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should be the growth of earthkeepers, both in the habits of everyday life, and in the provision of leadership for the care of creation.

3.12 Many other issues which may be the root cause or proximate cause of environmental problems may require similar political and educational initiatives such as those identified in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.7 above (population pressure, over-consumption, poverty, international financial transfers, and the status and role of women). p. 133

We welcome dialogue with all who are concerned with preserving and enhancing our environment (which is God's creation). We pray that these reflections may provide a positive contribution towards achieving the goals which we share.

The Earth is the Lord's ([Psalm 24:1](#)).

He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ([Col. 1:17](#)). p. 134

God's Love for the World and Creation's Environmental Challenge to Evangelical Christianity

Calvin B. DeWitt

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth in him, shall not be condemned ... But he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought according to God ([John 3:17](#), [18a](#), [21](#) GB).¹

CREATION'S INTEGRITY AND VIOLATION

'The time has come ... for destroying those who destroy the earth.'² This pronouncement of [Revelation 11:18](#) is one that made little sense to anyone until recently. It has been largely neglected in pulpit and pew, and has had little to do with people's 'manifest deeds'—the way people conduct their lives. This ominous judgement—proclaimed at the sound of the last trumpet—has been unheeded for apparently good reason. For how could human beings possibly destroy the Earth? How could people abuse their stewardship responsibility on such a scale? And why would people ever use their authority over creation ([Gen. 1:28](#)), to destroy creation—thereby to negate their own dominion! And, even if they did abuse their God-given stewardship of creation, certainly people would never gain enough power to destroy the Earth!

¹ The quotations at the beginning and conclusion of this paper designated 'GB', are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969. Archaic spellings of words have been replaced with modern spellings by the author.

² Scripture throughout this paper is taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version* Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Recently, however, we have been given reason to ponder the composite immensity of human power. Every day now, we learn about new destructions of land and creatures. And, while some reports are dramatized and overstated, professional scientific literature time and again describes new and increasing instances of environmental degradation. In calm and dispassionate scientific language, accounts [p. 135](#) in referred technical literature are building a description of Earth's destruction—scientific accounts that present an unfolding drama of devastation whose depth and extent the popular literature has yet to fathom or express. These accounts, taken together, announce what would have been unbelievable a century ago: human beings have become the predominant destructive force on Earth. Impacts of people, with power of hands and minds amplified by machines, now exceed those of great floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes. We have come to see the reality of our power and the actuality it has created. The time has come that we can envision the end of nature; the time has come to realize that we are able to destroy the Earth.

Seven Degradations of Creation

An analysis of the scientific literature produces a picture of Earth's destruction describable as 'seven degradations of creation'.³ These degradations, all of which interact, include:

1. *alteration of Earth's energy exchange* with the sun that results in accelerated global warming and destruction of the Earth's protective ozone shield.⁴
2. *land degradation* that destroys land by erosion, salinization and desertification, and reduces available land for creatures and crops.⁵ [p. 136](#)
3. *deforestation* that annually removes some 100,000 square kilometres of primary forest—an area the size of Iceland—and degrades an equal amount by over-use.⁶

³ Presented here is a listing of these degradations with but one example and one corresponding citation to the literature for each. A more comprehensive listing of these degradations and references to these in the primary literature is given in the *Earthkeeping Papers* of the Au Sable Institute, Issue Number 1, available from Au Sable Outreach Office, 731 State Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706 U.S.A., Fax/Phone: (608) 255-0950. Other listings of these degradations are given in Chapter 1 of *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* C. B. Dewitt, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1991); in 'Seven Degradations of Creation', C. B. Dewitt, *Perspectives* (Feb. 1989): 4-8; and in 'Seven Degradations of Creation: Challenging the Church to Renew the Covenant', *Firmament* 2(1):5-9, 1990.

