimony of the LORD is faithful, assuring our witness.  
The promises of the LORD are sure, anchoring our souls.  
The good news of the LORD is true, giving peace to our lives.  
The love of the LORD is steadfast, filling our hearts.  
The torah of the LORD: Very Good!*

These words point beyond themselves to the LORD whose instruction is rewarding to people who follow the path of life. From the psalmist we learn that creation and torah join together in testimony to the LORD God. They speak different languages, but have the same intent. One interprets the other, yet both point to the same God.

The psalmist encourages us to become bilingual. With two distinct parts Psalm 19 teaches the wisdom of being fluent in the two languages of creation and torah. Through the witness of both creation and torah we are drawn into a deeper understanding of the LORD God.

The writer of the Gospel of John has learned this lesson, for the majestic prologue speaks the languages of creation and torah. Furthermore, we hear those languages of Psalm 19 spoken in the knowledge of the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ:

*Creation.* “In the beginning was the Word.... He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him”(John 1:1a, 2—3a).

*Light and darkness.* “In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (1:4-5).

*Testimony.* “[John] came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him” (1:7).

*Glory.* “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (1:14).

*Torah.* “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (1:17).

*Invisible/Visible.* “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (1:18).

This gospel’s own sign language is the Word made flesh, the One who uniquely reflects the glory of the God of creation and torah.

On my October morning drive I listened to the beauty of creation’s non-verbal witness to the Creator. Later, in First Baptist Church, London, we gathered together to hear torah-like instruction in the hymns and anthems, prayers and offerings, and sermon with sign language interpretation. Worship shifted from one language to the other.

Here is the benediction offered by the psalmist who has heard both languages. Listen to its closing significance: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer” (19:14).

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The writer of the Gospel of John is bilingual, for the majestic prologue speaks the languages of creation and torah. Furthermore we hear those languages of Psalm 19 spoken in the knowledge of the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

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GREG EARWOOD

is president of Baptist Seminary of Kentucky. He lives in Georgetown, Kentucky.

This photo is available in the print version of  
Moral Landscape of Creation

Vibrant colors, to be savored in nature's sunlight or  
sanctuary lighting, capture this time of joyous inno-  
cence: the spirit of God brooding over the populating of  
the sky and sea landscapes.

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# Joyous Innocence

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

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**T**he contemporary Christian artist David J. Hetland transforms spaces with light. Dramatic in their scale, rich color, and pattern, his stained glass series at First Lutheran Church in Fergus Falls, MN celebrates the Genesis 1 creation account. The scene illustrated here depicts the bringing forth of living creatures on the fifth day (1:20-23).

The magnificent, vibrant colors chosen by the artist give a glorious effect to the scripture. In response to God's word, the waters teem with an abundance of living creatures (1:20) and the birds multiply on the earth (1:22). Brooding over them all, with outstretched wings and crowned with a nimbus and cross, is a dove, symbolizing the preeminent presence of the Holy Spirit throughout God's creation. Other birds fill the sky in every direction. In the lower portion of the window we see a medley of fish, crustaceans, and amphibians of divers colors and species. God's creation is brimming but not crowded, varied but not chaotic! The creatures swirl before a backdrop of geometric patterns that recalls the medium of mosaic, a technique also enjoyed by this artist.

Hetland is best known for his liturgical interpretations expressed in mosaic and stained glass. He studied with Cyrus M. Running of Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. The companion pieces to this window, "Teeming With Life," and other liturgical art can be viewed on the artist's Web site, [www.hetland.com](http://www.hetland.com).

The populating of the sky and sea landscapes is a moment of joyous innocence, indicated by expressive color in this window. Craftspersons of Venetian glass tiles began with Hetland's designs and formed them into this work of art that can be enjoyed and studied in either nature's sunlight or sanctuary lighting.

This photo is available in the print version of  
Moral Landscape of Creation

Michelangelo's astonishing images of Eden disclose the root and effects of our sin. From yielding to temptation in a rocky terrain, Adam and Eve must wander into a terribly vacant and barren landscape.

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# Sin's Landscape

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

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Michelangelo, who preferred to sculpt rather than to paint, could not decline Pope Julius II della Rovere's 'request' to continue the decoration of his private place of worship, the Sistine Chapel. The walls of the chapel, built in the 1480s by Julius' uncle, Pope Sixtus IV, had been adorned with scenes of "the world during Law," specifically from the lives of the lawgivers Moses and Jesus. Michelangelo painted the ceiling with Genesis-based scenes from the world before Law. An image of the world after Law would complete the theological program when he returned in 1534-41 to paint the *Last Judgment* above the altar.

The famous ceiling's nine bays are divided into three triads of images: the creation of the world (Genesis 1), the stories of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2-3), and the Noah stories (Genesis 6-9). *Original Sin and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* illustrates well the artist's surprising use of landscape in the Adam and Eve images. Notice that this is not the green, flowery conception that most of us have of Paradise: here sin is born in a rocky landscape filled with boulders and a twisted tree stump. The left side of the composition shows the moment of temptation as the serpent, wrapped around the thick trunk of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, passes its fruit to Eve. Adam holds the limb back to allow the pass to be easier. These gestures by the serpent and Adam are the artist's interpretation; they go beyond the Genesis account (3:6) and suggest their complicity in Eve's sin. The right side of the image shows the effect of sin: the land is terribly vacant and barren behind the sinful couple and the anguish visible in their faces heightens the drama of their expulsion.

We expect the artist's Eden landscape to reveal the goodness and vitality of God's creation, but here it discloses the root and effects of our sin.



This photo is available in the print version  
of Moral Landscape of Creation

The landscape of creation is powerful by its absence. In self-reproach and shame Eve is isolated from Adam, the beautiful garden, and most of its inhabitants. Only the serpent is present.

*Moses Jacob Ezekiel (1844-1917). EVE HEARING THE VOICE, Modeled 1876, cast c. 1904. Bronze, over life-size. Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Dr. Merlyn McClure and the Family of Dr. George W. McClure. Photograph © Cincinnati Art Museum.*



# Isolation

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

Rarely is Eve depicted alone in visual representations of the Garden of Eden stories. Where is Adam in this powerful bronze? Where is the glorious landscape of Paradise? Of all the creatures in the garden, only the serpent is barely visible at the base.

Moses Jacob Ezekiel wrote that his sculpture represents “Eve when she hears the voice of God in the garden and is ashamed.” Eve’s self-reproach shows in the exaggerated theatrical gesture which is not typical of the academic-classical style Ezekiel had studied. He once told of a lady who arrived in a fine carriage at his studio in Rome. He did not know her, but she seemed to think that everybody did. Seeing this statue, the lady “at once criticized the thumb as being bent too far back and said that, when a woman’s thumb is bent back in that way, she must have an immoral character.”<sup>†</sup> For the high lady there was this subtler token of shame!

Ezekiel, the first celebrated American Jewish sculptor, was one of 14 children in a Sephardic family of Dutch descent in Richmond. He attended the Virginia Military Institute in 1862, fought as a Confederate cadet, and befriended Gen. Robert E. Lee in 1866. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Berlin from 1869 until 1871. After winning the Prix de Rome in 1873, he worked in that city for most of the rest of his life. Among his best-known works are eleven full-length portraits of artists for niches in the Corcoran Gallery (today the Renwick Gallery) in Washington, D.C. (1877-84) and the Confederate Memorial at Arlington National Cemetery (1914). At his request, Ezekiel was buried beneath that memorial in a ceremony that mirrored the complexity of his life: an art-historian Rabbi from Cincinnati paid tribute, the Washington lodge conducted a Masonic interment, and the United Daughters of the Confederacy led a separate ceremony.

This complicated artist sculpted a strikingly simple and powerful image: the shameful figure of Eve in isolation from her mate, the beautiful garden, and most of its inhabitants. Because of her sin Eve is separated from her landscape.

## NOTE

<sup>†</sup> Moses Jacob Ezekiel, *Memoirs From the Baths of Diocletian*, ed. Joseph Gutmann and Stanley F. Chyet, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 179-81.

# Stars and Planets Flung in Orbit

HERMAN G. STUEMPFLE, JR.

JOHN GOSS (1869)

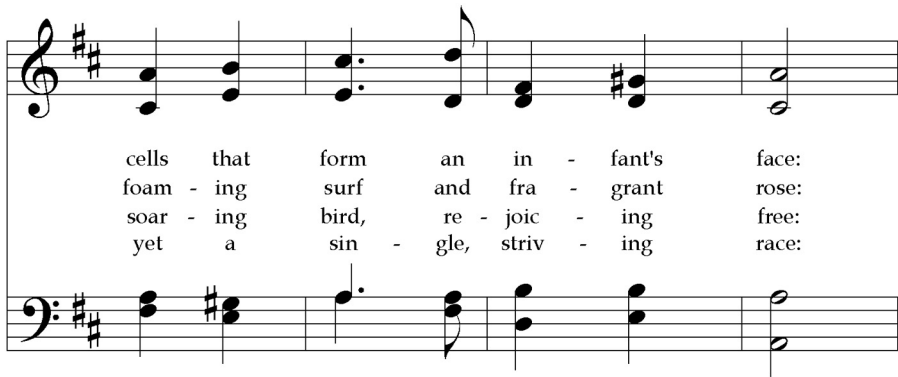
Stars and plan - ets flung in or - bit,  
Skies a - dorned with sun - set splen - dor,  
Life in won - drous, wild pro - fu - sion,  
Hu - man - kind, earth's deep - est mys - tery,

gal - ax - ies that swirl through space,  
si - lent peaks in calm re - pose,  
seed and fruit, each flow'r and tree,  
born of dust but touched by grace,

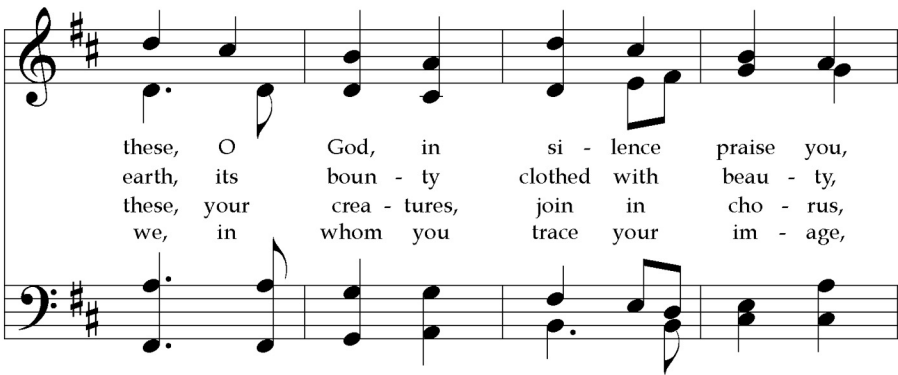
pow - ers hid with - in the at - om,  
gol - den fields a - wait - ing har - vest,  
beast and fish and swarm - ing in - sect,  
torn a - part by tongue and col - or,

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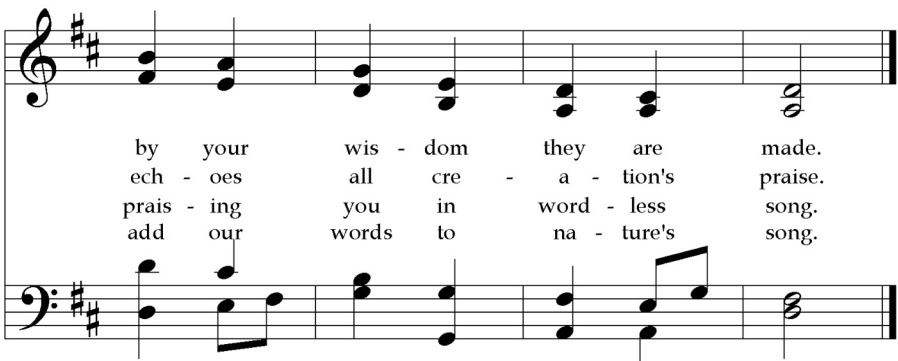
Tune: LAUDA ANIMA  
8.7.8.7.8.7.



cells that form an in - fant's face:  
foam - ing surf and fra - grant rose:  
soar - ing bird, re - joic - ing free:  
yet a sin - gle, striv - ing race:



these, O God, in si - lence praise you,  
earth, its boun - ty clothed with beau - ty,  
these, your crea - tures, join in cho - rus,  
we, in whom you trace your im - age,



by your wis - dom they are made.  
ech - oes all cre - a - tion's praise.  
prais - ing you in word - less song.  
add our words to na - ture's song.

