



AOTEAROA NZ  
**ROCHA**  
 Conservation and Hope

# PLANETCAREERS:

a course exploring why Christians need to be actively involved in environmental stewardship

Prepared by Phillip Donnell  
 A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand  
 2015  
 (with illustrations by Katrina Tulip)

FIVE MODULES
<b>A PERFECT STORM</b> The Reality of the Ecological Crisis (nationally and globally)
<b>IMPERATIVES AND INSIGHTS</b> The Biblical Mandate for Creation Care (seven significant signals)
<b>AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH</b> Occasional Objections and Everyday Excuses (addressing the hang-ups)
<b>FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!</b> Twin Transformations (creation care as a matter of morality and a means of mission)
<b>FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS</b> Translating Theory Into Practice (answering the "So what?" question)

**This series may be utilised as a course for -**

- \* personal study and reflection
- \* group study and reflection

Instructions are on the next two pages...

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS COURSE

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP STUDY AND REFLECTION

- \* The series comprises **five modules**. These can be tackled over a period of five meetings, at whatever interval is most amenable.
- \* It is suggested that you have add an **introductory** meeting and a **concluding** meeting, making seven meetings in total.
- \* **Each module comprises:**
  1. *Participant's Notes*, which should be distributed at least a week before the topic is explored by the group, to enable the notes to be read)
  2. A *Participant's Worksheet* which enables participants to make a *summary* of the notes as they read them. The Worksheet should also be distributed at least a week before the topic is explored at the group meeting.
  3. A set of *Questions to Ponder and Discuss* when the group gathers (copies of these may be copied and distributed at the gathering if you wish).

The *Participant's Notes* are found on the following pages:

Module One:	pages 4-16	Module Two:	pages 19-28
Module Three:	pages 31-72	Module Four:	pages 76-103
Module Five:	pages 108-122	Conclusion:	pages 126-127

The *Participant's Worksheets* are found on the following pages:

Module One:	page 17	Module Two:	page 29
Module Three:	pages 73-74	Module Four:	pages 104-106
Module Five:	pages 123-124		

The *Questions to Ponder and Discuss* are found on the following pages:

Module One:	page 18	Module Two:	page 30
Module Three:	page 75	Module Four:	page 107
Module Five:	page 125		

\* At the **introductory meeting**, introduce one another, ask why people have come to the course, canvas the range of views represented by your group and view a relevant video, such as "Thin Ice", "Chasing Ice" or "This Changes Everything" (seeking reactions and responses afterwards). Then distribute the *Participant's Notes* and *Participant's Worksheet* for Module One.

Note: Some of the material in Module One applies only to New Zealand.

It is recommended that you seek information about the situation in your own country.

\* Work through the **modules**, distributing the relevant *Participant's Notes* and *Participant's Worksheet* a week prior to the group discussion on the topic. Use the *Questions To Ponder and Discuss* at the meetings.

\* At the **concluding meeting** utilise the material on pages 126-127, including the story of the damaged ship and the "Stewardship Action Plan"

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR PERSONAL STUDY AND REFLECTION

\* The series comprises **five modules**. These can be tackled at whatever pace/interval is most amenable.

\* **Each module comprises:**

1. *Participant's Notes*
2. A *Participant's Worksheet* (which enables you to make a summary of the notes)
3. A set of *Questions to Ponder (and Discuss)*

The *Participant's Notes* are found on the following pages:

Module One: pages 4-16	Module Two: pages 19-28
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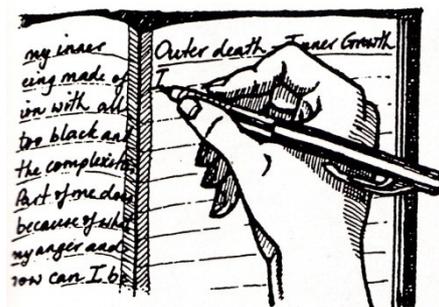
\* Read through the *Participant's Notes* for Module One, and complete the *Participant's Worksheet* as you read, which will give you a *summary* of the notes. Then use the *Questions To Ponder and Discuss* to make your own responses (it is a good idea to perhaps write your responses down!)

Note: Some of the material in Module One applies only to New Zealand.

It is recommended that you seek information about the situation in your own country.

\* Work through the **modules**, utilising the relevant *Participant's Notes*, *Participant's Worksheet* and *Questions to Ponder and Discuss*.

\* **Conclude your studies** by utilising the material on pages 126-127, including the story of the damaged ship and the "Stewardship Action Plan".



**MODULE ONE**  
**A PERFECT STORM: THE REALITY OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**  
**PARTICIPANT'S NOTES**

© Phillip Donnell, June, 2015

**THE NEW ZEALAND SITUATION**

**BIODIVERSITY LOSS**

- Since humans arrived in New Zealand, the country has experienced one of the highest species extinction rates in the world, due to the loss of habitats and the introduction of pest plants and animals. Although New Zealand was one of the last places on earth to be settled by humans, it has one of the worst records of native biodiversity loss. As a result dozens of species have become extinct and an increasing number are now threatened with extinction.
- “Currently 35% of all our native plant and animal species have become extinct since humans arrived, or are in danger of extinction. This figure includes all of NZ’s terrestrial mammals and frogs, 85% of vascular plants and marine invertebrates, 60% of reptile and native freshwater fish species, about 50% of bird, macro-algae and bryophyte species, 30% of freshwater invertebrate species, and 25% of our marine fish species.”

Dr Mike Joy, *Forest and Bird Magazine*(NZ), August 2011, p.19

- 67 species are known to have become extinct in NZ since human habitation began here in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, one of the highest rates on Earth. During its first 1000 years of human occupation New Zealand has lost a third of all native land and freshwater birds, a fifth of all seabirds, three of seven frog species, one species of bat, at least twelve invertebrates and eleven plant species.  
 Examples:
  - The Haast's eagle was the largest eagle in the world and is thought to have eaten moa.
  - Kawekaweau was the world's largest gecko.
  - 9 species of moa (the largest bird on earth)
  - South Island kokako (listed as extinct in 2007). It had a call described as haunting, and similar to several pipe organs.
- Today NZ has 2788 threatened species (nearly half of the total number of 5819 species identified) (according to the *New Zealand Threat Classification System List, 2007*, published by DoC), including 100% of our terrestrial mammals and frogs, 85% of our vascular plants, and 50% of our birds. 800 species are in acute or chronic decline and only 184 species are receiving any help to reverse that trend. Among them we have the world’s rarest marine mammal (the Maui dolphin – just 55 left) and rarest wading bird (the black stilt – just 180 left).
- In some species groups, a large proportion of native species are threatened. For example, all native frog species are threatened because of habitat loss and predation,

5 out of 6 New Zealand bat species are endangered. Not enough is known about some groups to reliably determine their threat status, e.g. many fungi and plants are listed as data-deficient.

- Monitoring the extent of suitable native habitats for a selection of 'indicator species' is a practical way of assessing changes in New Zealand's native biodiversity. Seven indicator species are monitored (short-tailed bat, kiwi, kaka, kokako, yellowhead, wrybill, woodrose). The latest *State of New Zealand's Environment* report (2007) advises that all indicator species are still in decline.
- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists New Zealand among the five worst countries with threatened birds as a percentage of total number of native bird species exceeding 15% (after Philippines, Mauritius, Madagascar, Hawaii). For example, currently 37 of our 51 species of land birds are threatened, e.g. the North Island brown kiwi is slipping towards extinction. Aquatic birds are faring little better, e.g. the endemic whio or blue duck is fast disappearing (now only 2500), and we have the world's rarest wading bird (the black stilt – currently only 180 of them).
- We have 36 native fish species, 80% of which are found nowhere else in the world. Native fish numbers are plummeting, e.g. whitebait. 60% of our freshwater fish species + our only freshwater crayfish and mussel are listed as threatened with extinction (the global average is 37%). At present rates of decline, around two-thirds of them will disappear by 2050.
- In excess of 750 species of plants are currently classed as threatened, such as the wild kaka beak, kowhai ngutukaka, and the Poor Knights spleenwort.
- The shameful news is that New Zealand is now right up there (or down there) with world leaders in biodiversity loss.

### **HABITAT DESTRUCTION**

- More than 2/3rds of all land ecosystems in NZ are currently classed as threatened.
- Originally 85% of NZ was covered in forest. Today it is 23%. 90% of our lowland forests have been destroyed.
- Around 90% of our wetlands have been drained. They no longer exist.
- Nearly half of all NZ lakes, and 90% of lowland rivers are classed as polluted, with pathogen levels too high to swim in. Much of this is due to dairy cows dumping the equivalent of 96 million people going to the toilet in the grass every day. We are actually creating aquatic dead zones caused by agricultural runoff. Water degradation is a major problem.
- Most of New Zealand's lowland forests, wetlands, dunes and estuaries have been converted into pasture or towns.

- Many lakes, rivers and streams have been modified by dams, drainage and irrigation schemes and by pollution from farms and urban areas.
- New Zealand's once continuous range of unique ecosystems is now a patchwork of isolated fragments. Relatively undisturbed habitats are found at high altitudes in the mountains or a few ecological 'islands,' some of these real offshore islands.
- He would also find that 10 per cent of NZ is classed as severely erodible, and there are thousands of contaminated soil sites, over 50,000 from sheep dipping alone.
- NZ currently ranks 46th in the world for protecting the habitat of its endangered species.

### INVASIVE SPECIES

- More than 25,000 plant species, 54 mammal species, and about 2000 invertebrates have been introduced (not all into the wild).
- Introduced birds such as the Australian magpie and Asian myna compete aggressively with native species.
- 22 species of introduced freshwater fish are now in New Zealand waterways (by comparison New Zealand has just 36 native freshwater fish). Three quarters of our native species are under threat and unlikely to survive beyond 2050, which is very bad news for those of you who like whitebait fritters!
- About a third of our freshwater fish and birds are now exotic.
- Rats, stoats and possums are serious threats to our native biodiversity. Possums are voracious eaters – in New Zealand some 30 million of them consume an estimated 21,000 tonnes of vegetation per night. Most noticeably, they destroy spectacular flowering trees such as pōhutukawa and rātā. They also change the overall structure and composition of native forests. According to Landcare research, invasive mammals destroy an estimated 26 million native birds (or their eggs) per year.
- Botanical records tell us that toward the end of the 20th century the number of introduced plant species in New Zealand surpassed the number of indigenous species. We have more introduced than indigenous plant species and many of them are harmful – such as pampas, broom, ragwort, and gorse.
- Every year, several hundred more plant species arrive in New Zealand. More than 200 introduced plant species now have the potential to displace native plant ecosystems. Alien species currently threaten one-third of our protected forests (1.8m hectares), and large tracts of our native grasslands. e.g. *Pinus contorta* (Lodgepole Pine)
- Introduced species threaten waterways (e.g. didymo in 150 South Island rivers) and coast, e.g. *Undaria*, an unintentionally introduced seaweed first detected in the 1980s

which threatens to overtake native seaweeds and threatens the seaweed communities they support.

- Then there's the humble moggy. NZ has 1.4 million of them. At a conservative estimate, domestic cats kill 18.7 million animals per year, including 8.2 million native invertebrates, lizards, and birds (sorry if you like cats!)

### OFFICIAL COMPLACENCY

- We have a sad history of **complacency**, prevarication, inaction, and retrenchment, at least at an **official** level.  
*The present government has:*
  - scrapped the moratorium on new fossil fuel generation, the bio-fuels sales obligation, and car fuel efficiency standards
  - cut climate research funding
  - weakened the Emissions Trading Scheme and let the carbon price collapse
  - failed to meet obligations under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and refused to recommit to it in 2012.
  - opened up potential fossil fuel reserves to more prospecting and drilling
  - constructed a lot more roads
  - increased tax breaks for oil companies
  - and repeatedly cut DoC budgets and staff.
- Under the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, NZ committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2012, but a Ministry of Environment report revealed they were actually 25% higher in real terms in 2012. We won the 'Colossal Fossil' award (for the worst performance on climate change) at the UN Conference on Climate Change in Doha that year.  
In August 2013 the NZ government finally agreed to reduce to 5% below the 1990 levels by 2020 - which would be a 30% reduction in 7 years, quite some feat!
- In July 2015, the New Zealand Government announced:
  - a provisional post-2020 target of 30 per cent below our 2005 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2030
  - an unconditional target of five per cent below our 1990 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2020
  - a long-term target of 50 per cent below our 1990 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2050
- On a per person basis, NZ now produces twice the amount of greenhouse gases as China and 8x that of India. We currently emit over 14 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per person, when the globally sustainable rate is around 1 tonne per person.
- Half of our emissions are from agriculture, mainly methane and nitrous oxide, which is 34 times more effective at trapping heat than carbon dioxide. Dairy cow numbers have doubled over the past 20 years to 6.7m, with virtually no compensating environmental safeguards. Measures are mooted but continually put off.
- What is more, contrary to popular belief, we don't compare favourably with other developed countries. In 2006 we ranked **first** in Yale University's Environmental

Performance Index. As of 2014 we have slipped to **16<sup>th</sup>**, overtaken by countries like Slovenia and the Czech Republic.

*So, is New Zealand really clean and green and 100% pure? In terms of biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, the impact of alien species and global warming, we actually have one of the worst records in the world. The World Wildlife Fund's 2012 report "Beyond Rio: New Zealand's Environmental Record Since the Original Earth Summit", concludes that our performance has been deficient, and that "we cannot afford another twenty years of inaction." We have had some limited environmental successes, but the "100% pure" description is actually 100% pure hype.*

In the August, 2011 "Forest and Bird" magazine Dr Mike Joy (of Massey University) isolates five myths:

- NZ is clean and green and 100% pure  
He says: *"The golden goose of our tourism and exports is the 100% Pure branding. Well, I reckon our goose is cooked."*
- Biodiversity and the environment are looked after by the central government
- We are 100% pure compared with the rest of the world
- Dairy farming in NZ is sustainable
- The Resource Management Act (RMA) protects the environment

#### **UPDATE: OCTOBER 2015**

For the first time in several years, Statistics New Zealand and Ministry of the Environment collaborated to produce *Environment Aotearoa*, a new state of the environment report. It highlights the failure of government agencies to protect nature in New Zealand.

- Two-thirds of the key environmental indicators went backwards in the decade to 2012
- NZ's greenhouse gas emissions grew by 42% since 1990
- Nitrogen levels in rivers increased 12% since 1990
- 50% of freshwater sites have potentially damaging nutrient levels
- 80% of our native land birds, 90% of our lizard species, 71% of native freshwater fish, 40% of our larger plants are now threatened with extinction
- 94% of the country is affected by possums, rats and stoats
- 100,000 ha of indigenous vegetation was lost between 1996 and 2012
- 14 of our commercial fish stocks are being overfished
- 35% of our seabirds and 27% of our marine mammals are threatened with extinction
- Air quality improved, largely driven by regulations on home heating

## **THE GLOBAL SITUATION**

### **THE 12 MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS FACING MODERN SOCIETIES**

(from Jared Diamond in his book "Collapse", 2005 and 2011)

#1-8 were also significant in the past, but #9-12 became serious only recently.

### **DESTRUCTION OR LOSSES OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

## 1. Natural Habitats

\*Forests: more than half the world's original area has been converted to other uses (and at present rates another quarter of what remains in the next 50 years)

\*Wetlands: an even larger fraction of the world's original wetlands has been destroyed, damaged, or converted.

\*Coral reefs: one third of the world's coral reefs have been damaged (half remaining reefs by 2030)

\*The ocean bottom: Most of the shallow bottom has been destroyed.

## 2. Wild Foods, especially fish and shellfish (free protein in contrast to that from animals).

The majority of valuable fisheries have already collapsed or are in steep decline (2 billion poor depend on these for food). Fish grown by aquaculture consume up to 20x more wild fish meat than they yield in meat of their own, and they contain higher toxin levels.

## 3. Wild Species and Populations /Genetic Diversity/Biodiversity Loss

A significant fraction has been lost. In the history of Planet earth, over 90% of all existent species have become extinct. At present rates a large percentage of what remains will be lost in the next 50 years. Elimination of lots of little species (providing us with free services) causes big harmful consequences for humans later on, e.g. earthworms, soil; bacteria, bees, seed dispersers, waste decomposers.

*A recent major study indicates that if global temperatures increase 1.8-2° Celsius (3.2-3.6°F), which is considered a mid-range estimate, a million species would be threatened with extinction over the **next fifty years**. This can only be avoided by rapid emissions reductions in the next few decades. There is still time to save many species, but it is fast running out. Of course, if temperatures go even higher, more species will be lost. Most of the world's endangered species -- some 25 percent of mammals and 12 percent of birds -- may become extinct over the next few decades as warmer conditions alter the forests, wetlands, and range lands they depend on, and human development blocks them from migrating elsewhere.*

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

## 4. Soils of Farmlands

These are being carried away by wind and water erosion at rates between 10 and 40x the rate of soil formation., and between 500 and 10,000x soil erosion rates on forested land. Salinization, loss of fertility, alkalisation are major problems. Estimates of the world's farmland severely damaged vary from 20-80%.

## CEILINGS ON NATURAL RESOURCES

### 5. Energy

Coal reserves are believed to be large, but *readily accessible* oil and natural gas reserves will only last for a few more decades. Then they will be deeper, dirtier, more expensive to extract, with greater environmental impact.

### 6. Freshwater

Most of the world's freshwater is already being utilized. Those not utilized are far from population centres. Aquifers are being depleted faster than they are being replenished. Over a billion people lack access to safe drinking water.

### 7. Photosynthetic Capacity (the amount of solar energy fixed by photosynthesis)

Growth due to sunlight is limited by the geometry and biochemistry of plants. 1986 estimate: humans used, diverted or wasted half of the Earth's capacity. By 2050 most energy fixed by sunlight will be used for human purposes, and little will be left over to support the growth of natural plant communities.

## **HARMFUL THINGS THAT WE PRODUCE OR MOVE AROUND**

### 8. Toxic Chemicals

Insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, mercury, fire-retardant metals, frig coolants, detergents, plastics. We swallow, breathe and absorb them, causing numerous health problems and defects. Some break down slowly or not at all.

### 9. Alien Species

Species we transfer intentionally or inadvertently from a place where they are native to a place where they are not native. Some are useful (e.g. crops, domestic animals) but others are hugely devastating (e.g. Australasia's rabbits, water hyacinth, lampreys in the Great Lakes).

### 10. Atmospheric gases

Human activities produce gases that escape into the atmosphere, where they either damage the protective ozone layer (e.g. CFCs) or act as greenhouse gases that absorb sunlight and thereby lead to global warming (e.g. carbon dioxide, methane). Most knowledgeable scientists now agree that despite year to year ups and downs, the atmosphere really has been undergoing an unusually rapid rise in temperature recently, and that human activities are the major cause. Debate rages over how much the temperature will rise over the next 50 years (1.5 to 5 degrees). Figures may not sound like a big deal until we realize that average global temperatures were only 5 degrees cooler at the height of the last Ice Age! The rise in sea levels will result in flooding, coastal erosion, inundation of low-lying regions, and further climate changes.

## **POPULATION ISSUES**

### 11. Population Growth

Rates vary from country to country, but overall it is growing. Because of the "demographic bulge" (a disproportionate number of children and young reproductive people in today's population), it will continue to do so. More people require more food, space, water, energy, and other resources.

### 12. Impact of People on the Environment

What counts is not the number of people alone, but their impact on the environment as they consume resources and generate waste. People in the First World (US, western Europe and Japan) consume 32x more resources and produce 32x more wastes than those in the Third World. But an increasing number of low-impact people are becoming high-impact people because of the rise in living standards (e.g. India, China) and immigration (legal and illegal). A world in which Third World people reach and maintain First World living standards is unsustainable.

These problems are all linked: one exacerbates another or makes its solution more difficult, e.g. human population growth affects all 11 other problems. Given the interrelated spider web of the world in which we live, every creaturely move affects every other creature, for good or for ill.

Here are some quotes from Jared Diamond's book "Collapse" (2005 and 2011), page 498:

*"Our world society is on a non-sustainable course, and any of the 12 problems of non-sustainability would suffice to limit our lifestyle within the next several decades. They are like time bombs with fuses of less than 50 years..."*

*"...because we are rapidly advancing along this non-sustainable course, the world's environmental problems will get resolved in one way or another, within the lifetimes of the children and young adults alive today. The only question is whether they will become resolved in pleasant ways of our own choice, or in unpleasant ways not of our choice, such as warfare, genocide, starvation, disease epidemics, and collapses of societies..."*

In 2007, 390 scientists from around the world produced the **Global Environmental Outlook Report (GEO4)** for the United Nations.

- 390 scientists, 500+ pages of detailed analysis.
- Paints a very bleak future for humanity: a picture of a planetary population living well beyond its means, and crises brewing everywhere one chooses to look.
- Concludes that our current use of natural resources is unsustainable.
- It's not just other species that are in danger, humans are too!
- The human population of planet Earth is, in effect, maxed out on its credit cards and soon will have problems paying the mortgage.
- Unless concerted global efforts are made to address these mounting problems, GEO-4 concludes that we shall shortly pass the point of no return – when the planet no longer has the capacity to heal (= regenerate, repair, restore) itself.
- The scientists said: "We've got about 10 years to get this right – and we should have been moving five years ago."

In June, 2012, **GEO5** appeared, reviewing progress made. It concludes that *"the currently observed changes to the Earth System are unprecedented in human history. Efforts to slow the rate or extent of change including enhanced resource efficiency and mitigation measures – have resulted in moderate successes but have not succeeded in reversing adverse environmental changes. Neither the scope of these nor their speed has abated in the past five years. As human pressures on the Earth System accelerate, several critical global, regional and local thresholds are close or have been exceeded. Once these have been passed, abrupt and possibly irreversible changes to the life-support functions of the planet are likely to occur, with significant adverse implications for human well-being."*

*Read Jeremiah 4:22-26, Hosea 4:1-10, preferably in **The Message** translation*

The tenor of these passages is that environmental disaster and degradation are frequently the result of human failure. Our actions can result in the natural order being blighted.

*"A problem exists as real and meaningful as a sinking ship with billions of people on board. The earth is our ship, an ark for everything that lives. It is the only vessel available to carry humans through the ocean of space, and it is rapidly becoming unseaworthy."*

- Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action*, 2007: 16

## AN ADDITIONAL NOTE ABOUT FOSSIL FUELS

### THE PROBLEM

Not only do fossil fuel companies receive \$775 billion to \$1 trillion in annual global subsidies, but they pay nothing for the privilege of treating our shared atmosphere as a free waste dump.

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 70

*These are companies whose business model requires that they replace the oil and gas they have in production with new reserves of fossil fuels or face a shareholder rebellion. In order for the value of these companies to remain stable or grow, oil and gas companies must always be able to prove to their shareholders that they have fresh carbon reserves to exploit after they exhaust those currently in production. At minimum, an energy company is expected to have as much oil and gas in its proven reserves as it does in current production, which would give it a "reserve-replacement ratio" of 100%. A company's reserve replacement ratio must be at least 100% for the company to stay in business long-term. Which is why investors tend to get quite alarmed when the ratio drops below that level.*

*For a fossil fuel major, keeping up its reserve-replacement ratio is an economic imperative; without it the company has no future. It has to keep moving just to stand still. And it is this structural imperative that is pushing the industry into the most extreme forms of dirty energy; there are simply not enough conventional deposits to keep up the replacement ratios.*

*From the perspective of the fossil fuel company, going after these high-risk carbon deposits is not a matter of choice - it is fiduciary responsibility to shareholders, who insist on earning the same kinds of mega-profits as they did this year and last year. And yet fulfilling that fiduciary responsibility virtually guarantees that the planet will cook.*

*That is not hyperbole...In 2011 a think tank in London called the Carbon Tracker Initiative added together all the reserves claimed by all the fossil fuel companies, private and state-owned. It found that the oil, gas and coal to which these players had already laid claim - deposits which they have on their books and which were already making money for shareholders - represented 2795 gigatons of carbon ( a gigaton is 1 billion metric tons). That's a very big problem because we know roughly how much carbon can be burned between now and 2050 and still leave us a solid chance (roughly 80%) of keeping warming below 2 degrees Celsius. According to one highly credible study, that amount of carbon is 565 gigatons between 2011 and 2049. And as Bill McGibben points out, "The thing to notice is 2795 is five times 565. It's not even close." He adds: **"What those numbers mean is quite simple. This industry has announced...that they're determined to burn five times more fossil fuel than the planet's atmosphere is able to absorb.***

*Those numbers also tell us the very thing we must do to avert catastrophe - stop digging - is the very thing these companies cannot contemplate without initiating their own demise. They tell us that getting serious about climate change, which means cutting our emissions*

**radically, is simply not compatible with the continued existence of one of the most profitable industries in the world.**

*This Changes Everything*, pp.129,146-148

*...methane emissions linked to fracking are at least 30% higher than the emissions linked to conventional gas...And methane is an extraordinarily dangerous greenhouse gas, 34 times more effective at trapping heat than carbon dioxide...*

*...huge liquid natural gas terminals in Australia, Canada and the United States are not being constructed to function for only the next decade but for closer to half a century. So, to put it bluntly, **in the key period when we need to be looking for ways to cut our emissions rapidly, the global gas boom is in the process of constructing a network of ultra-powerful atmospheric ovens.***

*This Changes Everything*, pp.143-144

*...the fossil fuel corporations...work furiously to block all serious attempts to regulate emissions.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.200

*Burning fossil fuels is not the moral equivalent of owning slaves or occupying countries. (Though heading an oil company that actively sabotages climate science, lobbies aggressively against emission controls while laying claim to enough interred carbon to drown populous nations like Bangladesh and boil sub-Saharan Africa, is indeed a heinous moral crime.)*

*This Changes Everything*, p.456

*The polluters would have us believe that we are all just common travelers on Spaceship Earth, when in fact a few of them are at the controls, and the rest of us are choking on their exhaust.*

- pamphlet from the National Toxics Campaign, USA

## **THE ALTERNATIVE**

*It's absolutely not true that we need natural gas, coal, or oil - we think it's a myth.*

- Mark Jacobsen, Stanford University in a report on New York's Energy Policy, March 2013

*They know very well that ours is a global economy created by, and fully reliant on, the burning of fossil fuels and that a dependency that foundational cannot be changed with a few gentle market mechanisms. It requires **heavy-duty interventions**: sweeping bans on polluting activities, deep subsidies for green alternatives, pricey penalties for violations, new taxes, new public works programs, reversals of privatizations - the list of ideological outrages goes on and on. Everything, in short, that these think tanks have been busily attacking for decades.*

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014:39

***... the oil and gas industry...cannot survive in anything like its current form if we humans are to avoid our own extinction.***

*This Changes Everything*, p.63

Given this track record, it's safe to assume that if fossil fuel companies are going to help pay for the shift to renewable energy, and for the broader costs of a climate destabilised by their pollution, it will be because they are **forced to do so by law**.

*This Changes Everything*, p.112

If industrial policy were brought in line with climate science, the supply of energy through wind, solar, and other forms of renewable energy (geothermal and tidal power for example) would generate huge numbers of jobs in every country - in manufacturing, construction, installation, maintenance, and operation.

*This Changes Everything*, p.127

The latest research on renewable energy, most notably by Mark Jacobsen's team at Stanford, shows that **a global transition to renewable energy is both technically and economically feasible** "by as early as 2030".

*This Changes Everything*, p.137

...all progress will be put at risk unless policymakers are willing simultaneously to **say no to the ever rapacious fossil fuel industry**.

*This Changes Everything*, p.139

...climate experts tell us that if we want to have a shot at keeping warming below two degrees Celsius, then developed country economies need to have begun their energy turnaround by the end of this decade, and to be almost completely weaned from fossil fuels before 2050.

*This Changes Everything*, pp.143-144

We should all join the Society of Citizens Really Enraged When Encircled By Drilling (SCREWED).

*This Changes Everything*, p.314

...before we can effectively solve this crisis, we have to stop making it worse. Specifically and categorically, we must cease making large, long-term capital investments in new fossil fuel infrastructure that locks in dangerous emission levels for many decades...**step one for getting out of a hole: Stop digging**.

