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future, need not act as a disincentive. Rather, it frees us from the burden of ethical and technological autonomy and makes it clear that human claims to sovereignty are relative. The knowledge that it is God's world, that our efforts are not directed toward the construction of an ideal utopia, but that we are (under God), building bridgeheads of the kingdom, serves to humble us and to bring us to the place of ethical obedience.²²

We might finish, however, with a poem more in the genre of the prophets and psalmists.

The time of rest, the promised Sabbath comes! ...
Rivers of gladness water all the earth,
And clothe all climes with beauty. The reproach
Of barrenness is past. The fruitful field
Laughs with abundance; and the land, once lean [p. 167](#)
Or fertile only in its own disgrace,
Exults to see its thistly curse repeal'd.
The various seasons woven into one,
And that one season an eternal spring,
The garden fears no blight, and needs no fence,
For there is none to covet, all are full.
The lion, and the lizzard, and the bear
Graze with the fearless flocks ...
One song employs all nations, and all cry,
'Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us!'
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosanna round.²³

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Let There Be Life: Theological foundations for the Care and Keeping of Creation

Praveen (Sunil) Kapur

²² Francis Bridger, 'Ecology and Eschatology: A Neglected Dimension', *Tyndale Bulletin* 41.2 (1990:290–301). This article was a response and addition to an earlier one by Donald A. Hay, 'Christians in the Global Greenhouse', 1–7-kli 41.1 (1990): 109–127.

²³ William Cowper, 'The Task', Book 6, lines 733, 763–744, 791–797.

Almost three millennia ago the prophet Isaiah said, 'the earth mourns and withers, the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the law ... The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent as under, the earth is violently shaken' ([Isaiah 24:4-5, 19](#)). In chapter twelve, Jeremiah also speaks of the withering and mourning land having become desolate because of the destructiveness and wickedness of humans.

The world at large has come to realize the danger that it faces from the gruesome monster that is eating it up at an escalating rate. The need to know about this danger is not purely for the head, but more so for the heart of humanity. For even having the knowledge, many continue to be carefree. 'Despoiling the earth is blasphemy, and not just an error of judgement, a mistake; it's sin against God as well as man'.¹ We ought to confess our unbelief and ungratefulness towards God, because we have not cared for the rest of creation as we are called to do. The consequences are clear: the death of nature means the death of humanity itself.

The world is forever falling into the temptation of trying to turn 'stones into bread'. The task of Christianity is not, however, to produce new social conditions. New conditions do not produce a new person; new persons produce new conditions. The foundation for our environmental concern must be Jesus Christ and him alone. It is upon this ground that we must build, and not on good works, or humanism, or science. For Jesus triumphed where the first man, Adam, failed. Adam had everything in his environment conducive to victory. Jesus had everything in the howling wilderness against him. Yet, after forty days without food he triumphed over Satan.

The church at present seems to be impotent before the ecological crisis, for we are mistakenly using the wisdom of the world. The weapons of our warfare ought to be spiritual rather than carnal. Using the world's weapons, the church does not stand a chance. But using God's weapons ([Eph. 6:14-17](#)), the world will become weak. These [p. 169](#) are not the days for the church to turn inward, curl up in a corner, and passively await the end. The world has yet to see what the Spirit can do.

In getting a right perspective, Christians should not be among the destroyers of nature; rather we should treat creation with overwhelming respect and reverence. Nature should not be regarded as nothing more than a warehouse supplying the raw material for the transformation of society and history. Our interest in ecology must not be related only to survival. Our faith must inherently and necessarily be open to nature, as it was created for God's pleasure, praise, and glory.

The simplest and the oldest way in which God is manifest is through and in the Earth itself. God still speaks to us through earth and sea, birds of the air, creatures upon the Earth, if we can but quiet ourselves to listen and ponder, carefully and prayerfully, to the created order. Nature does not open up to us if we always come to it with our knives. 'Man is the only being who can interpret creation. He is, so to speak, the language of nature. Nature speaks but silently. Man puts into words these silent utterances of nature'.² ([Ps. 19:13-14](#)).

But all this language can be misinterpreted. As a devout man of God, Sadhu Sunder Singh talked in his writings as if God were speaking to him saying, 'In the book of nature, of which I also am the author, I freely manifest myself, but for the reading of this book also spiritual insight is needed, that men may find Me; otherwise there is a danger lest instead

¹ John Stott, *Involvement: Being a Responsible Christian In a Non-Christian Society* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1985), 160.

² Sadhu Sunder Singh, *Reality and Religion* (Madras: C.L.S., 1974), 22-23.

of finding Me they go astray'.³ 'The happiness we derive from creation has its limits. God alone can completely meet the needs of the human hearts and satisfy them in perfection.'⁴ It is then folly to worship living things, like trees ([Rom. 1:21-25](#), [Jer 2:20](#)).