5. Gra-cious God, we bring be-fore you  
gifts of hu-man life a-lone,  
Truth that throbs through song and sto-ry,  
vi-sions caught in paint and stone:  
These, O God, we glad-ly of-fer,  
Gifts to praise the Giv-er's name.

6. Christ, the Word be-fore cre-a-tion  
as cre-a-tion's fin-al goal,  
Once you came for earth's re-demp-tion;  
by your Spir-it make earth whole.  
Then, O God, the new cre-a-tion  
will your praise for-ev-er sing.

# The God Who Set the Stars in Space

TIMOTHY DUDLEY-SMITH

GESANGBUCH, Wittenberg, 1784

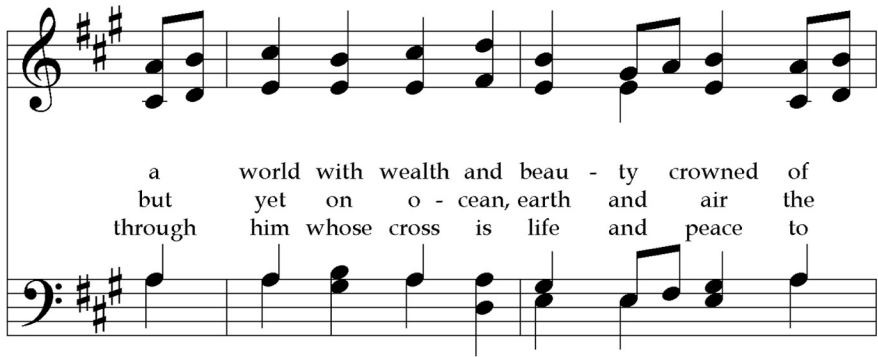
The God who set the stars in space and  
 A world of or - der and de - light God  
 O God, by whose re - deem - ing grace the

gave the plan - ets birth cre - a - ted for our  
 gave for us to tend, to hold as pre - cious  
 lost may be re - stored, who stooped to save our

dwel - ing place a green and fruit - ful earth;  
 in his sight, to nur - ture and de - fend;  
 fal - len race in Christ, cre - a - tion's Lord,

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Tune: ELLACOMBE  
 8.6.8.6. D



a world with wealth and beau - ty crowned of  
 but yet on o - cean, earth and air the  
 through him whose cross is life and peace to



sky and sea and land, where life should flour - ish  
 marks of sin are seen, with all that God cre -  
 cleanse a heart de - filed may hu - man greed and



and a - bound be - neath its Mak - er's hand.  
 a - ted fair pol - lut - ed and un - clean.  
 con - flict cease and all be rec - on - ciled.

4. Re-new the wastes of earth a-gain,  
 re-deem, re-store, re-pair;  
 With us, your chil-dren, still main-tain  
 your cov-e-nant of care.  
 May we, who move from dust to dust  
 and on your grace de-pend,  
 No long-er, Lord, be-tray our trust  
 but prove cre-a-tion's friend.

5. Our God, who set the stars in space  
 and gave the plan-ets birth,  
 Look down from heav'n, your dwell-ing  
 place, and heal the wounds of earth;  
 Till pain, de-cay and bond-age done,  
 when death it-self has died,  
 Cre-a-tion's songs shall rise as one  
 and God be glo-ri-fied!

# Worship Service

B Y R A G A N C O U R T N E Y

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## *Prelude:*

“2.73”<sup>1</sup>

*Ann Gebuhr*

## *Call to Worship:*

“Silent Prelude”

In cold, dark empty  
Silence  
Nothingness slowly evolved into Nothingness.  
No time to pass,  
Nothing marked the passing of anything.  
Nothing measured the cold, the dark, the silence, the emptiness.  
Eternity? A mere pillow on which God rested His head.  
Chaos? The black velvet that covered His bed.  
Then in that vast unknowable void without form,  
Before the Foundations of Time,  
God shook the covers;  
And the Spirit of God moved, hovered, and brooded.  
And the Spirit of God said: “Let there be light!”  
And there was.  
And God saw the light was good.  
He named the light Day, and He named Day’s shadow Night.  
Day was good.  
Night was good.  
God is good.

*Ragan Courtney*

## *Hymn of Praise:*

“Stars and Planets Flung in Orbit”<sup>2</sup>

Stars and planets flung in orbit, galaxies that whirl through space,  
Powers hid within the atom, cells that form an infant’s face:  
These, O God, in silence praise you; by your wisdom they are made.

Skies adorned with sunset splendor, silent peaks in calm repose,  
Golden fields awaiting harvest, foaming surf and fragrant rose:  
Earth, its bounty clothed with beauty, echoes all creation’s praise.

Life in wondrous, wild profusion, seed and fruit, each flower and tree,  
Beast and fish and swarming insect, soaring bird, rejoicing, free:  
These, your creatures, join in chorus, praising you in wordless song.

Humankind, earth’s deepest mystery, born of dust but touched  
by grace,  
Torn apart by tongue and color, yet a single, striving race:  
We, in whom you trace your image, add our words to nature’s song.

*Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr.*

*Suggested tunes:* LAUDA ANIMA or REGENTS SQUARE

## *Prayer of Praise.*<sup>3</sup>

Leader: Alleluia! We give thanks to Yahweh, for you are good.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: We give thanks to you the God of gods.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: You alone perform great marvels.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: Your wisdom made the heavens.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: You set the earth on the waters.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: You made the great lights,

The sun to rule the day

And the moon and stars to govern the night.

**People: Your love is everlasting!**

Leader: It was you, who created our inmost selves,

And put us in our mother’s womb.

**People: For all of these mysteries we thank you;**

Leader: For the wonder of self,

**People:** For the wonder of your works.

**All:** For your love is everlasting! Amen.

*Old Testament Reading: Genesis 1:24-28, 31*

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beast of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."...And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**Reader:** This is the word of the Lord.

**People:** Thanks be to God.

*Hymn of Reflection:*

"I Sing the Mighty Power of God"

*New Testament Reading: John 1:1-4*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

**Reader:** This is the word of the Lord.

**People:** Thanks be to God.



*Hymn:*

“Morning Has Broken”

*Prayer of the People:*

**People:** Dear Creator God, we call to you from this beautiful little planet that you extravagantly made. We come from a galaxy that has over 400 thousand, million stars in it. We call from a universe that has as many galaxies as our galaxy has stars. You are so mighty and we are so small. How do we reach your ear with our moaning and crying, or our praise? How can we ever convey to you the love and reverence that we have for you? Your ways are not our ways, but you said that we are made in your image. And you said that you gave us this small planet over which we are to have dominion. We, then, are created to show our dominion over the earth in careful, creative ways.

Lord, we confess that we have not been good stewards of what was entrusted to us. We have squandered the resources of this planet; we have hoarded mere material things; we have built bigger barns; we have filled our bellies until they are too full, yet we allow others to die of malnutrition. Most of the things that you made and called good, we have polluted, perverted, or destroyed. We ask for forgiveness. We beg for mercy, knowing that we are here by your grace. We ask that you open our eyes to what you would have us do and be, as we strive to be more like whom you are, as revealed to us by Jesus, your Son. In his name we pray. Amen.

*Choral Offering:*

“Glorious in Holiness”<sup>4</sup>

*Ragan Courtney and Buryl Red*

*Sung Response:*

“Doxology”

*Sermon**Hymn of Response:*

“The God Who Set the Stars in Space”<sup>5</sup>

The God who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth  
created for our dwelling place a green and fruitful earth;  
a world with wealth and beauty crowned of sky and sea and land,  
where life should flourish and abound beneath its Maker’s hand.

A world of order and delight God gave for us to tend,  
to hold as precious in his sight, to nurture and defend;  
but yet on ocean, earth and air the marks of sin are seen,  
with all that God created fair polluted and unclean.

O God, by whose redeeming grace the lost may be restored,  
who stooped to save our fallen race in Christ, creation’s Lord,  
through him whose cross is life and peace to cleanse a heart defiled  
may human greed and conflict cease and all be reconciled.

Renew the wastes of earth again, redeem, restore, repair;  
with us, your children, still maintain your covenant of care.  
May we, who move from dust to dust and on your grace depend,  
no longer, Lord, betray our trust but prove creation’s friend.

Our God, who set the stars in space and gave the planets birth,  
look down from heav’n, your dwelling place,  
and heal the wounds of earth;  
till pain, decay, and bondage done, when death itself has died,  
creation’s songs shall rise as one and God be glorified!

*Timothy Dudley-Smith*

*suggested tune:* ELLACOMBE

*Benediction:*

Pastor: And now, O God, as we leave this place where we have considered your handiwork and have been moved to worship you, go with us to the other part of our world outside these doors. As we go, we take faith, hope, and charity to those who need these gifts.

We go out to be stewards of all that you have entrusted to us. We go out to work for justice so that we may have peace, not the world's peace but your peace. We ask for that peace to rest upon us now. Amen.

**NOTES**

†"2.73" by Ann Gebuhr can be obtained by writing to Dr. Ann Gebuhr, 7502 Fondren Road, Houston, Texas 77074.

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is Co-Pastor with his wife, Cynthia Clawson, at Tarrytown Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

# Little Things Mean a Lot

BY RAYMOND BAILEY

Though called to care for God's good world, we are polluting the environment and killing our children. I was hesitant to undertake this subject because, I thought, I'm "preaching to the choir." Yet after a little personal survey I realized that for me to *know* better is not always for me to *act* better.

---

*The earth dries up and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish together with the earth.  
The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled,  
and few people are left.*

*Isaiah 24:4-6*

**S**ome Christians' resistance to dealing with the environment as a matter of their faith is difficult for me to understand. From Genesis to Revelation the Scripture speaks of creation as God's good gift and the arena in which the glory of God is revealed. The Scripture also portrays a history of God's direction and empowerment of human agents to be stewards to carry out the Divine will. It is remarkable, for instance, how often Jesus used paradigms of masters and stewards in his parables. Unfortu-

nately, however, the parables usually warn of stewards who have failed in their duties.

The Genesis 1 account of creation pictures all that exists—animal, plant, firmament, and human—as a good and purposeful work of God. The fundamental purpose of humanity is to care for creation. “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’” (Genesis 1:28). The meaning of humankind’s dominion over the earth is a source of much debate among Christians. Some argue that everything in the universe is intended for human satisfaction and pleasure. Their attitude is one of consumption with no regard for the needs of future generations. Other Christians believe that we are to participate with God’s spirit in the ongoing work of creation. We have to do our part to provide for the preservation and growth of God’s good world. Scripture suggests that the pillaging of the earth, if not sin, is the result of sin. Hosea’s assessment of the results of covenant breaking in his day seems apt for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

*There is no faithfulness, no love,  
no acknowledgment of God in the land.*

*There is only cursing, lying and murder,  
stealing and adultery;  
they break all bounds,  
and bloodshed follows bloodshed.*

*Because of this the land mourns,  
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.*

*... my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.*

*Hosea 4:1a-3, 6 NIV*

If “dominion” means that God trusts us to care for earth, sky, seas, and creatures, then we are not doing a very good job.