K.C Golden, Seattle-based environmental policy expert, 2013, cited in *This Changes Everything*, p.304

## SOME MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

The range of environmental problems that we face today is vast and interconnected. Some issues, though, are more serious than others. At the low end of the spectrum, some environmental problems are merely *aesthetic nuisances*, such as litter strewn along the side of highways, or old tires and appliances tossed into nearby wooded areas. While these activities make the scenery look ugly, in most cases they cause no actual damage to the environment itself. The more serious environmental problems go beyond our human sense of beauty and involve harm; in essence, there is a body count, such as dead animals,

destroyed habitats, endangered species. Even when some human activity genuinely harms the environment, a distinction must be made between the scope of its impact, particularly whether it is *local or global*. A polluted stream will typically effect the environment only within its immediate area. Other problems, though, such as global warming, impact much of life across the planet.

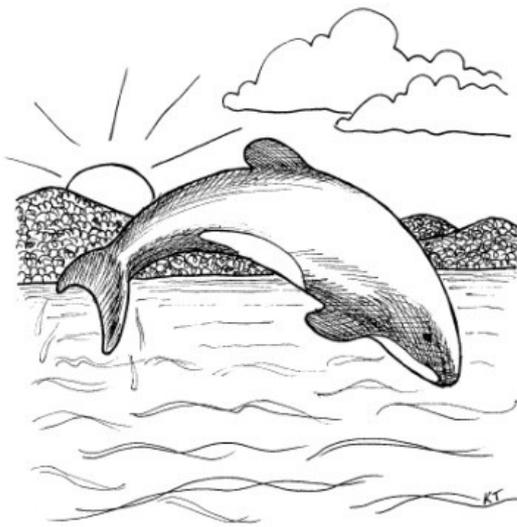
One of the more universal environmental problems is **waste disposal**, that is, the discarding of unwanted objects or substances that negatively impact the environment. The garbage that we throw out is the end result of the ever-increasing number of products that we buy in our consumer driven society. While the sheer quantity of trash is a problem to manage in itself, the real environmental damage comes from toxic chemicals in garbage that leach into the ground when dumped in landfills or get released into the air when incinerated. Some of the main offenders are batteries, automobile oil, electronic appliances, cleaning agents, and fluorescent bulbs. Even discarded organic material creates problems, and decomposed matter in Landfills is responsible for creating 1/3 of the human-related methane gas emissions. Recycling efforts aim to reuse these materials and thus cut back on the release of toxins and also conserve energy. Connected with the problem of waste disposal is *air and water pollution*, which is typically associated with byproducts of major industry, chemical solvents used in factories, drainage from mining operations, smoke from coal-powered electrical plants, oil spills, agricultural fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides. Worse yet is *radioactive material* from nuclear power plants, which poses a double threat. First is the problem of the safe disposal of radioactive waste, which remains hazardous to humans and animals for upwards of a million years. There is no way to destroy it, and there is no foolproof way to store it out of harm's way for such long periods of time. Second is the problem of radioactive fallout from a nuclear core meltdown, such as what happened at the Chernobyl power plant in 1986. Nuclear material spewed into the air and was blown across Europe where it contaminated farm land as far away as England.

Another set of problems involves the shrinking of ecosystems from growing human population and industrialization. **Habitat destruction** occurs when an area is no longer able to support the plants and animals that were once indigenous to that region. Agricultural expansion and new road construction are the primary cause of deforestation, and the most dramatic example is the depletion of rainforests in developing countries such as Brazil. The most serious consequence of habitat destruction is *species extinction* – the more we encroach on ecosystems, the more we risk driving species out of existence. This is particularly so with the rainforests, which contain an especially high percentage of plant and animal species. Genetic diversity is critical for the continuation of any ecosystem, where species are mutually dependent upon each other as specialized food sources. Eliminating a few critical links in the food chain can have widespread consequences. Genetic diversity is also important for enabling species to survive when environments go through radical changes in temperature and rain fall. While some species might not survive these natural changes, others may be adapted to do so. The greater the species diversity, the greater the odds are that some will survive during periods of radical environmental change.

One of the more potentially catastrophic areas of environmental damage is the **depletion of the earth's ozone layer**. The ozone surrounding the earth is not all compressed into a single region, but, instead, is dispersed within an area between 15 and 80 km above

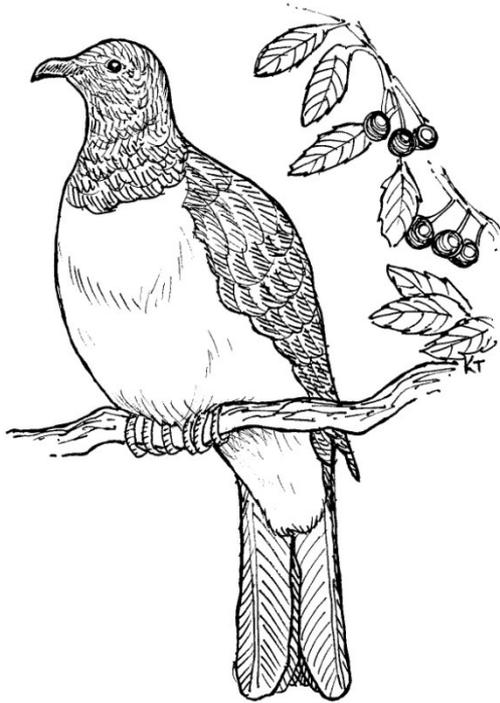
its surface. If it was squeezed into a single layer it would be only the thickness of two pennies. The ozone layer plays a critical role in absorbing over 97% of the sun's ultraviolet rays – a spectrum of light that is particularly damaging to DNA, and full exposure to it would destroy animal tissue. Thus, animal life on the surface of the planet depends upon the ultraviolet filtering effects of the ozone layer. During the last few decades the ozone layer has been thinning out, due largely to the release of chlorofluorocarbon gases (CFCs) into the atmosphere which destroy ozone. CFC gases are used in industry as refrigerants such as Freon, propellants to puff up Styrofoam, and cleaning solvents. Ozone layer depletion manifests in two forms, the first of which is an overall thinning of atmospheric ozone concentration everywhere. The second is the creation of an ozone hole above Antarctica, which each year from September to December is around 50% lower than normal.

International agreements have been made to phase out CFCs, although some countries continue their use. Once the damage ceases, full recovery of the ozone layer is expected to take between 50 and 100 years.



The biggest environmental issue today is the **global warming** of the earth's atmosphere, which threatens to make the sea level rise, turn tropical areas into deserts, and push countless species into extinction. In the past 100 years global temperature has risen by one degree, and projections are that it will continue to rise. Scientists uniformly agree that global warming is principally a human-caused phenomenon. It results from the burning of fossil fuels, which produce excess carbon dioxide, which in turn traps heat from the sun and causes temperature to continually rise. The cycle begins with combustible materials such as oil, gas and coal, which are chemically composed of

carbon. In their solid or liquid forms these carbon-based substances pose no risk; even natural gas can do no damage to the atmosphere while it is trapped beneath the earth's surface. However, once retrieved and burned, all of these carbon-based fuels chemically transform into carbon dioxide gas and are released into the atmosphere. Some carbon fuels are *renewable*, in the sense that once burned they can be naturally replaced with an equal amount of carbon in solid form. For example, if I cut down and burn a tree in my fire place, I can plant a new tree, which, while growing, will absorb an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store the carbon in the form of solid wood. Fossil fuels, though, are non-renewable: when oil, gas and coal are retrieved from the ground and burned, there is no way to replace them. The problem is intensified by contemporary society's dependence on fossil fuels.



**MODULE ONE: PARTICIPANT'S  
WORKSHEET**  
(Complete this outline as you read the notes)

**THE NEW ZEALAND SITUATION**

**4 MAJOR PROBLEMS**

- B \_\_\_\_\_ Loss
- H \_\_\_\_\_ Destruction
- I \_\_\_\_\_ Species
- O \_\_\_\_\_ Complacency

## THE GLOBAL SITUATION

### 4 MAJOR CATEGORIES OF PROBLEMS

- *DESTRUCTION OR LOSSES OF N\_\_\_\_\_ RESOURCES*
- Habitats (such as forests, wetlands, and coral reefs)
- Wild Foods, especially fish and shellfish
- Biodiversity (we are already witnessing the sixth and most catastrophic global wave of extinctions)
- Soil (which is being destroyed far more quickly than it is being formed)

- *C\_\_\_\_\_ ON NATURAL RESOURCES*
  - Energy - coal, oil, natural gas
  - Freshwater - most of what is available is already being utilized.
  - Photosynthetic Capacity (the amount of solar energy fixed by photosynthesis)
- All of these are finite and will very soon reach their limit.



- *H\_\_\_\_\_ THINGS THAT WE PRODUCE OR MOVE AROUND*
- Toxic Chemicals - insecticides, pesticides, herbicides, detergents, plastics, etc.
- Alien Species - some useful but others are hugely devastating
- Atmospheric gases - which damage the protective ozone layer or absorb sunlight and thereby lead to global warming.

- *P\_\_\_\_\_ ISSUES*
- Population Growth (especially the disproportionate number of children and young reproductive people)
- The Impact of that Growth on the environment as so many seek a better standard of living (which the planet can't sustain)

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. Read Romans 8:18-25, which speaks of creation groaning like a woman giving birth. In what ways is creation groaning today? Are the groans getting louder and longer?
2. Is the world "sleepwalking into a crisis"? Is it a case of "ignorance is bliss"?
3. What in your opinion, what is the single biggest environmental problem the world faces at this time? Circle ONE of the following:
  - Global warming/Climate change
  - Energy problems
  - Pollution (air, water, etc))

Toxic substances in environment  
 Loss of habitat/Overdevelopment  
 Biodiversity loss  
 Waste disposal  
 Other  
 None  
 Unsure

4. Do you think that global warming will pose a serious threat to you or your way of life in your lifetime?

Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_ Unsure: \_\_\_\_\_

If you answered "Yes", how do you think global warming will be a threat to you?

5. Is the country you live in 100% pure? If not, what percentage would you use?  
 20% \_\_\_\_\_ 40% \_\_\_\_\_ 60% \_\_\_\_\_ 80% \_\_\_\_\_ 100% \_\_\_\_\_
6. Does the evidence about global environmental trends make you pessimistic or optimistic? Give reasons.
7. This module seems to indicate that global environmental problems need to be tackled with some urgency. Do you agree? Why or why not?
8. Which do you think would do a better job reducing global warming: the government (through laws intended to reduce the output of greenhouse gases) or businesses (through competition in the market system)?  
 Government \_\_\_\_\_ Business \_\_\_\_\_ Both Equally \_\_\_\_\_ Unsure \_\_\_\_\_
9. Should polluters pay for the damage they cause (e.g. a carbon tax)?
10. Are *individual and personal* actions enough to resolve the problems that face us, or have we now moved into the era when *governmental and collective* actions are needed on a massive scale?
11. David is one of the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 (see v.32). How do you think he was looked upon by those of his day? In facing environmental (and other) challenges, what lessons and encouragements emerge to us from the story of David and Goliath? Is the ecological crisis on planet earth a "giant"? If so, in what ways? Would you like to trade places with David?
12. Do the circumstances of the book of Esther, and Esther's words in Esther 4:14 have any parallels with, or relevance to, the ecological situation in this country or on this planet?

**MODULE TWO**  
**IMPERATIVES AND INSPIRATION:**  
**THE BIBLICAL MANDATE FOR CREATION CARE**  
**PARTICIPANT'S NOTES**

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My starting point is that God is the Creator. He created all things out of nothing. Let me present the notion (closer to the truth than most others) that creation is the result of a hilarious Trinitarian bash. I'll leave you to sort out the minor details for yourself, but that's where I come from.

Having affirmed God as Creator, I move to what the Scriptures say about looking after what he created. I trained 35 years ago in a Baptist theological college and cannot remember ever looking at what the Bible said about caring for God's creation. That was a shame. I would have found out much earlier what Scripture says on the subject.

My conviction is that anything we do as Christians should be sanctioned by Scripture, and that we do things not because people tell us to do them, but because God tells us.

During my twenty years as a pastor/teacher in local churches, people often said to me, "Show us where it is in the Bible, and we will believe it. Not only that, we'll do it!" It was a legitimate and appropriate request. Any preaching and teaching has little authority or power unless it is based squarely on God's Word, so that is where any case to care for creation must be sourced.

Here are **seven strands** from Scripture, seven big ideas. For ease of memory, I have titled all of them using the letter "S".

### 1. Stewardship

It may come as a surprise to some of our politicians, businesspeople, and even Maori Treaty claimants, to learn that we don't actually own the earth. They may act as though "This place is ours. We're in charge!"

but they are mistaken. Psalm 24:1 says: "The earth is *the Lord's*, and everything in it." *He* owns it. He still holds the deed to the planet.

What he said way back in Genesis 1 was this: "Okay guys, I own it, but I'm going to give you a certain amount of control and jurisdiction over what I own". That's why you find words there such as "dominate, subdue, rule over". However, they don't mean "Treat it in whatever way you please."

In Genesis 2, God went on to define the nature of that jurisdiction. He took the man (representing humans) and put him in the Garden of Eden (representing the natural world) "*to tend and keep it*"

"Tend" there means to cultivate, , dress, adorn.

"Keep" means to watch over, guard, look after.

In other words, right from the outset, humans were given permission to use the earth, but not to abuse it. We were appointed stewards. i.e. managers, caretakers. God took a risk. He entrusted what he had made to us and put us in charge of developing all the potentialities he built into it - wisely, faithfully, and in a timely manner. It was very much a case of to serve and to preserve, a nurturing and nourishing task.

A caretaker, or course, is meant to maintain and protect his charge so that he can return it to its owner in as good or better condition than when he received it. The essential concept here is the faithful preservation of it as a trust.

Let me illustrate. Imagine you are sixteen years old, and you just got your driver's license (awesome!!). Your gracious and loving parents hand you a strange set of keys, and your heart starts to pound. They lead you outside, and there, in the dimly lit garage, is a brand-new, hotrod red Chevrolet Camaro. Your parents say, "We technically own this car, but it's yours to drive to school, to work, and anywhere else you need to go. You need to put gas in it, make sure the oil gets changed, and *please* wash it regularly. It's your responsibility to take care of it." Are you going to take care of that Camaro? You bet!

We are in the driver's seat, but this place we call planet Earth belongs to God. We forget that so easily, just as we forget that our time, talents, resources and very lives belong to God. We are called to be good stewards of what He has gifted to us. Environmental stewardship is not just some issue that we can choose to address if it's our thing. Our caretaking of the Earth proclaims to God and to the people around us that we accept his commission and take it seriously.

## 2. Sanctity

Sanctity just means "a condition deserving of great respect" – as in "the sanctity of human life". It can also mean "holiness". The two concepts are closely linked, for if something is holy, it is indeed worthy of respect and reverence.

Creation qualifies – for several reasons.

- God brought it all into being. It is derived from him and has its origin in him. God delights in everything he has made. Every organism has inherent value because God made it, not because of what we can get from it. (Job 12:10; Psalm 104:24,30; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3).

- God has an ongoing relationship with all of his creation. He sustains it in existence, provides for it, takes delight in it, and cares for it enormously – to the extent that he even notices the demise of a single sparrow.

(Deuteronomy 32:1-2; Job 37:14-18; Psalm 96:10-13, 104:25-29; Isaiah 43:20-21; Matthew 6:26, 10:29-31).)

- According to John 3:16 God so loved the *cosmos* that he was prepared to sacrifice his Son to rescue it.

- Nature reveals God's attributes, especially his wisdom and power (Joshua 2:10-11; Psalm 104:24; Romans 1:20). He leaves all its splendour as his calling card.

- God teaches us through the book of nature (Job 12:7-9; Isaiah 11:9; Romans 1:20-21).

From Genesis we learn four essential facts about species.

He created the different species of plants and animals (1:11-12, 20-21, 24-25).

He then blessed them (1:22), protected them (6:19-21, 7:8-10), and made a covenant that he would never again destroy them (9:8-17).

Every species that God has made is precious to him. It's his desire that the Earth teems with creatures. He entrusted to us the task of caring for and protecting the habitats they depend on for their survival, so whenever a species goes extinct, we are defaulting on the account that God has called us to manage.

Aquinas said the world and its species are icons of God. Everything that exists shows something of the image of God, and to lose any of it is to lose something of our revelation of, and contact with, him.

I'm interested to observe that compassion for animals is associated with godly people such as Noah, Moses, Rebekah and Laban. In contrast, people such as Balaam, Levi and Simeon are cursed not only because they are insensitive to humans, but because they are cruel to animals.

Put all these ideas together and you begin to understand why creation is imbued with a certain sanctity. The whole of creation is integrally linked to its Creator. In that sense it is sacred. It possesses an innate sanctity.

Frederick Buechner comments: *"Moses at the burning bush was told to take off his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy ground (Exodus 3:5), and incarnation means that all ground is holy because God walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it."*

The bottom line is that as followers of Christ, we should love what God loves. Since God values all created things, we should value them too. They are worthy of great respect. When we care about creation as deeply as our Father in heaven, he is pleased.

Environmental degradation is actually a sign of disrespect. More than that, it is, in a sense, desecrating something that is sacred. To treat what God has made with contempt, and live in a way that damages it, is, in fact, sinful and needs to be repented of.

*Qualification:* When talking about respect for nature, it is necessary to factor in the problem of natural evil. An event may be said to be a natural evil when loss of life or pain or suffering occurs through (non-human) natural means to human life or non-human life. It is doubtful that we should respect or revere the mosquito that brings malaria, the virus that feeds Ebola, the super bug that eats human tissue, or the deadly brain tumour to a teenager.

### **3. Sustainability**

Sustainability simply means: the capacity for continuance into the long-term future. God expects us to maintain the natural fruitfulness of the world.

I think of the passages in Deuteronomy and Leviticus about not cutting down trees that have fruit on them, not taking a mother bird from her eggs, not sacrificing a cow and its calf, sheep and its lamb, goat and its kid. In each case the principle is that while we can use the natural world for sustenance, we must preserve its capacity to reproduce.

I think of the biblical metaphors and practices for keeping nature fertile and productive, such as the Sabbath year and the Year of Jubilee in Exodus 23 (vs.10-12) and Leviticus 25. Verse 24 of Leviticus 25 says, "You must provide for the redemption of the land", a statement which grows in meaning the more we ponder it! They are a far cry from much of what we see today.

A number of values in the Christian religious tradition can inform the notion of sustainability:

- In this legacy to my children, I am looking in that *inheritance to that which is lasting and eternal*. It is not, as the psalmist put it – "like the grass that is renewed in the morning, but in the evening it fades and withers" (Psalm 90:5).
- The second is I want my children to *grow their gifts*. Like the parable of the sower, if the seed falls on rocky, hostile, or infertile ground, it will never grow. The seed needs a fertile soil in which to grow. (Matthew 13:3-9) For our children to flourish, we should not bequeath to them an impoverished and declining civilisation.
- And I want to try and *leave the world in a better state*. When we are leased a vineyard, we are tenants who have the task of producing fruit. And if we cannot, because of theft or greed, the parable of the wicked tenants states that it should be given to those who can. (Matthew 21:33-41)

Beyond that, I think of how God intended that creation should benefit and provide for *all generations* – past, present, and future. In Exodus chapter 3 God designates himself as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." In short, he is the God of successive generations. It seems that God is greatly interested in continuity and concerned that his faithfulness and blessings should be expressed to, and experienced by, one generation after another (Psalm 45:17, 71:18, 78:4, 89:1).

The created order is a key means to this end. We live on what some have termed "the Goldilocks planet". God continually maintains the synchronized and finely-tuned forces that support life on earth, such as night and day, thermo-regulation, the rhythm of the seasons, atmospheric circulation, the water cycle, gravity, etc. They are evidence that he designed the earth to express his faithfulness and blessings "through all generations". Unfortunately, much human activity today appears to work against rather than in synergy with it. We need to be in tune with what God is doing today to ensure that those downstream from us in time do not inherit a dying planet and a world very different from the one we know.

Tim Flannery suggests sustainability is essentially about extending the eighth commandment - you shall not steal - to future generations (see "Now or Never, A Sustainable Future for Australia", <http://www.quarterlyessay.com/qe/pastissues/index.php,p6>).

There was a pretty telling advertisement in the February 2013 issue of the NZ "Forest and Bird" magazine. It was headed "What are you leaving your kids?" and then listed some of the sobering facts about NZ's environmental record. Food for thought, isn't it?

#### 4. Similarity

I believe that Jesus was a "greenie", that is, he was very concerned about preserving the natural environment.

John 1, Hebrews 1 and Colossians 1 all tell us that Jesus was personally involved in the whole process of creation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2-3).

He was, as John 1 puts it, the Word who existed from the very beginning, who spoke creation itself into being. Creation is literally littered with “Master-pieces”

Colossians 1 presents him as the cosmic Christ: the One by whom and for whom all things were made. We find him presented there as

The Source of creation: “*By him all things were created*” (v.16)

The Sustainer of creation: “*In him all things hold together*” (v.17)

The Saviour of creation: “*through whom God is pleased to reconcile to himself all things*” (v.20).

Now if you’ve made something, and keep it in existence, and are prepared to die to redeem it, you have a deep attachment to it and appreciation of it. Little wonder, then, that as you read the gospels, you very much sense an intimate connection between Jesus and the natural world.

Even though Jesus did not explicitly address environmental ethics, Creation theologians, such as Sean MacDonagh, say it was through events and incidents in his life involving nature, and references to nature in his teaching, that Jesus showed his followers that he had concern for the environment.

He is born in a manger surrounded by animals and his first visitors are shepherds who have come to seek the Lamb of God, a title later used by John the Baptist. Angels speak of bringing ‘peace on earth’ – literally, God’s shalom throughout the created order. His birth means all material creation is blessed. After his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon him like a dove. Jesus is called the Good Shepherd of the sheep. In calming the storm, he shows his authority over natural forces. He gets his taxes out of the mouth of a fish. He loves the wilderness and the mountains. He takes delight in the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. He rides into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey.

His death and resurrection are accompanied by earthquakes, as creation reacts to the Creator overcoming death and decay, and to the hope that creation itself would be set free from those things. His death and resurrection defeat the laws of entropy and decay, and inaugurate the new creation.

It’s not just what he did, and who he was. It’s what Jesus proclaimed.

- In terms of his teaching, Jesus treated the Old Testament as God’s word.

He never revoked the creation command to look after God’s world and its creatures.

- He said ‘*Look at the birds; look at the flowers.*’ In other words, earnestly study nature to discover your place in God’s world. Learn from God’s book of works.

- He told us to pray that God’s will be done ‘*On earth as in heaven.*’ The Lord’s prayer teaches that God’s Kingdom rule is to be earthed in the realities of this physical world.

- He based most of his parables on nature's wisdom, building on the Psalms, Proverbs and Job in seeing nature as a commentary on scripture.

- He exhorted us to '*Preach the Good News to all creation.*' Mark 16:15's version of the Great Commission couldn't be clearer. Our mission is to proclaim and demonstrate Jesus' Lordship so that all creation acknowledges him as Creator and Saviour (Revelation 4 and 5).

From all this, we see clearly that Jesus fulfilled the Genesis vision of humanity, reflecting God's image in his relationship with creation. Just as the first Adam (literally 'made from earth') was told to tend and keep the garden, so Jesus, the Son of Man (or second Adam) truly appreciated and cared for it.

Now, according to Romans 8:29, what is God's ultimate goal for you and I as Christians? He wants us to be just like Jesus. God loves us just the way we are but he refuses to leave us that way. Resemblance to Christ is what he wants.

So if God's agenda is to make us like Jesus, and for us to follow the example of Jesus, caring for creation will be part and parcel of what that means. It is God's world and we are called to reflect his character in how we look after his world, just as Jesus did. If caring for the earth rests in the heart of God and resonates in the attitudes and actions of God's Son, so to it must be for us. In the words of I John 4:17: "As he is, so are we, in this world". End of story. When we care for creation, we conform more closely to his image. Creation care really is part of what it means to follow Jesus.

## 5. Showing Honour

In John's gospel chapter 4, Jesus tells us that God seeks our worship. He really desires it (v.23).

The word "worship" conjures up many thoughts in many minds, not all of which are accurate or healthy, but the Bible gives us a handle on what worship is in Psalm 29:1-2:

*Honour the Lord, you heavenly beings; Honour the Lord for his glory and strength.*

*Honour the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*

From this Scripture, we learn that the essence of worship is simply this: *showing honour* - giving God the honour he deserves to receive. Worship is not so much a "Bless me" exercise as a "Bless God" exercise. Rick Warren says "anything we do that gives God pleasure is worship".

Is caring for creation something that you and I can do to honour God and bring him pleasure? Indeed it is! We can worship him in the cathedral of the outdoors. Caring for God's world is as much worship as what goes on in a church building because those caring actions bring delight to his heart. They honour him. Conversely, when we fail to care for creation we dishonour God.

It is salient to note that worship is not an activity confined to humans. God calls *all* of his creation to render him worship: animal, vegetable and mineral elements. In a sense, then, the way we treat the environment either facilitates or frustrates the whole of creation giving him praise, thanksgiving and adoration. And, going back to what I said a moment ago, when we engage in creation care, we are simply joining with nature in giving God glory.

## 6. Salvation

Sometimes we think that God's rescue plan applies only to humans. Not so. We have already noted John 3:16: "God so loved the cosmos that he gave his only son..."

Acts 3:21 says Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to "restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (TNIV).

Ephesians 1:10 says he will "bring unity to *all things* in heaven and on earth under Christ."

Colossians 1:20 says that he wants to "reconcile to himself *all things*"

In Revelation 21:5 he wants to make "*all things* new."

There's no doubt that God's love encompasses all creation, and Jesus died and rose so that all things in heaven and earth might be set free from bondage and reconciled to God.

God's purpose is to reverse the curse *wherever* it has reached - to redeem the whole created order, human and non-human. It's not just a case of saving souls. As far as he is concerned, it's also a case of saving seals. That's the scope of his redemptive programme.

We see this very strongly in the story of Noah's Ark. Who was included in God's saving purposes on that occasion? The ship of salvation includes every species - 14 of some and 2 of others, with just 8 humans. The biblical God is therefore passionate about biodiversity conservation, yet not simply to provide Noah with a varied diet or a floating zoo, but because all these creatures matter deeply to God. They are to be kept alive simply, '[So that their kind might continue upon the earth](#)'. The biblical account therefore shatters the myth that God only cares about saving souls, or even just saving people. Yet that doesn't make people irrelevant either. God chooses Noah, and [in the biblical story's climax](#) God's rainbow covenant includes people, all other creatures, and even the earth itself.

Study Romans 8 (vs.19-25) and you will find the redemption of the human and the non-human creation are integrally linked. One impinges on the other. One is contingent on the other. Paul argues that since our fall into sin affected not only us but the rest of creation as well, redemption from sin and its effects must also involve the *totality* of God's creation. Just as nothing in creation remained untouched by sin after Eden, so nothing in creation can remain untouched by God's redemption after Christ's victory on the cross. It's not a case of "either/ or" but "both/and".

And we can cooperate with him in rescuing both - right now!. As Matthew Sleeth observes: *Christ the Gardener has returned! This is the good news: God's plan for redemption of the earth is no less bold or powerful than his original creative one. The difference is that although we were not part of his original creative team, we are invited on to the redemptive one!* (2010: *Hope for Humanity*, p.108).

Logic tells me that the gradual process of restoration that God is currently undertaking in people, is a process that he also wants to pursue in the rest of what he has made. I would like to suggest that, by extension, the renovation of the created order is not something that he will neglect until some ultimate and instantaneous transformation at the end of time, but rather a gradual process that he is working on even now and will one day bring to its culmination. "New creation, starting now" is an entirely biblical ambition.

It has been rightly noted that this narrowing of salvation in the West is the result of the powerful force of the Enlightenment worldview. The gospel narrowed its scope under its onslaught. 'The early Christian belief (i.e. Biblical) that the Fall and Redemption pertained not just to man, but to the entire cosmos, a doctrine already fading after the Reformation, now [under the power of secularism] disappeared altogether: the process, if it had any meaning at all, pertained solely to the personal relation between God and man' (Tarnas, 306f.). A. Koeberle writes that 'this cosmic aspect of redemption was increasingly lost to Western Christendom since the Age of Enlightenment, and to this day we have been unable to restore it to its strength and clarity' (Quoted in Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, 103).