⁴ A specific example is ozone loss each spring over Antarctica where twenty-five years of nearly continuous measurements by the British Antarctic Survey station at Halley Bay detected slight ozone decline in the late 1970s, greater declines the 1980s, with thirty percent depletion of the total column ozone content by 1984 and seventy percent in 1989. [Anderson, J., D. Toohey and W. Brune, 'Free Radicals Within the Antarctic Vortex: The Role of CFCs in Antarctic Ozone Loss', *Science* 251 (1991): 39-46.]

⁵ A specific example is that infiltration of rain water in eroded soils may be reduced by over ninety percent; in Zimbabwe water runoff is twenty to thirty percent greater than on non-eroded soil, with resulting water shortages even during years with good rainfall. [D. Pimentel, et. al., 'World Agriculture and Soil Erosion.' *BioScience* 37 (1987): 277-283.]

⁶ A specific example is forest loss in Thailand where forest cover declined from twenty-nine to nineteen percent of the land area between 1985 and 1988. In the Philippines undisturbed forests have been reduced from sixteen million hectares in 1960 to less than a million hectares left at present. [R. Repetto, 'Deforestation in the Tropics.' *Scientific American* (April, 1990):36-42.]

4. *species extinction* that finds more than three species of plants and animals eliminated from Earth each day.⁷
5. *water quality degradation* that defiles groundwater, lakes, rivers and oceans.⁸
6. *waste generation and global toxification* that results from atmospheric and oceanic circulation of materials people inject into the air and water.⁹
7. *human and cultural degradation* that threatens and eliminates longstanding human communities that have lived sustainably and cooperatively with creation, and eliminates a multitude of longstanding varieties of food and garden plants.¹⁰

Seven Provisions of Creation

These degradations contrast with what can be called ‘seven provisions of the Creator’ upon which creation, all creatures, and human life depend. These seven provisions—many of which are celebrated in [Psalm 104](#)—are indicative of the remarkable integrity and beauty that [p. 137](#) have engendered awe, wonder, and respect for the Creator and creation through the ages. These provisions—given here in parallel with the seven degradations—are:

1. *regulation of Earth’s energy exchange with the sun* that keeps Earth’s temperatures at a level supportive of life through the longstanding greenhouse effect, that protects life from the sun’s lethal ultraviolet radiation by filtering sunlight through the stratospheric ozone layer.
2. *biogeochemical cycles and soil-building processes* that cycle oxygen, carbon, water, and other vital materials through living things and their habitats and build life-supporting soils and soil structure.
3. *ecosystem energy transfer and materials recycling* that continually energizes life on Earth and incessantly allocates life-sustaining materials.
4. *water purification systems of the biosphere* that distill, filter, and purify surface waters and groundwater upon which all life depends.
5. *biological and ecological fruitfulness* that supports and maintains the rich biodiversity of life on Earth by means of responsive and adaptive physiologies and behaviors.
6. *global circulations of water and air* that distribute water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other vital materials between living systems across the planet.

⁷ A specific example is Ecuador where since 1960 the original rainforest has been almost totally eliminated and converted to cash crops; a small remnant at Rio Palenque of less than one square kilometer is the only remaining site for forty-three plant species and the adjacent Centinella Ridge that once supported 100 endemic plant species was cleared between 1980 and 1984. [D. Given, ‘Conserving Botanical Diversity on a Global Scale,’ *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Gardens* 77 (1990):48–62.]

⁸ A specific example is the case for Europe and the U.S. where between five percent and ten percent of all wells examined have nitrate levels higher than the recommended maximum of forty-five milligrams per liter. [J. Maurits la Riviere, ‘Threats to the World’s Water,’ *Scientific American*. (September 1989):80–94.]

⁹ A specific example is the presence of DDT in the fatty tissue of penguins in Antarctica and the presence of pesticides in a remote lake on Isle Royale in Lake Superior between the United States and Canada—both extremely distant from the places in which these materials are used.