One problem in dealing with a subject like the environment is the difficulty of grasping scientific theory and philosophical abstractions. Yet we do not have to understand chemistry, biology, or ethical theory to see the results of pollution and land abuse on human beings. As believers in the incarnation, Christians are grasped by images of human suffering, including that of our savior impaled on a tree. Though some critics of social justice preaching say that we should preach only Christ and Him crucified, can we

talk about Jesus and the crucifixion without looking also at those for whom Christ suffered? Is not the cross ever present in the heart of God and in the heart of creation? What was the way for which Christ was willing to sacrifice his life? When I think about Jesus, I think about one who cared about the life and well-being of people, about them being fed and having their basic human needs met I think about one who was in the healing business and who wanted children to be healthy and happy.

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We could not look at a *particular* child in danger of death and not be willing to make major sacrifices and suffer significant inconveniences to prevent that death. Yet children who are suffering and dying because of environmental degradation could be saved if enough of us would make minor sacrifices and endure a little discomfort.

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What sacrifice would you be willing to make to save the life of a child? We could not look at a *particular* child in danger of death and not be willing to make major sacrifices and suffer significant inconveniences to prevent that death. Yet children who are suffering and dying because of environmental degradation could be saved if enough of us would make minor sacrifices and endure a little discomfort.

The world will be a long time recovering from the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York City. The shock of the deaths of thousands of people will linger for a long time for those who saw the horrific scene played over and over on television. If we could go back and *do something* to save those lives, rather than digging through the rubble and providing for the survivors, we would not hesitate as individuals, as a nation, or as a church. But there are large numbers of people dying whom we could save. The truth of the matter is that 31,000 people died on September 10, and 31,000 people died on September 12, but because those were daily occurrences on the world scene, the media did not report their deaths on the front page of the newspaper or on the television evening news. Outside of the United States one child out of every five dies before the age of five and an overwhelming number of these deaths are related to environmental problems. Does God care? Should Christians be concerned? Should we hide our faces in our hymnbooks and Bibles and leave these matters to the economists and politicians? These thousands die because of problems of earth and air abuse, gluttony and waste in the industrial world, and poor distribution of the world's resources. For instance, between 40 and 300 million poor people who live in tropical regions are at risk for hunger and

starvation because of reduced agricultural output due to global warming.

We are polluting the air and killing our own children. Infectious disease is no longer the most common cause for illness among children in the United States. Today they are not in great danger of small pox, but they are universally threatened by respiratory dysfunctions like asthma. The number of affected children between the ages of five and fourteen has increased 74% since 1980. The incidence among children from birth to age four has increased 124%. Asthma death rates for African-Americans are three times that of whites. One in three Americans lives in an area with unhealthy air. We can immunize our children against measles, mumps, whooping cough and those other diseases once fatal to millions around the world. But only gas masks could protect them from the exhaust of our engines of comfort. Masks cannot protect vegetation and animals.

The second leading cause of children's deaths is cancer. In the United States alone, one out of four children lives within a mile of a toxic dump. What can we do about it? Certain forms of cancer have risen sharply in recent years. Testicular cancer is up 60%, brain tumors are up 30% and leukemia has increased by 10%.

In a democracy we can use our voices and votes to change policies that ignore scientific realities with fatal human implications. Yet a recent Gallup poll indicates that only 27% of Americans think that environmental issues are important. 57% of those polled rank environmental issues above economic ones, but that is a drop of 10% from the previous two years.

We can inform ourselves about environmental policies and encourage courageous elected officials who put people over politics and profit. The Evangelical Environmental Network suggests that

Christians should urge their Senators to endorse the Kyoto Protocol to control global warming. This action could reverse the current trends of air pollution. National leaders should encourage research to develop energy sources other than fossil fuels that increase carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas in the atmosphere.

At home and church, we can practice these three R's: reduce, reuse, and

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Little efforts in conserving fossil fuels can go a long way. What difference would it make if Christians gave up their sport utility vehicles and drove smaller ones? What if we were a bit warmer in summer or colder in winter to conserve energy? What if we chose our home chemicals, from hairsprays to pesticides, more carefully?

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recycle. Little actions practiced by many people can make a major difference in our stewardship of natural resources.

Little efforts in conserving fossil fuels can go a long way. Simply by lowering the temperatures in our homes by six degrees in the winter, we would save 570,000 barrels of oil a year. By raising temperatures in our homes in the summer by six degrees, we could save an additional 170,000 barrels of oil. What if we were willing to be a bit warmer in summer or colder in winter to preserve energy for our grandchildren? Experts say that more energy escapes through the windows and doors in our homes than flows through the Alaskan pipeline every year. What difference would it make if Christians gave up their sport utility vehicles and drove smaller vehicles? What if we chose our home chemicals, from hairsprays to pesticides, more carefully?

Genesis says that our Lord created step by step the world in which we live. At each step of the way God said, "that's good." It's good, the separation of land from sea, the separation of darkness and light, the stars in the sky, the vegetation, the cattle and the creeping things, and humankind. All of creation being good, how do we keep it good?

I was hesitant to undertake the subject of a Christian response to environmental degradation, not because it doesn't need to be addressed, but because, I thought, I'm "preaching to the choir." You are people who believe that the environment is being abused and who care about creation; you know the facts and care about the facts. However, then I did a little survey of my own actions and realized that for me to *know* better is not always for me to *act* better. It's easier to say the right thing than to do the right thing. We sing, "This is My Father's World." Is it our Father's world? And if it is, what claim does God have on us and the way we treat it?

#### NOTE

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## ❧ Other Voices ❧

To believe in God the Creator means to believe that he created me along with all other created beings. Few have progressed so far as to believe this in the fullest sense.

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

We have forgotten that the Apostle's Creed begins with an affirmation of God as Maker of heaven and earth. We have forgotten that Genesis begins with creation, not redemption, and that Revelation ends with a redeemed, renewed creation. We have forgotten that, in the words of St. Paul, all things were created and hang together in Christ. While reading the book of Scripture, we have forgotten to read the book of nature.

STEVEN BOUMA - PREDIGER , *For the Beauty of the Earth*

[Genesis 1:2] provides us with an image we rarely think of when regarding the natural world: Hovering over the creation, brooding over this world now as surely as at the dawn of time, is the Spirit of God, hands up-  
raised in a divine benediction. What a loaded image to keep before us when we are out and about in the world! After all, anything God blesses should be treated with utter respect and holy awe, with preserving care and joyful delight.

SCOTT HOEZE , *Remember Creation: God's World of Wonder and Delight*

GRANDEUR OF GOD

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge & shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast & with ah! bright wings.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844-1889)

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it," wrote the psalmist (Psalm 24:1). But the cedars of Lebanon, which were a part of the earth the psalmist knew, are gone.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). But today in many parts of the world what the sky proclaims is dimmed and muted by a yellow-brown haze, and scars on the earth testify to its own erosion.

For too long many people in their sacred assemblies have acknowledged God as Creator but failed to care for the creation he made. Others have erred in worshiping the creation rather than the Creator, replacing God with something less.

FRED VAN DYKE, DAVID C. MAHAN, JOSEPH K. SHELTON, and RAYMOND H. BRAND, *Redeeming Creation*

... C. S. Lewis once said, we Christians need always to be fighting on two fronts. On the one front are the pantheists who think that everything is divine. When you are dealing with them, you need to emphasize that God and creation are distinct. On the other front are those who make the chasm between God and creation so deep and wide that in their service to God they care not a fig for the environment. When dealing with these folks, Lewis says, you need to emphasize how close God is to his creation, pointing out that in a sense God really is in my dog, my cabbage patch, my oak tree. It is a delicate balancing act between identifying God too closely with the world and not keeping God close enough.

SCOTT HOEZEEL, *Remember Creation: God's World of Wonder and Delight*

When we turn the attention of the church to a definition of the Christian relationship with the natural world, we are not stepping away from grave and proper theological ideas; we are stepping right into the middle of them. There is a deeply rooted, genuinely Christian motivation for attention to God's creation, despite the fact that many church people consider ecology to be a secular concern. "What does environmental preservation have to do with Jesus Christ and his church?" they ask. They could not be more shallow or more wrong.

JOSEPH SITTLER, *Gravity and Grace*

Contempt for the earth is not ancient but modern, not biblical but secular. The revolution in human thinking and action that was introduced by the age of the so-called Enlightenment is, more than anything else, responsible for it. In that intellectual-spiritual movement the human took charge of all things, the self and the world. Worldviews were secularized so that there was no longer a God of love and justice to answer to, only a humanity of ambition and self-interest to give commands. "Glory to man in the highest and on earth a higher standard of living for all" was the theme

hymn. Earth is here for our *use*, not for our *care*. Technological developments provide increasingly powerful means to impose human will on the environment at the same time that spiritual understandings, which restrain pride and cultivate humility, diminish.

As the “image of God” as the controlling metaphor for understanding our place in the universe fades and the myth of self-sufficiency replaces it, fewer and fewer people ask the question, “What is the purpose of God in creation?” They ask instead, “How can I use creation to fulfill my purposes?” Purposes are not evaluated against God’s purposes. It is simply assumed that what is good for the human is good for everything.

EUGENE H. PETERSON, *Where Your Treasure Is: Psalms That Summon You from Self to Community*

Now this double worship of God—for his mighty works in creation and salvation, for his glory revealed in creation and his grace revealed in Scripture—is only a stammering anticipation of the full-throated chorus in heaven, in which angels, animals, and humans will join in unison and sing:

You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
*for you created* all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.

—Revelation 4:11

And again,

Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength,  
and honor and glory and praise!

—Revelation 5:12

Thus the worship of heaven also recognizes the double nature of the works of the Lord, as Creator and Redeemer.

JOHN R. W. STOTT, “The Works of the Lord,” in *The Best Preaching on Earth*, ed. by Stan L. LeQuire

# Teaching Children the Story of Creation

BY ANDREA HARRELL MOORE

We can teach our children to understand God's relationship with creation, God's relationship with His people, and their own relationship toward the creation. In addition to teaching these important truths found in the creation story, we also must teach them how to respond. But this will require students and teachers to move out of the ordinary church classroom setting.

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**W**hen I think of the creation story and its place in Christian theology, I'm reminded of the summer when one of our sons, then a toddler, visited the beach for the first time. He danced a dance of celebration as he stood on the wet sand and watched the tide cool his bare feet. Then, with dogged determination, he skipped to the sand dunes, filled his chubby little hands with moist sand, and ran as fast as he could to the edge of the foaming water to offer his gifts to the sea. His mission, it seemed, was simple: to restore to the ocean the grains of sand lost with each great exploding wave. "Thank you God for your great, big, beautiful sea," we recited as we ran together to greet the waves and share his newly gathered bounty. The sweet, spontaneous giggles that erupted from deep within his soul as he threw his arms up in victory became our "Amen."