**In this regard, I recommend you read and meditate on Michael Gohen's article *(Re)new(ed) Creation: The End of the Story*.**

***Salvation: Escape from Creation to Heaven or Restoration of Creation on New Earth?***

*Is going to heaven when you die the goal of God's redemptive work? Or is the goal of the story of God's redeeming work a renewed creation? Then the return of Christ, the restoration of God's kingdom, the resurrection, and judgement take on a different meaning. I believe that the Bible supports the latter: God will renew the whole creation.*

*The Bible does not teach a final spiritualized kingdom but a kingdom where the creation is restored. We will live in resurrected bodies on a new earth. It is not 'up there' but lies at the end of history and is 'down here.' The creation will not be destroyed but will finally be renewed; it is only sin and its effects that will be destroyed. This is not an individualistic hope but is cosmic. Human life in all its relational and creational context will be renewed. And it is not only future; we have begun to taste of that kingdom that we will enjoy in full when Christ returns.*

*- from Michael Goheen's article *(Re)new(ed) Creation**

## **7. Sensitivity**

When the tribes of Israel were rallying to support David as the new king, the tribe of Issachar sent 200 gifted leaders. These leaders had one special and outstanding skill.

We are told in I Chronicles 12:32 that they had "*understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.*" (NRSV/ESV).

The GNB says: "These men knew *what Israel should do* and the *best time* to do it."

It seems that these men had a special ability to understand the temper of the times, and they advised King David what should be done in response to what was happening.

Their knowledge, discernment and judgement provided timely and much-needed help in making decisions for the community and for the nation. Not only did they have a handle on what was going on; they were also very good at discerning what practical steps should then be taken, what actions would be most appropriate to address the changing situation, and also the optimum point in time to take those steps. The net result was that God's wisdom was brought to bear on a whole range of specific issues and problems – local, national or international. I am sure that King David greatly valued the men of Issachar.

When it comes to what is happening in our world environmentally (see Module One), I believe that it is incumbent on God's people today to be like the men of Issachar – not only in terms of awareness, but also in terms of action.

Over the centuries the church has abrogated that role. It is time that we re-discovered it and started to exercise leadership again. Ephesians 5:16 talks about "redeeming the time" -making the most of every opportunity.

If we are sensitive to the times in which we live, we can no longer afford the luxury of neglecting creation care. We need to get real about the seriousness of the challenge, because Jesus may not actually come back by 2050 to sort it all out. And even if he did, that would not absolve us of our current and ongoing moral responsibility for setting things on a better path.

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We cannot avoid the conclusion that caring for what God has made is a significant theological vision in the Bible. Scripture really does present creation care as a divinely-given responsibility.

Postscript: As a result of Christians re-evaluating their position on the environment there has been a push towards a Creation-Centred Theology over the past 20 years. Creation Theology is concerned with the cherishing of all life and all people, as gifts from God. Creation Theology (or Green Theology) is influencing the Christian position on the environment as it encourages Christians to focus on God's creative power and for them to appreciate that this is important. By valuing God's creative power we as humans would not purposely destroy the environment.

A METHOD YOU CAN USE TO EXPLORE ANY BIBLE PASSAGE	
TITLE	SCRIPTURE PASSAGE
Present Suffering and Future Glory	Romans 8: 18-25
KEY TRUTHS	DISCOVERY QUESTIONS (review the key truths)
<p>*Creation is currently in bondage to frustration, decay, pain and longing.</p> <p>*At some point in the future, creation will be redeemed and set free. It awaits liberation.</p> <p>*Christians have experienced partial redemption and release, but wait for its completion and culmination (its full and final expression)</p> <p>*The liberation seems to ultimately will exp</p>	<p>*How did Paul describe the difference between his present and his future (v.18)</p> <p>*In vs.17-18, what type of suffering does Paul have in view, and what do you think he means by the glory to come?</p> <p>*What is creation waiting to see (v.19)?</p> <p>*For what reason has creation been forced to wait (vs.20-21)?</p> <p>*To what human experience did Paul compare his waiting (vs.22-23)?</p> <p>*For what are the children of God waiting (v.23)?</p> <p>*What is and is not genuine hope (vs.24-25)?</p> <p>*What causes us to wait patiently (v.25)?</p>
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	<p>*What would a world like ours be like if there was no decay, disease or death? How is this a picture of glory?</p> <p>*The passage speaks of creation groaning like a woman giving birth. What is one pleasant or one painful memory you have of experiencing or witnessing childbirth? Do you think this an accurate picture of what creation is currently experiencing?</p> <p>*In what ways is creation groaning today? Are the groans getting louder and longer? Are they more intense than previously in history?</p> <p>*What is real hope? How would you explain the relationship between hope and faith / hope and wishful thinking?</p>
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**MODULE TWO: PARTICIPANT'S WORKSHEET**  
(Complete this outline as you read the notes)

**As Christians, any course of action we take should be sanctioned by the Bible. Here are 7 big ideas...**

1. S \_\_\_\_\_ Genesis 1:28-30, 2:15.
2. S \_\_\_\_\_ Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:20.
3. S \_\_\_\_\_ Deuteronomy 20:19,22:6-7;  
Exodus 20:8-11, 23:10-12; Leviticus 22:28,25:1-54; Psalm 45:17,  
71:18, 78:4, 89:1.
4. S \_\_\_\_\_ John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-20;  
Hebrews 1:2-3; Romans 8:29; I John 4:17.

5. S \_\_\_\_\_ Psalm 29:1-2; John 4:23; I Chronicles 16:29-34; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 1:8-9; Isaiah 55:12-13; Revelation 5:13.
6. S \_\_\_\_\_ Genesis 6-9; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:18-25; Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20; Revelation 21:5.
7. S \_\_\_\_\_ I Chronicles 12:32; Ephesians 5:16.



Caring for creation is one of the key responsibilities that God has given us. It is mentioned *throughout* the Bible. Indeed, it is a pervasive theme.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. Why is it wise to use the Bible when presenting the case for creation care?
2. Which one of the seven ideas do you find most convincing and cogent? Which one speaks to you most strongly? What are the practical implications for your life?
3. Do you think that the responsibility God gave to Adam "to tend and to keep" the Garden (Genesis 2:15) extends to all of humanity for all time?
4. (a) The custody of the garden was given to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition that, being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain.  
- John Calvin, Commentary on Genesis  
Have recent generations been "content with the frugal and moderate use" of the earth's resources? Give examples.  
or (b) 'To dress and keep it'  
That, then, was to be our work.  
Alas! What work have we set ourselves instead?  
How have we ravaged the garden instead of kept it?  
- John Ruskin  
In our commerce and workplaces, how have we "ravaged the garden"?
5. In what ways have you sensed that what God has made is sacred and deserving of great respect?
6. Read Psalm 8 and Psalm 19:1-4. Describe your experiences of awe at God's creation. How does caring for creation constitute or facilitate worship?
7. In Romans 8:19-25: What is creation/the world waiting for (v.19)? For what reason has creation/the world been forced to wait (vs.20-21)? To what human experience

did Paul compare his waiting (vs.22-23)? For what are the children of God waiting (v.23)? What is and is not genuine hope (vs.24-25)? What causes us to wait patiently (v.25)?

8. God wants to be the God of, and manifest his faithfulness to, all generations. How does the created order figure in this intention? Could what we do now facilitate or mitigate against such an intention?
9. After reading I Chronicles 12:32, what role do you think God's people should exercise in environmental stewardship? Should we be leading the way? Have we abrogated our God-given responsibility? If so, how may we regain it?
10. In Acts 3:21 Peter says that Jesus must remain in heaven "until the time comes for God to restore everything." What does this say to you about God's current and future agenda?
11. Ephesians 1:10 talks about all things in heaven and on earth "being brought together under one head, even Christ." When will everything be brought together? Why does God want us to know this?
12. Hoekema says: "the goal of redemption is nothing less than the renewal of the entire cosmos". How does this make you feel? What practical implications might this have for us?
13. If you had to persuade a group of Christians to be more actively involved in caring for the environment, what Biblical principles/passages would you utilise?
14. God says he is "making all things new" (Revelation 21:5), not all new things. Is there a difference? Is this a future hope or a present reality? So what?

**MODULE THREE**  
**AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH:**  
**OCCASIONAL OBJECTIONS AND EVERYDAY EXCUSES**  
***PARTICIPANT'S NOTES***

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

I Peter 3:15

Al Gore called climate change "an inconvenient truth", which he defined as an inescapable fact that we would prefer to ignore. Many people want to ignore environmental problems.

Over the time that I have been involved in the Christian environmental movement, I have heard nearly every possible objection and excuse for disregarding the Biblical mandate and choosing not to be involved in caring for what God has made. Many people think we don't need to take care of the earth for one reason or another.

In this module I do not have time to address all of the reasons that are trotted out. I'm only going to address the one that I hear most often, and then I want to give you the opportunity to chew the cud on a number of others and help one another.

**Isn't God going to destroy this earth anyway? If this present earth is going to be destroyed eventually (2 Peter 3:10-13) what is the point of our taking care of it now? Why get sentimental about a container that served its purpose and is about to be completely replaced ? Why bother?**

My grandfather liked charts, especially ones that depicted "the last days". I recall his explaining one on the lounge wall which graphically portrayed dispensational stages in human history and beyond, including the eternal state. One glaring and frightening feature was an image of our planet engulfed in flames. It was an image that always bothered me. Will the new earth really be the result of God destroying the present material universe and starting all over again, or will it be the culmination of a more gradual restoration process which I may participate in and which God will ultimately complete?

For many people, the answer to this question significantly determines whether there is any point at all in seeking to care and conserve creation in the here and now, 2 Peter chapter 3 is, in my experience, the passage that is most often used as a "proof text" by those who see the earth as doomed and therefore abrogate any responsibility to exercise environmental stewardship. Why care for creation if it is to be destroyed eventually? Negative attitudes to creation's future inevitably lead to neglect at best, rampant destruction at worst.

For years, I heard that this world would be destroyed completely when Christ returned in judgment. But deep down something felt wrong, and as I started reading the Bible myself, my questions grew, so I looked into the issue, and I discovered some interesting facts. Here are some reasons why modern thinkers increasingly struggle with the "do away with/start over" scenario...

- **The "obliteration" idea is relatively recent**

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

It has been rightly noted that the view of Earth being obliterated only emerged as the cosmic understanding of redemption lost ground in Western Christendom after the Reformation as a result of the powerful force of the Enlightenment and the growth of secularism.

Over the past 30 years, an increasing number of voices have echoed the great leaders of the early church (before the King James Version!), asserting that the new earth will not be something totally different and divorced from the present one, but more like a renovation and restoration of it. They reject the concepts of annihilation of the present cosmos and of a sharp discontinuity between the old earth and the new. Wayne Grudem, for example, states categorically: *“The Bible leads us to believe that the earth will be renewed, not recreated”* (2009: 166).

- **The real problem is sin and its consequences**

If God’s going to destroy the creation, why does he make it ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31), and continue to sustain it, delight in it, and renew it (Psalm 104)?

The problem is not the materiality of the creation, from which we need to be released. The problem is sin and its ruinous consequences. Adam and Eve took nature with them when they fell. When God sets out on the long road of redemption, his goal is to remove sin and its effects so that the good creation can again be his kingdom. His plan is to destroy the enemy of his good creation (Genesis 3:15; I John 3:8), not to destroy the creation itself. In short, God did not create matter just to throw it away.

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

- **Biblical images of the world to come don't fit the obliterate and replace scenario**

If we’re heading for an otherworldly heaven or a completely different version of the planet, why are the biblical images of ‘new creation’ so full of landscapes, rivers, wild animals and fruit trees?

e.g. the lion and the lamb (in Isaiah 11), fruit trees with leaves for healing (in Ezekiel 47), the river flowing from the throne of God (in Revelation 22).

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

- **Mistranslations have hidden a very different interpretation**

We should be aware that a passage as critical as this one might not say exactly what many of us thought it did. Poor and confusing translations of 2 Peter 3 from the original Greek have a lot to answer for. Here are several examples:

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

*The question is whether the fire of judgment will annihilate or purify the world. Fire can do both. In Scripture the fire of judgement destroys that which is evil but purifies what is good. Malachi speaks of the refiner's fire that destroys impurities but purifies metal. In a similar way Paul speaks of fire of judgment that tests the quality of human work. It will either burn it up in destruction or purify it (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). It is like that with the creation; the creation will be purified but the evil that pollutes it will be destroyed. The language of 2 Peter can mean both things.*

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

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

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

Theologian Cornelius Venema adds another shade of meaning: "The word used in the older manuscripts conveys the idea of a process that does not so much destroy or burn up, but uncovers or *lays open for discovery* the creation, now in a renewed state of pristine purity." God's fire of judgment will consume the bad but refine the good, exposing things as they really are (compare Malachi 2:2-4, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). Once the judgment has taken place and the fallen powers have been destroyed (see below), the earth will be revealed again for what it was originally intended to be.

I observe here that Peter is very much reflecting the apocalyptic genre found elsewhere in the Bible (such as Matthew 24, Isaiah 13 and 34, and Malachi 3), in which the emphasis is "*all about the cleansing fire of purifying judgment, rather than the destructive furnace of blind anger...God judges in order to enable a new beginning, not in order to completely wipe out.*" Dave Bookless (2008:83) says of verse 7: "*...the Old Testament background is critical. Mention of 'fire' and 'burned up' would not have taken people to images of exploding planets, but to Malachi 3:2-3 where God's judgment is seen as a refining fire, purifying and cleansing, not destroying but leaving the final result without blemish. What is destroyed is not the earth, but 'ungodly men' (verse 7)...*"

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

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

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

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

We may also observe that the word Paul uses to describe what happens to the old nature of the believer in 2 Corinthians 5:17 is the same word Peter uses v.10, and which John uses in Revelation 21:1, to refer to the fate of the old heavens, namely *parerchomai*.

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

Like the old nature, the heavens will "pass away". Again this does not have to mean that they go out of existence; rather, there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away, somewhat like a caterpillar passes away, and a butterfly emerges. *Just as God is into recycling broken, spoiled, messed-up people, and making them into new creations in Christ, so this whole damaged and groaning creation will be made new again.*" (Bookless, 2008:80). There is a real passing away, but also a real continuity and connection.

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

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

Both in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1 the Greek word used designate the newness of the cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos* - *not brand new but new in nature and quality*. It does not imply replacement but renewal. Creation is restored, repaired, redeemed, and rejuvenated, not a cosmos totally *other* than the present one, but one which stands in glorious continuity. This is no cosmetic makeover, but a comprehensive remodelling. God is, in Bouma-Prediger's view, "the great recycler."

Again, this makes perfect sense when we go back to 2 Corinthians 5:17, which speaks of Christians as '**new** creations in Christ' - *kainos*: new in nature, not new in time.

- **Peter's allusion to the Noah story is not consistent with the total obliteration view**

There is another cogent argument from 2 Peter 3 to show that the theme of continuity and restoration after judgment is what the author actually had in mind. In vs.5-7 the coming judgment is compared to the flood at the time of Noah. Peter says that the fire of judgment the present world will face will be just like the floodwaters which engulfed the earth at the time of Noah. Yet of course, the earth was not completely and utterly destroyed by the flood. It was cleansed, purified and finally laid bare, so that a new start - a new world - could begin. Cleansing without complete obliteration.

We also have to ask: Why did God rescue all those species in the Ark, and what about that saving Covenant with all living creatures and the Earth itself (Genesis 9:9-17)?

In the Noah story God demonstrated that his saving intentions included all creation, both by the passenger list for the ark and, more remarkably, by who was included in the covenant promise not to destroy the earth ever again in such a way.

God says: "I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." God has a unique and precious covenant with the earth itself, a promise he cannot break.

- **Other Bible Passages Don't Agree**

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

Examples:

- How about *Romans 8:20-21*, where creation is described as 'waiting to be set free from its bondage to decay', instead of waiting to be taken out of existence?

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

- In *Revelation 21:5* we read that God intends to make "all things new"

Notice he says "all things new", not all new things. And guess what the word for "new" is - Yes - *kainos* (new in the sense of nature or quality), not *neos* (new in the sense of origin or time).

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

- **There is a clear analogy between the new earth and the resurrection bodies of believers.**

Romans 8 and other passages indicate that there will be both continuity and discontinuity between the present body and the resurrection body. The differences, wonderful as they are, do not take away the continuity: it is we who shall be raised and it is we who shall be always with the Lord. Those raised with Christ, will not be a totally new set of human beings but the people of God who have lived on this earth, apparently with our current personalities but devoid of sin. By analogy, we would expect that the new earth will not be totally different from the present one, but will be the present one wondrously renewed.

- **The life, ministry and resurrection of Jesus began the new creation.**

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

Tom Wright (*Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 99,186-202 and *Simply Christian*,2011: 5,78,80-85) develops the restoration scenario, pointing to *Easter* as a key argument. The Christian hope for "new heavens and new earth" has already come to life in Jesus, whose resurrection is "the utterly characteristic, prototypical and foundational event within the world as it has *begun to be*" and "*inaugurates* the new creation right within the middle of the old one." He speaks of "the launching of the new creation *in the present*". He sees a new earth as our eternal home, and convincingly argues that our view of life *after* death directly affects what we believe about life *before* death. If God intends to renew the whole creation – and if this has already begun in Jesus' resurrection – the church cannot stop at 'saving souls' but also work for God's kingdom in the wider world right now.

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

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

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

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**Dave Bookless responds:**

There are two main answers to this question. First, whatever God has in mind for the future, the task of Christians now is to be obedient to God's command to care for the earth (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15). In one sense, it's none of our business if God wants to destroy what he's made – our job is to look after it until then. However, secondly, the idea that God might totally destroy the earth is actually built on very shaky biblical foundations. The fact is, whenever the Bible talks about the future of the earth it holds in tension the twin themes of destruction (judgment) and renewal (salvation). Often Christians have grabbed at one of these (usually destruction) and constructed a theology around it while totally ignoring passages that point in the other direction. A truly biblical understanding avoids both false extremes: the notion that God is going to destroy the earth completely, and the equally wrong idea that things will slowly improve and evolve towards perfection. Rather, a balanced Biblical understanding recognizes that God's judgment of all that is fallen, evil and sinful will mean a radical cleansing of the whole creation, but that God's saving love towards all he has made will eventually lead to the remaking, reshaping and renewal of creation.  
 (*Planetwise*, 2008: 145-146)

**Edward Brown responds:**

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

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

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

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

(Our Father's World, 2008: 79-81)

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

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

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

**REDEEMING THE MATERIAL AND THE NON-MATERIAL**

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

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

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

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

#### A COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATION

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

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

Numerous passages briefly open windows on God’s ultimate intention for his creation. The Old Testament prophets depict God’s kingdom as a place and time of cosmic restoration characterized by shalom. The ultimate harmony and bounty of creation in the kingdom of God are emphasized (e.g. Joel 2:18-27). It is especially the language of “new heavens and a new earth” that makes this clear (Isaiah 65:17; cf. 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1-3). Peter is well aware of such passages: after Jesus conquered sin on the cross and returned from the grave in triumph over death itself, Peter proclaimed the good news in Jerusalem, saying : (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to “*restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets*” (Acts 3:21 TNIV). When Christ returns, God's agenda is not to destroy everything and start over, but to "restore everything." The perfection of creation once lost will be fully regained, and then some. . . .

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

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

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

As alluded to above, when God set out to redeem his creation from sin and sin’s effects on it, his ultimate purpose was that what he had once created as “very good” (Genesis 1:31) should once again live and thrive under his beneficent rule. The final chapters of the Bible are a vision of a creation completely restored to its original goodness. The redeemed of God will live in resurrected bodies within a renewed creation, from which sin and its effects have been expunged. This is the kingdom that Christ’s followers have already begun to enjoy in foretaste.

## TWO SALIENT PASSAGES

Elaboration on just two of the above passages will be illustrative and salutary. The clearest picture of God’s kingdom is in the life of his Son, Jesus Christ. The coming of Jesus is the moment all creation had been awaiting. It is interesting that Jesus himself used the word

“cosmos” in John 3:16, a term used elsewhere (e.g. Acts 17:34) to refer to the whole material universe. That Christ’s person and work was mysteriously and inextricably linked to the salvation of the entire created order is a notion Paul expands on in **Colossians 1:15-23**. He is very clear on the scope of God’s redemptive work: ‘For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to *reconcile to himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross’ (vs.19-20). Since humans were made to be God’s stewards over creation, so the one through whom all things were made, the eternal Son, the eternal wisdom, becomes human so that he might truly become God’s steward, ruler over all his world. The apostle points out that just as nothing in creation remained untouched by sin after Eden, so nothing in creation can remain untouched by God’s redemption after Christ’s victory on the cross. In verse 23b he reiterates that in some mystical way the redemption gained through the sacrifice of Jesus affects the entire universe: “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to *every creature* under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant”. “Every creature” is literally “all creation”, as in the ESV. When Colossians was written, the gospel had not been preached to every person, or even all in the Roman Empire. Rather, the point is that the gospel had been proclaimed not just to people but to everything God had made and all things were being redeemed.

Not surprisingly, then, according to **Romans 8:19-23**, *both* the non-human creation and Christians are described as groaning as they await the completion of their redemption. Here Paul draws on both the imagery of childbirth (labour pains) and the language of Exodus 2:23–24, which portrays the Israelites groaning in their bondage under Pharaoh (a different sort of labour pains). Paul applies these images not just to the human condition, but to the entire created order. Utilizing the model of deliverance from Egyptian bondage, he portrays salvation first (in verse 21) as *liberation* or *setting free* from bondage, and this is applied to *creation itself* and also to *humanity* (described as the sons/children of God). It is because the human race implicitly takes the place of Pharaoh in Paul’s picture (subjecting creation to frustration) that non-human creatures await human liberation. Since humans have been granted dominion over the non-human world, the oppressor has first to be liberated. But human liberation is not simply “internal” (affecting only the “soul”), since salvation, portrayed as *redemption* — which continues the exodus imagery—is applied in verse 23 to our very *bodies* (a reference to the resurrection).

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

It is a connection that Paul has made elsewhere. When we enter in to relationship with Christ, we become a “new creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Paul declares that the old creation “has gone” - *parerchomai* - the same word Peter uses in 2 Peter 3:10 when

he says that the old heavens will “pass away”. In both cases, he is referring to present nature, not existence. The work God will complete in us at the end of time has already begun to such an extent that we are a “new creation” already. For us, it has already happened, because God has already re-formed us by giving us his Spirit, making us into spiritual beings. We already have the “first fruits of the Spirit,” so we have already begun to receive the re-creation that the rest of the heavens and earth are looking forward to. Our new creation is for a purpose — God anticipates in us what he will one day finish, in order that we will join him in his redemptive work. We are re-created to be like God (Ephesians 4:22-24), and to do the good works that he prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). *In short*, God makes us into new creations in anticipation of making the heavens and the earth into new creations. Indeed, we are called to become instruments through whom he can achieve that purpose.

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

#### HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?

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

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

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

Citizens of the kingdom of God yearn for shalom, but non-Christians often yearn for it too, and sometimes work so tirelessly for this that they put Christians to shame. Creation care furnishes an immediate point of mutual interest, shared vision, identification and commonality. It also provides a context in which to forge meaningful relationships as a prelude to evangelistic influence. For this reason, Christian environmentalism is currently the fastest growing missional enterprise in the global church. For instance, A Rocha, a Christian conservation movement, took a piece of unkempt land in West London and turned it into an oasis for wildlife called Minet Country Park. It raised questions among the neighboring people, "Why are they doing this?" It gave opportunities for them to find out that their ecology was based on the gospel and their gospel was centred on the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

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

Another statement by Hoekema (1994: 54) is worth pondering: *"Being a citizen of the kingdom, therefore, means that we should see all of life and all of reality in the light of the goal of the redemption of the cosmos. This implies, as Abraham Kuyper once said, that there is not a thumb-breadth of the universe about which Christ does not say, "It is mine." This implies a Christian philosophy of history: all of history must be seen as the working out of God's eternal purpose. This kingdom vision includes a Christian philosophy of culture: art and*

science reflect the glory of God and are therefore to be pursued for his praise. It also includes a Christian view of vocation: all callings are from God, and all that we do in everyday life is to be done to God's praise, whether this be study, teaching, preaching, business, industry, or housework."

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

#### SOURCES

Anthony Hoekema, 1994: *The Bible and the Future*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans.

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#### **Phillip Donnell also responds:**

"*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*" is a Christian hymn by Charles Wesley. By general repute, it is among Wesley's finest, justifiably famous and beloved, better known than almost any other hymn he wrote. Judging by its distribution, it is also among his most successful. Like many hymns, *Love Divine* is loosely Trinitarian in organization: Christ is invoked in the first stanza as the expression of divine love; the Holy Spirit in the second stanza as the agent of sanctification; the Father in the third stanza as the source of life/grace; and the Trinity (presumably) in the final stanza as the joint Creator of the New Creation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Logic tells me that the gradual process of restoration that God is currently undertaking in people, is a process that he also wants to pursue in the rest of what he has made. I would like to suggest that, by extension, the renovation of the created order is not something that he will neglect until some ultimate and instantaneous transformation at the end of time, but rather a gradual process that he is working on even now and will one day bring to its culmination. Both are within the scope of his redemptive purposes in the here and now.

Frederick Buechner comments: “...all ground is holy because God walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it. If we are saved anywhere, we are saved here. And what is saved is not some diaphanous distillation of our bodies and our earth, but our bodies and our earth themselves...” (*Wishful Thinking*, 1993, p.52).

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

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

What I describe in this article, and long to see, is a contemporary vision of creation that is authentically Christian, something rooted in revelation and consistent with the Great Tradition of Christian belief and teaching, something which may unify Christians of various denominations and understandings. Why is this important? Besides the urgency of a unitive spirit among authentic Christian believers in an increasingly postmodern, pluralistic culture, there is the urgency of the global ecological crisis.

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

*anticipate* God's final restorative act, and *honour* God's original creative act and declaration that its products were good, by caring for the garden of nature.

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

**Dave Bookless responds:**

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

Second, when evangelism is not only words but is accompanied by Christians showing care for the whole world in practical ways, it is much more powerful. When Christians have nothing to say about today's 'big issues', including the environment, it puts many people off Christianity. In contrast (to quote the late Rob Frost), 'when Christians take the earth seriously, people take the gospel seriously.' This is the experience of A Rocha's projects, where for many people the Christian faith suddenly seems to make sense when they see it lived out in relationship to other people and the whole planet. So, in conclusion, it's not a case of either evangelism or saving the earth, but both the good news of salvation *and* good news for creation.

(*Planetwise*, 2008: 144-145)

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

Sometimes Christians ask, "Isn't it more important to save people than to save species. Refresh yourselves on the story of Noah and the flood in Genesis 6-9. You might reflect by asking questions like these:

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

*Earthwise*, 2011: 59

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

**Dave Bookless responds:**

Not worrying about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34) does not mean not caring about tomorrow. Biblical faith is about depending on God 100% to meet all our needs, yet at the same time taking up God's call 100% to be co-workers in his kingdom. Somebody once put it: "It's my business to do God's business and it's his business to take care of my business." So, while God is committed to caring and caring for the whole creation, he's delegated much of that to us! The story of Noah is a great example: God didn't reach out and rescue all the animals; he asked a human being to act on his behalf. He still does.  
(*Planetwise*, 2008: 148)

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

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

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

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

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray for God's kingdom to come. We then define what the kingdom is. It is where God's will is "done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 TNIV). What is God's will concerning creation? God's will concerning creation is, as we have

seen, to care for it, and that obligation is ongoing. Later (in v.33), Jesus indicated that the advancement of God's kingdom on earth was to determine our priorities. The kingdom is now here in part, but not yet in full, and we have a significant role in extending its influence and its manifestation. Our Christian calling is to work for his kingdom in the world, and part of that is to demonstrate sustainable living. The fact that we will never see our prayer for the kingdom to come totally fulfilled before Jesus returns does not negate the fact that Jesus told us to pray that prayer; and exhorted us to start to move in the right direction at least, even if we do not fully achieve it. In short, the way we live now should point forward to what God's reign in its future fullness will look like. That applies to the way we treat the environment as much as anything else. Therefore we have every reason and motivation to care for creation today!

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

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

**Edward Brown responds:**

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

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

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

I believe God has seen the sufferings of people around the world, and I believe he is ready to step in to reverse the ecological disaster we have brought on ourselves. And he is calling his church to take up this task on his behalf.  
(*Our Father's World*, 2008: 16-17)

### **Shouldn't we spend our time and resources helping poor people rather than animals or plants?**

#### **David Chong responds:**

Vinoth Ramachandran once remarked that the question is like asking a poor mother not to bother about her child's education because feeding him is more important. Of course, both basic needs should be our concern although in some contexts, saving lives would have higher priority than environmental conservation.