¹⁰ A specific example is a 1975 study of the Hanunoo tribe of the Philippine Islands that found that an average adult could identify 1,600 different species—some 400 more than previously recorded in a systematic botanical survey; for Nigeria and elsewhere in the two-thirds world there are similar findings. [N. Awa, ‘Participation and Indigenous Knowledge in Rural Development,’ *Knowledge* 10 (1989):304–316.]

7. *human ability to learn from creation and live in accord with its laws that makes it possible for people to live sustainably on Earth and safeguard the creation.*¹¹

CREATION'S TESTIMONY

These and the many other of God's provisions in creation convincingly proclaim God's love for the world. Creation's telling of God's glory and love is echoed by Scripture's testimony: God lovingly provides the rains and cyclings of water, provides food for the creatures, fills people's hearts with joy, and satisfies the Earth ([Psalm 104:10-18](#); [Acts 14:17](#)). It is through this manifest love and wisdom that creation declares God's glory and proclaims the work of the Creator's hands ([Psalm 19:1](#)). The evangelical words of creation permeate the universe **P. 138** ([Psalm 19:1](#); [Rom. 1:20](#)), and from the very beginning creation's witness to God's integrity and love for the world has been pervasive; its voice has gone out clearly through all the Earth. Creation's evangelical declaration is so forceful that God's eternal power is clearly seen and God's divinity is manifest, leaving everyone without excuse ([Rom. 1:20](#); [Psalm 19:1](#)).

But this powerful statement by creation itself is threatened. First, people are increasingly alienated from creation and its testimony. This alienation comes in part from their increasing separation from the natural world; for example, fewer and fewer people are needed in agriculture, so they move to expanding cities whose growing inner cores often displace and destroy nature. It also comes from the disconnection of human causes from environmental effects, as happens when people come to believe that food comes from the store and gasoline from the pump. Increasingly, this alienation also comes from a diminishing of creation's testimony through environmental degradation, as when once-inspiring rivers supporting diverse life are transformed into waste canals, or when formerly-clear skies are obscured by air pollutants. (How then can we sing the songs of the Creator?) With this increasing estrangement comes complicit involvement in creation's degradation and even energetic work and action that destroys creation. Thus, the long-standing evangelical witness of creation is abandoned, muted, and silenced, accompanied by even greater environmental degradation, in a continuing downward spiral.¹²

Distancing of Redeemer from Creator

Correspondingly, in many churches God as Creator has been distanced from Christ as Redeemer. In the view of some, God has become only one who saves, not the one who created and sustains the world, not the one who expects us to be imaging God in our care of creation. For some—under the continuing influence of the Gnosticism that infected the early church—God has become the one who saves us **p. 139** out of creation.¹³ This

¹¹ A full treatment of the provisions of the biosphere, in addition to a description of environmental degradations and needed responses can be found in G. Tyler Miller, Jr., *Living in the Environment* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1992).

¹² A more comprehensive treatment of creation's testimony and the responsibility of Christians to acknowledge and preserve this testimony is given in C. B. DeWitt, 'The Christian Broadcaster and the Environment', *Religious Broadcasting* (February, 1992):32-35.

¹³ Saving people 'out of creation' has roots in the Platonic idea that physical nature is a source of ignorance and evil and is a snare to the soul. Joined with the idea of human transcendence, this results in a theology which 'laid most stress on the salvation of the *soul*, and which tended to dismiss as insignificant the body and the creation of which it was a part' (Wilkinson, 1992). For verification that all Christian thought does not make this unbiblical distinction between the physical and the spiritual and does not encourage an

distancing of Savior from Creator has gone so far in some minds that belief in the Creator has been reduced to words without deeds. Mimicing the absurd prospect that Rembrandt-praising art critics might somehow find it acceptable to trample Rembrandt paintings while honoring Rembrandt's name, some Creator-praising people now trample creation while proclaiming Christ's name. Having become distant from the Creator and creation, some Christians comfortably have neglected creation's evangelical testimony, and even assist in bringing creation's degradation.