Our toddler had experienced for the first time the wonderful gift of one of God's greatest creations and his heart had danced. How wonderful it would be if we all approached the creation story with such expectancy and exhilaration. We give a great gift to our children when we share the story of creation with the same joy and celebration. By telling and retelling

the wonder of God's majesty in creation, we, like our son, can restore what has been taken away from God's creation; in the process we strengthen our relationships with God and with the world through which God blesses us.

### DEFINING OUR GOALS

Unfortunately it is easy to fall into the habit of teaching as we always have taught, or even as we were taught ourselves. Like many parents I have welcomed those colorful pictures and creative designs depicting the seven days of creation that my children have brought home from Sunday School. They have learned to recite easily the daily acts of creation beginning with "On the first day..." and continuing to the end of the story when God rests. However, too often the lesson has stopped there.

We want more for our children. Merely appreciating the vivid and majestic drama in the opening chapter of Genesis is not enough; we must all understand *our role* in the story. The creation story is our story and our children's story. It is the story that gives us breath and life. Only through a deeper understanding of it will our children be able to live well in the place given to them for well-keeping by the Creator. Thus our children and we will be better stewards of God's word and God's world.

So, let's define what we want our children to learn. We desire for them to know of God's infinite greatness and to grasp their relationship with their Creator. The creation narrative is our first introduction to God, and it is, therefore, where we first begin to learn about our unique relationship. Then we want our children,

through a careful study of how God created our world and assigned each of us to care for it, to understand their role in the story: that they were created miraculously and wonderfully, and called by our Maker to celebrate rather than corrupt, and to

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We want our children to understand their role in the story: that they were created miraculously and wonderfully, and called by our Maker to celebrate rather than corrupt, to preserve rather than destroy.

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preserve rather than destroy. We long for our children to view the world through the windows of the creation story.

In addition to teaching our children these important truths found in the creation story, we also must teach them how to respond. Through careful teaching and modeling we can guide our children to establish good habits of stewardship. This will be challenging for two reasons: in addition to requiring faithful stewardship from teachers and the church community, this will require students and teachers to move out of the ordinary church classroom setting. Not only good stewardship practices, but also a grasp of why we do them is essential for our children on their life journeys. The

creation narrative provides clear reasons why we must tend the gardens of the earth and care for their well-being, and our children need to understand this theological rationale. Finally, and most importantly, we yearn for our children to accept the call to restore the created order, for this is an essential aspect of God's redemption of the world.

Although it is challenging and time-consuming to think in new ways and to gather the support for nurturing new teaching methods, we owe it to God, as well as our children, to rethink the ways that we traditionally have taught children in our churches. In the process we will open our own minds to rediscovering our relationship with God and the creation.

The question is often asked, should we integrate recent environmental concerns with the idea of responsible stewardship when teaching our children? Truly we cannot teach the creation story effectively and responsibly to our children without integrating them. They go together, in the words of my older son, like peanut butter and jelly. Neither seems quite sufficient without the other. When teaching our children, we must intentionally interrelate our scientific knowledge of God's world with our understanding of God as Creator. Only then are we able to present a clear and faithful picture of God in relationship with His people.

#### TEACHING FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

Here are practical ways that we can teach our children to understand God's relationship with creation, God's relationship with His people, and their own relationship toward the creation.

*God's relationship with creation.* Scripture teaches us that the God of Israel is not merely a deity to be praised, but is the Holy One who began creation and remains ever sovereign. Through an understanding of the majesty and sovereignty of the Creator our children will appreciate the magnitude of being chosen to work with God. We must avoid a pantheistic view that deifies nature and invites us to worship it; a clear distinction needs to be drawn between Creator and creation. Nor do we go to the other extreme that encourages an arrogant exploitation of the world in which God placed us. We should not treat nature as if it were God, but neither can we abuse the natural world as if we were God.<sup>1</sup>

We can teach our children to avoid pantheism and human arrogance, and to worship God as creator:

- ♦ Guide children to look for ways people have neglected or abused the natural world and encourage them to offer solutions by which they help to make a difference. Ask probing questions: "When we see all these pieces of trash on the ground, what message are we sending to God?" "When we see the skies turn brown and black because of exhaust fumes, what must God be thinking?" and "How do we treat the things we care for and the people we love?" Sometimes the best way to explain an abstract concept like *worshipping the creator*

is to show in concrete ways what it is not. Our world offers innumerable tangible ways in which our treatment of the creation indicates that God is not worshiped.

- ♦ My younger children love to go on prayer walks. We thank God for all that we see. This not only encourages them to look closely at all that is around them, it helps to clarify the relationship of God with the creation. Giving thanks acknowledges and praises the Giver.
- ♦ I mentioned the teeter-totter balancing act that we must perform as we teach children to care for their world in a way that offers glory to the Maker: we must neither encourage the New Age idea of God in nature, which distorts the Creator's image, nor lean to the other extreme and relinquish our responsibility as caretakers. Children's literature and movies have made this proverbial teeter-totter go up and down with great gusto: heroes often either dominate nature or worship it. We can help our children read and view these materials critically. Using a balanced approach within the church we can teach and encourage our children to see their world through God's eyes and seek restoration of an often neglected world.

*God's relationship with His people.* The creation story illuminates God's love for us. The Psalmist rejoices in the knowledge that God has made humankind to be "a little lower than God" and has "crowned them with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5). Knowing that we not only have been created in the image of the Holy One, but also chosen to "rule over the works of [God's] hands" inspires our hearts.

How do we help our children sense their calling as co-workers with God in caring for the creation and thereby partake in what John Stott calls the divine-human relationship?<sup>2</sup> This relationship involves responsibilities. Children can easily identify with personal responsibilities given to them at home and at school. By highlighting their God-given responsibilities we prepare them to understand just how much their Creator loves them:

- ♦ "Show-and-tell" gets children excited about coming to church. Invite them to bring something that is very special to them. They quickly will grasp the idea that we take good care of things that we love—so much, in fact, that we are often overly protective. If we want to keep our special things, then we must care for them in a responsible manner.
- ♦ Children are given responsibilities at home, church, and school in order to help both them and those around them. This concept is made more concrete by listing such responsibilities and discussing the consequences of failing to do what is expected. With the creation story we take this idea of responsible behavior a step farther: God gives us responsibilities for caretaking. Since an authority higher

than parents or teachers is involved, the purposes and consequences are greater and more meaningful. Children can create a new list of God-given responsibilities to care for the created world in tangible ways. They will begin to see that their responsibilities go beyond the walls of home, church, and school.

Scott Hoezee notes a falling-out today between Christians who forsake the environment in search of a deeper spirituality and environmentalists who seek only to save the earth.<sup>3</sup> Responsible teaching of the creation story

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So much of our culture has taken away what children need: a joyful encounter with the natural world. How can they love and appreciate what they do not experience? Here we can learn much from the “greening of the classroom” in schools across America.

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can help to lessen this divide. Our children can become a new generation of Christians who grow spiritually through tending responsibly to the earth and its needs.

*The child’s relationship to creation.* So much of our culture has taken away what children need: a joyful encounter with the natural world. How can they love

and appreciate what they do not experience? A thoughtful integration of adoration and stewardship must go beyond the printed lessons and must venture out of the classroom setting.

We can learn much from the “greening of the classroom” movement in public schools across America. Through a careful incorporation of a hands-on approach to the natural world, educators are realizing how much can be learned from the soil and its rich, fertile gardens. A recent study shows that schools with an EIC program (for “Environment as an Integrating Context”) see significant improvements in both learning and teaching.<sup>4</sup> Student involvement and interest level increase as the natural habitat makes math, social studies, science, and language come alive. Abstractions become more easily understood when children have the opportunity to learn in a more creative and hands-on atmosphere. Environmental-based learning has made a big impact on many classrooms. How wonderful it would be to have a “greening of the Sunday School” in order to introduce God’s world to our children in a more tangible and meaningful way:

- ♦ It can be as simple as teaching children to care for plants in a small garden; to pick up litter; to turn off lights when they are not being used; to eat and drink with reusable cups, plates, and utensils; to not waste water when washing their hands; and to recycle paper in a separate container. A green learning environment teaches children to care for and conserve the creation.



- ♦ Through their “green” projects children can care for other people. A small garden can grow into a larger garden to help feed the hungry. A recycling project can help pay for new ministries, like playground equipment, children’s hymnals, or Christmas gifts for other children. Planting young trees can shade future generations. The ideas are as endless as our imaginations allow.

Consider several factors when “greening” your program with these new learning activities: Will the activity be Sunday morning or another time? Will the children be wearing dress clothes or play clothes? How many children will be present and of what ages? How can the wider church family support and be involved? What are the community’s needs? Children will enjoy participating in this assessment process. With the involvement of caring adults and energetic children, great ideas can become reachable goals.

However we choose to begin the blending of theological truths and environmental stewardship, we must continue to recognize the importance of both our words and our actions in portraying God’s truth to those beginning their faith journeys. The Biblical stories of creation give children pictures of faith and glimpses into God’s nature and love. Through careful teaching and modeling we can build bridges of faith that enable our children to accept God’s word as meaningful to them today, and we can bring the beauty of the natural world into our lives and our church communities. All of us truly will rejoice with the Psalmist who says,

The earth is the LORD’s, and all that is in it,  
the world, and those who live in it (Psalm 24:1).

## NOTES

1 John Stott, “Forward” in *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*, ed. R. J. Berry (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 8.

2 Ibid.

3 Scott Hoezee, *Remember Creation: God’s World of Wonder and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 10.

4 Gerald A. Lieberman, “Putting the ‘E’ Back into Education,” *Native Plants* 18:2 (Summer 2001): 16-19.



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# Becoming Better Gardeners

BY TERESA MORGAN

Not only must Christians engage in careful theological reflection on the Christian theology of creation, we must act on our responsibilities. Many denominational and parachurch organizations, like the six mentioned here, can help us to become better “gardeners,” wise and committed environmental stewards who keep and serve God’s creation.

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**T**he Church is rediscovering a Christian ecological theology that affirms the beauty and goodness of creation and the human role to serve and keep God’s garden.<sup>1</sup> This ecological theology recognizes that care for the environment is an intrinsically religious issue because all of the earth’s community is valuable to God, who creates, sustains and redeems the whole. It promotes social justice and the common good, yet it is rooted firmly in the Bible and traditions of the Church. It grows in the rich soil of Scripture, wherein God delights in all creation (Genesis 1:9, 31), covenants with human beings and all other living creatures (Genesis 9:9-10), and redeems all creation (Romans 8: 22-23). This theology of creation has ethical implications for us. We are called to increase our appreciation for God’s presence in creation and recognize the interdependent relationships between humanity and nature. Aware that our use of global natural resources is unsustainable, we must adapt to the limitations of the creation. We must promote just and compassionate interventions to assist human communities, ecosystems, and the global commons that are in ecological crisis.

## THEOLOGICAL SPADEWORK

Among the first to draw attention to the deep religious implications of

environmental restoration was the Catholic community. Pope John Paul II wrote in his World Day of Peace (1990) address:

Men and women without any particular religious conviction, but with an acute sense of their responsibility for the common good, recognize their obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment. All the more should men and women who believe in God the Creator, and who are thus convinced that there is a well-defined unity and order in the world, feel called to address the problem.<sup>2</sup>

The religious aspect of creation's degradation is best defined as a moral obligation for the Church to intervene on its behalf. How should we approach the issues in light of the affirmations of our faith? What kind of interventions can the people of God accomplish in these highly complex, interrelated, and seemingly insolvable problems? Clearly the Genesis narratives charge us to serve and keep the garden that God created, because we reflect the divine image and can nurture the creation's life-giving processes. Though the biblical imperative to keep and serve creation is human-centered (Genesis 2:15), Genesis also requires humility and justice toward non-human creation. To act upon its moral responsibility in keeping creation, therefore, the Church must respond in ways that preserve the integrity of the whole.