In most situations, however, it's not an either/or choice. The well-being of rural poor is often dependent on a sustainable ecosystem. The natural resources are their 'pharmacy' (from which they gather medicinal herbs) and 'local supermarket' (from which they are supplied daily needs) and water supply system. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor. Since there is close interdependence in the ecosystem, animal and plant extinctions would ultimately be unhealthy to people as well. Helping people to manage and develop their natural resources in a sustainable manner would in turn alleviate poverty.

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

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

(Extracted from the website of Biblical Environmental Stewardship, Malaysia)

#### **Dave Bookless responds:**

It's a false distinction to separate caring for the poor from caring for the planet. God has made a world that is interdependent, where we as humans cannot survive without healthy ecosystems to give us food, water, shelter, clothing, fuel, and even the air we breathe. It is the world's poor who are suffering most from climate change and who are most directly dependent on the natural systems around them. Dr Stella Simiyu, a Kenyan botanist and

member of A Rocha International's Council of Reference, puts it like this: "The rural poor depend directly on the natural resource base. This is where their pharmacy is, this is where their supermarket is, this is in fact their fuel station, their power company, their water company. What would happen to you if these things were removed from your local neighbourhood? Therefore we really cannot afford not to invest in environmental conservation. It is also very important to remember that we should care for everything God cares for – which includes the wildlife he made, sustains, and entrusts to our care. (*Planetwise*, 2008: 147)

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: *We should care more about people than saving species of plants and animals*). We often hear this rationalization for not saving living species threatened with extinction. But again we must ask, "What does the Bible teach?" Recall the account of the flood in Genesis 6-9. Who perishes? Who is saved? Are species less important than individual people? At the very least, care for living species cannot be disregarded because of the importance of people. Christ's redemption covers all creation, not just humans. (*The Green Bible*, 2008: 1-26-27)

**What's the point? The ecological problems are so big. What I do won't make any difference."**

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

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

For example, in I Samuel 17:1-58, we read about Goliath—a giant, proven soldier, and Philistine champion - who defied, terrorized, and shocked the Israelites daily. They lapsed into severe anxiety and desperation. In stark contrast, David came on the scene. He was just a boy, but proved to be a true warrior for God. Choosing five smooth stones from the wadi, he slew the giant and put the Philistines to flight. By so doing, he also abolished negative emotional and spiritual giants in the Israelites' hearts. Similar hope, trust, courage and optimism can empower us to face our giants without fear or doubt. Active faith in the God who guides and enables our efforts, multiplies our usefulness, and enhances our effectiveness is the secret. As far as environmental stewardship is concerned, the big difference faith makes for me is the confidence that God is "reconciling to himself all things" (Colossians 1:15-20) and that He will in some mysterious way use us in this reconciling process.

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

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

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

A SMALL STONE: Support an environmental organisation such as A Rocha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **David Chong responds:**

Environmental stewardship is a loving response to God and turning away from consumerist lifestyles. As Christians, we can do what is right not primarily because of the perceived usefulness, but as an act of worship. This perspective frees us from the despair that secular environmentalists face – to act rightly while trusting in the sovereignty of God for the results even when the circumstances look bleak.

(Extracted from the website of Biblical Environmental Stewardship, Malaysia)

#### **Dave Bookless responds:**

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

- Be local! Your responsibility is not to change the world on your own, but to 'become the change you want to see in the world'. In other words, obedience to God's call rather than 'success' is what we're called to. Let's make sure we're changing what we can, and let God worry about the big picture.
- Get some perspective! 'Climate change is not one big intractable problem, but billions of tiny, tractable ones.' In other words, if we break things down into everyday decisions we all make, together we can make a huge difference. As the riddle goes: 'How do you eat an elephant?'. One bite at a time!
- Be encouraged! World-changing movements can have small and seemingly insignificant beginnings. Think of William Wilberforce and the abolition of slavery, of Ghandi and the Quit India movement, or of how one travelling preacher in the Middle East 2000 years ago, who died a 'failure', transformed the world. (*Planetwise*, 2008: 148)

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

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

*(Serve God Save the Planet, 2006: 29,33)*

**Naomi Klein responds:**

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

*This Changes Everything, p.447*

**Isn't the gospel about spiritual, not material matters? Doesn't God care about our souls, not our bodies? Shouldn't our minds be on heaven and not on earth?**

**Dave Bookless responds:**

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

*(Planetwise, 2008: 14)*

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

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

(*Planetwise*, 2008: 145)

**Since we’re headed for heaven anyway, why take care of creation? Why bother since we’ll be whisked away safely in our spirits from this God-forsaken physical planet?**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

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

(*The Green Bible*, 2008: 1-25-26)

**We don’t need to worry about nature. Everything will be renewed after the rapture.**

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

The Bible promises that the earth will be renewed; however, this promise has little to do with us now. Why not? When asked, Jesus said that even he did not know when the end would come. Instead, he cautions us to conduct our lives in a way we would not be ashamed of if the world ended today. We must always be ready for the end (Mark 13:32).

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

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

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

**Ecology and environmental issues are a bit dodgy because the green movement has been infiltrated by New Age thinking, so Christians should keep well clear.**

**Dave Bookless responds:**

You will certainly find environmentalists who talk of the earth as 'Gaia', the ancient mother goddess, and who practice nature worship. You will also find some who are anti-Christian, believing Christianity justifies exploiting nature and is therefore to blame for the environmental crisis.

However, this is a strange reason for Christians to avoid environmentalism. The environment is created by God, not the new Age movement. It's almost like saying Christians shouldn't listen to music because some musicians have dubious beliefs. That may be true but it misses the whole point! Music, like the environment is God's good creation. Actually, many environmentalists are not into new Age, pagan or occult ideas. Many are agnostic or atheist, and a growing number are committed Christians.

Imagine if Jesus refused to mix with people he disagreed with: dishonest tax-collectors, outcast prostitutes, self-righteous Pharisees, argumentative fishermen. He would have had very few disciples. The environmental movement certainly includes people with a very different view of Christianity, but also many who are openly searching for spiritual reality. It's a compelling reason for Christians to get involved.

(*Planetwise*, 2008: 13)

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: I don't want people to think I'm a New Ager. Isn't concern for the environment and working for a better world what New Age is all about?). For thousands of years now, believers have looked forward to the coming of the kingdom of God, and that includes the renewal of God's created world (Romans 8:19-22; Revelation 21-22). The Bible also makes clear that human beings are earth's caretakers (Genesis 1:27-30; 2:15). As Christians, we confess that our entire earth belongs to God. It is not the private property of any group.

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 116-117)

**There are too many worldly people out there doing environmental things.**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: *If people who don't share my beliefs in God are working to save the earth, I know it can't be right for me*). In Isaiah 45:1-6 we read that unbelieving Cyrus the Persian was anointed to do God's work. Often if God's people are unwilling or unable to do God's work, God sees to it that the work gets done anyway. So if there are some worldly people out there doing God's work, let's be glad for the help and not use this fact to excuse ourselves from our God-given task as stewards of God's creation.

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 117-118)

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

The Bible repeatedly describes nonbelievers whom the Lord uses to accomplish his will. God instructed the prophet Elijah to be fed by (unclean, unkosher) ravens and then by a pagan woman at Zarephath. What if Elijah had refused help from these sources? What if he had told God he didn't like the pedigree of his help?

When Jesus asked the pagan woman at the well for water, an opportunity for ministry presented itself. Because Jesus accepted help from a nonbeliever, many of the woman's town came to know Christ. The same opportunities abound for working with nonbelievers in the environmental arena.

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 42-43)

**Respecting creation gets us too close to pantheism. Tree huggers worship nature. I don't want to be involved with them.**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: *If you care for plants and animals, and especially if you value protecting endangered species, you are close to worshipping them as gods*). Surprisingly, pantheism (the belief that God is in all things and that all things are in God) is a growing problem even in our scientific age. In our study of creation we must be careful to worship the Creator, not the creation; we must be clear in conveying the good news that God is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, and that the awe and wonder we develop from the study of creation is praise for the Maker of all things. But this does not mean we may avoid taking care of creation. The example of Noah is instructive: Noah cared for the creatures on the ark, preserving all the species endangered by the flood – not because they were gods but because God required it (Genesis 7:13-16).

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 117)

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

The problem today is not one of nature worship; instead, it is the worship of all things made by human beings. Ask yourself, "How much time have I spent admiring what God has wrought, and how much time am I spending admiring my possessions?" We have hundreds of magazines devoted to fashion, homes, self-image and cars...

As Christians, we believe that God made the heavens and the earth...heaven is God's throne and the earth is his footstool (Isaiah 66:1). If a person is working to save the Lord's footstool (i.e. an atheist or agnostic), does that mean we should obstruct their labour (stewardship of the created world?)

God prescribes many acts as pleasing to him, among them feeding and clothing hungry children. Not all organizations working to help the poor are Christian. Does that mean that their work should be stopped, or that we should not labour alongside of them?

What would happen if the thirteenth-century person for whom San Francisco and Santa Fe are named were in ministry today? Would the media dismiss Saint Francis, patron saint of

animals and the environment, as a tree hugger? Would they try to have him thrown out of church because he took seriously God's commandment to preach the gospel to all creatures?

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 42,44)

**We need to avoid anything that looks like political correctness.**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: *Being 'politically correct' these days means pro-abortion and pro-environment, and I'll have nothing to do with that*). The Ku Klux Klan, a racist organization in the United States, uses the symbol of a cross in its terrorizing activities. Does this mean that Christians should no longer use the symbol of the cross for their churches? Some alternative religious and lifestyle groups use the symbol of the rainbow in their literature. Does this mean that Christians should stop using this symbol in their educational materials? People who identify themselves as 'politically correct' may advocate for saving certain species from extinction. Does this mean that Christians should not act to preserve God's living creatures? We approach the subject of caring for creation as God's stewards, not as members of a politically correct group.

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 117)

**Caring for creation will lead to world government.**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

(Translation: *If we try to tackle global environmental problems, we'll have to cooperate with other nations, and that will help set the stage for world government*). There is no doubt that cooperation (with unbelievers and other nations) will be necessary in order to address many environmental concerns. Migrating birds, for example, do not recognize international boundaries. Their care may involve the cooperation of many nations along their migratory path. Such cooperation does not have to lead to world government. For example, the work of the International Crane Association to care for wetland habitats and birds has been accomplished through cooperation between Russia and China and between North Korea and South Korea. The end result has not been the merging of these nations' governments.

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 118)

**Before you know it, we'll have to support abortion.**

**Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

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

(*Earthwise*, 2011: 118)

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

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

In 1967, medieval historian Lynn White Jr. published an article called '[The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis](#)'. This provocative article has become the most cited piece of writing within theological debate about the environment.

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

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

He says:

*...[Christianity] not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends... Man's effective monopoly...was confirmed and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled... Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. Such indifference towards nature continues to impact in an industrial, "post-Christian" world.*

White argued that '[Western] Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'. He concludes that the modern technological conquest of nature has engendered the ecological crisis, and that this has, in large part, been made possible by the dominance in the West of this Christian world-view. At various times this view may have been held by the majority of Christians. Christianity therefore 'bears a huge burden of guilt'.

However, White does not think that secularism is the answer to our environmental problems. He does not want to reject Christianity but rather to radically change it. What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion... More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. It is humanity's fundamental ideas about nature that must change; we must abandon "superior, contemptuous" attitudes that make us "willing to use it [the earth] for our slightest whim."

He appeals to the figure of Francis of Assisi as a potential 'patron saint for ecologists'. White suggests adopting St. [Francis of Assisi](#) as a model in imagining a "democracy" of creation in

which all creatures are respected and man's rule over creation is delimited. In this way, White points to the potential for a renewed kind of Franciscanism - a spirituality that focuses on humanity's kinship with all other creatures in a community of creation.

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

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

\* White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-7. Lynn White's article was reprinted in Robin Gill, *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*, 3rd edition, T and T Clark, 2006, p.303ffg.

#### **Dave Bookless responds:**

This misunderstanding has often been present in western Christian thinking, and has caused untold damage both to the planet and the reputation of the gospel. In fact, the Bible is very clear that it is God's world, not ours (Psalm 24:1; 50:10-11) and that it was created ultimately for Jesus (Colossians 1:16). We are permitted to use and enjoy creation as its tenants (Leviticus 25:23) and caretakers (Genesis 2:15), but not in a way that is careless, greedy or destructive. We are answerable to the owner: God. In fact, the word in Genesis 1 for 'subdue' should be seen as 'manage' or 'bring order to', and the word 'dominion' is about ruling over in a way that reflects God's gentle and just rule. In the light of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve, we can describe this as servant kingship. (*Planetwise*, 2008: 147)

#### **Calvin B. DeWitt responds:**

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

creation, but to preserve and care for it so it could benefit all people and creatures for generations to come.

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

**Edward Brown responds:**

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

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

(*Our Father’s World*, 2008: 50)

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

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

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

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

Indeed, God retains ownership of the earth (Psalm 24:1-2). Human ownership is an illusion. How can creatures that die own anything? No matter what you temporarily lay claim to or

control, one thing is certain: In one hundred years you will not longer own it. God introduces this concept to his people early on (Leviticus 25:23).

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006, 35-37)

**Wealth is God's reward to believers.**

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

God promises to reward his followers, but not with material wealth. He will provide for our needs if we dedicate our hearts and lives to him (Matthew 17:27-30). The problem comes when we confuse our needs with our wants. Time and time again Jesus warns of the dangers of having too many possessions. It is not our spiritual longings but our material desires that keep us from a right relationship with God (Revelation 18:13). We are explicitly urged to seek after non-material, eternal rewards: Matthew 6:19-20.

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 38)

**I bought my SUV because it is bigger, weighs more, sits up higher, and is safer in a crash. If I'm going to be in a wreck, I want my family to be safe.**

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

I've heard this line numerous times, which makes me wonder if it isn't on a poster in the back room of SUV dealers. This philosophy is condemned, however, in the Bible. Proverbs 18:11-12 (NLT) says:

*The rich think of their wealth as an impregnable defence; they imagine it is a high wall of safety. Haughtiness goes before destruction; humility precedes honour.*

If we want to experience life to the fullest, we may have to do things that seem, well, scary at first. The worldly hunger for permanence and safety "at any cost" is an illusion. It is not a path to God (Mark 8:35-36).

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 38-39)

**I don't have time to worry about the world's problems.**

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

Jesus directs his followers to minister to the lowest and least of the kingdom. In the parable of the sheep and goats, he warns that he will deny salvation even to those who call him Lord if they have not cared for the least among society. The "least" includes the naked, the hungry, the sick, the homeless, and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46)...

A significant portion of our society is so wealthy that we have no exposure to the one billion people who are in a constant state of hunger. This lack of contact with the poor contributes to two problems: ignorance and a lack of perceived opportunity to help those in need.

Environmental concerns are intimately tied to issues of poverty, health and compassion.

Ignorance is neither bliss nor an excuse...(Proverbs 15:14 TNIV).

Over and over, the Bible reminds us to educate ourselves about the world's problems and then act on that knowledge. We must actively help those least able to speak for themselves - including unborn generations.

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006, 39-40)

### My neighbours all do it. Why shouldn't I?

#### Matthew Sleeth responds:

When I was a kid, the “Everybody else is doing it” excuse was the single worst reason we could offer when we tried to argue in favour of one of our childish wants. It was sure to be followed by “If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?”

The “I’m doing it just because everybody else is” plea was lame when we used it as kids, and it doesn’t get any better as we age. Pouring chemicals on the lawn that are poisonous to small children is go-along-with-the-crowd reasoning.

One of the dangers of keeping up with the neighbours is that we haven’t aimed high enough. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, Paul says:

*They are only comparing themselves with each other, and measuring themselves by themselves. What foolishness!* (NLT)

Jesus is the one to aim for. Whenever we are uncertain about a particular behaviour, all we need to ask is, “What would Jesus do?”

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 40-41)

### Haven't Christians got an appalling track record in caring for creation, and isn't that all based on what the Bible teaches?

#### Dave Bookless responds:

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

- *It is not only Christianity that has been guilty of causing environmental disaster.* Atheistic communism, aggressive secular capitalism and Islamic imperialism have all done the same. Any world view that exalts human beings above other species, and forgets our interdependence with them, will lead to environmental disaster.
- *The track record of Christianity is far more positive than some have realized.* Alongside the many failures are inspiring examples of sustainable living and creation care, such as St Francis of Assisi, early Celtic Christianity, Benedictine monasticism in the Middle Ages and the Amish in America. It is when Christians have become captives of a human-centred culture, rather than allowing God’s word to transform their culture, that greed, exploitation and carelessness have caused damage to creation.
- *The Bible does not teach that the world exists simply for humanity to use or abuse.* Every major theme in Scripture shows us that God’s world is precious and worthy of our care and respect. God himself is committed to sustaining and renewing creation, and has entrusted its care to humanity. Understood in context, Genesis 1 and 2

clearly teach that it is God's world (not ours!), that humanity is as much part of creation as called apart to be God's image, and that 'dominion' and 'ruling over' are about our exercising God's just and gentle rule: working to preserve the earth and its creatures.

(*Planetwise*, 2008: 149-150)

**Looking after the environment is fine if that's your passion, but it isn't for everybody. I'm glad somebody's caring for the planet, just as long as it doesn't have to be me!**

**Dave Bookless responds:**

...there are many areas of life that only a few people are called to get involved in. However there are also areas right at the heart of the Christian faith which anybody who is a follower of Jesus must take on board. Take prayer, for example...we all know that prayer is an essential part of the Christian life. Some people may be called to a special ministry of prayer – intercessors of prayer warriors – but everybody is called to pray.

As I've re-read the Bible, I've come to realize that...caring for the earth and its creatures is a core part of what all Christians are called to. Concern for the whole of God's creation is fundamental to the God of the Bible and to his purposes for human beings. Just as all Christians are called to pray, meet together, study God's Word, and share the good news, so caring for creation is essential to following Jesus Christ...

We tend to see the Bible as being all about people. Actually it is all about God. Alongside the familiar material about God's dealings with humanity, there's a huge amount about God's dealings with the earth which we've tended to overlook. Most of us have failed to ask what the Bible says about the planet, about God's relationship and ours with it...

We need a change of worldview. We are not the only focus of God's creative and saving love. Rather, God cares about all that he has made. We urgently need to recognize that the earth and the creatures with which we share it are not merely the stage on which we act out our relationship with God. They are the characters in the story themselves.

(*Planetwise*, 2008: 16-17)

**There's no urgency. We've got plenty of time. These problems won't become serious until after I die, or even later.**

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

In my role with A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, I frequently hear reasons for dismissing, or excusing a response to, our current environmental problems. Many of them are not well-informed, and I believe all of them can be refuted. One such argument is that "These problems won't become serious until after I die." It is this objection that I want to address in this article, because it is patently wrong, and if we do not recognize the error of it, the impact on our descendants will be serious.

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

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

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

In 2007, 390 scientists from around the world produced the *Global Environmental Outlook Report (GEO4)* for the United Nations, containing over 500 pages of detailed analysis. It painted a very bleak future for humanity: a picture of a planetary population living well beyond its means, and crises brewing everywhere one chooses to look. It showed that our current use of natural resources is unsustainable. It warned that it's not just other species that are now in danger, humans are too! It said that the human population of planet Earth is, in effect, maxed out on its credit cards and soon will have problems paying the mortgage. And it stated emphatically that unless concerted global efforts are made now to address these mounting problems, we shall, *within 50 years*, pass the point of no return - when the planet no longer has sufficient capacity to repair and heal itself. Its regenerative and restorative processes will not be enough to cope. That situation has never arisen before in human history. It is the great new challenge of our time. The scientists actually said (in 2007): "We've got about 10 years to get this right - and we should have been moving five years ago."

In June, 2012, *GEO5* appeared, reviewing progress made. It concludes that "*the currently observed changes to the Earth System are unprecedented in human history. Efforts to slow the rate or extent of change including enhanced resource efficiency and mitigation measures*

- have resulted in moderate successes but have not succeeded in reversing adverse environmental changes. Neither the scope of these nor their speed has abated in the past five years. As human pressures on the Earth System accelerate, several critical global, regional and local thresholds **are close or have been exceeded**. Once these have been passed, abrupt and possibly irreversible changes to the life-support functions of the planet are likely to occur, with significant adverse implications for human well-being."

Both Diamond and the UN reports believe that the environmental degradation around the world is not yet irretrievable. However, in more recent times, a few scientists have begun to say just that. Books like James Hansen's *Storms of my Grandchildren* are even more gloomy. He doubts that we can avert run-away global heating later this century (his grandchildren's lifetime) now that the melt of ice sheets is accelerating and methane releases are well underway. The truth of the situation probably lies somewhere between the two perspectives: some things we may still be able to change, but others are fast closing in on an inexorable chain of events.

In her 2014 ground-breaking book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein quotes Fatih Birol, the IEA's chief economist: "The door to reach two degrees is about to close. In **2017** it will be closed forever." In short, Klein says, we have reached what some have started calling 'Decade Zero' of the climate crisis. We either change now or we lose our chance (pp.23-24). She continues: *The nature of the moment is familiar but bears repeating: whether or not industrialised countries begin deeply cutting our emissions **this decade** will determine whether we can expect the same from rapidly-developing nations like China and India next decade. That, in turn, will determine whether humanity can stay within a collective carbon budget that will give us a decent chance of keeping warming below levels that our own governments have agreed are unacceptably dangerous. In other words, **we don't have another couple of decades** to talk about the changes we want while being satisfied with the occasional incremental victory...the fact that our current road is headed toward a cliff...tells us that we had better start making that sweeping turn, and fast. There is **just enough time**...* (pp.153,155,459 - emphases mine).

Whatever view we take on such issues as climate change, Matthew Sleeth is right when he says: "A problem exists as real and meaningful as a sinking ship with billions of people on board. The earth is our ship, an ark for everything that lives. It is the only vessel available to carry humans through the ocean of space, and it is rapidly becoming unseaworthy" (2006:16). I seem to remember the Old Testament telling the story of a seriously-miffed God flooding the world, and Noah building a wooden mono-hull to save each species. This time it won't be an act of God, but a pickle of our own making, and the planet is the only ark we have.

In his book *Creation Untamed* (2010), Terence Fretheim says that God first assessed his creation to be "good", but not static. He reckons that creation is a process, undergoing ongoing improvement and development. God's creation he says, is a dynamic reality and is going somewhere, a long-term project ever in the process of becoming. Put another way, God did not exhaust his divine creativity in the first week of the world; he continues to create and chooses to work with others in creating. Certain constraints are in place: seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, night and day (Genesis 8:22). But

beyond that, the future of the world is characterized by a remarkable open-endedness, in which more than God is involved. What human and non-human creatures do in creation counts with respect to the emergence of ever-new creations; they make a difference to the shape that the future of creation takes. The Spirit, working in and through existing matter and creatures, enables genuine novelty to emerge. We need, he asserts, to be cooperating with God in his work of “creating futures” – for the natural order and for generations to come.

I am blessed by having three children and eight grandchildren. Most of us who have children consider the securing of their future as the highest priority to which we devote our time and money. We pay for this, that and the other with the goal of helping them enjoy good lives. Before the birth of my children I could not take seriously any event (like global warming or the end of the tropical rainforests) projected for the year 2035. I shall probably be dead before that year and even the date struck me as unreal. However, when my children were born between 1979 and 1984, and my wife and I started going through the parental obsessions I have alluded to, I realized with a jolt: 2035 is the year in which my kids will be in their 50's, and my grandchildren in their 20's. It's not an imaginary year! Such a realization received another shove when the next generation began to arrive from 2005 onwards!

I began to ask myself some probing questions: What legacy are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? What kind of world will we bequeath? What situation will they grow up into? What are we doing to secure or to jeopardize their future? Do those yet to be born warrant an effort or sacrifice on the part of us who are older? What's the point of willing our property to our kids if the world will be in a mess then anyway! Does it make any sense to do so while simultaneously doing things undermining the world in which they will be living 50 years from now?

I began to realize that to do nothing about growing environmental problems is actually to sleepwalk into a crisis which my loved ones will have to wear. In other words the party's over, the bill has arrived, and now we need to settle up! It was time to wake up and smell the carbon. I could not press the snooze button, roll over and go back into dreamland. I needed to get real about the challenge. Such notions were a key factor in my decision to take environmental stewardship seriously and integrate it into my Christian life. They also motivated me to get involved in the Christian environmental movement.

The Bible provides a fitting summation. In Exodus chapter 3 God designates himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In short, he is the God of successive generations. Psalm 89:1 highlights his “faithfulness to all generations”. It seems that God is greatly interested in continuity and concerned that his blessings should be expressed to, and experienced by, one generation after another. The created order is a key means to this end, and that is why we need to be in tune with what God is doing today to ensure that those downstream from us in time do not inherit a dying planet and a world very different from the one we know.

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

Selfishness, unlike wine...does not age well. Yet there are people alive today who have lived long enough to see the loss of the American chestnut and the American elm. They've seen the sky turn a purple-grey haze, streams become undrinkable (even unswimmable!), wells

poisoned, and the death of half the world's birds. After describing these losses, I've heard many sadly say that they're glad they won't be around to see the outcome of another fifty years of business as usual. This group absolves itself of any responsibility for setting things on a better path. It is as if all the little children being born do not warrant an effort of sacrifice on the part of us who are older. Retirement from morality is not mentioned in the Bible. John the Evangelist wrote the last book of the Bible at age ninety while on an island prison.

As Christians, we pray that God's concerns become our concerns – no matter what our age. God is intensely concerned with the needs of the next generation. We who are older and have a greater understanding of the negative changes occurring in nature must be bold (Psalm 92:12-14 TNIV)

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 41-42)

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### I don't want to be an alarmist or extremist.

#### Calvin B. DeWitt responds:

(Translation: *I want to be considered normal and not some kind of prophet of gloom and doom*). Gloom and doom are not necessary components of the message about caring for creation. Frightening ourselves into action is far less preferable than caring for creation out of gratitude and love for God. As for being called an alarmist, is it wrong to sound the fire alarm when a building is burning? In many cases today, it may be necessary to sound the alarm.

(*The Green Bible*, 2008: I-26)

### I disagree with what some environmentalists and scientists say will happen.

#### Calvin B. DeWitt responds:

(Translation: *If I work to care for and heal the environment, I will be supporting people I strongly disagree with*). The first thing to say is that doing what is right and what God calls us to do should not carry a litmus test for who is allowed to do it. Plus, we need to recognize that there are concerted efforts to promote doubt and uncertainty whenever it helps maintain sinful structures and institutions. Just as the tobacco industry is able to promote confusion and distrust of cancer research despite extensive evidence that smoking produces lung cancer and other health concerns, similar efforts have been made to discredit the science of climatology and its findings on global climate change. Promoters of doubt about

the findings of climatology and environmental science have become experts in playing on the fears and apprehensions of the public. A major strategy for discrediting this science is to seek any contrary opinions, dress them up in scientific garb, and put them on display and in debate with the findings of science.

(*The Green Bible*, 2008: 1-27)

**Science will find a solution. Green technology will save us.**

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

We should avoid imprudent notions such as having an improper faith in the power of technology to save us from the perils ahead. You can't change the basic laws of nature.

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

They might, but that hope should be tempered with the understanding that science brought us ethyl gasoline, which was supposed to stop engine knock but gave children brain damage. Science invented spray deodorants to keep teens from sweating; however, these aerosols ate a hole in the earth's protective ozone.

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 44)

**Naomi Klein responds:**

...if we wait for what Bows-Larkin describes as "whiz-bang technologies" to come online "it will be too little too late."

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.90

"...the mere suggestion of an emergency techno-fix" feeds "the dangerous but prevalent belief that we can keep ramping up our emission sfor another couple of decades."

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.261

Geoengineering might do something far more dangerous than tame the last vestiges of "wild" nature. It may cause the earth to go wild in ways we cannot imagine...

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.267

Boosters of Solar Radiation Management tend to speak obliquely about the "distributional consequences" of injecting sulfur dioxide into the stratosphere, and of the "spatial heterogeneity" of the impacts. Petra Tschakert,, a geographer at Penn State University, calls this jargon "a beautiful way of saying that some countries are going to get screwed." But which countries? And screwed precisely how?

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.269

...you could not conduct meaningful tests of these technologies without enlisting billions of people as guinea pigs - for years. Which is why science historian James Fleming calls geoengineering schemes "untested and untestable, and dangerous beyond belief."