Such behavior, while distressing, is not surprising, say the scriptures. Early on, the Bible tells us, people chose to go their own way, alienating themselves from God and from the consequences of their sin ([Genesis 1–11](#)). Human beings are described as prone to do anything within their capacity, rather than seeking to do what is right. People are more likely to do what they imagine rather than to do truth, rather than to make belief in God manifest in their deeds (cf [John 3:16–21](#)). And so today, what directs human behavior is not so much what *should* be done but what *can* be done, reflecting God's concern at Babel that 'nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them' ([Gen. 11:6](#)). Breaking down the constraints of stewardship—discarding of the biblical principle of caring for creation and keeping the Garden—some pursue the possible instead of the right, relish darkness instead of the light,¹⁴ bringing about the destruction of the Earth. Forsaking godliness, people may seek to become gods. In contrast with the teachings of [1 Timothy 6:6–21](#) where we are admonished to seek godliness with contentment as our great gain, they may regard profit in terms of how much they can extract and take from creation. The creation groans; they destroy the Earth. p. 140

Unheeding of the message of [Revelation 11:18](#)—neglecting to love, keep, and care for, the world—means forsaking everlasting life. Neglecting to love the world, people degrade and destroy the world. Failing to hear God's word and creation's testimony, they degrade creation. Violating the laws the rest of creation observes, and failing to hear modern prophets who merely describe the present, people plunge toward destruction of Earth and thus also themselves. Using godly, technical, and political language, they fail to see and hear; they deny the reality of creation's present degradation. Many of their leaders read the polls, and then tell the people what they want to hear.

At another time of environmental degradation, six centuries before Christ, Jeremiah described a similar degrading and undoing of creation: 'I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger' ([Jer. 4:23–26](#)). Neglecting to do God's will in the world is not new and its environmental consequences have been known for over two thousand years (cf. [Jer. 5:22–23](#), [31](#) and [8:7](#)).

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE WORLD

But the scriptures assure us that God loves the world ([John 3:16](#)). Admonishing people to choose life ([Deut. 30:19](#)), God offers a luminous alternative to destruction: everlasting life

understanding of salvation which turns men and women away from creation, see *Earthkeeping in the Nineties: Stewardship of Creation* Loren Wilkinson, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), 299–306. For a theological study of the importance of matter and of creation, and of the unbiblical hatred of creation by Marcion, and by Greek and Gnostic leaders, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, 'Christ's Resurrection and the Creation's Vindication', in C. B. DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 57–71.

¹⁴ See [John 3:19](#) and its context, [John 3:16–21](#).

([John 3:16](#)). While those who destroy the Earth themselves will be destroyed, those who truly believe in the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things will not. Those who believe in the One through whom the world was made, the One who holds the world together, the One who reconciles the world and all things to himself, will receive the gift of everlasting life. To believe in this One is to honor and to follow Jesus Christ.

How does one follow the Creator of all things, the Author of creation that God repeatedly declares good in [Genesis 1](#)? How does one follow the Sustainer of all things, the Provider for creation, the Integrator of all things? How does one follow the Savior who takes whatever is degraded in the world God loves and makes it right again?

Biblical Principles for Creation Stewardship

How to follow Jesus—the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all creation—is something we learn both from the Scriptures and from the [p. 141](#) working out of the love of God in creation. A number of biblical principles can be identified to help bring disciples of Jesus Christ into proper relationship to creation.¹⁵ These principles are:

1. *We must keep the creation as God keeps us.* The Lord blesses us and keeps us ([Num. 6:24–26](#)); we in turn are expected to keep the Earth ([Gen. 2:15](#)). As God’s keeping of us is a loving, caring, nurturing, and sustaining keeping, so must be ours of creation. Imaging God—exercising dominion in the manner of Christ ([Phil. 2:5–8](#)) we join our Creator in keeping creation (also see and study [Gen. 1:28](#) & [Deut. 17:18–20](#)), caring for the land as God does, keeping our eyes continually upon it ([Deut. 11:11–12](#)). ‘He makes springs pour water into the ravines.... They give water to all the beasts of the field.... The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among its branches ... the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work’ ([Psalm 104:10–13](#)). And so too should it be satisfied by ours.
2. *We must be disciples of the Last Adam, not of the First Adam.* We are part of a lineage that has fallen short of the glory of God ([Rom. 3:23](#)). ‘But’, affirm the scriptures, ‘Christ has indeed been raised from the dead ... as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive’ ([1 Cor. 15:20–22](#)). ‘For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things’ ([Col. 1:19–20](#)). As disciples of the One, ‘by whom all things were made, and through whom all things hold together’, we participate in undoing the work of the First Adam, bringing restoration and reconciliation to *all things* ([John 1](#) & [Colossians 1](#); [1 Cor. 15](#) & [Rom. 5](#); [Isaiah 43:18–21](#), [Isaiah 65](#) & [Col. 1:19–20, 5:17–21](#)).¹⁶
3. *We must not press creation relentlessly, but must provide for its Sabbath rests.* As human beings and animals are to be given their sabbaths, so also must the land be given its sabbath rests ([Exodus 20:8–11](#); [23:10–12](#)). People, land, and creatures must not be [p. 142](#) relentlessly pressured. ‘If you follow my decrees ... I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field

¹⁵ The biblical principles presented here have also been published in ‘Can we help save God’s Earth?’ *ESA Advocate* (April, 1990): 12–13; ‘Respecting Creation’s Integrity: Biblical Principles for Environmental Responsibility’, *Firmament* 3(3): 10–11, 20–21; and ‘Responding Biblically to Creation and Creation’s Degradation’, *Theology New and Notes*, (forthcoming). They are also available on audiotape from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Environmental Stewardship Office, 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, Illinois 60631 U.S.A., telephone number 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2708.

¹⁶ For a theological study of this topic, see Ronald Manahan, ‘Christ as the Second Adam’, in C. B. DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 45–56.

their fruit' ([Lev. 26:3](#)). Otherwise, the land will be laid waste, only then to 'have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it' ([Lev. 26:34-35](#))!

4. *We may enjoy, but not destroy, the grace of God's good creation.* The abundant gifts and fruitfulness of God's creation were not enough for Adam or his seed: in pressing for more and yet more there is even a willingness to destroy creation's sustaining fruitfulness. Our Sovereign Lord says: 'Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?' ([Ezek. 34:18](#); see also [Deut. 20:19](#) & [22:6](#)).
5. *We must seek first the kingdom, not self-interest.* This, then is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth ...' ([Matt. 6:9-10](#)). It is tempting to follow the example of those who accumulate great gain, to creation's detriment. But the scriptures assure us: 'Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture ... those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land' ([Psalm 37](#); [Matt. 5:5](#)). Fulfillment is a *consequence* of seeking the kingdom ([Matt. 6:33](#)).¹⁷
6. *We must seek contentment as our great gain.* The fruitfulness and grace of the Garden—the gifts of creation—did not satisfy Adam and subsequent generations ([Gen. 3-11](#)). Even as God promised not to forsake them, they chose to cut out on their own—squeezing ever more from creation. Our Creator wants us to pray: 'Turn my heart to your statutes and not toward selfish gain' ([Psalm 119:36](#)). Paul, who has learned the secret of being content ([Phil. 4:12b](#)), writes: 'godliness with contentment is great gain ...' ([1 Tim. 6:6-21](#); also see [Heb. 13:5](#)).
7. *We must not fail to act on what we know is right.* Knowing God's requirements for stewardship is not enough; they must be practiced, or they do absolutely no good. Hearing, discussing, singing, and contemplating God's message is not enough. The hard saying of scripture is this: We hear from our neighbors, 'Come and p. 143 hear the message that has come from the Lord.' And they come, 'but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice' ([Ezek. 33:30-32](#); see also [Luke 6:46-49](#)). Believing on God's Son ([John 3:16](#)), we must *do* the truth, making God's love for the world evident in our own deeds, energetically engaging in work and action that are in accord, harmony, and fellowship with God, and God's sacrificial love ([John 3:21](#)).