The theological spadework that clarifies, develops, and announces this biblical imperative to care for the environment is an important first step as the Church responds to ecological degradation. Through this careful thinking we proclaim God's healing and redemptive presence in creation. Religious teachings shape societal attitudes; they provide an ethical interpretive framework, or worldview, for the way in which people live and relate to God and nature. Lynn White observed, "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion."<sup>3</sup> In the current ecological crisis our theology can link our spirituality to social activism in correcting the economic abuses and political injustice that often cause the environmental problems. The good news is that Christian denominations and institutions by the early 1990's had initiated broad efforts in education, advocacy, and focal service projects for environmental care. World conferences, scholarly publications, educational materials, denominational events, and powerful public exhortation began to enlarge their religious vision of creation. As a result, major initiatives were launched to protect the global commons and advance the cause of human justice.

As we develop the Christian ethical interpretative framework we discover significant concepts in the New Testament writings that can enrich

our understanding of stewardship and social justice. Three ideas discussed here are the household of God, the role of deacon, and the incarnation.

For example, the biblical imperative to keep and serve the creation must be linked to long-term sustainability of the whole, including land, water, animal species, and ecosystems. Sustainability is a norm that keeps the future in view; it says that meeting current needs cannot compromise the ability of future generations of creatures to meet their own needs.<sup>4</sup> We may put this meeting of the present and future needs of people and ecosystems into Christian terms by thinking about the earth's community as the household of God, the *oikos*. This way of thinking also highlights the interconnectedness among human beings, other creatures, and the non-living creation. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA's *Hope for a*

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The Christian theology of creation grows in the rich soil of Scripture. The New Testament ideas of the household of God, the role of deacon, and the incarnation, richly shape the biblical imperative to care for the environment.

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*Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development* (1996) is an important policy statement that links justice and sustainability in the context of *oikos*. It says, "Sustainable development is now the most widely recommended remedy for the global social, economic, and ecological crisis." Sustainability is a necessity within the *oikos* because it integrates the economic, social, political, cultural, and ecological dimensions of the global community's future. In this way the fullest realization of human potential can occur that "centers attention on the critical role of justice."<sup>5</sup>

If Christians lag behind in caring for the environment, Susan Power Bratton challenges them to realize that they might be "deacons" to the creation. "Christianity has hardly shown consistent or courageous leadership in confronting demographic dilemmas or environmental degradation," Bratton complains. "Although a handful of socially conscious Christians have exhorted their denominations and congregations to greater environmental responsibility, Christianity thus far has been barely a follower, much less a leader, in engaging international environmental concerns."<sup>6</sup> Let us confess that sometimes, believing incorrectly that the earth is so vast and nature is so powerful as to be beyond meaningful intervention, we do not make even modest efforts to address these concerns. One remedy that Bratton advocates is to be "environmental deacons" in our congregations and local communities. Environmental deacons live everyday in creation's service, addressing the unjust distribution of economic benefits and risks,

leading the way in poor neighborhoods next to leaking dumps, and encouraging the victims of toxic exposure.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, theologian Leonardo Boff recommends that reflecting upon the incarnation should deepen our commitment to care for God's creation. Of course, he notes, "The entire universe was created by God ... [and we] observe the signs of God's hand in everything: in all created things and in the spiritual and physical reality of humankind." However, he emphasizes, "The Christian scriptures extend and radicalize the same line of experience of God in history. It testifies that God whole and entire has entered into human reality and has taken human form in Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>8</sup>

We must recover and proclaim the biblical imperative to serve creation. This includes interpreting the biblical witness to a postmodern world, deepening theological reflection, and re-envisioning the church's mission to include striving for environmental justice.

#### ACTING ON OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Not only must we engage in this careful theological reflection, we must act on our responsibilities, which include:

- ♦ Encouraging appropriate technologies such as reuse, recycling, and renewable energy;
- ♦ Fostering local conservation and sustainable growth strategies;
- ♦ Educating about environmental degradation and its impact on human health and wellness;
- ♦ Seeking fair distributions of economic benefits and risks produced by our ecological problems, in regard to wealthy and poor, urban and rural populations;
- ♦ Forging local connections among churches in different denominations and with other groups in order to address common problems;
- ♦ Developing an ethic for the church that combines with integrity our concern for the creation and for the gospel.

Many denominational and parachurch organizations can help congregations and us to become involved in environmental stewardship. Here are six examples.

Earth Ministry's "Greening Congregations" is an impressive model for any congregation or community wanting to participate in ecological education and awareness. Earth Ministry promotes creation stewardship with *Earth Letter*, a thoughtful newsletter on current environmental issues. It highlights local, national, and international struggles of indigenous groups to achieve environmental sustainability. Go to [www.earthministry.org](http://www.earthministry.org) for a closer look.

"Transforming faith-based communities for a sustainable world" is the

mission of the Web of Creation site maintained by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. It provides prayers and worship materials, biblically based lessons and study programs, and practical ideas for individuals' and congregations' energy stewardship. Web of Creation has educational resources for environmental health and wellness. See [www.webofcreation.org](http://www.webofcreation.org).

The Christian Environmental Association (CEA) promotes biblical stewardship by focusing on environmental justice, which is the relationship

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The objective of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment is to move churches and synagogues from "pollution to solution" through positive local, regional, and national efforts in environmental sustainability.

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between the health of the environment and the health and well-being of the poor and marginalized. Through the CEA's one-week team programs and eight-week internships, believers may serve Christ by serving the poor in circumstances of ecological blight. Colleges as well as churches can participate in many research and mission opportunities.

Explore the CEA at [www.targetearth.org/index.html](http://www.targetearth.org/index.html).

The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission developed the Christian Environmental Network, [www.christianenvironmentalnetwork.com](http://www.christianenvironmentalnetwork.com). It offers "The Call of Creation," twelve Bible study lessons (six for adults, three for youth, and three for children) on topics related to the creation and human dominion, over-consumption, loss of biodiversity, and ecological stewardship. The Web site also reviews current activity in the Texas legislature related to environment ethics, including issues of water, solid waste, nuclear pollution, and agriculture. With many links to other organizations, faith-based and secular, this site is a great starting place for searching the World Wide Web for environmental education resources for churches.

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE) was established in 1993 by four major religious communities: the U. S. Catholic Conference, the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, the National Council of Churches, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. These partner organizations maintain their unique faith perspective as they cooperate to "weave care for God's creation throughout religious life in such a way as to protect the natural world and human well-being within it."<sup>9</sup> The NRPE's objective is to move churches and synagogues from "pollution to solution" through positive local, regional, and national efforts in environmental sustainability. The NRPE Web site, [www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org), provides an overview of the history, goals and objectives of the movement.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology, Harvard University Center for

the Environment, is an excellent resource for environmental ethics, science, public policy, and economics. The Forum is developing a Web site, [www.environment.harvard.edu/religion](http://www.environment.harvard.edu/religion), with information on environmental ethics in the world religions and relevant passages from their sacred texts. Teachers will find syllabi and reading lists for innovative courses on religion and ecology.

These are just a few of the organizations that can help our congregations and us to become better “gardeners,” wise and committed environmental stewards who care for the creation.

## NOTES

1 See, for instance, the articles in Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2000).

2 Pope John Paul II, “World Day of Peace Address” (January 1, 1990: Vatican City). Reprinted in *And God Saw That it Was Good*, ed. Drew Christianson, SJ, (Washington, DC: U. S. Catholic Conference, 1996), 215.

3 Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (March 1967), 1204.

4 *Our Common Future, The World Commission on Environment and Development*. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 1987.

5 *Hope for A Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church USA, 1989), 75.

6 Susan Power Bratton, “Response to Daniel Maguire: The Church Should Call not Just Prophets but Environmental Deacons,” in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Ruth Radford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 429.

7 Ibid., 432-433.

8 Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 150.

9 “Mission.” *National Religious Partnership for the Environment*. Online. World Wide Web. Available: <http://www.nrpe.org/mission.html>.



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# Our Two Gardens

These resources and activities, which are easily adapted for teaching in the church or at home, will help younger children to appreciate God's creation.

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**D**id Andrea Harrell Moore's article, "Teaching Children the Story of Creation" (pp. 66-71), pique your interest in going outside the ordinary classroom setting for a joyful encounter with the natural world? These recommended resources and activities will help younger children to appreciate God's creation. They are easily adapted for teaching in the church or at home.

The opening lines from Margaret Hebblethwaite's *Our Two Gardens* (Nashville: Oliver-Nelson, 1991) can set the stage for your children's outdoor encounters:

We have two gardens, and I love them very much.  
One is quite small, and is behind our house....  
The other garden is big....  
The world is a garden, planted by God.  
God is the best gardener there has ever been.

This story is about a backyard's demise due to neglect and pollution, and its wonderful rescue by its original gardener named Nancy. As the children in the story act to repair each problem in their backyard, they notice that a similar wound plagues God's big garden, the earth. They hope that we will do something about the damage to God's garden so that future children may enjoy the world, too, for "that is the way God meant it to be." Peter Kavanagh's beautiful watercolors illustrate the young reader's (grade 2) text. Though *Our Two Gardens* is currently out of print, look for this gem in church libraries or used bookstores on the Internet.

The illustrated 'recipes' in Kathleen Fry-Miller and Judith Myers-Walls' *Young Peacemakers Project Book* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1988) are wonderful action-oriented lessons. Our favorite is to construct an underwater viewer with a tin can or milk carton and plastic wrap, then put on tennis



shoes to enjoy a creek walk ("Puddles, Streams, and Water Holes," p. 9). A "Garbage Awareness Collage" helps children to identify and sort garbage (p. 18), with an optional activity for elementary school age kids to learn about decomposition and recycling. These authors put caring for the environment into a broader context of justice and peacemaking. An appendix lists Bible verses about creation to mix and match with the recipes.

Kath Murdoch's large resource, *Ideas for Environmental Education in the Elementary Classroom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993), is adaptable by parents and church teachers. "Getting Out There" (chapter 2) gives an excellent rationale for environmental education and a recommended activity sequence for working with children in the outdoors: in the "warming down" and "response" periods you can guide them to reflect on God's majesty and their own role as stewards in the creation. Some activities in this book would be terrific for a day-camp program or a creation-care theme camp. For example, "Cunning Compost" describes step-by-step how to construct a compost bin and use the soil that you 'make' (pp. 69-70).

Several Web sites feature free environmental-activity lessons for children. SEEDS Foundation, a Canadian non-profit organization that supports environmental education, gathers "170 Action Ideas" at <http://greenschools.ca/Ideas/select.html>.

Children who love trees will enjoy the eleven imaginative activities in *Silent Witnesses: America's Historic Trees* from American Forests' Historic Tree Nursery ([www.historictrees.org/educate.htm](http://www.historictrees.org/educate.htm)). When your children's program is ready to attract wildlife to the church's landscape or a backyard, look at the "WILD Ideas" from Canadian Wildlife Federation ([www.cwf-fcf.org/pages/wildideas.htm](http://www.cwf-fcf.org/pages/wildideas.htm)).

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Activity guides from the Church of the Brethren combine environmental education with mission projects that care for the poor. Children can help protect forests in Belize, assist Guatemalan families in building wood-conserving stoves, and provide food-related development assistance in North Korea.