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.270

...geoengineering will certainly monsterise the planet as nothing experienced in human history. We very likely would not be dealing with a single geoengineering effort but with some

noxious brew of mixed-up techno-fixes - sulfur in space to cool the temperature, cloud-seeding to fix the droughts it causes, ocean fertilisation in a desperate gambit to cope with acidification, and carbon-sucking machines to help us get off the geo-junk once and for all...The earth - our life-support system - would itself be put on life support, hooked up to machines 24/7 to prevent it going full-tilt monster on us.

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.279

...turning whole nations, even subcontinents, into sacrifice zones, is a decision our children may judge as humanity's single most immoral act.

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.284

**Kevin Anderson responds:**

We don't need to concern ourselves too much with geo-engineering in the future, we just need to stop getting fossil fuels out of the ground today.

Kevin Anderson (Tyndall Centre, UK, in an interview with Rob Hopkins, Transition Culture)

**Kenneth Brower responds:**

The notion that science will save us is the chimera that allows the present generation to consume all the resources it wants, as if no generations will follow. It is the sedative that allows civilisation to march so steadfastly towards environmental catastrophe. It forestalls the real solution, which will be the hard, non-technical work of changing human behaviour.

'The Danger of Cosmic Genius' in *The Atlantic*, 27 October, 2010.

**It's up to the government to protect us.**

**Naomi Klein responds:**

Climate change has never received the crisis treatment from our leaders, despite the fact that it carries the risk of destroying lives on a vastly greater scale than collapsed banks or collapsed buildings. The cuts to our greenhouse gas emissions that scientists tell us are necessary in order to greatly reduce the risk of catastrophe are treated as nothing more than gentle suggestions, actions that can be put off pretty much indefinitely.

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.6

Speaking of the much-hyped but ineffective 2009 UN Climate Summit in Copenhagen:

...it was the moment when the realization truly sank in that no one was coming to save us. The British psychoanalyst and climate specialist Sally Weintrobe describes this as the summit's "fundamental legacy" - the acute and painful realisation that "our leaders are not looking after us...we are not cared for at the level of our very survival"...It really is the case that we are on our own and any credible source of hope in this crisis will have to come from below.

*This Changes Everything*, p.12

The interests of financial capital and the oil industry are much more important than the democratic will of the people around the world. In the global neoliberal society profit is more important than life. Or, as George Monbiot, *The Guardian's* indispensable environmental columnist put it on the twenty-year anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit,

"Was it too much to have asked of the world's governments, which performed such miracles developing stealth bombers and drone warfare, global markets and trillion-dollar bailouts, that they might spend a tenth of the energy and resources they devoted to these projects on defending our living planet? It seems, sadly, that it was." Indeed, the failure of our political leaders to even attempt to ensure a safe future for us represents a crisis of legitimacy of almost unfathomable proportions.

...we are products of our age and of a dominant ideological project...This project has led our governments to stand by helplessly for more than two decades as the climate crisis morphed from a "grandchildren" problem into a banging-down-the-door problem.

*This Changes Everything*, p.460

It is slowly dawning on a great many of us that no one is going to step in and fix this crisis; that if change is to take place it will only be because leadership bubbled up from below.

*This Changes Everything*, p.465

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

...our government has a mixed record on protecting our health and the environment. To trust that government or science will fix everything is to abdicate our personal roles as stewards. One of the key features of Christianity is its emphasis on a personal God, personal redemption, and personal accountability. We cannot depend on the state, our church, or science to redeem us today or in the afterlife. The Bible says that each of us will stand before God to give an account of our actions – and our lack of action.

*(Serve God Save the Planet, 2006: 45)*

**Why a Christian environmental organization? Shouldn't we just join with others?**

**Dave Bookless responds:**

Christians should indeed be involved in the wide range of conservation and environmental movements that already exist. However, there is a key place for organizations such as A Rocha in educating and challenging churches, and in linking the environment to clearly defined moral and spiritual values. Many conservation organizations have no worked-out idea of why obscure species matter. In addition, if we believe that caring for creation is part of seeking God's kingdom 'on earth as in heaven', then it should be as natural to have Christian environmental organizations as to have Christian relief and development agencies – they are both an expression of God's love through his people.

*(Planetwise, 2008: 148-149)*

**Phillip Donnell responds:**

Many feel that the Christian Church globally is not showing the leadership that it should in the face of the ecological crisis. If the Church, as the largest NGO in the world, took its creation care commission (Genesis 2:15) seriously, imagine the difference that would make to turning things around. It urgently needs to be mobilized, and God is raising up organizations for that specific purpose.

**Matthew Sleeth responds:**

As a Christian, I felt a mandate to align my lifestyle with what I was saying. Seeing the spiritual benefits that went along with our lifestyle changes gave me great optimism. I began to have faith that the church would become a powerful part of the solution to global warming and the degradation of the earth. The environmental movement needed new leadership and that leadership had to be motivated by moral conviction. I am convinced that when the church becomes fully engaged in the problems of creation care, we will overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. As the thirty million evangelical Christians – and all those who consider themselves people of faith – grow in their understanding that God holds us accountable for care of his creation, we will begin to see positive changes on an unprecedented scale. (Serve God Save the Planet, 2006: 24)



### AN INTERESTING POSTSCRIPT

According to Yale University's Cultural Cognition Project, one's "cultural worldview" (= political leanings, ideological outlook) explains individuals' beliefs about climate change more powerfully than any other characteristic.

The Yale researchers explain that people with strong "egalitarian" and "communitarian" worldviews (marked by an inclination towards collective action and social justice, concern about inequality, and suspicion of corporate power) overwhelmingly accept the scientific consensus on climate change. Conversely, those with strong "hierarchical" and "individualistic" worldviews (marked by opposition to government assistance for the poor and minorities, strong support for business and industry, and a belief that we all pretty much get what we deserve) overwhelmingly reject the scientific consensus.

What the latter group care about is exposing climate change as a "hoax" perpetrated by liberals to force them to change their light bulbs, live in Soviet-style tenements, and surrender their SUVs. They deny reality because the implications of that reality are, quite simply unthinkable...

We do know that having a significant stake in the fossil fuel industry makes one more prone to deny the reality of climate change, regardless of political affiliation.

The bottom line is that we are all inclined to denial when the truth is too costly - whether emotionally, intellectually or financially.

One of the more interesting findings of many recent studies on climate change perceptions is the clear connection between a refusal to accept the science...and social and economic privilege. Overwhelmingly, climate change deniers are not only conservative but also white and male, a group with higher than average incomes.

See Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 36-37,43,45-46

To the extent people prioritize values and goals such as achievement, money, power, status and image, they tend to hold more negative views towards the environment, are less likely to engage in positive environmental behaviours, and are more likely to use natural resources unsustainably.

Tim Kasser and Tom Crompton, 2009: *Meeting Environmental Challenges: The Role of Human Identity*, p. 10

I have heard every kind of objection and rationalization for not protecting our earthly ark of life. Most of the arguments boil down to *selfishness*. I have met those who would bet the futures of their grandchildren on wishful thinking that the earth will end tomorrow; however, I've met none willing to bet their 401ks on such end-time thinking.

Matthew Sleeth, *The Green Bible*, 2008: 1-22

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



### MODULE THREE: *Participant's Worksheet* (Complete this outline as you read the notes)

Some of the reasons why people reject or neglect environmental stewardship are:

- The view that 2 Peter 3 teaches the d\_\_\_\_\_ and replacement of the present earth.
- The Church should only be concerned about s\_\_\_\_\_ s\_\_\_\_\_.
- God is in c\_\_\_\_\_, so we should leave solving the problem to him.
- Helping the p\_\_\_\_\_ is more important than helping nature.
- The problem is too big for us to make any d\_\_\_\_\_.
- We should only concern ourselves with s\_\_\_\_\_ matters.
- We're all going to h\_\_\_\_\_ so why bother about earth?
- Everything will be renewed after the R\_\_\_\_\_.

- The environmental movement is d\_\_\_\_\_.
- Too many w\_\_\_\_\_ people are involved in the environmental movement.
- Respecting nature is too close to p\_\_\_\_\_.
- It looks too much like p\_\_\_\_\_ c\_\_\_\_\_.
- It could lead to world g\_\_\_\_\_.
- It could lead to support for a\_\_\_\_\_.
- The Bible tells us to "have d\_\_\_\_\_ " over the earth.
- W\_\_\_\_\_ is God's reward for believers.
- SUVs are s\_\_\_\_\_.
- We do not need to worry about the world's p\_\_\_\_\_.
- My n\_\_\_\_\_ do it. Why shouldn't I?
- Christians have an appalling t\_\_\_\_\_ r\_\_\_\_\_ in this area.
- It's okay if it's your p\_\_\_\_\_, but not for everyone.
- There's no u\_\_\_\_\_. We have plenty of time.
- We shouldn't be a\_\_\_\_\_ or extremist.
- I disagree with what s\_\_\_\_\_ and environmentalists are saying.
- Science and t\_\_\_\_\_ will save us.
- It's up to the g\_\_\_\_\_ to protect us.
- We don't need C\_\_\_\_\_ environmental organisations.

**QUESTIONS TO  
AND DISCUSS**

1. Which of



**PONDER**

these

2. Have you used any of these objections/excuses yourself? If so, do you still think the same, or have you changed your mind?
3. Do you agree that climate change/environmental degradation is "an inconvenient truth"? Why or why not?
4. Has your understanding of any biblical passages changed as a result of reading the material in this module?

5. Do you agree with Hoekema that if God has to annihilate this present cosmos, Satan will have won a great victory?
6. If 2 Peter 3:1-13 does not necessarily speak of the destruction of the present creation, what is the alternative? If there is an alternative, do we have any role to play in bringing it about? What should we be *expecting*, and what should we be *looking forward to*? How should this affect our daily lives?
7. Is "Let go and let God" an adequate response to the environmental challenges we face?
8. When God told humans to "have dominion" over the earth, what did he mean?
9. Look at Revelation 21:5. What is the difference between God making "all new things" and God making "all things new"? How would you answer the question: If this present earth will ultimately be renewed by God what is the point of our taking care of it now?
10. How would you answer someone who says: "The problem is so big! What possible difference is anything I do going to make?"
11. In terms of mission, are "saving souls" and "saving seals" equally important? Can we ignore one at the expense of the other?
12. How do you answer those who think that involvement in creation care is too worldly or politically correct?
13. How could you use Colossians 1:15-20 in response to someone who said that everything physical was evil and only the spiritual realm was good? What is the relationship of Christ to "all things"? Does this relationship have any implications for us?
14. If you were in charge of the world's clock, would you slow it down or speed it up? Why?
15. Look at In Romans 8:18-25.
  - (a) What would a world like ours be like if there was no decay or death? How is this a picture of glory?
  - (b) Why do you think Paul enlarges the discussion to include not just God's redeemed people but the entire creation? What does this tell us about the right way to view our earthly environment?
  - (c) How would you explain the relationship between hope and faith? How can the hope of Romans 8:22-25 help you during times of trial?
16. What do you think of the conclusions arising from Yale University's Cultural Cognition Project. Are we prone to deny the truth if it gets too costly? How do our goals in life influence this?

**MODULE FOUR**  
**FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE: CREATION CARE AS A MATTER OF**  
**MORALITY AND AS A MEANS OF MISSION**  
**PARTICIPANT'S NOTES**

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In this module we are looking at two aspects: creation care as a matter of morality and as a means of mission. Morality and mission, both of which, in a real sense, are pursued "for heaven's sake."

## A MATTER OF MORALITY

### MORAL OR AMORAL?

Morality in essence has to do with clarifying what is good and bad, right and wrong and what human beings should freely do or refrain from doing  
It is a prescriptive pursuit: it tells us how we *ought* to behave.

Ethics are the explicit reflection of moral beliefs and practices.  
*Moral values* are held by an individual person or society in general.  
*Ethical standards* (or principles) are criteria which help us distinguish right from wrong.

Moral values and ethical standards comes into play in any situation in which humans are faced with a right choice and a wrong choice.

*Environmental ethics* is the application of ethical standards to relationships between human and the natural environment. As such it is a relatively recent field of concern and exploration.

It only really gained momentum after Rachel Carson wrote "Silent Spring" in 1962.  
Explicit environmental ethics is a recent phenomena both in the secular and religious world.

- In Genesis 1, does what is created have moral value?
- Do you think that caring for the environment is a moral issue?
- Is the environment and how we treat it something to which notions of morality are relevant and can be legitimately applied?
- "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." (Aldo Leopold) Do you agree?

**Many believe that creation care very much involves moral/ethical considerations:**

*...climate change will test our **moral character** like little before.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.48

*It's enormously telling that as far back as 1998, when the American Geophysical Union(AGU) convened a series of focus groups designed to gauge attitudes towards global warming, it discovered that "Many respondents in our focus groups were convinced that the underlying cause of environmental problems (such as pollution and toxic waste) is a pervasive climate of rampant selfishness and greed, and since they see this **moral deterioration** to be irreversible, they feel that environmental problems are unsolvable.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.60

*It is **not right** for us to destroy the world God has given us. He has created everything; as the Bible says, 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven' (Acts 17:24). To drive to extinction something He has created **is wrong**. He has a purpose for everything...*

Billy Graham, *Detroit Free Press*

*Science alone will not be able to resolve the situation because it is a **moral, spiritual and ethical** one requiring major changes in our behaviour.*

Sir Ghillean Prance (former Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew)

*Compassion, in which all **ethics** must take root, can only attain its full breadth and depth if it embraces all living creatures and does not limit itself to human kind.*

Albert Schweitzer

### MORAL RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION TO ANYONE OR NOT?

When it comes to the environment and how we treat it, do we have a moral obligation towards anyone?

*If ever there were an urgent **moral and spiritual** issue, this is it. We risk a two-fold betrayal – of our responsibility to the **Creator** for the good stewardship of his creation, and of our responsibility to our vulnerable **neighbours**, here and world-wide, who bear the brunt of environmental degradation and looming crisis – not to mention our responsibility to **generations to come**, our own children and grandchildren. We need to show a deeper faithfulness to God and our neighbour...*

- Dr Rowan Williams, Former Archbishop of Canterbury, in the C of E Diocesan Environment Officers' campaign leaflet, *Hope for the Future*

In this statement, Rowan Williams identifies three parties to whom we have responsibilities: the Creator, vulnerable neighbours, and generations to come.

- **OUR RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION TO GOD**

- In terms of the environment, do we have any obligations to God?  
 - Have environmental problems arisen (at least in part) because we have spurned God's precepts and principles?  
 - Do you think that God will hold us accountable for how we have treated what he has made?  
 - Is environmental degradation a confessional issue?  
 A Confession, according to Bonhoeffer is a 'decision of the church based upon its entire doctrine, to take up the struggle at a particular place'. And it involves sorrow and repentance on the part of the church.

If we fail to care for what God has made, Scripture seems to indicate that God sees it as a betrayal, and therefore holds us accountable. He appointed us stewards or managers of the

earth, and therefore expects, even demands, that we nurture and preserve it. This is a God-given commission. And with that commission comes great responsibility – many believe that one day he will hold us accountable for how well we have fulfilled that role (Isaiah 24:4-6; Jeremiah 2:7; Ezekiel 34:1-20; Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:1-13; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrew 9:27; James 1-5; Revelation 11:18).

B.T. Adeney's article "Global Ethics" in the *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* 1995 states:

*The Christian world view sees the universe as created by God, and humankind accountable to God for the use of the resources entrusted to humankind. Ultimate values are seen in the light of being valuable to God...*

*This applies both in **breadth of scope** - caring for people (Matthew 25) and environmental issues, e.g. environmental health (Deuteronomy 22.8; 23.12-14) - and **dynamic motivation**, the love of Christ controlling (2 Corinthians 5.14f) and dealing with the underlying spiritual disease of sin, which shows itself in selfishness and thoughtlessness. In many countries this relationship of accountability is symbolised at harvest thanksgiving.*

Philosopher and theologian Thomas Berry, says that people today have a sensitivity to suicide, homicide and genocide, but they commit biocide (the killing of the life systems of the planet) and geocide (the killing of the planet itself) simply because they have **no morality** to deal with it.

In other words, because humans have chosen to reject biblical morality and ignore God's parameters for relating to the environment, anything goes.

As Pope Benedict observed in his Inaugural Mass in 2005: "the external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast."

*The seriousness of ecological degradation lays bare the depth of man's **moral** crisis...Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as the spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life.*

- Pope John Paul II, *Peace With God, Peace With Creation*

- **OUR RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION TO OUR NEIGHBOUR**

- Is it okay for some communities to be exposed to more pollution?
- Would you buy a garment if you knew it was produced by overworked and underpaid workers in another country?
- Is it fair to impose the same strict environmental regulations on poorer developing countries that we do on wealthier developed countries?
- Can we truly love God and our neighbour without caring for creation?

*In WWI The poet E E Cummings experienced the paramedic's paradox as a volunteer ambulance driver on the front: Whom do you save? How do you determine and justify the candidates for triage? And the dilemma becomes even more terrible when you consider that today we are already **triaging human populations** (who gets fancy cars and clean water versus whose children must walk far to gather firewood and could die of waterborne diseases), and that situation is likely to get much worse.*

- Paul Ehrlich: 2014, *Hope On Earth*, p.3

Ethics involve not only how we treat other people directly, but how we treat them and other organisms indirectly through our effects on the environment. The fact is that maintaining our lifestyle in the west often has an impact elsewhere. People suffer external costs. External costs include pollution, health problems, poor wages and conditions, property damage, and harm to other organisms.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus said, "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets. This "Golden Rule" has always been a basic part of the Bible's message.

The primary NT command is the love ethic (love God, love others, love yourself). In Matthew 22:39 he said that the second most important commandment (after loving God) is to "love your neighbour as yourself".

How can we love God and our neighbour without caring for creation, especially if our lifestyle and actions are detrimentally affecting people in other parts of the world? Loving God means loving all that God created and sustains in love. Loving our neighbour means nurturing the good earth on which human flourishing depends.

- **OUR RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION TO FUTURE GENERATIONS**

- Do you accept that we have a moral responsibility to bequeath a livable planet to those who come after us, e.g. should we save resources for future generations?  
- Do you feel any responsibility for what happens to the environment in the future?

*...climate change is also about the inescapable impact of past generations not just upon the present, but on **generations in the future.***

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.15

*As Christians, we pray that God's concerns become our concerns – no matter what our age. God is intensely concerned with the needs of the **next generation.** We who are older and have a greater understanding of the negative changes occurring in nature must be bold (Psalm 92:12-14 TNIV)*

Matthew Sleeth: *Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 41-42

*Selfishness, unlike wine...does not age well. Yet there are people alive today who have lived long enough to see the loss of the American chestnut and the American elm. They've seen the sky turn a purple-grey haze, streams become undrinkable (even unswimmable!), wells poisoned, and the death of half the world's birds. After describing these losses, I've heard many sadly say that they're glad they won't be around to see the outcome of another fifty years of business as usual. This group absolves itself of any responsibility for setting things on a better path. It is as if all the **little children being born** do not warrant an effort of sacrifice on the part of us who are older. Retirement from morality is not mentioned in the Bible. John the Evangelist wrote the last book of the Bible at age ninety while on an island prison.*

*God wants us to take care of this planet, but I think there's something even more important to God than birds or trees or clean air. What's even more important to God is you and me and our **children and grandchildren and their grandchildren***

Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Creation*, p.96

*The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

I am blessed by having three children and eight grandchildren. Most of us who have children consider the securing of their future as the highest priority to which we devote our time and money. We pay for this, that and the other with the goal of helping them enjoy good lives. Before the birth of my children I could not take seriously any event (like global warming or the end of the tropical rainforests) projected for the year 2050. I shall probably be dead before that year and even the date struck me as unreal. However, when my children were born between 1979 and 1984, and my wife and I started going through the parental obsessions I have alluded to, there came a day when I realized with a jolt: 2050 is the year in which my kids will be in their 70's, my grandchildren in their 40's, and my great grandchildren in their teens. It's not an imaginary year! Such a realization received another shove when the next generation began to arrive from 2005 onwards!

I began to ask myself some probing questions: What legacy are we leaving to our children and grandchildren? What kind of world will we bequeath? What situation will they grow up into? What are we doing to secure or to jeopardize their future? Do those yet to be born warrant an effort or sacrifice on the part of us who are older? What's the point of willing our property to our kids if the world will be in a mess then anyway! Does it make any sense to do so while simultaneously doing things undermining the world in which they will be living 50 years from now?

I began to realize that to do nothing about growing environmental problems is actually to sleepwalk into a crisis which my loved ones will have to wear.

### **RUDE AWAKENING**

It's sometime in the dead of night  
and I've been woken with a fright.  
My grandkids come to me in dreams  
with searching questions, so it seems:  
"Grandad, what things did you avoid  
in case our planet was destroyed?"  
"Grandad, how was your life re-shaped  
to save the earth from being raped?"  
"Grandad, how did you seek to care  
once tragic trends made you aware?"  
"Grandad, what actions did you take  
when all our futures were at stake?"  
"Grandad, we'd really like to know,  
because you said you loved us so!"

- Phillip Donnell 2014

Author Paul Collins has the view that:

*Those of us whose lives have spanned the seven decades since the beginning of the Second World War will be among the most despised and cursed generations in the whole history of humankind. The reason why we will be hated by our own **grandchildren and by those who come after** them is simple: never before have human beings so exploited, damaged and degraded the earth to the extent that we have."*

(*God's Earth: Religion as if Matter Really Mattered*, 1995, p1.)

This quotation has a very strong inference.

The inference is that what has been done in the past very much disadvantages some in the present and many in the future, and that therefore our generation have somehow acted in an irresponsible, reckless and profligate fashion.

Is he right? Will we be hated? More importantly, *should* we be hated?

Have we done anything wrong? Are we in any way culpable or accountable for what has happened over the past 50 years. Are we responsible? Should we be held to account?

Is there anything which we need to repent of and lament for? Are we guilty or not guilty?

#### ACCOUNTABLE OR NOT ACCOUNTABLE?

- Do you accept any responsibility for what has happened to the environment in the past?
- Should individuals be blamed for acting in environmentally- destructive ways if they do not have reasonable alternatives?

**Are we as individuals responsible and accountable for acting in an environmentally destructive way in a backward-looking sense?**

My answer is "Yes and No"

I argue that individuals are not appropriate targets of blame when acting in environmentally destructive ways *unless they have reasonable alternatives*.

If they have had reasonable alternatives and have not followed or pursued them, then they are responsible

If they have not had reasonable alternatives, they are not responsible.

Today, many individuals lack the options or do not have the resources to do the environmentally friendly thing. Here are just a few general or structural obstacles to individuals in modern societies that make it unreasonably difficult to act in environmentally friendly ways.

- The infrastructure in many societies encourages people to drive instead of using public transport or bicycles. Individuals need to drive to the supermarket, to work and to school. If they do not need to drive, it is often easier and/or less expensive to drive than to take the train.
- It is assumed in many industries that people need to meet face to face, hence extensive business traveling.
- The information about the origin and energy cost of producing certain consumer goods, e.g., food, is often inadequate.
- Government information is sometimes unclear, or even conflicting. Food products that

are encouraged for health reasons are sometimes discouraged from an environmental perspective.

- Climate-smart food is often substantially more expensive than regular food.

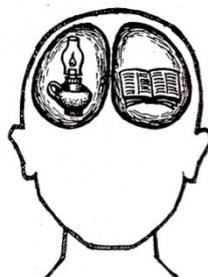
These are just a few general structural problems and there are also individual differences that should be taken into account. What options an individual has or the cost of acting in an environmentally friendly way should be seen as interplay between the individual and her surrounding socio-economic, political, and cultural environment.

It is not fair to ascribe responsibility in the backward-looking sense, i.e., to blame individuals, for environmentally destructive actions unless they have reasonable alternatives and resources to act in environmentally friendly ways.

### **Are we as individuals responsible for acting in an environmentally destructive way in a forward-looking sense?**

Although it is questionable to hold individuals responsible in the backward-looking sense, it is reasonable to hold individuals responsible in a *forward-looking* sense. Again, the different contexts and the different extent to which individuals have the capacity and resources to assume such responsibility should be taken into account. The most important conclusion is that governments and corporations have a great forward-looking responsibility to create opportunities for individuals to behave responsibly and act in environmentally friendly ways. Although acknowledging individual responsibility is beneficial, we should make sure that institutional responsibility is not overlooked or ignored as a consequence.

It is fair to ascribe forward-looking responsibility to individuals, based on their capacity to contribute to solutions to environmental problems. Furthermore, a considerable share of forward-looking responsibility should be ascribed to governments and corporations because they can make the group of capable, hence responsible, individuals larger. The urge to ascribe forward-looking responsibility to institutional agents is motivated by the efficiency aim of responsibility distributions. Simply put, if we ascribe responsibility to governments and corporations we have a better chance of creating an improved society.



### **ANTHROPOCENTRIC, BIOCENTRIC, ECOCENTRIC OR THEOCENTRIC?**

- Is it okay to destroy an indigenous forest to create jobs?
- Is it right for humans to knowingly cause the extinction of a species for the convenience of humanity?

Should protection of the environment be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth?

- Do animals have rights?

This question has to do with the way we value things. Some think that animals are only valuable because we can use them (instrumental or utilitarian value), and therefore have no rights. Others think that animals are valuable because they live their own lives (Intrinsic or inherent value). How we value something often determines how we treat it.

- Do you think that the environment has intrinsic value (in and of itself, not in relation to anything or anyone else)

Your answers in this exercise reflect your moral posture/ethical perspective on the environment:

- ◉ Anthropocentrism – *human-centered*
- ◉ Biocentrism – *life-centered*
- ◉ Ecocentrism – *system-centered*
- ◉ Theocentrism – *God-centered*

- **Anthropocentrism:** Human-centred. Only humans have intrinsic value. Human interests should get priority because the environment has no intrinsic value. This relationship to nature emphasises the value of securing the resources needed for further development.  
Example: Gifford Pinchot (the first Chief of the United States Forest Service from 1905 until his firing in 1910) had an anthropocentric viewpoint. He said that natural resources should be used (albeit wisely) for the greatest good for the most people (the utilitarian standard). He called it "the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man."



- **Biocentrism:** Life or environment-centred. Non-human life has intrinsic value. Environmental interests should get priority - the environment has value in and of itself and we should act in its best interests rather than our own). This relationship to nature emphasises the value of conserving her integrity and beauty.  
Arising out of biocentrism, some have put forward a *third ethical perspective*:

- **Ecocentrism:** System-centred. Whole ecological systems have intrinsic value (incorporating human and non-human elements). It is a holistic view that preserves connections.

*Examples:* John Muir (Father of Yosemite) had an ecocentric viewpoint. He was a tireless advocate for wilderness preservation. Aldo Leopold (US ecologist and proponent of the "land ethic")

believed that healthy ecological systems depend on preserving all parts. His land ethic changed the role of people from conquerors of the land to citizens of it.



Postscript: The value of leaving ecosystems intact is 100x that of converting it to some other use...

- **Theocentrism:** God-centred. Theocentrism is the belief that **God** is the central aspect to our existence. In this view, meaning and value of actions done to people or the environment are attributed to God. God is not only the Creator, but personally and intimately involved in the life of all creatures – human and nonhuman. God's good purposes are far wider than narrow human interests. The tenets of theocentrism, such as humility, respect, moderation, selflessness, and mindfulness, can lend themselves towards a form of environmentalism. In modern theology, theocentrism is often linked with **stewardship** and **environmental ethics** or **Creation care**. It is the belief that human beings should look after the world as guardians and therefore in the way God wants them to. Humans should be considerate to all, from animals to plants to humans themselves. It maintains that human beings are merely here for a short time and should be looking after the world for future generations. This relationship to nature reconciles in God our value for resources and nature and establishes a divine order of humans and nature apart from human egoism and intentions.



**The following article explains the characteristics and implications of an anthropocentric or biocentric approach to life....**

## THE ENVIRONMENT

From *Moral Issues that Divide Us and Applied Ethics: A Sourcebook*

James Fieser

[www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class](http://www.utm.edu/staff/jfieser/class)

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### BACKGROUND

Over the past billion years of ecological history, there have been environmental disasters of epic proportion: major volcanoes, meteor bombardments, ice ages, rising sea levels, mass extinctions. Even if humans had been alive throughout those times, there's nothing we could have done to prevent these catastrophes since they were the result of purely natural causes beyond our control. *But the issue is different with the environmental problems that we face today: they are human caused and, in theory, are within our power to prevent.* There's evidence that some early civilizations pushed themselves to the brink of extinction because of environmental mismanagement. Biologist Jared Diamond makes this case regarding the inhabitants of Easter Island. By cutting down their forests and depleting their soil, they wiped out many of their plants and animals. The island's tribes then waged war against each other for what resources remained, and ultimately resorted to cannibalism. Assuming that Diamond got the story right, this kind of environmental destruction by early civilizations may have been rare. It wasn't until the Industrial Revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that worldwide and systematic damage to the environment began, thanks largely to wide-scale coal mining, steel production, and large factories. Newer industries in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century have made environmental problems even worse.