Following the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all creation is much more than reading—or even acting upon—these seven biblical principles. But they can bring us more deeply into the scriptures and into contact with God's wider creation. From this greater penetration and broader comprehension of God's word and world we can become better disciples of Jesus Christ. No doubt, we all are guilty—for 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'—but our work is done out of joy and gratitude to God. For we have God's forgiveness—not forgiveness that gives license to continue in sin 'that grace may abound', but rather forgiveness that permits joyful service in doing God's work in the world God loves so much. Joyful and grateful for God's love for us and the world, we expectantly pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. On earth....'

¹⁷ For a related theological study see 'The Kingdom of God and Stewardship of Creation', by Gordon Zerbe, in C. B. DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), 73-92.

Stumbling Blocks to Creation's Care and Keeping

There are troublesome stumbling blocks in the way of creation-keeping discipleship. All of us know of these stumbling blocks and most of us have stumbled over them, thereby denying ourselves the experience of full stewardship under God. Some of these we have invented ourselves and others have been devised by our friends. We must identify these to clear the way for doing the service to which we are called. What are these stumbling blocks?

Some of the major ones may be identified as follows:

1. *This world is not my home. I'm just passing through.* (Since we are headed for heaven anyway, why take care of creation?) It is true that those who believe on Jesus Christ (as Creator, Sustainer, Reconciler, and Redeemer), will receive the gift of everlasting life. This everlasting life began with our birth and includes the here-and-now. [p. 144](#) And we in the here-and-now take care of our bodies, our teeth, and our hair, even though 'the length of our days is seventy years—or eighty ...' ([Psalm 90:10](#)). Similarly, we take care of our buildings even though the largest of these—the skyscrapers—are constructed with both a construction plan and a demolition plan on file (to allow their safe destruction a hundred years or more later). Perhaps our learning how to take care of things in this moment of eternity is important for the care of things with which we will be entrusted later? [Revelation 11:18](#) and other biblical teachings on care and keeping of creation certainly move in this direction. A pastor friend of mine sums this up by saying, 'We should so behave on earth that heaven is not a shock to us!'
2. *Caring for creation gets us too close to the New Age movement.* (Isn't concern for the environment and working for a better world what the New Age movement is all about? I don't want people to think I am a New Ager.) The Bible, of course, has the corner on the kingdom of God, not the New Age movement. For thousands of years now, believers have looked forward to the coming of the kingdom of God and it is for this they continue to look when they pray, 'Thy kingdom come....' Many of those in the New Age movement have never been told of the kingdom of God and, not having received the gospel, are doing what they can to invent their own. As the Apostle Paul did for the people on Mars Hill in Athens—connecting their altar to the unknown god to the living God—so also should we do for the people in the New Age movement. We need to tell them that the new age they seek is the kingdom of God, bringing them the Good News. '... how can they hear without someone to preach to them?' ([Rom. 10:14b](#)).
3. *Respecting creation gets us too close to pantheism.* (If you care for plants and animals, and especially if you value the keeping of endangered species, you are close to worshipping them as gods.) Pantheism and panentheism are growing problems and (surprisingly in this age of science), worship of creatures is increasingly practiced. Thus, we must be careful to worship the Creator, and not the creatures; we must be clear in our conveying the good news that God is the Creator and that the awe and wonder we develop from the study of creation is to be directed not at creation but to its Creator. As Paul teaches in [Rom. 1:25](#) and Luke in [Acts 14:14–18](#), it is necessary to make this distinction. But this problem does not mean that we may deny or avoid taking care of creation. The example of Noah is instructive to us here: Noah cares for the creatures, and preserves the species endangered by [p. 145](#) the flood not because they are gods, but because God required it of him to keep the various species and kinds alive on the Earth.