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The Church of the Brethren combines environmental education with mission projects that care for the poor. In one activity guide, *If A Tree Falls...*, children study rainforests and then share \$10 to \$30 with Christian organizations that plant fruit or forest trees in Guatemala or purchase and protect forests in Belize. Through the *Fire and Forest* effort of the Global Food Crisis Fund they can assist Guatemalan families in building wood-

conserving stoves and provide food-related development assistance in North Korea, Honduras, the Sudan, and other locations worldwide. *Faith Expeditions* takes children to learn about threats to the environment in Central America and the Arctic. Your class can join an initiative to sell compact florescent light bulbs as a fund-raiser and for energy conservation. For more information or to order these guides free, go to [www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/VBS2001.htm](http://www.brethren.org/genbd/witness/VBS2001.htm).

If the story *Our Two Gardens* has inspired you to garden with children, it is time for you to visit *Kinder Garden* and *KidsGardening.com*. Texas A&M University's *Kinder Garden* Web site ([aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/kinder.htm](http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/kindergarten/kinder.htm)) is a one-stop resource for gardening with children. Three major sections (school gardens, community gardens, and botanic gardens) offer links to gardening organizations around the world. The National Garden Association's [www.KidsGardening.com](http://www.KidsGardening.com) has advice, gardening products, and more links for families and teachers.

Why not vary "the ordinary classroom setting" by inviting youth or older adults to share their environmental concern with the children? Ask them to tell their personal stories, read and comment on Biblical stories about creation, or share a favorite children's story of creation-care. We recommend Sarah Stewart, *The Gardener* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1997). With David Small's imaginative illustrations it tells the story of Lydia Grace, who in the Depression must leave home to live with an uncle who owns a city bakery. Lydia Grace's short letters home recount the joy that she brings to her uncle and his workers through her favorite pastime, gardening. Another favorite is *Morning Has Broken* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996) with Tim Ladwig's paintings based on the text of Eleanor Farjeon's famous hymn for children. *Francis: The Poor Man of Assisi* by the famous children's artist Tomie dePaola (Holiday House, 1982, reprinted 1990) presents selections from St. Francis of Assisi's writings, including the Canticle of the Sun. St. Francis (c. 1181-1226) had a loving companionship with animals and an enthusiasm for flowers that inspires children. ☺

# The Glory Robe of God

A CONVERSATION WITH

SCOTT HOEZE

With rich biblical images of creation and the new creation in Christ, pastor Scott Hoezee came to understand his own joy in tramping through wetlands, bird watching, cross-country skiing, and snorkeling over coral reefs. Now he summons his congregation to delight in and care for creation as “the glory robe of God.”

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**W**hy have some Christians been slow to respond to environmental damage, whether it is planet-wide problems of ozone depletion and desertification of farmland, or the threats to health and safety of life-forms in our local communities? Perhaps we are sitting on the sidelines, suggests pastor and author Scott Hoezee, because we fail to delight in the environment as God’s creation.

Hoezee (pronounced “hoe-ZAY”), Minister of Preaching and Administration at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI, talked with me about his love for the Gospel and childhood delight in the creation, and how he connected these together first in his sermons and then in his book, *Remember Creation: God’s World of Wonder and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

Environmental organizations help us to grasp the problems that we face, though sometimes they espouse a “religious stew” as they combine uncritically the diverse faith traditions of their members. Christians should respond to this “Babel of confusion” about why to care for the environment, says Hoezee, by remembering the rich biblical images of creation and of the new creation in Christ: “What motivates a love of nature is that it is not finally ‘nature’ at all! It is creation, it is God’s work. As such it bears the stamp of his glory, it praises him in all its manifold diversity, and

it has received and continues to receive his divine benediction" (*Remember Creation*, p. 88).

**Bob Kruschwitz: What do you mean when you encourage us to recognize and honor "the ecology of praise"?**

Scott Hoezee: In God's sight and hearing the physical cosmos is like a symphony of praise. This theme comes through again and again in Scripture, particularly in Old Testament psalms but also in the Apostle Paul's writings. The birds of the air, trees of the field, mountains, brooks, and all

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In God's sight and hearing the physical cosmos is like a symphony of praise. I want to tune people's hearing to recognize in the cadences of creation something of what God hears.

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the rest do not merely reveal God's handiwork and move us to praise God, but they *themselves* actively praise God. So I've wanted to tune people's hearing to recognize in the cadences of creation something of what God hears. In the preservation of the physical

cosmos we are helping to preserve and perpetuate what to God is a most beautiful song of praise. When I talk about "the ecology of praise," it's an attempt to turn the ecological movement of preservation of species, habitats, and the like in a decidedly biblical direction: to see those efforts as not merely keeping alive this or that species for our grandchildren to enjoy, though that's a noble goal, but also as keeping all of the members of God's choir in place.

**When you interpret the beautiful passage Psalm 104:1-2, you borrow John Stek's metaphor that the cosmos is "the glory robe of God."**

Yes, I liked that image as soon as I heard it in seminary class. It pictures creation as a garment that enhances the glory of God while yet being separate from God, as something that gives God joy and delight similar to a favorite outfit we really enjoy putting on. I like "the glory robe" because it shows how dear creation is to God and how it enhances God's beauty and glory, and yet it avoids the theological pitfalls of pantheism, which many Christians fear is an inevitable result of thinking too much about creation. As C. S. Lewis once said, we Christians always need to be fighting on two fronts. On the one hand we do not want to identify creation so closely with God that we become pantheists who think everything is divine, but on the other hand we've got to see God's close association with the *rutabaga* growing in our garden.

**How did you come to delight in and to care for the creation?**

I grew up in the country on a farm, so I've always enjoyed being out and about in the woods. When I was in the second or third grade I really liked birds and got to know as many different bird species as I could. I

came back to that hobby during my seminary years when I met my wife, because she and her father were big on bird watching. Then my mother got back into it, so I really took up that hobby again. Meanwhile, I discovered the hobby of snorkeling over coral reefs and that whole world opened itself up to me. So, I have always enjoyed looking at and learning about at least those aspects of the physical world.

My seminary training never connected to those interests and I didn't find much theological reflection on them. I came to that more or less on my own as I began to preach; I wanted to find ways to relate those parts of life to my faith. Certainly my avocations of snorkeling, bird watching, hiking, and cross-country skiing were not "un-Christian" activities. Therefore, it seemed, there must be some way to reflect on them theologically and bring them into my preaching. I started to read the Bible looking for that kind of theological reflection, for affirmations of these hobbies that I enjoyed. When I began to read through that lens, all kinds of material in Scripture leapt out at me in a way it had never done before.

**Your story reminds me of this comment:**

**"Among the many holy tasks of Christians is to foster, nurture, and develop children's God-given sense of curiosity [about the world] in such a way that it will still be there when they are adults. For this whole world belongs to God—we should want to know more about it." (*Remember Creation*, p. 29) Are we failing our children and stifling their curiosity?**

Sometimes we do. Fortunately, some Christian day school teachers in my tradition are doing a better job than did some of my teachers, although I had many wonderful teachers. When I've spoken to teachers' conventions on these themes, it's been heartening to see Christian school teachers connect the curiosity that children in elementary grades naturally possess about anthills and so on, to their Biblical and theological formation. That's very important. Otherwise it's easy to grow up thinking, as I once thought, that there's little connection between a Thursday afternoon field trip when you tramp through a wetland and a Sunday morning in church, where the windows are opaque, and the words and songs offer no reminders of what you saw in the wetland.

As parents, teachers, or pastors, we should connect the joy that children rather naturally take in creation with the work of Jesus and their



*Scott Hoezee urges his church members to "remember creation" in worship and environmental action.*

identity as Christians. This will foster their curiosity and sanction it in a biblical way that may help to keep it alive. Otherwise, if we indicate, subtly or overtly, that curiosity about the physical world is nice, but it doesn't belong at church, then we might wither children's curiosity a bit. For instance, we send subtle signals when we sing, "turn your eyes upon Jesus, ... and the things of earth will grow strangely dim."



*Large crosses are integrated into the window frames of the sanctuary of Holyway Presbyterian Church nestled at the base of Mount Zion near Tucson, AZ. (Used by permission of the architects, Albanese-Brooks Associates PC.)*

**How can our church communities, in our liturgy and architecture, become "creation-friendly" places?**

The liturgy is easier to address, because short of literally knocking out walls and getting rid of much-loved stained glass windows, there's only so much retrofitting that may be practical in a church. My church recently finished a new fellowship space with many clear windows and skylights so we can grow plants and flowers, and we took real care with the

landscaping of trees, a variety of plants and flowers, and so forth. When we are able to see the physical creation out through the windows or bring the plants of creation inside, we are reminded that we aren't hermetically sealed behind brick and glass, but that the context of our worship is the physical creation. Anything that makes our houses of worship transparent to creation helps a lot, whether it be art, banners, or architectural retrofitting—not just because it's pretty, but as a reminder of the context of our worship and as one of things for which we're grateful.

We have control each week over the liturgy in a way that is not true of architecture. At least some of our prayers and hymns on a regular basis ought to be creation related. Sermons now and again should focus in an extended way on some aspect of the physical world, and even when they do not, some sermon illustrations might include agrarian images or examples from the physical world. These heighten people's awareness. For instance, in the last year I have begun to write most of my prayers, particularly my congregational prayers in the morning service. At least once or twice a month I open that prayer with a reflection on and thanksgiving for cre-

ation. I thank God for not just the wonders of creation that are “way out there” but the wonders of creation that are in the sanctuary every week in the form of fingernails, kidneys that are functioning, and hearts that are beating, in order to make people aware that within our own skin are wonders for which we give thanks to God. It’s not weird and it ought not be unusual to mention something like a spleen or a knee joint in a prayer. If as the psalmist said, “we are fearfully and wonderfully made,” then reflecting on that in a liturgical setting only makes sense.

**How have church members responded to these sermons and prayers?**

Their response to my sermon series based upon biblical passages about the physical creation encouraged me that there was a need for a book like *Remember Creation*. Most people said that they had never heard such sustained reflection on the nature, purpose, and future of the physical cosmos. Some people clearly had been longing to hear their own love of creation reflected in a Christian theological context. They were very, very appreciative. Members of my church know that they will hear two themes, grace and a cosmic perspective on redemption, weaving in and out of all my sermons.

Other reviews and correspondence about *Remember Creation* fall into two or three categories. Some folks say that this emphasis is fresh and new in evangelical circles, but nevertheless they, like my congregation, are very appreciative. On the other

hand, there is a certain amount of resistance. If I get specific about the ecological side of all this and say, for instance, “Here’s a salmon species that we need to preserve,” or I really get down to brass tacks as to what it means to exercise ecological stewardship as an act of discipleship, some people very quickly caricature what I’m saying. They raise five or six counter-

balancing points: “Yes, maybe it would be good to preserve a certain species, but something that you didn’t mention makes it impossible or impractical to do that.” They resist specific, hands-on preservation efforts. When I keep it abstract, people are more willing to go along with it. If I get concrete in what I’m saying, then they resist changing their lifestyle as much as I suggest. Some say, “Well, recycling is fine, but really it doesn’t

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Anything that makes our houses of worship transparent to creation helps a lot. When we are able to see the physical creation through the windows or bring it inside, we are reminded that we aren’t hermetically sealed behind brick and glass, but that the context of our worship is the physical creation.

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do any good,” or “It costs more energy to recycle than to make new stuff.” No matter who suggests the ecological efforts, whether it’s a pastor or somebody from the Sierra Club, some Christians respond that it is just a little “loopy” and too much work.