'To read other books you master painfully the language in which these books are written, but this is not so with the Book of Nature. It is written in a language which is simple and intelligible to all. Live with Christ and the Book of Nature will be clear to you.'⁵

The Christian mystic seeks to find God meditating on the great wonders of God's creation, knowing that there must be a Creator, and that creation and Creator are not one and the same. God works in creation in a hidden way—even more wonderfully within a converted soul. The Good News is all about the abundant life. Where then does this abundant life begin? Is it not here on Earth? Can we really [p. 170](#) experience this abundant life without nature, given our destructive attitude toward it?

Although the word 'nature'—as we use it—appears nowhere in the Bible, to those who are open and receptive scripture is full of references to it. Revelation comes from seeing how life works. To those who have eyes to see, the Bible says, 'The heaven declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands' ([Psa 19:1](#)). The things made by God reveal God's nature and God's power: 'Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse' ([Rom 1; 19-20](#)).

All nature glorifies God, except for two of God's creations: the fallen angels who have no chance of redemption, and human beings who yet have a way to come back to God through Jesus Christ. One can learn from nature that has not sinned against its Creator and glorifies God in its beauty and honor! 'On all the works He has inscribed his glory,' says Calvin.

Nature glorifies God because of its immense variety. The numberless species visible and invisible in the world are a reflection of the infinite being of God, revealing God's numberless attributes. 'The death of these creatures, great and small will leave a void in God's creation and in the imagination of men for generations to come'.⁶

Without nature as interpreter of God's Word, it is difficult to understand God's mind. In [Job 12:7-9](#), the animals are said to instruct us, as elsewhere they are said to minister to Jesus in the wilderness. Is there any reason not to take care of our interpreters, instructors, and ministers?

The whole of creation joins in the praise of God—the sun, moon, sea, land, fire, snow, human beings, and all creatures. Creation is our praise partner. All created things were given to humans to glorify God, and not to abuse, exploit, or destroy.

God is not left without witnesses. The beauty of nature testifies to God's glory. Our consciences attest to the living God, just as nature affirms the presence of God. 'The heavens proclaim his righteousness, [p. 171](#) and all the people see his glory' ([Psa 96:6](#)). How clearly David often expressed the Lord of Glory in nature in the Psalms ([Psa 29:39](#)).

While both nature and our inner selves witness to God the Creator, we cannot remain silent while there is a destruction of the living witness of God in nature. With the death of

³ Sadhu Sundar Singh, *At the Master's Feet* (Madras: C.L.S., 1983), 11.

⁴ Sundar, *Reality*, 1.

⁵ B. H. Streeter and A. J. Appasawmy, *The Sadhu* (London: Macmillan, 1921), 193.

⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and Death of Man* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Pub, 1970), 21.

nature, our fellow silent witness to the existence of God will disappear. Why do we not seem to care sufficiently to stop this annihilation of nature?

Do we prefer to reduce the Gospel to cold calculation, or to a series of prescriptions, or of laws and theories? Or can we tell a poetic story through nature that is close to the heart of humanity, that relates the Lord of Creation to human beings, that brings a fuller relationship and meaning rather than any analytical description would have done? It is much easier to create interpersonal bonds. Yet, not being able to relate to nature, we know even less the art of relating and communicating to the 'crown of creation', human beings. As we tend to move away from nature, we become more and more impersonal and less and less communicative. The further away we have gone from the Garden of Eden, the harder it has become for us to relate to God, other humans, and nature. We can go back into the Garden only by repenting and accepting the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so as to be able to walk with God again 'in the cool of the day' ([Gen 3:8](#)).

Much biblical wisdom comes from examples of nature manifesting order in human life. This kind of wisdom steers us rather than taking on the task of mastering our lives. It is rooted in experience and is practical, particular, and open. It observes orderliness, but does not seek to impose order. We must train ourselves to listen to be able to see the order in nature established by God.

One of the wisest men ever to live was Solomon. The fourth chapter of First Kings describes Solomon's wisdom. It is not Solomon's ability to render justice—not even his ability to rule effectively—that is highlighted in the summary of his wisdom. Rather, it is his encyclopedic knowledge of the environment. This is all the more striking when one contrasts the book of Proverbs. There the focus is on human life and experience.

Creation brings about relationship; God's plan for this world is relationship. In looking at the biblical view of the connection between humanity and nature, we notice that humanity and land animals were created on the same day ([Gen. 1](#)), out of the same dust or ground ([Gen. 2:7–19](#)), both having God's breath (Spirit) breathed into them ([Gen. 2:7](#), [Ps. 104:29–30](#), [Job 34:14–15](#)). Both have rationality and feeling ([Gen. 3:1–5](#), [Num. 22:28–30](#), [Job 39:16–18](#)); both have an awareness of God, though with animals it might bear different responsibilities and is less clouded with sin. In the end, both share the fate of death. In fact [Ecclesiastes 3:19](#) claims that 'man has no advantage over the animal.'