## ETHICAL ISSUES

The central philosophical issue surrounding the environment is whether we should only value the environment for how it affects human interests, or, instead, whether we should value it for its own sake. The competing views here are called **anthropocentrism** and **biocentrism** respectively.

### Anthropocentrism

*Anthropocentrism*—literally meaning “human centered”—is the view that all environmental responsibility is derived from human interests alone. The traditional view of morality is that only human beings can be the focus of moral consideration—not rocks, rivers, plants, or even animals. Only humans are moral persons, have moral rights, and have a direct moral standing. We have a unique status among things on this planet, and morality only applies to us.

Anthropocentrism assumes this traditional view that only human beings have a direct moral standing, and we therefore do not have any responsibility to the environment for its own sake. The value that we place in anything, such as a house, a car, a pair of glasses, is based on the importance that these things have in our lives; there is nothing special about any of these things apart from the value we give them. We value works of art such as the Mona Lisa for the joy that they give humans, and not for what they are independently of us. So too with the environment: it is important for our happiness and our very survival, and because of that we have an obligation towards it. But the obligation is *indirect* (derived from human interests only) and not *direct* (derived from the value of the environment itself). Our indirect obligation would include keeping the environment hospitable for supporting human life and preserving its beauty and resources so that we can continue to enjoy it.

Thus, nothing in the environment is valuable for its own sake, but only for the benefit that it brings to humans.

### Biocentrism

By contrast, *biocentrism* is the view that we have direct moral obligations to things in the environment for their own sake, irrespective of their impact on human interests. There are two ways that the biocentric position can be understood. First is *biocentric individualism*: individual living things within the environment have moral worth in and of itself. According to Paul Taylor in his book *Respect for Nature* (1986), every organism has moral worth because each has a built in goal that directs its growth and activities towards its survival and well-being. Whether it's a plant, human or animal, it has, as he calls it, a “teleological center of life.” This does not mean that every living thing has rights in the way that humans do, but it does mean that we have moral responsibilities towards them. That responsibility also increases as we move up the food chain, from plants, to unconscious animals to conscious ones.

Second, there is *biocentric holism*, sometimes called *ecocentrism*, which is the view that we have direct responsibilities to environmental collections, such as animal species and rain forests, but not necessarily to the individual organisms within those collections. What is important is that ecosystems and species thrive. Even if there is no negative human

consequence of destroying a species or ecosystem, we still have a moral responsibility towards those collections in and of themselves. Biocentric holism was first articulated by American ecologist Aldo Leopold in his essay "The Land Ethic" (1949). He describes how notions of morality have evolved over the millennia. The earliest moral conceptions regulated conduct between individuals, as reflected in the Ten Commandments. Later ones regulated conduct between an individual and society, as reflected in the Golden Rule. But now, according to Leopold, we are on the brink of a new advance in morality that regulates *conduct between humans and the environment*. He calls this final phase *the land ethic*, and states that "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." This involves a radical shift in how humans perceive themselves in relation to the environment. Originally we saw ourselves as conquerors of the land. Now we need to see ourselves as members of a community that also includes the land. Thus, he writes, the guiding moral principle of the land ethic is that "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

Biocentric holism is often associated with other environmental theories that make even more radical claims. The theory of *deep ecology* holds that humans are only part of a larger ecosphere, and we should seek to understand how the environmental system operates as a whole. To gain that understanding, we need to go through a life-transforming experience called "re-earthing" by which we gradually identify more closely with the earth. Another related theory is the *Gaia hypothesis*, which is the view that the entire earth is a single ecosystem or organism that regulates itself through feedback mechanisms to maintain a state of equilibrium that is conducive to life on this planet. For example, when the heat from the sun increases or decreases, the planet's self-regulating ecosystem compensates by adjusting the amount of greenhouse gas that it emits; as a result, the temperature on earth has remained relatively constant for the past billion years. Defenders of the Gaia hypothesis argue that recent human intrusion into the ecosystem threatens to disrupt its self-regulating process. Deep ecology and the Gaia hypothesis share the central intuition of biocentric holism that we must value the earth's larger ecological system apart from our isolated human interests.

Both the anthropocentrist and biocentrist views recognize that we have a responsibility to the environment. Does it matter which of these two views we adopt? The answer is yes, particularly since the two sides disagree about whether human interests or environmental interests should get priority. On the one side, anthropocentrists like Baxter criticize biocentrists for giving too much consideration to the environment at the expense of human interests. On the other side, biocentrists like Leopold criticize anthropocentrists for making environmental decisions based on what is cost-effective, and thus selling out the environment. To illustrate the differences, suppose that a chemical company was found responsible for polluting a river, and two corrective options were open to them. First, they could invest fifty million dollars in pollution control systems at their factory, but this would likely force them out of business. Or, second, they could pay the community one million dollars in compensation for living with the polluted stream, thus costing them much less money. This second solution might very well address the human concerns of the affected community, and thus be a viable option for the anthropocentrist. However, the biocentrist

would completely dismiss the second alternative and be satisfied only with the first one that seeks to repair the damage to the environment itself.

The rift between anthropocentrism and biocentrism often plays out in public debates over wilderness land management issues. For example, should the government lease out wilderness for oil production? The regions in question are probably the last undisturbed natural areas in the country, and they are so desolate and remote that people don't live there and it's not suitable for recreation. If you are an anthropocentrist who values the environment only for its human benefit, then you'll be in favor of oil drilling. On the other hand, if you are a biocentrist who values the environment for itself, independent of human interest, then you will oppose drilling.

## **ARGUMENTS PRO AND CONTRA**

### **The Conservative Position (anthropocentric)**

The conservative view is that environmental policies should be directed mainly by human economic and social interests, and managed by the free market. The main arguments for the conservative position are these.

1. *Nature is for people:* Nature involves a hierarchy of living things, where the organisms higher up make use of the ones lower down. They instinctively manipulate their surroundings to make their own specialized habitats, and we don't question their entitlement to do so. Humans are at the top of the natural hierarchy and we too are entitled to make use of our natural surroundings for our purposes. A criticism of this argument is that our human ability to manipulate nature is incomparably greater than any other organism and can have devastating consequences. We can reach down through the hierarchy at every level and influence what takes place, even to the point of completely destroying it, an ability which no other creature has. The fact that we have the ability to alter or destroy all of nature does not entitle us to do so.

2. *Human interests are more important than environmental ones:* It is natural for any organism to consider its own interests above that of other organisms. Termites care little about the habitats they destroy as they devour wooded areas. Squirrels will hoard as many nuts and seeds as they can, with no thought about sharing with other animals. It is thus natural for us to consider our own interests above those of other living things. A criticism of this argument is that there is no limit to human selfish interests. Millionaires want to be billionaires, billionaires want to be trillionaires. There are natural caps on the damage that termites and squirrels can do to the environment when they pursue their selfish interests. The environmental damage that humans can do, though, is boundless.

3. *Human interests produce good environmental policies:* Human wellbeing depends on the environment, and so we have a vested interest in a healthy environment. Reckless disregard for nature through poor environmental policies will not only reduce our quality of life, but put at risk our very existence. Thus, when looking for a reason to have good environmental policies, we don't have to look any further than human interests alone. A criticism of this argument is that human interests are often driven by short-term benefits—the money that I can make or save today, the consumer products that I can enjoy right now,

the immediate convenience of my fuel-guzzling car. Good environmental policies need to be based on long-term strategies that will often involve short-term sacrifices.

### **The Liberal Position (biocentric)**

The liberal position is that environmental policies should be directed mainly by concerns for the long-term well being of the environment, not human short term interests, and should be managed by the government through regulation. The main arguments for the liberal position are these:

1. *Ecosystems have an independent moral standing:* Humans are not the only things that have a moral standing, and human well-being is not the only moral good. Ecosystems, species, and perhaps even some individual non-human life forms, have their own purposes and interests, and are worthy of value in their own right. It doesn't matter that they can't speak for themselves. We can recognize their inherent value, and we should acknowledge that they have a moral standing independently of our own. A criticism of this argument is that, even if some nonhuman things have inherent value, many human things have more inherent value than those nonhuman things. A collection of bacteria on a rotten orange has less value than a collection of trees in a forest, and a forest may have less value than a human person. In the end, even if ecosystems have some moral standing, our moral agenda may still be directed mostly by our human inherent worth.

2. *Humans are part of a larger natural process:* All life on earth is part of a complex web of interdependent organisms. We humans tend to think of ourselves as autonomous and independent creatures, but the biological fact is that we are just one piece of a large organic puzzle, and not necessarily even the most important piece. We are at bottom animals, and environmentally damaging animals at that. Our highest priorities should be to preserve the web of life that sustains us, and not the fulfillment of our isolated human interests. A criticism of this argument is that within the web of life, we are the only organism that knows what's going on. Through our knowledge and self-identity, we thus stand apart from the larger natural process. A factory that manufactures chairs is also an interconnected and complex web of processes, but its end result is the chair itself. In many ways we are the end product of the web of life, not just a tiny strand within that web. Consequently, we are entitled to value our human interests, independently of the natural process from which we arose.

3. *Environmental responsibility is best served through governmental regulation:* Human beings are inherently selfish and we typically pursue our individual best interests at the expense of everything else, including the environment. The entire history of environmental problems is a history of human selfishness. Environmental policies cannot be left to our individual selfish whims. Governmental regulations force us to take into account the impact of our individual actions on the world outside of us; regulations protect the environment from our most selfish and ecologically damaging choices. With environmental damage as bad as it has gotten, the stakes are too high to surrender the environment to personal and economic greed. A criticism of this argument is that the government itself is not always the best manager of the environment. It often sells out to the most environmentally destructive industries, and blocks citizens from suing those industries on behalf of the environment. Personal greed certainly needs to be harnessed in the interests

of preserving the environment, but we can't trust that the government's policies are the best ones to accomplish this. Non-governmental and even free-market solutions are also needed.

### **A Middle Ground**

The anthropocentric and biocentric approaches to environmental responsibility are dramatically distinct from each other: one says that moral value is grounded only in human interests, and the other says that it is grounded at least in part by environmental wellbeing independent of human interests. Deep ecologists argue further that moving from an anthropocentric to a biocentric moral position requires something like a religious experience: we need to connect our individual identities with a larger ecological self through a re-earthing experience. Thus, from a strictly philosophical perspective, there is no obvious middle ground between the two positions. However, what matters most with environmental responsibility is how we act, not necessarily what motivates us. To that extent, everyone, even the die-hard anthropocentrist, should be capable of appreciating environmental policies that may improve the integrity of the environment. During the 1970s, the EPA took dramatic steps in reducing industrial pollution that was blackening the skies of major cities and poisoning surrounding rivers. At the time businesses resisted these changes at every step, but in retrospect it is evident that these environmental regulations enhanced our quality of life, and no reasonable person would want to return to the days before these regulations.

There are still many more tasks that need to be done to stabilize and improve the environment as we've listed at the outset of this chapter, the most urgent of which is to address global warming. If we make these important changes through both governmental regulation and some voluntary self-regulation of industries, it is easy to see how our quality of life will be improved even more. Education is a large part of the battle—learning how many of the consumer products and life-style choices that we take for granted are damaging the environment, and along with that our quality of life. There is an environmental cost for virtually everything that we do, and understanding that cost is an important first step in motivating us to act responsibly. Becoming more environmentally responsible undoubtedly involves short-term personal sacrifices, but environmental education should teach us that the sacrifices are worth the long-term personal gain we'll receive through a healthier environment. Armed with this knowledge, we will thus be more willing to reduce energy consumption, develop renewable resources, and participate in recycling programs. It may also incline us to shop more responsibly, and send a message to manufacturers that consumers prefer environmentally-friendly products and are prepared to voice that preference with their wallets. While this shift in attitude may not necessarily make me a biocentrist, it will make me a smarter anthropocentrist and enable me to see how I can personally benefit from more environmentally-friendly personal choices and public policies.

While countries are largely in control of setting their own environmental laws and policies, there have been a growing number of international environmental treaties which aim to get countries around the world to collectively address environmental problems. Many of these have originated within the United Nations, addressing issues as diverse as climate change, biodiversity and sustainable development. The most famous of the international environmental agreements today is the Kyoto Protocol, which requires developed countries to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. 37 of the world's most developed countries signed on, but the U.S. did not, principally because the Protocol does not impose restrictions on developing countries. The reason for excluding developing countries is this. Wealthier developed countries have had unfettered access to environmental resources as they've built strong industries and economies. Poorer developing countries, by contrast, are just now coming of age and placing heavy demands on the environment. Environmentally responsible policies today are expensive to implement, wealthier countries have a much easier time absorbing those costs than do poorer countries. Is it fair to impose the same strict environmental regulations on poorer developing countries that we do on wealthier developed countries? Should poorer countries be allowed to first catch up to wealthier ones? The U.S. says no on the grounds that this is a double standard that requires wealthy countries to carry the environmental burden for the rest of the world.

#### WHAT PRINCIPLES CAN WE APPLY IN MORAL REASONING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

**By Keith Douglass Warner OFM, with David DeCosse**

[http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/environmental\\_ethics/lesson3.html](http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/focusareas/environmental_ethics/lesson3.html)

Ethical standards (or principles) are criteria which help us distinguish right from wrong. There are many different principles on which to draw in moral reasoning about specific environmental problems. This lesson reviews three basic pairs of principles: justice and sustainability; sufficiency and compassion; solidarity and participation. This lesson demonstrates how environmental concerns challenge us to extend these principles to include the well-being of the natural world and our human duties to it. It concludes with a description of three general types of arguments that can be used in moral reasoning about the environment.

The three classic ethical principles of justice, sufficiency and solidarity can be traced back to many different sources: Greek philosophy, religious teachings, and reflection on human experience. In the face of any decision involving environmental ethics, we should ask how each of these ethical principles - also known as ethical norms - can be applied to the situation at hand. Ethical principles are standards or benchmarks against which we can evaluate our actions. They are also signposts to orient us toward the difference between right and wrong, especially in conditions where there are multiple problems, and the interests of more than one party. Ethical principles are different from scientific principles in that they are generally not as hard and fast. They are less likely to give us one correct answer, but can be used to evaluate conflicting claims, a decision making process, or the outcome of a decision.

### Justice and sustainability

The classic formal principle of *justice* is that equals should be treated equally unless there is a sufficient reason to treat anyone (or anything) unequally. It is clearly relevant in the field of ethics called *environmental justice*, but this principle cuts across many issues. Environmental justice is concerned with the inequitable access to environmental resources (clean food, air and water) and the injustice of greater pollution that often characterize lower-income communities - not wealthy suburbs. The notion of justice underlies concern about animal welfare. On the basis of what values are other animals considered different from the human animal, and thus subject to consumption by humans? Recent advances in biology have shown that the differences between humans and other animals are much less than many of us might think. Does the equality of humans and animals as living creatures require far more humane treatment of animals? Or even the total non-use of animals? To apply justice to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. Are all human beings involved in this situation being treated equally and, if not, why not?
2. Are all living creatures involved in this situation being treated equally and, if not, why not?

*Sustainability* extends justice into the future. *Sustainability* can be defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. We are consuming or degrading many resources (such as fossil fuel energy, topsoil and water) today faster than they can be naturally replenished, which means they will not be available to people in the future. The ethical principle of justice is at play because it underpins the need to equitably balance the needs of those alive today (the rich and poor) with future generations. Thus, environmental ethics takes the notion of fundamental fairness and stretches it to include those yet to be born. To apply the principle of sustainability to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. What are the immediate and long-term effects of the problem before us?
2. Who - humans and otherwise - is affected today by the problem before us and who will likely be affected by this problem in the future?

### Sufficiency and compassion

The principle of *sufficiency* mandates that all forms of life are entitled to enough goods to live on and flourish. The principle also means no one should waste or hoard resources intended for the sufficiency of all. Upholding the norm of sufficiency makes demands upon individuals - to share, to live more simply, to think creatively - and on human communities: to ensure that everyone has access to the goods that they need to live a life of dignity. The ethical norm of sufficiency is closely tied to the notion of moral significance, which means that something is worthy of our ethical concern. This means that we include the needs of others in our consideration of what is important, or worthy of our concern. When we consider the needs of others, such as poor individuals in our society or poor countries in the world, we are asserting the moral principle of sufficiency. This principle helps us think about whom else we need to consider, to whom we have moral duties. It underlies the practice of

empathy. This principle can conflict, at least in some people's minds, with the notion that the Earth does not have sufficient goods to meet everyone's needs. To apply the principle of sufficiency to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. Will the decision permit all those involved, especially the poor, to have enough resources on which to live and flourish?
2. Is there any aspect of the decision that indicates the presence of waste or excess? Or a failure to be creative?

Compassion extends the notion of sufficiency to the Earth. Environmental ethics asserts that other animals, plants, and the elements (such as water, soil or air) are morally significant, and that humans have responsibilities to act so that their needs are met too. Some environmental ethicists, such as [Deep Ecologists](#), assert that non-human forms of life have moral significance equivalent to humans. Most people, however, believe that other forms of life have some moral worth, but that humans are of greater moral significance. Even if you think animals are far more worthy of your concern than plants or elements, recognize that all animals depend, either directly or indirectly on plants for food, and that no creatures can live without sufficient clean water. To assert that any wild animal is worthy of our moral concern begins the process of learning about the interdependence of all creatures on the habitat and food resources provided by other creatures in an [ecosystem](#). It is simply impossible to consider the well-being of one other creature in isolation from their environment. Ultimately, the future of humans is tied to the well-being of all other creatures. To apply the principle of compassion to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. What duties do we have to the other creatures likely to be affected by our actions?
2. What does sufficiency mean for other creatures, especially those threatened with extinction?
3. What would it mean to extend the principle of compassion to non-human creatures?

### **Solidarity and participation**

The principle of solidarity invites us to consider how we relate to each other in community. It assumes that we recognize that we are a part of at least one family - our biological family, our local community, or our national community - but then challenges us to consider the full range of relationships with others. In a globalizing economy, we participate in a vast, international economic community, one in which goods and services are provided for us by those on the other side of the world. Solidarity requires us to consider this kind of extended community, and to act in such a way that reflects concern for the well-being of others. To apply the principle of solidarity to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. Who are all the human stakeholders involved in this situation?
2. Who are all the natural stakeholders?
3. Is there a community of life ([ecosystem](#)) involved?

4. Are there any stakeholders - human and non-human - who are especially vulnerable?

*Participation* extends the idea of solidarity to make it practical. The demands of solidarity point us to the principle of participation, so that those affected by an environmental decision can shape how it is made. Many, many environmental problems stem from decisions being made by private individuals or companies that have wide-ranging implications. In some cases, in this country and others, governments make environmental decisions without fully securing the consent of the public. Often, those most affected are unaware of the decisions or the long-term effects on their health and the well-being of their environment. The ethical principle of participation requires us to recognize all of the parties - human and non-human - likely to be affected by a decision, and to recognize that all parties should have a say in how the decision is made. Genuine participation requires transparency, meaning that each individual has access to the same information that everyone else has. To apply the principle of participation to an environmental decision, we should ask:

1. Do all stakeholders in this decision actually have a say in how the decision is going to be made?
2. Are there any stakeholders who cannot represent themselves? Or who have little power? How will their interests be represented in the decision-making process?

### **Modes of Ethical Reasoning about the Environment**

We now come to the "what" of environmental ethics, in other words, to the kinds of ethical reasoning that uses standards for environmental behavior or decisions. If we reflect on how we already think, we can see several common modes of ethical reasoning. For the sake of simplicity and by using a sort of short-hand, let's consider these modes as three: moral reasoning about commands, consequences, and character. Whenever we consider an ethical problem, we usually find ourselves reasoning along one or more of these lines. And this is as much the case in environmental ethics as in any other kind of ethics.

**Commands.** We can use the notion of "commands" as a shorthand way for referring to those things that we ought to do, no matter what the consequences. This kind of reasoning is also associated with such ethical categories as commandments, laws, rights, and justice. In terms of environmental ethics, perhaps the classic command is one of the classic commands in all of ethics, "Do no harm." That is, our first general duty toward the environment is to do no harm. Moreover, we are reasoning in a command mode when, for instance, we think that animals have rights and, therefore, that justice requires that we not harm them; this is often the ethical conviction behind those who do not eat meat.

**Consequences.** The ethical notion of consequences is most often associated with the philosophical school of utilitarianism. According to this mode of ethical reasoning, commands are not sufficient in themselves to tell us what we ought to do. Instead, we need to think carefully about the consequences of our actions. Thus we can determine the correct ethical action by choosing the one that will produce the greatest balance of good consequences over bad consequences. This kind of reasoning helpfully invites us to consider the totality of a situation and to identify its positive and negative aspects. More to the point, in this kind of reasoning, commands or laws or rights can be overridden if doing so will yield

a greater balance of benefits over harms. This means, for instance, that something like the rights of animals can be overridden for the sake of some perceived human benefit. In consequential reasoning, it is often difficult to specify what qualifies as a "benefit" and a "harm" or, similarly, a "benefit" and a "cost," or "good" and "bad," etc. Frequently in environmental cases, costs and benefits are considered only in monetary terms. But while the assessment of such financial costs is an essential part of many ethical analyses, it cannot be the whole of such analyses. And it is important to try to name what else constitutes harm and benefits. One way of doing this might be to say, for instance, that harm is constituted by things like premature death, undue pain, or the violation of human economic or political rights. An environmental action that leads or very likely will lead to such harms would be ethically problematic. Working to protect the full diversity of life on Earth is an example of ethical action with a positive consequence.

**Character.** When we speak of "character," we are not doing so precisely in the way that we often hear the word: As referring to a role in a play or movie. Rather, we are referring more to the notion that "he or she has got good character" or to the notion that "he or she is a person of conscience." In the face of a situation of environmental ethics, we are asking: What kind of person am I becoming by engaging in these actions in relation to the environment? Am I becoming more just, more humble, more generous? This mode of ethical reasoning invites careful and honest self-reflection. It can also be a kind of reasoning used very well by a group. The fact is, we become what we do - whether what we do involves only other people or also involves the natural world.

*Keith Warner, OFM, is the Assistant Director for Education, Centre for Science, Technology, and Society at Santa Clara University*

*David DeCosse is the Director of Campus Ethics Programs at the Markkula Centre for Applied Ethics*

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## **A MEANS OF MISSION**

Mission is a word often used but it is not easy to find a concise definition which describes it, even less to find one on which everyone can agree. Mission has many elements to it, which is reflected in the widely used 'Five Marks of Mission' formulated by the Anglican Church:

**1. Anglican Consultative Council** (*one of the authoritative international bodies of the Anglican Communion*)

'To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by living service

To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation

**To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'**

(*Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p49. Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p10 and ACC Auckland 2012*)

## 2. The Constitution of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia

(from the Preambles):

'AND WHEREAS (3) the mission of the Church includes:

- (a) proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ,
- (b) teaching, baptising and nurturing believers within eucharistic communities of faith,
- (c) responding to human needs by loving service and
- (d) seeking to transform unjust structures of society, **caring for God's creation**, and establishing the values of the Kingdom.

The language of the Anglican 'Mission Shaped Church' Report reflects this, describing mission as:

*"God's missionary purposes are cosmic in scope, concerned with the restoration of all things, the establishment of shalom, the renewal of creation and the coming of the kingdom as well as the redemption of fallen humanity and the building of the Church."*

You will notice that the statements above refer to striving to "safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" and "Caring for God's creation."

There are many, of course, who think that we should concentrate on saving souls and forget about saving seals, but (as we learned in Module 3) it is not a case of either/or; it is a case of both/and. God wants to rescue both the human and the non-human creation. Both lie within the scope of his redemptive purposes. The Old Testament views future salvation as restoration of life in creation, and Jesus affirms the Old Testament view of salvation in his kingdom mission.

He told us to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news *to the whole creation.*" (Mark 16:15 NRSV). Caring for what God has made is cooperating with him in part of his mission.

What A Rocha says is that we should engage in caring for the non-human creation as a witness and relationship bridge to the human creation, and also as a way of increasing the wellbeing of both.

### **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NON-BELIEVERS**

During my 25 years as a pastor, it was well-known that the key requirement for successful evangelism was to build bridges into the community and form relationships with people who had not yet come to faith. After all, you cannot influence anyone towards anything if you do not connect with them.

This was born out by research done by Ray Muller in NZ in the 1990s (detailed in the book *New Vision New Zealand*, Volume 1, chapter 12). He surveyed how people come to Christ and the Church. This is what he discovered:

MEANS (PRIMARY INFLUENCE)	PERCENTAGE RANGE
Special need	1-3
Walk-in	2-4
Pastor or church staff	-

Visitation/telemarketing	-
Sunday School/Small group	4-6
Evangelistic crusade	-
Church programmes	-
Friends and/or relatives	75-90

Today, many people are seeking spiritual reality but see Christianity as irrelevant to the questions they are asking. Creation is a place where they encounter something of that spiritual reality, sensing a greater presence, experiencing the ordering of seasons and tides, or feeling a deep empathy with other creatures. Sadly, Christians have often dismissed such experiences as nature worship. Yet surely this is exactly what Romans 1:20 means by seeing God's invisible qualities through what has been made. Creation is a natural place of encounter with God. What a tragedy that those struggling to make sense of God's fingerprints in creation often find Christians closing the door in their faces.

The environmental movement today certainly includes people with a very different view of the world from Christianity, but also many who are openly searching for spiritual reality. Citizens of the kingdom of God yearn for shalom, but non-Christians often yearn for it too, and sometimes work so tirelessly for this that they put Christians to shame. It's a compelling reason for Christians to get involved.

Creation care furnishes an immediate point of mutual interest, shared vision, identification and commonality. It also provides a context in which to forge meaningful relationships as a prelude to evangelistic influence. For this reason, Christian environmentalism is currently one of the fastest growing and most productive missional enterprises in the global church.

For instance, A Rocha took a piece of unkempt land in West London and turned it into an oasis for wildlife called Minet Country Park. It raised questions among the neighboring people, "Why are they doing this?" It gave opportunities for them to find out that their ecology was based on the gospel and their gospel was centred on the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Phillip Donnell** reflects:

*A PROFOUND REFLECTION ON EVANGELISTIC METHODOLOGY IN THE POST-MODERN ERA*

Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-35

John 14:6, Acts 24:14

Relationship before religion.

Belonging before believing.

Friendship before faith-sharing.

Get to know the messenger

before hearing the message.

That's the essence, I would say

of introductions to The Way.

**Nancy Sleeth** (*Hope for Humanity*, 2010, pp.34-35) describes how introducing "green practices" into her workplace gave her the opportunity to say that her faith was a primary motivation.

**Matthew Sleeth writes:**

The Bible repeatedly describes nonbelievers whom the Lord uses to accomplish his will. God instructed the prophet Elijah to be fed by (unclean, unkosher) ravens and then by a pagan woman at Zarephath. What if Elijah had refused help from these sources? What if he had told God he didn't like the pedigree of his help?

When Jesus asked the pagan woman at the well for water, an opportunity for ministry presented itself. Because Jesus accepted help from a nonbeliever, many of the woman's town came to know Christ. *The same opportunities abound for working with nonbelievers in the environmental arena.*

(*Serve God Save the Planet*, 2006: 42-43, emphasis mine)

**ENVIRONMENTAL MISSION - LOCAL AND OVERSEAS**

Between 29 October and 2 November, 2012 a very significant and timely event took place in Jamaica. The *Lausanne Movement* for Global Evangelisation, in collaboration with the World Evangelical Alliance, held its first ever *Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel*. It was a gathering of theologians, church leaders, scientists and creation care practitioners, fifty-seven men and women from twenty-six countries from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, North America and Europe.

The days of discussion and deliberation arrived at two primary convictions. **The first was that creation care is indeed a gospel issue within the lordship of Christ.** Informed and inspired by their study of the scripture – the original intent, plan, and command to care for creation, the resurrection narratives and the profound truth that in Christ all things have been reconciled to God – they affirmed that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel, proclaiming and acting upon the good news of what God has done and will complete for the salvation of the world. This is not only biblically justified, but an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship to God for his wonderful plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, our ministry of reconciliation is a matter of great joy and hope and we should care for creation even if it were not in crisis.