4. *We need to avoid anything that looks like political correctness.* (Being 'politically correct' these days means being 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 the cross in its terrorizing activities. Does this mean that Christians no longer should use the symbol of the cross on their churches? Some New Age people use the symbol of the rainbow in their literature. Does this mean that Christians who know this to be the sign of God's covenant with 'every living creature on earth' ([Gen. 9:1-17](#)), should stop using this symbol in their educational materials? People who identify themselves as 'politically correct' may advocate saving uneconomic species from extinction. Does this mean that there can be no new Noahs who, in response to God's call to save species from extinction, will act to preserve God's living creatures? Not only must we, as the children's hymn says, 'Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone', but we also must 'Dare to be a Noah', even when we find ourselves complementing the work of a thousand unbelieving Noahs.
5. *There are too many worldly people out there doing environmental things.* (If people who don't share my beliefs in God and Jesus Christ are working to save the Earth, I know it can't be right for me.) God calls Cyrus into divine service. We read in [Isaiah 45](#) that unbelieving Cyrus is 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 nonetheless. And so, if there are some worldly people out there clearly doing God's work, it must not be used to excuse ourselves from our God-given task as stewards of God's creation.
6. *Caring for creation will lead to world government.* (If we tackle global environmental problems, won't we have to cooperate with other nations and that will help set the stage for world government.) There is no doubt that cooperation will be necessary in order to address many of our environmental problems. Migrating birds, for example, do not recognize international boundaries; therefore their care requires cooperation. That this does not have to lead to world government is illustrated by the work of the International Crane Foundation through whose work cooperation has been achieved between Russia and China and between North Korea and South Korea, in the keeping of wetland habitats and birds. [p. 146](#)
7. *Before you know it we will have to support abortion.* (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 license to use whatever means we have at our disposal to address environmental problems. The fact that many people use abortion and justify it in terms of the need to reduce population growth does not mean that people who are convicted of a God-given responsibility of stewardship cannot proceed to take care of the Earth, including population problems.
8. *I don't want to be an extremist or alarmist.* (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 that needs to be brought to people about caring for creation. Frightening ourselves into action is far less desirable than caring for creation out of a love for the Creator and in gratitude and joy in keeping the Earth. 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, just as did the prophets in their day.

9. *Dominion means what it says—oppressive domination.* (I think the Bible says that we have the right to destroy things that get in our way; that's what dominion is all about.) Many, particularly critics of Christianity, have pointed to [Genesis 1:28](#) to show that the Bible is the root cause of environmental problems. That this verse has been used in isolation from the rest of the scriptures cannot be denied. But dominion as outright oppression is not advocated or condoned by the scriptures. First, the [Genesis 1:28](#) passage gives the blessing and mandate to people before the Fall. Second, this passage must be understood in the context of the rest of the Bible. If this is done, one must come to the conclusion that dominion means responsible stewardship, to which the biblical principles presented in this paper attest. The Christian model for dominion is the example of Jesus Christ, who, given all dominion, and 'Who, being in very nature God ... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!' ([Phil. 2:6-8](#)).
10. *People are more important than environment.* (I'm for people, and that means that people are more important than saving species of plants and animals—if anything is endangered it is people, not furbished louseworts or snail darters.) This is an oftenheard [p. 147](#) rationalization for not saving living species threatened with extinction. Our question here should be 'what does the Bible teach?' We have an actual instance in the account of the flood given in [Genesis 6-9](#). We need to ask: Who perishes, and who is saved? Are species less important than individual people? Is the environment of people less important than the people this environment supports? God respects the environment so much that God calls heaven and Earth as witnesses against people ([Deut. 30:19](#)), witnesses to the fact that God has set before them the choice and admonishes them to choose life.