Human distinctiveness is by no means easy to define. It is clear that the world was not created only for human benefit ([Job 39](#), [Psalms 49](#)). The kindness to animals required in [Deuteronomy 25:4](#) and [Proverbs 12:10](#) has no ethical base if animals exist only for human use.

Satan's purpose in all environmental problems is to destroy as many people as possible. Satan has always been a destroyer and a murderer. Millions are dying, faster than we can reach them with the message of the merciful Lord Jesus. A total disregard for the ecological balance hinders their chance to experience salvation and grace here on Earth. Still, the need to save the environment for God's glory is urgent. In our burden for those who do not know God, our involvement is not merely in saving forests; it is a commitment for the survival of humankind. Life in all forms is precious. Let us nourish it, and not be disillusioned by Satan into aiding his evil strategy. The Bible tells that the wrath of God will come upon the destroyers of the Earth and they will be destroyed ([Rev 11:18b](#)). Let there be life!

God's purpose in creation is love. God's very being is love. It is experienced in the inner relations of the Trinity and expresses itself in the bliss of love by bringing into existence the entire universe. But sin has distorted creation.

The fall disturbed humanity's harmonious relationship with nature. Now it appears as hostile, introducing elements of struggle and violence in our relationship with nature ([Gen](#)

[3:15, 17-19; 9:2](#)). Because we misuse nature, nature suffers and groans with pain, awaiting our full redemption as its own liberation from the burden of our sin. The Earth and its creatures come to stand in an ambiguous relationship to humanity, being sustained by God, independent of human effort, but nonetheless suffering as a result of human disobedience to the Creator.

Of all the creatures on Earth, man is the most destructive and the root of the ecological crisis is human economic greed. In [Numbers 35:33](#), God clearly gives a command to us: 'do not pollute the land where you are', yet today this is exactly what we do. Sin—our rebellious nature and rejection of God—has been the cause of the curse upon our land. In some ways, humanity has become an enemy of creation ([Gen 9:2](#)). Before sin entered, people lived in harmony with nature; today fear and terror supplant the previous harmony between persons and animals. If we continue to defile our land with sin, the land itself will vomit us out ([Lev 18:25-30](#)). On the other hand, [p. 173](#) blessings flow if we are faithful towards God. Morality, response to God, and the fertility of the Earth are all interrelated. If we obey God, the fruitfulness of the Earth will be a natural consequence. When we refrain from sinning against God, God blesses the land.

Our work is to preserve the blessing by being holy. The Bible tells us that 'the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants' ([Lev 25:23](#)). If we do not obey God, as Master and King, God has every right to throw us out of the land ([Deuteronomy 11:13-17](#)), just as Adam and Eve were thrown out.

God never misses the fall of a sparrow. The fact that God has not destroyed us for what we have done to creation should be assurance of God's love and highlights the need for us to respond willingly to it. In the judgment upon humanity, a reversal in the creation order is said to take place. The first to go will be humans, then animals, then the birds of the air and, finally, the fish of the sea. In the end, redemption for persons and a right relationship with nature comes only through God's son, which, in turn, ought to stop further misuse of knowledge and destruction of life. As Richard Bauckham says, 'salvation is simply the completion of creation'.⁷

The biblical record includes the hope that the present Earth and heaven will pass away, and the Lord will create new ones. This will be a better creation, populated with redeemed people. God is planning an immeasurably better thing than we can imagine. To those who love and obey God, God will say, 'well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ([Matthew 25:14-30](#)). We must turn to God the Creator for a right relationship with nature, including other creatures: 'A righteous man cares for the needs of God's animals' ([Proverbs 12:10](#)).

This Earth may be destroyed, but woe to us if we become the agents of destruction. Knowing that each one of us is ultimately going to die does not mean that we should not be taken care of, or that we should not care for ourselves. Even should the Earth one day come to an end, does nature also not have the right to be cared for and to live? Let there be life!

'The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it', says the psalmist ([Psa. 24:1](#)). 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst [p. 174](#) create all things, and because of Thee will they exist, and were they created' ([Rev. 4:11](#)). All things were created for God's glory, says [Isaiah 43:7](#). 'The Lord has made every thing for its own purpose', says [Proverbs 16:4](#). In

⁷ Richard Bauckham, 'First Steps to a Theology of Nature', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58 (July 1986) 67.

contemplating nature, we see the meaning of coordination in this world and its manifold spaces. Everything is well arranged ecologically and has a purpose.