The second major conclusion was that we **are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation.** Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress, and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.

These two convictions were given practical expression in a ***Call to Action*** (*printed in full below*).

It called the whole church, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, to respond radically and faithfully to care for God's creation, demonstrating its belief and hope in the transforming power of Christ. It called on the Lausanne Movement, evangelical leaders, national evangelical organizations, and all local churches to respond urgently at the personal, community, national and international levels. It had 10 aspects...

Of particular interest was the highlighting of a **new frontier of mission**. The delegates agreed that **environmental mission** is a participation in Lausanne's historic call to world evangelization, and expressed the belief that "environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches in our generation". They encouraged the church to promote "environmental missions" as a new category within mission work (akin in function to medical missions).

Such a notion is gaining momentum amongst Christian writers. For example, in his book, ***Evangelism, Integral Mission and Creation Care***, Dave Bookless explores a biblical approach to the theology of mission, putting both evangelism and creation care in the context of the *Missio Dei* and God's call to humanity to participate in that mission. His presentation is a challenge to evangelicals to make a fundamental shift away from an unbiblically individualistic and dualistic understanding of mission, and to adopt a fully biblical paradigm where there is no separation between 'spiritual' and 'material', or between evangelism, social activism, and environmental concern but rather an integration of the creation and cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15), the great commandment (Matthew 22:36-40), and the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15). This presentation was developed from his essay *Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Evangelical Reflection* [Mission Studies 25 (2008) 1-16] where he took Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism (Biblicism, Crucicentrism, Conversionism, Activism) and N. T. Wright's summary of the great themes of scripture (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, the present and future age) and argued that creation care is fundamental to the Gospel and to the mission of the Church. Use was also made of two other pieces he had written on this subject: *A Famine of Hope: Christian Mission & the Search for a Sustainable Future*, in *Mission Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* [ed. Paul Mohan Raj, Theological Book Trust, Bangalore, India, 2009], and *The Fifth Mark of Mission: Ecological Concern from a Praxis Perspective* in *Mission in the Twenty-first Century* [eds. Prof. Andrew Walls & Dr. Cathy Ross, Darton Longman & Todd, London, 2008].

Alongside a growing stream of writing on the subject, there are a growing number of organizations being formed to engage in environmental mission, and help others to do so. A Rocha is one such organisation. Another is *Care of Creation*, an environmental organization formed in 2005 by Edward Brown with the aim of bringing together two important themes: love for God's people, and love for God's world. On the organisation's website, Brown says:

"We are also a *missions organization*: We believe that environmental problems are sin problems, and we are convinced that the Church of Jesus Christ is the world's best hope for dealing with this crisis. Simply stated, we believe that *missions and care for God's creation belong together*. In summary, *we are evangelical and environmental*, and, yes, we think we can be both. More than that, we think we have to be both. Our goal is *to mobilize the Church to respond to environmental challenges with and through the love of God* - and that's what evangelism and evangelicalism is - or should be - all about..

- In fact, in terms of *theology* we believe that to be truly evangelical - believing that Jesus Christ has come with 'good news' for the human race and for all creation - we have to be concerned about the environment.
- And in terms of *reality* - what is really going on in the world right now - we know that millions of people are suffering from this environmental crisis; we simply cannot love people without caring for God's creation."

There is now widespread agreement that environmental mission (EM) must be a concern of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church. The Church is God's primary instrument of redemption, and since both the human and non-human creation need redeeming, both must fall within the scope of its mission at both a local and an international level.

Any local church that is active in missions understands the connection between spreading the gospel as we work to improve quality of life. They also probably know, as Jesus did, that it's difficult to preach the gospel to people who constantly struggle to make ends meet, live in relative poverty, are sick, have no housing or don't have clean water to drink. Perhaps that's why that church supports missionaries or even organises mission trips to build decent housing, give needed medical care and provide Christian education as a critical part of spreading the word of Christ.

What that same church may not realize is that environmental issues such as the condition of farmland, water quality, air quality and erosion are problems that stand side-by-side with poor health, sub-standard housing and lack of food. They are all problems that affect the quality of people's lives.

Like medical missions or building missions, the goal of environmental missions is to spread the gospel. Environmental missions is a local church sharing its God-given resources and talents to spread the gospel while helping to improve the condition of people's lives in areas of the world (including its back-yard) where the condition of the environment is affecting how people live.

Environmental mission provides a unique opportunity for a church to expand its missions projects and gain wider participation because:

- Unlike medical or engineering missions, most congregations are already well equipped with the skills and tools to do EM projects. Re-storing forests, farmland and watersheds require physical labor and tools — items that are readily available.
- There is a both a local and foreign need for EM projects organized into both short-term and long-term missions. Whether it is organizing a community garden and education (using land at a church) or restoring a river-bank at a local park or helping farmers in a third-world country understand no-till farming methods, EM provides a wide range of project possibilities and a critical bridge between local and remote, short-term and long term missions.
- EM projects, tend to provide a continued "inter-generational" and long-term connection within a church as projects are "owned" and developed over the years. These types of projects tend to build long-term relationships as the members and adherents become "stewards" and "caretakers" of what they do.

Because environmental degradation is a global problem, affecting everyone on the planet, environmental mission has no borders. Those engaging in it may operate in any one country while contributing to the welfare of all countries. In the light of the above, I believe that any national mission organization and any local church should consider environmental mission as part of its outreach.

*A mission-shaped church must have its mission shaped by its hope. The genuine Christian hope, rooted in Jesus' resurrection, is the hope for God's renewal of all things; for his*

*overcoming of corruption, decay and death; for his filling of the whole cosmos with his love, grace, power and glory. To be truly effective in this kind of mission, we must be genuinely and cheerfully rooted in God's renewal of space, time and matter...*

*We must think through the hope that is ours in the gospel; recognize the renewal of creation as both the goal of all things in Christ and the achievement that has already been accomplished in the resurrection; and go to the work of justice, beauty, evangelism, the renewal of space, time and matter, as the anticipation of the eventual goal and the implementation of what Jesus achieved in his death and resurrection. That is the way both to the genuine mission of God and to the shaping of the church by and for that mission.*  
- Tom Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 2007: 282

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## **THE LAUSANNE GLOBAL CONSULTATION ON CREATION CARE AND THE GOSPEL: CALL TO ACTION**

**St. Ann, Jamaica, November 2012**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel* met from 29 Oct – 2 Nov 2012 in St. Ann, Jamaica to build on the creation care components of the *Cape Town Commitment*. We were a gathering of theologians, church leaders, scientists and creation care practitioners, fifty-seven men and women from twenty-six countries from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, North America and Europe. We met under the auspices of the Lausanne Movement in collaboration with the World Evangelical Alliance, hosted by a country and region of outstanding natural beauty, where we enjoyed, celebrated and reflected on the wonder of God's good creation. Many biblical passages, including reflections on Genesis 1 – 3, Psalm 8 and Romans 8, informed our prayers, discussions and deliberations on the themes of *God's World, God's Word and God's Work*. Our consultation immediately followed Hurricane Sandy's devastation of the Caribbean and coincided with that storm's arrival in North America; the destruction and loss of life was a startling reminder as to the urgency, timeliness and importance of this Consultation.

### **TWO MAJOR CONVICTIONS**

Our discussion, study and prayer together led us to two primary conclusions: *Creation Care is indeed a "gospel issue within the lordship of Christ"* (CTC I.7.A). Informed and inspired by our study of the scripture – the original intent, plan, and command to care for creation, the resurrection narratives and the profound truth that in Christ all things have been reconciled to God – we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our response to the gospel, proclaiming and acting upon the good news of what God has done and will complete for the salvation of the world. This is not only biblically justified, but

an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship to God for his wonderful plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, our ministry of reconciliation is a matter of great joy and hope and we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis.

*We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation.* Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress, and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbors and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to "urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility" (CTC I.7.A).

### **OUR CALL TO ACTION**

Based on these two convictions, we therefore call the whole church, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, to respond radically and faithfully to care for God's creation, demonstrating our belief and hope in the transforming power of Christ. We call on the Lausanne Movement, evangelical leaders, national evangelical organizations, and all local churches to respond urgently at the personal, community, national and international levels.

*Specifically, we call for:*

1. A new commitment to a simple lifestyle. Recognizing that much of our crisis is due to billions of lives lived carelessly, we reaffirm the Lausanne commitment to simple lifestyle (*Lausanne Occasional Paper #20*), and call on the global evangelical community to take steps, personally and collectively, to live within the proper boundaries of God's good gift in creation, to engage further in its restoration and conservation, and to equitably share its bounty with each other.

2. New and robust theological work. In particular, we need guidance in four areas:

- An integrated theology of creation care that can engage seminaries, Bible colleges and others to equip pastors to disciple their congregations.
- A theology that examines humanity's identity as both embedded in creation and yet possessing a special role toward creation.
- A theology that challenges current prevailing economic ideologies in relation to our biblical stewardship of creation.
- A theology of hope in Christ and his Second Coming that properly informs and inspires creation care.

3. Leadership from the church in the Global South. As the Global South represents those most affected in the current ecological crisis, it possesses a particular need to speak up, engage issues of creation care, and act upon them. We the members of the Consultation further request that the church of the Global South exercise leadership among us, helping to set the agenda for the advance of the gospel and the care of creation.

4. Mobilization of the whole church and engagement of all of society. Mobilization must occur at the congregational level and include those who are often over-looked, utilizing the gifts of women, children, youth, and indigenous people as well as professionals and other

resource people who possess experience and expertise. Engagement must be equally widespread, including formal, urgent and creative conversations with responsible leaders in government, business, civil society, and academia.

5. Environmental missions among unreached people groups. We participate in Lausanne's historic call to world evangelization, and believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches among unreached and unengaged people groups in our generation (CTC II.D.1.B). We encourage the church to promote "environmental missions" as a new category within mission work (akin in function to medical missions).

6. Radical action to confront climate change. Affirming the *Cape Town Commitment's* declaration of the "serious and urgent challenge of climate change" which will "disproportionately affect those in poorer countries", (CTC II.B.6), we call for action in radically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building resilient communities. We understand these actions to be an application of the command to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ.

7. Sustainable principles in food production. In gratitude to God who provides sustenance, and flowing from our conviction to become excellent stewards of creation, we urge the application of environmentally and generationally sustainable principles in agriculture (field crops and livestock, fisheries and all other forms of food production), with particular attention to the use of methodologies such as conservation agriculture.

8. An economy that works in harmony with God's creation. We call for an approach to economic well-being and development, energy production, natural resource management (including mining and forestry), water management and use, transportation, health care, rural and urban design and living, and personal and corporate consumption patterns that maintain the ecological integrity of creation.

9. Local expressions of creation care, which preserve and enhance biodiversity. We commend such projects, along with any action that might be characterized as the "small step" or the "symbolic act," to the worldwide church as ways to powerfully witness to Christ's Lordship over all creation.

10. Prophetic advocacy and healing reconciliation. We call for individual Christians and the church as a whole to prophetically "speak the truth to power" through advocacy and legal action so that public policies and private practice may change to better promote the care of creation and better support devastated communities and habitats. Additionally, we call the church to "speak the peace of Christ" into communities torn apart by environmental disputes, mobilizing those who are skilled at conflict resolution, and maintaining our own convictions with humility.

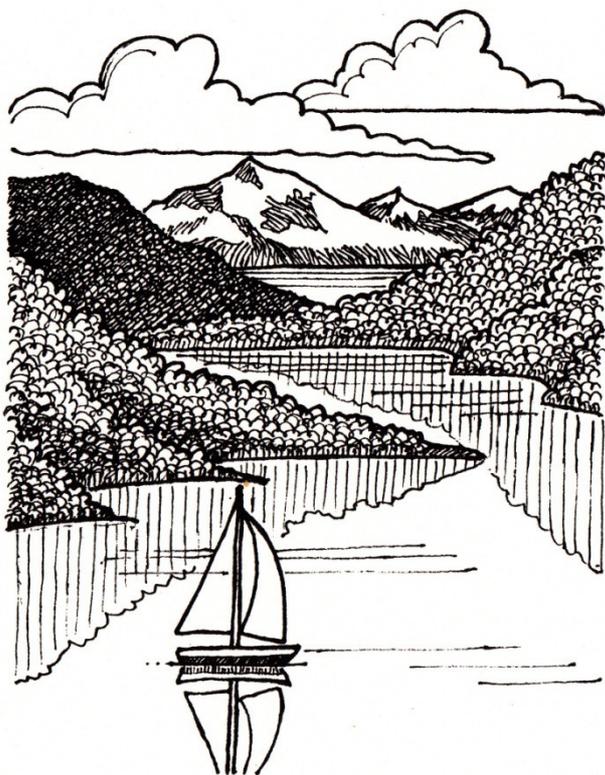
#### **OUR CALL TO PRAYER**

Each of our calls to action rest on an even more urgent call to prayer, intentional and fervent, soberly aware that this is a spiritual struggle. Many of us must begin our praying with

lamentation and repentance for our failure to care for creation, and for our failure to lead in transformation at a personal and corporate level. And then, having tasted of the grace and mercies of God in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, and with hope in the fullness of our redemption, we pray with confidence that the Triune God can and will heal our land and all who dwell in it, for the glory of his matchless name.

We, the participants of the 2012 Jamaica Creation Care Consultation, invite Christians and Christian organizations everywhere to signify your agreement with and commitment to this Call to Action by *signing this document as an individual or on behalf of your organization, institution or other church body*. Individuals may sign by going to <http://www.lausanne.org/creationcare> and following the directions given to add their names. Organizational signatories should send a letter or email signed by their leader, board chair, or authorized representative to [creationcare@lausanne.org](mailto:creationcare@lausanne.org) (Questions about this procedure may be sent to the same address.)

*Agreed together by the participants of the Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, St. Ann, Jamaica, 9 November, 2012*





**MODULE FOUR: PARTICIPANT'S WORKSHEET**  
**(Complete this outline as you read the notes)**

In this module we are looking at two aspects: creation care as a matter of morality and as a means of mission. Morality and mission are both pursued "for heaven's sake". i.e. to better reflect and advance the kingdom of God.

## A MATTER OF MORALITY

### MORAL OR AMORAL?

Moral values and ethical standards comes into play in any situation in which humans are faced with a r\_\_\_\_\_ choice and a w\_\_\_\_\_ choice.

*Environmental ethics* is the application of ethical standards to r\_\_\_\_\_ between human and the natural environment.

### MORAL RESPONSIBILITY/OBLIGATION TO ANYONE OR NOT?

We have a moral obligation to:

- G\_\_\_\_\_
- Our n\_\_\_\_\_
- Future g\_\_\_\_\_

### ACCOUNTABLE OR NOT ACCOUNTABLE?

- B\_\_\_\_\_ - looking

Individuals are not appropriate targets of blame when acting in environmentally destructive ways *unless they have reasonable a\_\_\_\_\_*.

- F\_\_\_\_\_ - looking

It is fair to ascribe forward-looking responsibility to individuals, based on their c\_\_\_\_\_ to contribute to solutions to environmental problems. Furthermore, a considerable share of forward-looking responsibility should be ascribed to governments and corporations because they can make the group of capable, hence responsible, individuals larger.

### ANTHROPOCENTRIC, BIOCENTRIC, ECOCENTRIC or THEOCENTRIC?

To understand Christian environmental ethics, we need to differentiate between four perspectives which affect the way people relate to the environment...

- A\_\_\_\_\_
- B\_\_\_\_\_
- E\_\_\_\_\_
- T\_\_\_\_\_

### WHAT PRINCIPLES CAN WE APPLY IN MORAL REASONING ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

- Justice and S\_\_\_\_\_
- S\_\_\_\_\_ and Compassion
- Solidarity and P\_\_\_\_\_

### Modes of Ethical Reasoning about the Environment

C\_\_\_\_\_

C\_\_\_\_\_

C\_\_\_\_\_

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## A MEANS OF MISSION

The last of the 'Five Marks of Mission' formulated by the Anglican Church is:

To strive to safeguard the i\_\_\_\_\_ of creation and sustain and r\_\_\_\_\_ the life of the earth.'

*"God's missionary purposes are c\_\_\_\_\_ in scope, concerned with the restoration of all things, the establishment of shalom, the renewal of creation and the coming of the kingdom as well as the redemption of fallen humanity and the building of the Church."*

God wants to rescue both the human and the non-human creation. Both lie within the s\_\_\_\_\_ of his redemptive purposes.

The Old Testament views future salvation as restoration of life in creation, and Jesus affirms the Old Testament view of salvation in his kingdom mission. He told us to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole c\_\_\_\_\_." (Mark 16:15 NRSV).

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NON-BELIEVERS**

It has long been recognised that the key requirement for successful evangelism is to build b\_\_\_\_\_ into the community and form relationships with people who have not yet come to faith. After all, you cannot influence anyone towards anything if you do not connect with them.

Citizens of the kingdom of God yearn for s\_\_\_\_\_, but non-Christians often yearn for it too, and sometimes work so tirelessly for this that they put Christians to shame. It's a compelling reason for Christians to get involved.

Creation care furnishes an immediate point of mutual i\_\_\_\_\_, shared vision, identification and commonality. It also provides a context in which to forge meaningful r\_\_\_\_\_ as a prelude to evangelistic influence.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL MISSION - A NEW FRONTIER**

Between 29 October and 2 November, 2012 a very significant and timely event took place in Jamaica. The L\_\_\_\_\_ *Movement for Global Evangelisation*, in collaboration with the *World Evangelical Alliance*, held its first ever *Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel*.

The days of discussion and deliberation arrived at two primary convictions. The first was that creation care is indeed a g\_\_\_\_\_ issue within the lordship of Christ. The second was that we are faced with a c\_\_\_\_\_ that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation.

Of particular interest was the highlighting of a new f\_\_\_\_\_ of mission. The delegates agreed that "environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to

demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches in our generation". They encouraged the church to promote "e\_\_\_\_\_ missions" as a new category within mission work (akin in function to medical missions).



### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

On *Morality*, see also the questions within the boxes in the *Participant's Notes*.

1. In his book *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis depicts hell as a place of infinite resources. How can unlimited resources - what most would consider a blessing - lead to undesirable behaviours and outcomes.? Give examples.
2. How does our culture's focus on wealth and independence pull us away from interdependence and sharing?
3. Can any of the four perspectives on environmental ethics be combined and practised simultaneously?
4. If you have children or grandchildren, do you ever get concerned about the kind of world they will inherit? If so, why?
5. How would you begin to define 'mission'?\_What is 'mission' in a Christian context?
6. Most people prefer to emphasise some of the *Marks of Mission*, more than others - which ones naturally appeal to you? And how can we engage in those which don't come so naturally to us?
7. How does thinking of the Church being partners with God in his mission affect your own understanding of mission?
8. Is rescuing the non-human creation part of the church's mission?
9. Do the church in general, and Christians in particular, need to rediscover their mission to creation? What would happen if they did? Is the phrase "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) relevant to such a re-discovery?
10. How can the local church use creation care to establish and build relationships with non-believers?
11. Do you agree with the Lausanne movement's recognition of "environmental mission" as a new frontier of mission?
12. What kind of EM project could your church initiate (in NZ and/or overseas)?

**MODULE FIVE**  
**FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS: TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE**  
**PARTICIPANT'S NOTES**

© Phillip Donnell, June, 2015

*We need to remember that the work of our time is much bigger than climate change. We need to be setting our sights higher and deeper. What we are really talking about, if we're honest with ourselves, is transforming everything about the way we live on this planet.*  
 - Rebecca Tarbottom, Executive Director of the Rainforest Action Network, 1973-2012,  
<http://ran.org/becky>

*If we would call 111 to save a life, why aren't we (metaphorically) calling 111 to save **all** life?*  
 Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Humanity*, p.105 (adapted)

I remember, when I was a child, creating an elaborate sandcastle edifice at Pilot Bay, Mount Maunganui. I spent a long time making it, with much careful thought and painstaking effort. Imagine how I felt when a bunch of boys, who were much bigger than me, came along, pushed me aside and wantonly smashed it to pieces. I felt hurt and

grieved. today I gave you a lot of information about the environmental damage done to our planet. Question: how do you think God feels about all of this?

I believe God feels increasingly grieved about what humans have done to what he has made, that the enormous damage and degradation



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today I gave you a lot of information about the environmental damage done to our planet. Question: how do you think God feels about all of this?

I believe God feels increasingly grieved about what humans have done to what he has made, that the enormous damage and degradation

perpetrated on what he has made actually breaks God's heart. It causes him grief. It makes him weep.

And that may be why he has lead you here today. He is calling a growing number of his people to actively work with him in addressing the problems. He is prompting more and more of his servants on earth to participate in a timely restorative agenda.

What I want to suggest to you quite strongly in this session is that just as we can and should actively participate right now in God's rescue mission for humans, so also we can and should actively participate, right now, in God's rescue mission for the non-human creation. I think one indicator of how out of touch the modern church is, is that it devotes 99.9% of its resources to rescuing people, and less than 1% to rescuing the contexts in which those people live and move and have their being.

Not that it should necessarily be 50-50. Humans are made in the image of God, and arguably hold a special place, so it is perhaps not reasonable to think that we would devote time, energy and resources equally, but for most churches the investment in redeeming the non-human creation is non-existent and could certainly be raised. In the light of present challenges, 90-10 or even 80-20 might be a worthy goal to aim towards. Because the fact is that if we do not participate in God's plan to rescue the non-human creation, there will be fewer and fewer humans left to rescue.

## TWO OBJECTIONS

Looking after the environment is fine if that's your thing, but it isn't for everybody. I'm glad somebody's caring for the planet, just as long as it doesn't have to be me!

What's the point? The ecological problems are so big. What I do won't make any difference."

See Module Two: Objections and Excuses

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

### **Time is short**

We are already halfway through Decade Zero - beyond which the negative effects of environmental degradation, especially global warming, will become inexorable and unpreventable.

In her 2014 ground-breaking book *This Changes Everything*, Naomi Klein quotes Fatih Birol, the IEA's chief economist: "*The door to reach two degrees is about to close. In 2017 it will be closed forever.*" In short, Klein says, *we have reached what some have started calling 'Decade Zero' of the climate crisis. We either change now or we lose our chance* (pp.23-24). She continues: *The nature of the moment is familiar but bears repeating: whether or not*

industrialised countries begin deeply cutting our emissions **this decade** will determine whether we can expect the same from rapidly-developing nations like China and India next decade. That, in turn, will determine whether humanity can stay within a collective carbon budget that will give us a decent chance of keeping warming below levels that our own governments have agreed are unacceptably dangerous. In other words, **we don't have another couple of decades** to talk about the changes we want while being satisfied with the occasional incremental victory...the fact that our current road is headed toward a cliff...tells us that we had better start making that sweeping turn, and fast. There is **just enough time...** (pp.153,155,459 - emphases mine).

*If we are to curb emissions in the next decade, we need a massive mobilisation larger than any in history. We have only a decade...*

Navarro Llanos, Bolivia's ambassador to the WTO, 2009 quoted in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, p.5

*Why aren't we, as a species, rising to our historical moment? Why are we so far letting "decade zero" slip away?*

Naomi Klein, 2014, *This Changes Everything*, p.61

See Objections and Excuses

### **Climate change is an opportunity for **change** on big scale**

*...climate change... could become a galvanising force for humanity, leaving us all not just safer from extreme weather, but with societies that are safer and fairer in all kinds of other ways as well...It is a vision in which we collectively use the crisis to leap somewhere that seems, frankly, better than where we are right now.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.7

*I am convinced that climate change represents an historic opportunity on an even grander scale. As part of the project of getting our emissions down to the levels many scientists recommend, we once again have the chance to advance policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up...transformations that would leave us with both a more habitable climate than the one we are headed for now and a far more just economy than the one we have now.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.10

*Put another way, if there has ever been a moment to advance a plan to heal the planet that also heals our broken economies and our shattered communities, this is it.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.155

### **Minor tweaking and incremental change will not now be **enough****

*If we are to curb emissions in the next decade, we need a massive mobilisation larger than any in history.*

Navarro Llanos, Bolivia's ambassador to the WTO, 2009 quoted in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, p.5

*We need to be very clear: because of our decades of collective denial, no gradual, incremental changes are now available to us. Gentle tweaks to the status quo stopped being a climate option when we superceded the American Dream in the 1990s, and then proceeded to take it global. In 2012, twenty one past winners of the prestigious Blue Planet Prize...authored a landmark report. It stated that "In the face of an absolutely unprecedented emergency, society has no choice but to take **dramatic action** to avert a collapse of civilisation. Either we will change our ways and build a new kind of global society, or they will be changed for us."*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.22

*Plenty of people are attempting to change their daily lives in ways that do reduce their consumption. But if these sorts of demand-side emission reductions are to take place on anything like the scale required, they cannot be left to the lifestyle decisions of earnest urbanites who like going to farmers' markets on Saturday afternoons and wearing up-cycled clothing. We will need comprehensive policies and programs that make low-carbon choices easy and convenient for everyone.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.91

*There is no scenario in which we can avoid wartime levels of spending in the public sector - not if we are serious about preventing catastrophic levels of warming, and minimising the destructive potential of the coming storms.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.108

*But between the Heartlanders who recognise that climate change is a profound threat to our economic and social systems and therefore deny its scientific reality, and those who claim climate change requires only minor tweaks to business-as-usual and therefore allow themselves to believe in its reality, it's not clear who is more deluded.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.211

### **We cannot rely on **political** leaders**

Leaders have failed us - because many of them are motivated by self-interest, embroiled in the drive for endless economic growth, or bound by corporate influence.

See Module 3: Objections and Excuses - "It's up to the government to protect us"

### **A grass roots **movement** of unprecedented proportions is needed**

Yes, I should turn the lights off. Yes, we should all try harder. But ultimately this battle is about cultural and political change on a scale that has rarely been seen before. First and foremost that will require *collective* action, a massive social movement. A barrier to success in the past has been the absence of a mass movement applying pressure from below. While small individual lifestyle changes are helpful, the need today is for a mass movement to influence individuals, counter corporates, persuade politicians and somersault society.

*It seems to me that our problem has a lot less to do with the mechanism of solar power than the politics of human power - specifically whether there can be a shift in who wields it, a shift away from corporations towards communities, which in turn depends on whether the great many people getting a rotten deal under our current system can build a determined and diverse enough social force to change the balance of power.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.25

*How do we create change so that the people responsible for the crisis do not feel threatened by the solutions?...The answer is: you don't. You make sure you have enough people on your side to change the balance of power and take on those responsible, knowing that true populist movements always draw from both the left and the right.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.59

*...building a mass movement that has a chance of taking on the corporate forces arrayed against science-based emissions reduction will require the broadest possible spectrum of allies.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.157

*What is clear is that fighting a giant extractive industry on your own can seem impossible, especially in a remote, sparsely populated location. But being part of a continent-wide, even global movement that has the industry surrounded is a very different story.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.157

*...only mass social movements can save us no. Because we know where the present system, left unchecked, is headed.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.450

*Winning will certainly take the convergence of diverse constituencies on a scale previously unknown.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.459

**Future** generations will be affected by what we do or don't do now

See Modules 1, 2 and 4!

## TWO OPTIONS

### 1. Do nothing

*We know that if we continue down our current path of allowing emissions to rise year after year, climate change will change everything about our world. Major cities will very likely drown, ancient cultures will be swallowed by the seas, and there is a very high chance that our children will spend a great deal of their lives fleeing and recovering from vicious storms and extreme droughts. And we don't have to do anything to bring about this future. All we have to do is nothing. Just continue to do what we are doing now, whether it's counting on a techno-fix or tending to our gardens or telling ourselves we're unfortunately too busy to deal with it.*

*All we have to do is not react as though this is a full-blown crisis. All we have to do is deny how frightened we really are. And then, bit by bit, we will have arrived at the place we most fear, the thing from which we have been averting our eyes. No additional effort is required.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.4

Remember what Edmund Burke said: "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing".

## 2. Take action

We cannot avoid the conclusion that caring for what God has made is a significant theological vision in the Bible. But knowing that is not enough. If any context in which we are exposed to truth does not become a laboratory for life transformation, the Bible is not fulfilling its God-intended function in our lives. Knowledge must issue in actions. We must be doers and not just hearers (James 1: 22-25). I believe we must be utterly realistic, acknowledging the disturbing challenges that confront us. We cannot afford to press the snooze button, roll over and go back to sleep. Nor should we be presumptuous, expecting God to save us from our folly. It's up to us to begin to remedy our ways, because doing what is right and responding to the Spirit of God is important and valuable at every point in our lives.