**Some Christians think that an emphasis on creation theology must be at the expense of a theology of redemption. How do you bring creation and redemption together?**

The two big themes of the whole Bible are creation and redemption. They go together hand in glove very naturally. If you just follow the line of

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We assume that if a group is not Christian, then we ought not to work with it. The notion of “common grace” frees us from that rather simple dichotomy. If our theology tells us that a group is doing what is right, then we recognize in it the glimmers of God’s grace even if some of the reasons they offer for their work are muddled or somewhat wrong-headed.

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Scripture through, it begins in Genesis with the creation and ends in Revelation with a new creation, and in between the whole story is of God’s long-term effort to salvage a creation that went sour. If you begin your theological reflections with the creation, with God’s loving, zestful, and delightful efforts at creating this exuberant cosmos of variety, then you notice all along in Scripture that this is what

God is working to keep alive and to bring back to the original intent that God had in the beginning. One problem that we evangelical Christians have is that we don’t begin our theological reflections with creation, but with the cross. Our religious ethos and piety in America have been forged by the great revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and therefore our focus has been on “Jesus died for me,” “I come to Jesus,” and “I am redeemed or saved.” It is very human-centered, very individualistic. Now if we begin with the notion of salvation that gets proclaimed at revival meetings, then the creation theme becomes a mere footnote rather than the keynote of our whole theology. If, however, we can see the cross as the apex, the center point, the climax of a story that began with the creation, then the creation becomes an essential part of what Jesus died to redeem.

**Though some people in Sierra Club and similar groups espouse a rather strange “religious stew,” these organizations do a lot of good work. In *Remembering Creation* you use the idea of “common grace” to recommend that Christians ought to work critically with secular environmental groups.**



For too long we have tacitly assumed that if a group is not Christian, then we ought not to support or work with it. The notion of “common grace” helps to free us from that rather simple dichotomy. If a group is doing what is right and proper from our theological perspective, then we recognize the glimmers of God’s grace that are present even if some of the reasons that they offer for their work are muddled or somewhat wrong-headed. So, nevertheless, we would work with them. If ecological preservation groups are pursuing something which we think is redolent of God and of God’s intentions for this world, then why not applaud what they do? Until recently no specifically Christian groups were doing the same kind of work and we could not say, “Well, I’ll support this group instead of the Sierra Club because this one’s Christian.” It’s changing now, but I still think that we look for the good that groups do and support them for that reason. God works in many ways and through many different people to get his work done.

**What would you say is the role of creation care in our discipleship?**

Pastors, teachers, and seminary professors, especially those who serve in evangelical and fundamentalist traditions, have an obligation to highlight this somewhat neglected but extremely important facet of theology. They must lead us to see ourselves as part of the big biblical story of creation and redemption, and then to become excited about actually being caught up in the grand, moving work of God through which God is tenderly reclaiming all that God has made. Sometimes, for instance, people worry that heaven will be boring; you know, how long can we strum golden harps on a cloud without becoming a little bit restless? That very fret stems from a lack of understanding about what the new creation, the kingdom of God, is going to be like. If we would understand that it will be endlessly fascinating because of the variety of life and creatures there, and see that eternity will be an endless exploration, appreciation, and celebration of that richly textured place, then our thinking about heaven would turn in a very new direction. ☸

# God's Delight and Covenant

BY EDWIN BAGLEY

Anyone seeking a standard of righteousness that takes the created order seriously will discover rich advice and practical examples in these books from an engaging pastor, a group of theologians, and four practicing scientists. Together they lead us to share God's delight in the creation and appreciate our covenantal duties.

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**W**hy is it that books about creation-evolution debates become bestsellers, but books about caring for creation or celebrating its beauty never do? Why do people flock to lectures about ancient fossil records but avoid programs about endangered species? Are evangelical Christians apathetic about the environment?

Scott Hoezee puzzles about the oddness of these behavior patterns, and his book *Remember Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998; 115 pp., \$14.00 paperback) may be precisely the cure for some congregations. Inspired by the experiences of the church he pastors in Michigan, and by several works of C. S. Lewis, Hoezee provides a lively and engaging text suitably subtitled *God's World of Wonder and Delight*. Scripture, theology, and hymns intermingle with his personal adventures and witty reflections on our collective shortcomings.

Theology should begin, he says, where the Bible begins: with creation. If we begin instead with the cross and the empty tomb, we risk having a narrow, individualistic view of redemption. Not even the books of the New Testament begin that way. God is known first as Creator, and in creation we find the expression of God's image and God's delight.

The relationship between a wife and her husband recurs as a parable for our relation to God. If a spouse creates a work of art, a caring person will show interest and treat it with care. To do otherwise would offend

and hurt. If a person loves God and believes that this world is a creation of God, how could a careless or destructive lifestyle be an option? For instance, if God has planned and created a distinctive species of fish, what kind of person would declare such a creation to be unimportant and expendable?

What about our hymns? The hymn that commends a faith in which “the things of earth will grow strangely dim” takes on a different meaning to those who read Hoezee’s critique of religious music. Psalms and hymns that celebrate creation are recommended to fill out a liturgy that too often reflects our indoor culture rather than directing our attention outside. Sermons can allude to nature rather than TV shows or movies, and transparent windows can let worshipers see the world that is so often shut out. Solomon’s temple was decorated with plants and animals. Why not our sanctuaries?

Have you ever thought of quizzing your fellow church members about their vacations? Some of them have found the nurturing power of spending time in forests or swimming around coral reefs. “Re-creation” takes on new meaning in such places. Even Sunday afternoons can be enriched by seeking contact with the wonders of nature as an expression of delight and a source of awareness appropriate to the day. Hoezee’s book is sprinkled with tales of those surprising, redemptive moments beyond the urban and suburban settings in which most of us work and live. He is clever and suggestive when he spotlights the habitual ways in which we avoid nature or devalue it in theory and practice.

Like the authors of the other two books discussed below, Hoezee reacts sharply to criticisms that Christians have more im-

portant matters to attend to than learning about creation and seeking a standard of righteousness that takes the created order seriously. Some of his favorite biblical images are those describing how plants and animals express praise to God. When he reads New Testament accounts of divine redemption, he notices that the whole creation is pictured as being redeemed and restored. There is much passion here for such a slim volume, and it is accessible to a wide range of readers.

What happens when evangelicals attending a meeting of the World

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Psalms and hymns that celebrate creation are recommended to fill out a liturgy that too often reflects our indoor culture. Sermons can allude to nature rather than TV shows or movies, and transparent windows can let worshipers see the world that is so often shut out.

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Council of Churches find themselves voted down on the issue of whether humans have a distinctive role in the created order? If they were insightful, concerned, and resourceful Christians, they might get together and compose a clear statement of their views that would be helpful to people of similar interests. They were, and they did. *An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* began capturing attention when it was issued in 1994. The *Declaration* only fills about four pages at the beginning of the book edited by R. J. Berry, but it is a precise, thorough statement of theological concerns and specific problems that believers should address. Taken alone, it is a rich resource for illustrating how biblical concepts and contemporary problems can be linked.

*The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000; 192 pp., \$17.99 paperback) is a set of articles related to the *Declaration*, with five articles that describe the context from which it emerged and fourteen articles that offer commentary on the *Declaration*. The book opens with the famous essay by Lynn White, Jr. that blames “Christian arrogance toward nature” for many environmental problems we see now. From the creation story in Genesis 1, he extracts the statement about human domination over the other animals. The interpretation he gives to that passage and to historic Christianity is that the creation has no purpose except human use.<sup>1</sup> For that reason, he says, Christianity has been “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen” and has been unable to provide moral guidelines in environmental issues. White’s article has influenced a generation of people with ecological interests, and some of them respond in this book.

Who wrote the *Declaration*? Loren Wilkinson talks about the original draft he produced and lists some of the people who met to make revisions. Ron Sider was there, and his essay applies biblical models to environmental problems, just as he has been doing for years with problems of poverty and hunger. Calvin DeWitt explains some of the scientific observations he added. His memorable analogy about how absurd it would be for an art critic to praise Rembrandt but trample his paintings captures the reader’s attention. His top ten list of Christians’ reasons for not getting involved in creation care ought to spark vigorous discussion in any group.

Alister McGrath opens the commentary section of the book with an overview of recent work and a description of the important theological issues. From the thirteen remaining articles, five are emphasized here to illustrate the scope of the book.

Stewardship is a popular topic among environmentalists even though the Bible does not use the term in connection with creation-care issues. Richard Bauckham explains several different perspectives about stewardship. One old view was that we should learn nature’s laws to increase human control. Another was that nature itself is chaotic and it is humanity’s re-

sponsibility to control and improve the natural world. Other perspectives say our role is to be co-creators with God, guardians, or servants. Since “stewardship” has a “chastened and humble” meaning in recent evangelical thought, Bauckham enumerates pros and cons of continuing that usage.

Jürgen Moltmann affirms the *Declaration's* emphasis on divine healing. He develops that emphasis in terms of God's Trinitarian nature and puts special focus on the presence of Christ throughout creation. He proposes that Christians who are serious about protecting the environment should press their governments to establish protective laws; he even recommends the wording for a short amendment to national constitutions.

Anyone who has struggled with the difficult task of doing theology without merely listing favorite Bible verses on some topic will find Peter Harris' article worthy of note. Begin by asking “Who is God?” he says, and the clear answer emerges that God is Creator. Rather than moving immediately to human needs that God is expected to meet, Harris would give priority to worship and prayer in order to acknowledge the character of God. Then, as the *Declaration* says, “offer creation and civilization back in praise to the Creator,” in order to recognize the lordship of Christ. He suspects that many evangelicals would find that the patterns of their worship fall short of these standards.

In a change of pace, Susan Drake Emmerich reflects on her “missionary Earth-keeping” in a fishing community on Tangier Island, Virginia. Isolated from many cultural influences, the residents have been affected significantly by pollution in Chesapeake Bay. How do you gather together and unite a community over an environmental problem, and then how do you organize and direct them in suitable forms of political action?

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Justice and righteousness can grow within a community that keeps true worship practices at the center of its life, for such worship will unmask the connections between injustice and ecological crisis.

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The high points of her thoughtful account are proclamation, confession, and development of local covenants.

The final piece in the book is a plea from Michael Northcott for a stronger focus on worship. If consumerism is a kind of idolatry, three of the Ten Commandments provide a contrast by pointing to the foundations of authentic worship: having no other gods, not misusing the name of the LORD, and keeping the Sabbath. Justice and righteousness can grow within a community that keeps such worship practices at the center of its life, for true worship will unmask the connections between injustice and ecological crisis.

The four authors of *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996; 214 pp., \$16.99 paperback) call their book a story. Fred Van Dyke, David C. Mahan, Joseph K. Sheldon, and Raymond H. Brand are practicing scientists and teachers, and their stories recount their experiences of taking students to forests, marshes, farms, and seashores, and affirming their Christian faith as they learn together. As they mingle the Christian story with their stories, these

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One chapter tracks teacher and students across a field and into the forest as they take measurements to assess the long-term impact of removing trees to grow crops. The first lesson this day is about linkage between the sun, plants, animals, and soil. The second lesson is about reading the Bible differently.

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scientists convey some of the tension of finding just the right way to synthesize our ancient traditions and our current observations.

One of the chapters, “Out of the Dust,” tracks teacher and students across a field and into the forest as they take measurements to assess the long-term impact of removing trees to grow crops. In the forest the rotting logs and rich soil yield abundant life forms that are not visible to those passing by too

quickly. The first lesson this day is about linkage between the sun, plants, animals, and soil. The second lesson is about reading the Bible differently. This created order is visible because it is physical, but not any less wondrous or valuable than things that are spiritual or invisible. Basic biblical concepts, not only creation, but shalom, sin, judgment, and Sabbath, are seen to be about the physical world.