[Psalm 104](#) provides commentary on the accounts of creation by portraying the importance of rocks and trees, birds and animals, for their own sake. Creation does not exist merely for the sake of human beings. Everything has a meaning, bringing glory to the Creator. There are animals, rocks, mountains, and stars that live without reference to humanity. There is life, because the life-giver has imbued everything with life. Without God, nothing can exist. God continues to create and sustain everything that exists for God, by God, and human beings are only the vice-regents. Creation has its own independent value. For this reason, 'dominion' must never be confused with exploitation.

Jesus frequently referred to the natural world and environment, and there is much we can learn from his ministry. He made much use of the environment conveying the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and even nature obeyed him. Not only did Jesus identify himself as a shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, but Christ is also identified as the Lamb, one of the most gentle, the most harmless of all animals, who will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

The promise of God never again to destroy the life that God has created 'as long as the earth remains', means that the creation receives from the Creator the promise of preservation. This is a promise of providential care. 'Everything that exists in heaven or earth shall find its perfection and fulfillment in Christ' ([Eph. 1:10](#) Phillips).

The death of creation is not normal, but do not weep. The Lamb has conquered. All of creation awaits transformation through the life of Christ. The church that is now Christ's body on Earth is the sign of that transformation already taking root in this world. In this upside-down world, the ethics of Jesus can turn things rightside-up, or at least, save them from further destruction. To this end, we must develop a specifically biblical environmental ethic.

Some might ask, should we just preach the Gospel and not care, practically, for nature? Is it wrong to stress matters of conservation or environment? For nominal Christians, the weakness lies in the fact that having known the Creator, they have not loved the creation. Yet, God's handmade things are loved and preferred even more when one has an intimate relationship with the One who came and suffered here on Earth. God's covenant is with all creation as illustrated at the time of [p. 175](#) Noah. In [Genesis 9:8-17](#) we read that God says, 'I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you.' Further, in verse [13](#), God promises, 'I have set my rainbow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.' It is absolutely false for a Christian to have a platonic view of nature. What God has made must not be despised by human beings.

Today's Christians have to seek for new ideas, ask new kinds of questions, and look at the unchanging Gospel in terms of their own culture. They must unfold new dimensions in relation to global ethical problems. In fact, for the Christian, the beauty of God is better understood in the light of many diverse cultures. Out of this might come a new spirituality that would illuminate the spiritual dimension of the world order. This could lead to the development of a planetary awareness, and work towards the redistribution of the Earth's wealth. This spirituality will see redemption not as the lifting of humanity out of nature, but as redeeming nature with and through human beings.

The work of the church is now to 'wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die' ([Rev. 3:2](#)). As other religions and national organizations maintain a concern for nature, how much more ought we to be concerned who are the sons and daughters of its Creator and who know that we will be accountable for dealing with God's creation.

The Old Testament prophets have shown that the Lord would reign through the anointed one as the Prince of Peace ([Isa. 9:6–7](#)). The zeal of the Lord will bring peace, not only to humanity, but to nature as well. ‘The wolf shall dwell with the lamb and the leopard shall lie down with the kid and the calf and the lion, the yearling together, and a little child shall lead them ... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea’ ([Isa 11:6, 10](#)). So the prophet’s vision here is the harmony between humanity and the rest of creation, not of enmity, or of creation forced cruelly into providing a human task. The relationship will be restored. This vision does not speak of creation being destroyed. All are good; the cobra, the viper or the lion will not be able to harm each other. All these things will be united to the one who was to be a substitution for the curse of God to human beings, and the Earth as well, Jesus Christ of Nazareth who redeems the world.

Now therefore the church is called to participate actively with God, through Jesus Christ, in a great cosmic mission for a New Creation. From this time forth, Christians must read their Bibles for a fresh insight into the message of God’s love for the entire cosmos in the light of our contemporary predicament.

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Gaia Spirituality: A Christian Critique

Loren Wilkinson

We are witnessing the emergence of a new metaphor for the Earth and our relationship to it: the planet as a self-organizing, self-regulating, and (to some degree) self-conscious entity. Many refer to that entity as sacred and call it by the name of ‘Gaia’, ancient Greek goddess of the Earth.

The idea of Gaia, the sacred Earth, was particularly evident at the Earth Summit in Rio. Increasingly, ‘Gaia’ thinking provides a framework for political discussion because it seems to provide a biological rationale for ‘thinking globally’. It grounds much religious discussion because the idea seems to fit with both Eastern monism (the idea that all is one), and with various kinds of New and Old world paganism.

Scientific, religious, and feminist dimensions of Gaia thought will be considered here, along with suggestions as to how Christians might respond to this complex and important idea.

THE SCIENCE OF ‘GAIA’

The Gaia hypothesis is a serious scientific theory suggested in the mid 1970s in several papers by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, and set forth in 1979 by Lovelock in his book *Gaia: A New Look at Life*. A mark of the seriousness with which the theory has been taken is that the American Geophysical Union—an international association of geologists and geochemists—devoted its entire 1988 biannual conference to discussion of the idea.