- Phillip Donnell

*To serve as custodians of creation is not an empty title; it requires that we act, and with all the synergy this dire situation demands.'*

Desmond Tutu, 'We Need an Apartheid-Style Boycott to Save the Planet', *Guardian*, 10 April, 2014.

*We need to re-think what really matters. Christians have a crucial role to play in this process. But to do so the Church itself must be reformed; in particular, it needs an ecological reformation. Christians need a stronger and more compelling theology of ecological responsibility and resilience, and they need to practise what they preach. The care and integrity of creation must become a key priority, not merely an optional extra. There is a long and difficult journey ahead, but precious little time.*

- Professor Jonathan Boston, Victoria University, speaking at the A Rocha national conference "Christianity and the Ecological Crisis: Lament, Hope, Action", Wellington, October, 2012

Matthew Sleeth uses the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) to identify **three possible responses**. He writes:

*This parable demonstrates a continuum of compassion, which can be applied to many problems, including the environment. The priest represents those of us who refuse to take any responsibility for environmental problems, even though we claim a close relationship with God. We close our eyes and walk on by. The second passerby, the Levite, is like most of us: he sees the problem, then says, "I should get back to Jerusalem and raise awareness. Maybe I'll blog on the problem of highway muggings, or send a letter off to the Roman centurion about beefing up patrols and installing better street lights." Like the Levite, we see the hardship caused by environmental problems, particularly for the poorest among us. Our hearts are moved to compassion, but we do little, if anything, to help because we don't want to be inconvenienced. Only the Samaritan, the one who is least likely to view the fallen Jewish man as his neighbour, takes action. He saw the need, and had mercy on him. Jesus tells us, as he told his questioner, "Go and do likewise."*

*What does this parable teach us about how we should approach environmental problems today? To have any lasting effect, our hearts must be moved by compassion for our fellow man and all of God's creation...*

*Everyone is our neighbour, including foreigners, strangers, people who hate us, and future generations. Perhaps the most important lesson of the Good Samaritan - the action that can separate us from the priest and Levite - is that we must "get off our donkey" before we can become part of the solution. The future will not be saved by our good intentions. It will be made better or worse, only by our actions.*

(2010: *Hope for Humanity*, p.108-109)

## TAKING ACTION

### **Reconnect with nature**

Enjoy time in nature. The more beautiful and striking the experience, the more you may find yourself contemplating or even grieving its possible or inevitable loss, and that will motivate you to get involved in conservation.

*If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.*

- Hildegard de Bingen (1098-1179) quoted in Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Humanity*, p.107

*...the deeper message carried by the ecological crisis is that humanity has to go a whole lot easier on the living systems that sustain us.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.178

*Love will save this place...a collective and deeply-felt expression of love for their breathtaking part of the world...The power of this ferocious love is what the resource companies and their advocates in government inevitably underestimate, precisely because no amount of money can extinguish it...when the extractive industry's culture of structural transience bumps up a group of deeply-rooted people with an intense love of their home-place and a determination to protect it, the effect can be explosive. When these different worlds collide, one of the things that seems to happen is that communities begin to cherish what they have - and what they stand to lose - even more than before the extractive threat arrived.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, pp.337,341,342,344

Psalm 104 is full of the joy of creation. It bursts with it. We need to experience that!

And as far as the ferocious love thing is concerned, we may well discover that it is the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that actually overflows in love and care for all God's creatures!

*...this need to adapt to nature is what drives some people...They demand that we adapt ourselves to the rhythms of natural systems, as opposed to bending those systems to our will with brute force engineering.*

*This Changes Everything, p.394*

And Nature, the old nurse, took  
The child upon her knee,  
Saying: "here is a story-book  
Thy Father has written for Thee."  
"Come, wander with me," she said,  
Into regions yet untrod;  
And read what is still unread  
in the manuscripts of God."  
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "The Fiftieth Birthday of Agassiz"

### **Reduce consumption**

In the late 1970's, I remember reading and being quite strongly influenced by , Ronald Sider's book *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, It was Hailed by *Christianity Today* as one of the one hundred most influential books in religion in the 20th century. Well, he hasn't changed his tune. Here is something he has said more recently:

*If we are ever able to stop destroying our environment, it will be because person by person we decide, by God's grace, to turn aside from greed and materialism. It will be because we learn that joy and fulfilment come through right relationship with God, neighbour and earth, not an ever-escalating demand for more and more material consumption. Nowhere is that more possible than in local congregations that combine prayer and action, worship and analysis, deep personal love for the Creator and for the Creator's garden*

Dr Ronald Sider, Professor of Theology and Society, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary

The root cause of the ecological crisis is seen by many to be the high-consumption lifestyle that dominates in the West - the excessive consumption of all materials, especially through large-scale industrialisation intended to support styles of life. And the voracious Western consumer lifestyle has been exported to the middle and upper classes in every corner of the globe, where it has wreaked environmental damage on a scale difficult to fathom.

Society constantly screams at us: "Buy more. Spend more. Consume more. Bigger, brighter, better. Don't fall behind - get the latest, the best, the one with the most whistles and bells. Keep up with the Joneses. Wealth is the measure of your worth. The one who dies with the most toys wins."

Jesus doesn't say any of that. Jesus counters with: "You cannot serve God and money. Live simply. Love your neighbor. Don't exploit others. Help the needy. You gain by giving away. Store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

That's not a popular message, but he didn't just say it. He practised it.

So if we follow his example, an acquisitive lifestyle (where the focus is on getting more and more stuff) will *not* be an important goal. We don't have to jump on the consumer-driven,

upward social-economic mobility treadmill. We can choose to reject materialism and consumerism and take only what we need.

If we don't take more than we need, we will greatly reduce our impact on the natural world, which will be beneficial for us, for others and for the planet! Otherwise we end up like the foolish rich in James 5 who "have looted the earth and lived it up" (vs.1-6).

We measure our stewardship not merely by healthy ecosystems but also by sustainable, responsible consumption, and for many of us that may entail a fundamental change of lifestyle! God expects us to obey him in our lifestyle choices, which are not to be driven by greed or self-interest (Leviticus 26: 3-6; Luke 12:15-23). We need to be smarter about the way we live: to simplify, to buy less, to save more. These are small but vital steps, and the possibilities are endless.

A Rocha encourages people to make great or small changes to their lifestyle to make it "lighter" – more sustainable. In the UK this takes shape as the **Living Lightly** campaign. A Kiwi version called **Living Richly** is under preparation. There are many publications to help in this regard, such as *L Is For Lifestyle* by Ruth Valerio and *Living Green: The New Zealand Handbook for an Eco-Friendly, Toxin-Free, Sustainable Life* by Annmaree Kane and Christina Neubert.

*The truth is that if we want to live within ecological limits, we would need to return to a lifestyle similar to the one we had in the 1970s, before consumption levels went crazy in the 1980s. In the 1960s and 1970s we enjoyed a healthy and moderate lifestyle and we need to return to this to keep emissions under control. It is a matter of the well-off 20 per cent in a population taking the largest cuts.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.91

*Fighting the pipelines and export terminals that would send fossil fuels...is one piece of the puzzle. So too is battling new free-trade deals, reining in our own overconsumption, and sensibly relocating our economies...*

*This Changes Everything*, p.413

### **Make better choices**

In this regard, it's not simply a matter of what we do with our waste (Reduce. Reuse. Recycle)

We also need to be smarter in what we decide to *buy* and *use*.

- Behold Exhibit A: one toilet roll.

According to World Wildlife Fund NZ, forensic tests prove that 25% of the toilet rolls sold in NZ contain fibre from Indonesian rainforests.

Yes, it's true. What you do in the loo could be *wiping* them out – literally.

One reason the planet is going down the toilet may well be what you are putting down the toilet. So don't buy Cottonsoft, Paseo, or Kiwisoft.

- Here's another exhibit: Tim Tam chocolate biscuits.

How are they hazardous to the environment?

Answer: It contains palm oil which comes from trees planted where there used to be rain-forests. Agri-business is responsible for massive rainforest destruction to produce palm oil. Did you know that palm oil is found in 50% of the products in our supermarkets. For example, most products made by Fonterra and Unilever contain palm oil.

You don't often read "palm oil" on the label, because manufacturers are pretty good at disguising it. They give it 30 different names.

The most common one is "vegetable oil".

You can send them a message by not buying their products.

- Another example.

SUVs – sports utility vehicles. There are huge numbers of them on the roads. They've almost become a yuppie status symbol.

The Toyota Landcruiser. Nissan Pathfinder, Kia Sorrento, Mitsubishi Pajero, Ford Ranger, Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Quite apart from fossil fuel consumption, the problem is that if you drive one SUV, you pump 6.35 metric tonnes of greenhouse gases into the air each year, compared to a typical vehicle's 4.7 metric tonnes (25% less) and a hybrid vehicle which emits 1.35 metric tonnes (80% less).

SUVs have a much more significant impact on the environment.

If you use a bicycle, of course, the effect is zero!

Note: There is little point installing a solar-powered radio in a diesel-fuelled SUV!

- Many of the causes of environmental degradation in our country and in our world today come down to simple everyday choices. We make choices that are good for the planet or bad for the planet. And too many of us are making bad choices because we don't know any better.

The practical implication of this is that many of us need to be better informed and revise our practices.

### **Resist the production of, and minimise the use of, fossil fuels**

*From a climate perspective...if there is to be any hope of meeting the agreed-upon 2 degree Celsius target, wealthy economies...must make getting off fossil fuels their top priority.*

Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 2014: 69

- Support efforts to turn the "no new fossil frontiers" principle into law (local, national, and international).
- Support bans on offshore drilling, fracking, and tar sand extraction.
- Call for public institutions (e.g. universities, faith organisations, municipalities) to sell whatever holdings they have in fossil fuel companies (the *divestment* movement)  
Fossil fuel companies have become the rogue actors whose continued economic viability relies on radical climate destabilisation. As such any institution claiming to serve the public interest has a moral responsibility to liberate itself from these odious profits.

What the fossil fuel divestment movement is saying to companies is your fundamental model of extracting and burning carbon is going to create an uninhabitable planet. So you need to stop. You need a new business model. It is the height of hypocrisy for institutions to profit from an industry that has declared war on the future at the most elemental level. We need to make it socially unacceptable

and morally reprehensible to be financing fossil fuel extraction - to bankrupt their reputations and take away their political power.

*The main power of divestment is not that it financially harms Shell and Chevron but that it erodes the social license of fossil fuel companies and builds pressure on politicians to introduce across-the-board emission reductions. That pressure, in turn, increases suspicions in the investment community that fossil fuel stocks are overvalued.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, pp.402-403

- *It is now technically feasible for everyone to have enough energy for a good quality of life, using only existing renewable technology. But it will only be possible if the wealthy minority stops over-consuming and allows others to come to a fair and sustainable level. For the under-privileged majority, renewable energy enables a new, decentralised, democratic energy system that meets the needs of the many rather than providing profits to the few. Nuclear power and geo-engineering will not.*  
Catherine Cheung, *Forest and Bird*, May 2015:4
- Support any moves towards renewables such as solar, wind, geothermal, hydro, tides.  
While none of these alternative energy sources alone will provide an immediate solution to the world's energy needs, policy makers and environmentalists often advise pursuing each of these paths, with hopes that technological improvements will eventually make them cost effective and readily available. For example, the NZ company *Lanzatech* are converting CO<sub>2</sub> to biofuel. They use bacteria to convert smoke stack waste gases into useful products such as ethanol.
- Wherever possible, avoid the use of fossil fuels, or mitigate them. For example, A Rocha runs a carbon mitigation scheme called *Climate Stewards*, a global programme which accepts donations for community-based tree planting projects, as well as offering practical tips for reducing [carbon emissions](#). Projects are designed according to international standards for benefits to biodiversity and the local community. Climate Stewards ranks 13th in the non-profit providers listing at [carboncatalog.org](#).

### **Get involved in environmental projects (and stir your church to do so!)**

Just do it! Be part of the solution. Don't remain on the sidelines.

Apply your time, your talents, your resources, and your life to helping "tend the garden"

- Join and support an environmental group (such as A Rocha/Generation Zero/Forest and Bird/Predator-Free NZ, Greenpeace, WWF, Friends of the Earth) and participate in practical projects! A Rocha Auckland has specific projects and A Rocha NZ has a huge national project at Mt Karioi.
- Initiate such a project through your local church, e.g. the community garden at Bethlehem Community Church in Tauranga (sponsored by the organisation *Let's Get Growing*).
- John Flenley (A Rocha Manawatu and Massey University) has estimated that if every person on the planet planted 40 trees per year, then in 5 years we could reduce CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere by 4%.

In Romans 8:19 we are told that “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (TNIV). Among other things, some interpret this to mean that the world is waiting for the *church* to rediscover its mission to creation.

One of the key ways God works in the world is still through the local church – the body of Christ. The Christian Church is the world’s biggest movement and largest NGO. It incorporates 25% of the earth’s population and is active in every corner of the globe. Just imagine the potential if the world-wide church, including that in New Zealand, were to more effectively pursue its biblical mandate for environmental stewardship. If we could mobilize God’s people in this endeavour, what a huge difference it would make.

I believe that the care of creation is an area in which the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should now be leading the way, and I suspect that God has a similar conviction. The re-awakening of the sleeping giant is part of God’s answer to the global environmental crisis, an important impetus within his ongoing restoration programme. The active involvement of Christians is vital for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14). Our individual actions and our commitment to be a new community pointing to God’s hopeful future, may seem small, but collectively will have a significant impact and make a big difference to our world.

*God designed each of us to be part of a vast body that stretches across time and space and culture. It's called the body of Christ - the church. God didn't leave his church, his body of Christ floating out in the middle of nowhere. He left it on a planet teeming with life and teeming with hope. God's hope for creation rests with us.*

Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Creation*, p.93

*The adoption of statements on the environment by church councils and assemblies is important. But unless every local congregation actually carries out sound environmental practices in its buildings and in the homes of its members, these statements are worthless. Care of the earth - our mandate from the Creator - is the responsibility of us all.*

Rev Dr Herbert W. Chilstrom, Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, quoted in Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Humanity*, p.71

### **Put pressure on, and pray for, leaders**

Example: James E. Hansen heads the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies. In the early days of climate modelling, in 1988, he gave testimony to the US Senate raising broad awareness of climate change for the first time.

*...if enough of us stop looking away and decide that climate change is a crisis worthy of Marshall Plan levels of response, then it will become one, and the political class will have to respond, both by making resources available and by bending the free market rules that have proven so pliable when elite interests are in peril.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.6

(after speaking about Denmark and Germany) *...when governments are willing to introduce bold programmes and put goals other than profit making at the forefront of their policymaking, change can happen at astonishing speed.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.132

In Ezra chapter 1 we read that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia" to make a proclamation. Cyrus said he was releasing the captives in Babylon to go home to Jerusalem, re-establish their homes, and rebuild their temple. This story has implications for us today. In a world that seems out of control, we can rest assured that God can move the hearts of leaders. We read in Proverbs 21:1 that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord", and Romans 13:1 says that "there is no authority except from God.". The Lord, who is able to change our own hearts, as well as our leaders', can be trusted for He is in control. Let's ask him to work.

### **Adopt and articulate a different **worldview****

Worldview: a person's or group's beliefs about the meaning, operation and essence of the world. Worldview is shaped by religious beliefs, community experiences, political ideology, economics, and vested interest. People draw dramatically different conclusions about a situation based on their worldview.

*It is always easier to deny reality than to allow our worldview to be shattered.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.37

*...protecting and valuing the earth's ingenious systems of reproducing life and the fertility of all its inhabitants, may lie at the centre of the shift in worldview that must take place if we are to move beyond extractivism. A worldview based on regeneration and renewal rather than domination and depletion.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.424

*Fundamentally, the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis - embedded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy.*

*This Changes Everything*, p.462

### **Challenge current **economic** paradigms**

Present economic approaches are based on the fiction of perpetual growth on a finite planet.

Basic physics governs that we cannot keep growing within a finite system, even though economists, industries and governments want us to believe otherwise. Our addiction to growth, driven by apathy, greed and ignorance, is what has brought us to the current crisis. Such approaches now need to be called into question. The real elephants in the room are de-grow, decentralise and democratise.

*....the bottom line is what matters here: our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.*

Naomi Klein, 2014: *This Changes Everything*, p.21

The real reason we are failing to rise to the climate moment is because the actions required directly challenge our reigning economic paradigm (deregulated capitalism combined with public austerity), the stories on which Western cultures are founded (that we stand apart from nature and can outsmart its limits), as well as many of the activities that form our identities and define our communities (shopping, living virtually, shopping some more). They also spell extinction for the richest and most powerful industry the world has ever known - the oil and gas industry, which cannot survive in anything like its current form if we humans are to avoid our own extinction. In short, we have not responded to this challenge because we are locked in - politically, physically and culturally. Only when we identify these chains do we have a chance of breaking free.

*This Changes Everything*, p.63

...we have an economic system that fetishes GDP growth above all else, regardless of the human or ecological consequences, while failing to place value on the things that most of us cherish above all - a decent standard of living, a measure of future security, and our relationships with one another. So what Anderson and Bows-Larkin are really saying is that there is still time to avoid catastrophic warming, but not within the rules of capitalism as they are currently constructed. Which is surely the best argument for changing those rules.

*This Changes Everything*, p.88

The lesson from all this is not that people won't sacrifice in the face of the climate crisis. It's that they have had it with our culture of **lopsided** sacrifice, in which individuals are asked to pay higher prices for supposedly green choices while large corporations dodge regulation and not only refuse to change their behaviour, but charge ahead with ever more polluting activities.

*This Changes Everything*, p.119

Though developed under capitalism, governments across the ideological spectrum now embrace this resource-depleting model as a road to development and it is this logic that climate change calls profoundly into question.

*This Changes Everything*, p.169

We know that we are trapped within an economic system that has it backward; it behaves as if there is no end to what is actually finite (clean water, fossil fuels, and the atmospheric space to absorb their emissions) while insisting that there are strict and immovable limits to what is actually quite flexible: the financial resources that human institutions manufacture, and that, if imagined differently, could build the kind of caring society we need.

*This Changes Everything*, p.347

While we have made progress on many environmental and conservation issues, there is still an unwillingness by economic and political leaders to acknowledge the central problem behind the ongoing damage we are doing to our world: that much of our present economic system is ecologically unsustainable...causing the permanent loss of species, landscapes and our natural environment...with the denial behind us, we can begin the positive task of...creating an economy that enriches our communities and our natural world."

Andrew Cutler, President of Forest and Bird NZ, editorial in *Forest and Bird* magazine, Summer 2015, page 2

*Boundaries are vital, biophysically and also spiritually. Christians, of all people, should celebrate that God has created boundaries, not to restrict but to enable our freedom, and to give us a safe operating space within which to thrive. If politicians aren't going to take up the vision of planetary boundaries (they're too scared of limits to growth), then perhaps the global church should take up the cause? Let's learn to celebrate living within the safe space of God-given boundaries.*

Dave Bookless, *Planetwise Blog*: "To Boldly Go? Exploring Planetary Boundaries", posted 31 October 2013

### **Maintain your optimism and hope in God**

As far back as 1965, Thomas Merton reflected in his journal: *"Perhaps the most crucial aspect of Christian obedience to God today concerns the responsibility of the Christian in a technological society towards creation and God's will for his creation. If our hope is in a temporal and secular humanism of technological and political progress, we will find ourselves, in the name of Christ, joining in the stupidity and barbarism of those who are despoiling His creation in order to make money or get power for themselves. But our hope must be in God. And he who hopes in God will find himself sooner or later making apparently hopeless and useless protests against the barbarism of power."*

Hope in God motivates us to take action that can lead to transformation, for by God's power at work within us, God is able to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. As Christians we can live in hope, despite the dangers that threaten us. We must not be paralysed by fear and depression. God has not abandoned us. Jesus says: *"Take courage. I am with you always..."* (John 16:33, Matt. 28:20). And we must remember that our efforts to conserve, heal and restore God's creation will never be in vain. (I Corinthians 15:58). We are not oiling the wheels of a machine that is about to fall over a cliff. We are not restoring a great painting that's about to be thrown in the fire. We are not planting roses in a garden about to be dug up for a construction site. We are accomplishing something which will become, in due course, part of God's new world. Whatever we do will have effects that will be preserved in the new creation which God will one day bring to its culmination and completion (Revelation 21:1).

The nature of Christian hope is that it plays back into the present life. In "Simply Christian" (2011: 99, 186-202), Tom Wright puts forward the idea that Christ's resurrection is a cogent incentive and inspiration for us "to go and make new creation happen in the world" (emphasis mine). He goes on to speak of "the launching of the new creation in the present". Christians, he asserts, should be "practising in the present the tunes we shall sing in God's new world". We are "called to be part of God's new creation, called to be agents of that new creation here and now...called to model and display that new creation...new creation has already begun". A heaven that demands environmental stewardship now may well resonate more with the activist generation of my children and grandchildren, but it is surely also one that, in my opinion, urgently needs to resonate with God's people of all ages around the globe.



**MODULE FIVE: PARTICIPANT'S WORKSHEET**  
 (Complete this outline as you read the notes)

**KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

- Time is \_\_\_\_\_
- Climate change is an opportunity for c\_\_\_\_\_ on big scale
- Minor tweaking and incremental change will not now be e\_\_\_\_\_
- We cannot rely on p\_\_\_\_\_ leaders
- A grass roots m\_\_\_\_\_ of unprecedented proportions is needed
- F\_\_\_\_\_ generations will be affected by what we do or don't do now

**TWO OPTIONS**

1. Do \_\_\_\_\_

Remember what Edmund Burke said: "All that is needed for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing".

2. Take \_\_\_\_\_

*To serve as custodians of creation is not an empty title; it requires that we act, and with all the synergy this dire situation demands.'*

Desmond Tutu, 'We Need an Apartheid-Style Boycott to Save the Planet', *Guardian*, 10 April, 2014.

Matthew Sleeth uses the parable in Luke 10: 25-37 to identify **three possible responses** to environmental degradation:

- Priest
- L\_\_\_\_\_
- Good Samaritan.

### TAKING ACTION

- Reconnect with n\_\_\_\_\_ and find joy in it!
- Reduce c\_\_\_\_\_
- Make better (informed) c\_\_\_\_\_
- Resist the production of, and minimise the use of, f\_\_\_\_\_ f\_\_\_\_\_
- Get i\_\_\_\_\_ in environmental projects (and stir your church to do so!)
- Put pressure on, and pray for, l\_\_\_\_\_
- Adopt and articulate a different w\_\_\_\_\_
- Challenge current e\_\_\_\_\_ paradigms
- Maintain your optimism and h\_\_\_\_\_ in God

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS

1. If you all-powerful yourself questions: *Why was I Why wasn't heaven? Why were earth heaven?*

Do your any bearing respond the

2. Roger Olsen *world is creation, as has always faithful to*

*sources, then nature is worthy of being preserved and restored."* Do you agree? If so, what are the practical implications?

3. *If we are ever able to stop destroying our environment, it will be because person by person we decide, by God's grace, to turn aside from greed and materialism. It will be*



believe in an God, ask these

*born here? I just born in*

*you born on rather than in*

answers have on how you environment? says: "If the God's good Christianity said when it is its own

*because we learn that joy and fulfilment come through right relationship with God, neighbour and earth, not an ever-escalating demand for more and more material consumption. Nowhere is that more possible than in local congregations that combine prayer and action, worship and analysis, deep personal love for the Creator and for the Creator's garden.*

- Dr Ronald Sider, Professor of Theology and Society, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Do you think that turning aside from materialism and consumerism at an individual level is an essential pre-requisite to stopping the destruction of our environment? How can a church foster "love for the Creator and for the Creator's garden"? How can the church help us "turn aside from greed and materialism" and pursue a "right relationship with God, neighbour and earth"? What has your church done to foster and pass along a love for God's creation?

4. Ponder Matthew 6:10. Environmentally speaking, what does it mean to be doing God's will on earth right now? What should be our attitude towards God's kingdom and will?
5. Revisit Luke 19:11-27. What did the man want his servants to do with the resources he gave them? What principle summarises the parable? What talents and resources do you think Jesus has left with you? If he returned tonight, how would you feel about the way you had "invested" them? How could you be more prudent in the way you are investing your talents, money, time, energy?
6. Look up and read Ephesians 2:10 in various translations. How is the believer God's work of art? What is the purpose of God's workmanship? What does this verse say about God's purposeful work and ours?
7. The church's re-awakening is seen by some as part of God's answer to the looming crisis, an important initiative in his ongoing restoration programme. Do you agree? If so, what implications might this have for you as an individual or for your community of faith?
8. Tom Wright talks about "*launching the new creation in the present*"? He also says "*new creation has already begun...*" Do you agree? If so, in what ways has it begun? What are the practical ramifications?
9. Terence Fretheim talks about "creating futures". How does such a phrase apply to God and to us? Does Jeremiah 29:11 shed any light on this?
10. What is one thing you and/or your group could do right now to care for creation?

## CONCLUSION

Imagine you are on a ship transporting refugees from one country to another. It's part of a Christian relief operation. The needs of the passengers are many: daily food, and sanitation, medical care, children to be entertained and educated, spiritual help. Some of you do administration: tracking supplies, scheduling rooms, making best use of volunteers.

The voyage proceeds. Occasionally problems appear: an outbreak of dysentery on one of the lower decks, disorganisation in the kitchen, disagreement over the use of certain rooms, etc.

So, being sensible, we start holding coordination meetings each morning to address these issues and make sure every service and ministry area has the resources it needs.

One morning there is a new face at the meeting. The captain introduces him, "This is our chief engineer and he has some news I think you need to hear."

It turns out that our vessel began to take on water during the night.

The situation is serious and will require cooperation from everyone at the table. "Bottom line, folks? If we don't fix the problem, we can't make it to port."

Think about how that announcement would affect the people sitting round the table. They all have jobs to do. Life has to go on, even while the leak is being investigated and fixed. Food still needs to be served, illnesses treated, people ministered to spiritually. But the problem with the ship needs to be fixed, or nothing else will matter.

Friends, *the problem with the ship has to be fixed, or nothing else will matter.*

**In this series, history has knocked at your door.  
How will you answer?**

Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress, and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility.

**STEWARDSHIP ACTION PLAN**

*The test of a preacher is that his congregation goes away saying, not "What a lovely sermon!" but, "I will do something!"*

- Francis de Sales

Does God give us truth simply for truths sake - just to tickle our ears?

No. He gives us truth in order that we might apply it, work it out in practice.

The fact is that many Christians are filled to the brim with unapplied truth.

If we only applied 20% of the truth we already know, we would be much the better for it and so would the world as a whole! Truth must issue in life transformation. Change! Action!

I don't know about you, but I cannot work on multiple changes at once in my life. I need God to make me aware of just one thing, and let me concentrate on changing just that. Paul recognised that this was true for him as well. At one point in his life, maybe God made him aware that his Christian life and ministry was a bit static, in the doldrums, that he was not progressing in the fulfilment of his calling and his commission. Maybe the devil reminded him of his past, so he thought he was unworthy to serve and things just ground to a halt. So at that point he wrote to the Philippians (in the context of talking about moving forward): "This one thing I do..." (Philippians 3:13)

What is **one thing** you can do within the next 3 months in terms of environmental stewardship? That one thing should be personal, practical and specific. Write it here, then share it with your group (or if you prefer not to, just say "Pass"):

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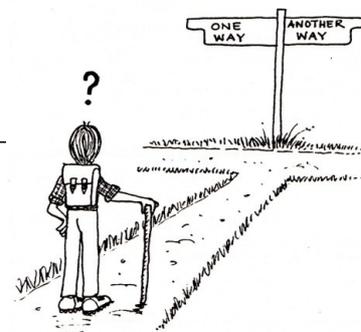
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Do you consider yourself an environmentalist or not?

Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Unsure: \_\_\_\_\_



*The changes we make will not earn our way to heaven, but they do two important things for our souls: they connect us with the family of humanity around the globe, and, more importantly, they bring us closer to God. If he asks us to give up everything we have and follow him, I now know with certainty that each member of my family would gladly do so. This lack of attachment to things brings us priceless freedom and allows us to hear his call.*

-Matthew Sleeth, 2010: *Hope for Creation*, p.105