THEN WHAT MUST WE DO?

A challenge confronts us that emerges from knowing the ongoing and accelerating degradation of the Earth, from the scriptures that require us to keep the Earth, and from stumbling blocks that prevent many evangelical Christians from taking action. Having set forth the challenge that confronts us, we now are prepared to ask, "Then what must we do?"

The simple (yet profound), response to this question appears to be this: Love God as Redeemer and Creator; acknowledge God's love for the world, and act upon this by following Jesus who creates, upholds, and reconciles all things.

But most people have been alienated from the Creator and God's creation, and thus it is difficult to love, uphold, and make right a world that we really do not know. Thus many will have first to become aware of creation and its God-declared goodness. From this awareness, we can move to appreciation, and from appreciation we can move to stewardship. This can be described using the following framework:

1. Awareness (seeing, identifying, naming, locating).
2. Appreciation (tolerating, respecting, valuing, esteeming, cherishing).
3. Stewardship (using, restoring, serving, keeping, entrusting).

Our ultimate purpose is to honor God as Creator in such a way that Christian environmental stewardship is part and parcel of everything we do. Our goal is to make tending the garden of creation in all of its aspects an unquestioned and all-pervasive aspect of our service to each other, to our community, and to God's world. Awareness

stands at the very beginning as the first of three components of creation stewardship. p. 148

Awareness means bringing things to our attention. In a time when so much calls for our attention foreign affairs, local politics, jobs, or traffic—the creation in its natural aspects does not even seem real to us. We might find that it seems real only on some of our travels, and even then it may be seriously obscured. We must consciously make ourselves aware of what is happening in God's creation.

Awareness involves seeing, naming, identifying, locating. It means taking off the blinders provided us by ourselves and society so that we not only see God's creation, but want to name and know the names of the things we see. It means providing ourselves with enough peace and thoughtfulness that we have the time and the will to identify a tree or mountain, bird or river. It means having the sense to enter the natural world intentionally in order to locate and find God's creatures we sing about each week in the doxology, 'Praise God all creatures here below'.

But awareness is not an end in itself. From awareness comes appreciation; we cannot appreciate that of which we are unaware. At the very least, appreciation means tolerating that of which we are aware. We may tolerate worms and hyenas, for example, and in so doing appreciate them. But beyond toleration, appreciation can also mean respect. We certainly respect a large bear, but we also can develop respect for a lowly worm as we learn of its critical importance to the rest of creation (including ourselves). Appreciation can build from tolerating, to respecting, to valuing. We know that God declares creation to be good, and we will find that God does so for good reason! As we become aware of the order of creation, we will find ourselves imaging God's valuing of the creatures. And this will build even further until much of what we discover we will even esteem and cherish. Thus, awareness will lead to appreciation.

But appreciation does not end the matter either, for appreciation leads to stewardship. At first stewardship may mean the use of creation; perhaps our appreciation for a flower will lead us to put it in a vase to decorate our table. But stewardship will bring us well beyond appropriate use to restoration of what has been abused in the past. The widespread lack of awareness and ignorance of creation and creation's integrity means that we and many others have abused and degraded the environment unknowingly, and stewardship means that we will work to set things right again—to reconcile and redeem. We might even buy back something degraded to make it right again.

Beyond restoration, stewardship means serving. As we understand that God through creation is in so many ways serving our own lives, we will return this service with our own. This service will include a p. 149 loving and caring keeping of what we hold in trust. And, our service in creation will ultimately even involve our entrusting others with what we have served, kept, and restored.

Christian environmental stewardship—our loving care and keeping of creation—is a central, joyful, part of the human task. As communities of God's stewards—as the body of the One who made, sustains, and reconciles the world—our churches and our lives can be, and must be, vibrant testimonies to our Redeemer and Creator.

'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour, and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy will's sake they are, and have been created' ([Rev. 4:11](#) GB).

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