Covenants are an important part of biblical faith. An initial definition of “covenant” offered in chapter five focuses on undeserved grace from God and a secure relationship with God. The covenant with Noah is so full of natural features that the authors suggest calling it the Creation Covenant. It is unconditional and universal in encompassing all creation, but it is dependent only on God. The obvious question arises whether a person of faith can rightly exclude from her or his concern what God has bound into the covenant. An even more profound dimension arises when the covenant of Christ is considered. God’s plan in Christ “to reconcile to himself all things” indicates that redemption is not merely personal or individual, but broad in scope and linking humans with all of creation.

The chapter on today’s world offers a catalog of evidence for environmental problems. All the usual suspects are listed. Central to many of the

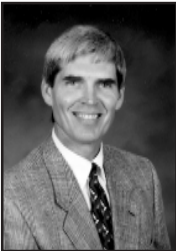
issues are the human activities on earth and rapid population growth. In light of the mandate in Genesis to fill the earth, the sort of sensible questions we expect from concerned scientists emerge: "How will we know when it is full? What is the carrying capacity of creation?"

Where can students go for an education that will include these kinds of questions and answers? Toward the end of the book, the authors recommend the Au Sable Institute in Michigan as a place for students from Christian colleges to prepare for careers as professional ecologists and be shaped by a focus on Christian faith, not just secular notions of resource management.<sup>2</sup> They make a passionate plea for regarding higher education as part of the church's mission and a significant way to combat structural evil in society.

## NOTES

1 Richard Butkus gives a contrasting reading of Genesis 1:28 in "The Stewardship of Creation" on pp. 17-23 in this issue.

2 For more information about Au Sable Institute, see the Web site [www.ausable.org](http://www.ausable.org).



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# The Biblical Landscape

BY STEVEN BOUMA - PREDIGER

What the Bible actually teaches is different from much “allegedly respectable Christian behavior” toward the earth. Three books are among the best recent research to display the ecological wisdom of Scripture. No one reading them can legitimately claim, as one contemporary theologian recently did, that we ought to put the Bible on the shelf for twenty or thirty years.

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**W**etlands Waning” declares the title of an article in my local news paper. Yesterday’s paper blared “Ozone Action Alert Today.” Last week it was global climate change, acid rain, and species extinction. And last month the paper reported unusually severe droughts in Florida and life-threatening floods in Minnesota. The litany of ecological worry and woe seemingly knows no end.

Many people place the blame for such ecological degradation at the feet of biblical religion. Judaism and Christianity are the culprits, they claim, because they foster and sanction the plunder of our planet. From British historian Arnold Toynbee to American novelist Wallace Stegner, the indictment of Christianity is pervasive. Well-known poet and novelist Wendell Berry, a Christian, concurs. Berry minces no words when he claims, “the indictment of Christianity by the anti-Christian conservationists is, in many respects, just.” He continues:

Christian organizations, to this day, remain largely indifferent to the rape and plunder of the world and its traditional cultures. It is hardly too much to say that most Christian organizations are as happily indifferent to the ecological, cultural, and religious implications of industrial economies as are most industrial organizations.<sup>1</sup>



Insofar as Berry's claim is correct, we Christians have much to confess.

But that is not the end of the matter. Berry argues further, "however just [this indictment of Christianity] may be, it does not come from an adequate understanding of the Bible and the cultural traditions that descend from the Bible." There is quite a difference, he notes, between what the Bible actually teaches and "the behavior of those peoples supposed to have been biblically instructed." Indeed in our tradition there are "virtually catastrophic discrepancies between biblical instruction" and "allegedly respectable Christian behavior." It is precisely because of such discrepancies that Berry concludes, "Our predicament now [as Christians], I believe, requires us to learn to read and understand the Bible in the light of the present fact of Creation."<sup>2</sup>

Three books under review in this essay enable us to do precisely that: read and understand the Bible in light of the groaning of creation (to use St. Paul's words in Romans 8). *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible*, by William Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999; 458 pp., \$35.00), *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner*, edited by William Brown and S. Dean McBride (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000; 273 pp., \$24.00), and *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel*, by Theodore Hiebert (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996; 228 pp., \$49.95), are some of the best recent research to display the ecological wisdom of Scripture. No one reading these books can legitimately claim, as one contemporary theologian recently did, that we ought to put the Bible on the shelf for twenty or thirty years.

I should say up front that these tomes are not going to be easy reading for the mythical "person in the pew." Hiebert, Brown, and McBride are Old Testament profes-

sors, as are many of the contributors to the Brown and McBride edited volume, and thus there is much Hebrew in the text. However, while a few of the essays in *God Who Creates* and some of the material in *The Ethos of the Cosmos* may be unintelli-

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William Brown highlights various ways in which five different biblical models of the cosmos, from the Priestly tradition, the Yahwist tradition, Second Isaiah, Proverbs, and Job, inform and shape a community ethic.

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gible to those who do not know Hebrew, most of the time these books can be understood by those unfamiliar with guttural consonants and Hiphil verbs. In short, don't let the sight of Hebrew text (or occasionally Greek and Latin) scare you off. The reading is worth it. And for those who have competence in the biblical languages, the feast is even more delicious.

And what a feast it is. Insights abound as the authors give new and provocative readings of familiar texts and illumine obscure or difficult

texts. Indeed, these books are a treasure trove of insight into the biblical story. For example, in his careful study of the Old Testament William Brown highlights various ways in which five different biblical models of the cosmos, from the Priestly tradition, the Yahwist tradition, Second Isaiah, Proverbs, and Job, inform and shape a community ethic. In his words, “The way in which the cosmos is structured says something significant about the way in which the cultural, including moral, contours of the community have been and should be shaped” (p. 10). So the Priestly account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4, with its elaborate structure, evokes an ethos of order. No surprises here, for this has been noticed before by many interpreters. But Brown also points out how light, earth, and water all actively cooperate in the creative process, how not just diversity but webbed interconnectedness is part and parcel of the created order, and how creation reflects in time the order and beauty that the tabernacle and temple reflect in space.

With respect to the Yahwist creation account in Genesis 2:4ff, Brown, like many, points out the centrality of agriculture and arable land. We are ‘*adam*’ made from the ‘*adamah*’, groundling born from the ground. But he also highlights the human vocation to tend and keep the garden that is the earth (2:15), the reversal of roles between human and ground as a result of the disruption of sin (Genesis 3), and Noah’s role as new Adam who plants a garden of grapes after the cleansing of the flood (Genesis 6-9). Moving beyond Genesis, Brown displays various parallels and inversions between the garden story in Genesis and the stories of the exodus and wilderness sojourn; he provides insight into the wonderful story of Balaam and his ass (Numbers 22-24), showing how it is in certain respects a mirror image of the garden of Eden narrative. Brown concludes that, according to the Yahwist tradition, humanity’s “very identity is bound up with the ground” so that “the man’s kinship is with both his companion and the ground” (pp. 220-221). This view of the cosmos, in short, evokes an ethos of ecological integrity.

Brown offers similar insights with respect to Isaiah 40-55, Proverbs, and Job, shedding light especially on the enigmatic chapters 38-41 of Job. After surveying five models of the cosmos—cosmic sanctuary, garden community, temple garden, cosmic domicile, wild and wondrous wasteland—he concludes that despite their diversity they share these themes: that “God is creator and sustainer of all life” and “the cosmos is meant to be a place of abundant and equitable provision” (pp. 406-407). Brown rarely moves from biblically informed ethos to explicit ethic, but his conclusion leaves little doubt as to the shape of such an ethic: ultimately we are, to borrow from Aldo Leopold, all members of the same biotic community.

The volume edited by Brown and McBride likewise gives us much food for thought. As with most edited collections, some essays offer more lucid prose, careful analysis, and penetrating exegesis than others. The collection

as a whole is, however, quite good and provides many exegetical insights. For example, James Luther Mays shows how Psalm 29 envisions the world as a theater of God's glory and how Psalm 65 portrays the earth as God's farm. Patrick Miller points out the many evocative parallels between Psalm 104 and Genesis 1, noting how the natural world is envisioned as a home for all creatures great and small. Karen Pidcock-Lester describes how Job is humbled and curiously comforted by the creating, sustaining, whirlwind of a God Who is in love with the wideness and wildness of the world.

Steven Tuell investigates the connections between the mysterious rivers of Eden, described in Genesis 2, and the glory-giving river of Ezekiel 47. David Bartlett explores the motif of new creation in the Pauline letters, concluding that what Paul proclaims is not just individual reconciliation with God but "the world reconciled to God—a cosmos created anew" (p. 231). John Carroll, in his study of Revelation, claims, "the future John images brings about the restoration of the beauty and grandeur of the original creation. The old world may seek to escape God, but God will not give it up" (p. 259). Carroll concludes, "this visionary work does not undermine but strongly supports responsible ecological engagement by people of faith" (p. 257). Such is the conclusion drawn from each of these works: an informed reading of the Bible encourages and promotes responsible care for the earth and its creatures, human and nonhuman.

Theodore Hiebert's clearly written and insightful monograph is perhaps the best of the bunch, for it brims with insights gained from a careful reading of the Old Testament, especially the Yahwist tradition (after the Hebrew divine name Yahweh). For example, Hiebert points out the centrality of arable ground (*'adamah*) in the worldview of the ancient Israelites, the importance of divine curse and blessing in the plot of the biblical narrative, the emphasis on particular features of the landscape at sacred places (Shechem, Bethel, Hebron), and the crucial role of agriculture in the life and thought of the early Jewish community. Given both the importance of this strand of the biblical tradition and the challenges facing us on our planet, Hiebert argues for "a recovery of the Yahwist's modest view of the human place within the world" (p. 159), that is, a recovery of a view in which we humans see ourselves not as rulers or even as stewards, but rather as servants.

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Collectively these authors present a very different perspective on how the Bible views humans, the natural world, and God. Biblical faith is not only about human history but rather envelops all the earth. Christian faith is essentially earthy and earthly.

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The cumulative aftereffect of these books is nothing less than a “tectonic shift in emphasis” that “[challenges] core theological assumptions about the nature of divine providence and the scope of theological ethics,” to use the words of Brown and McBride. This change “marks nothing short of a paradigm shift from a once exclusive stress upon the mighty interventions of God in history to God’s formative and sustaining ways in creation” (p. xi). To be more specific, Brown and McBride argue that the Bible “presents nature and redemption, history and creation, as a seamless whole, never to be rent asunder,” so that “just as it marks the beginning of the biblical drama, the affirmation of God as creator is the starting point for defining Christian faith” (p. xv).

In short, these authors present a very different perspective on how the Bible, and the Old Testament especially, views humans, the natural world, and God. Biblical faith is not only about human history but rather envelops all the earth, for human history and culture are inescapably rooted in the history of the natural world. Christian faith is essentially earthy and earthly.

If you are a Christian who takes the Bible seriously, these books are for you. Or if you eat, breathe, or care about your kids’ future, these books are for you. Perhaps especially if you are a pastor or educator, these books are for you. For the message of Scripture is quite clear, if we have the eyes to see. We ought to be very concerned about the earth and what we are doing to it. And if we were more concerned, then maybe the wetlands would be waxing, the ozone would be up in the stratosphere where it belongs, and the symphony of creation would better sing its praise to God.

## NOTES

1 Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom, and Community* (New York: Pantheon, 1992), p. 94.

2 Ibid., pp. 94-95.



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