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Responding Biblically to Creation: A Creator-Centered Response to the Earth

Bruce J. Nicholls

The inhabited world and especially the technologically developed nations are facing the crisis of human survival. Despite modern medicine, disease is increasing and AIDS threatens to become a global scourge. Racism and 'casteism', tribalism and terrorism are destroying nations and increasing poverty. Although women are being given their rightful place in society, the oppression of women and child slavery are increasing, and marriage and family life are breaking down. Violence, rape, and death fill our daily newspapers. However, it is the destruction of the environment that is threatening the survival of the human race. We are heading for ecological death. Jurgen Moltmann declares, 'The Nuclear catastrophe is only a possible catastrophe, but the ecological death will occur because of the irreversibility of the development of humanity if we do not succeed to fundamentally alter this development'.¹ Two carefully researched but popular articles spell out the details of this encircling ecological death.² Both detail the facts and projections of the greenhouse effects of pollution, and deaths of life and nature from nuclear radiation, the dangers of over-population, the waste of irreplaceable resources and the wanton destruction of natural habitats. Raj Chengappa ends his cover story with a grim *Vision 2020* of constant power failures, suffocating air pollution in our cities, extreme temperatures, exorbitantly priced petrol, scarcity of vegetables, disappearing forests being replaced by vast, arid deserts and frequent massive earthquakes.³

Is there another side to this question? Must it happen? Is there any hope of survival for the human race—in personal terms, for our children and grandchildren? The hope of secular humanists who trust science and technology to bring in the new age of peace, justice, and material affluence is fast fading. Global Marxism—the utopia of millions who have sacrificed for and died for it—has proved a delusion. A widespread ideological vacuum now exists. It is a critical p. 210 moment in human history. People in every nation are searching for a coherent world view, a satisfying ethic and a meaningful lifestyle. I suggest as a broad generalization that three alternative paths are being offered for the survival of society and of the inhabited earth.

In recent years there has been a remarkable revival of fundamentalist religions. Each of the traditional religions is turning back to its roots, restating its fundamentals, seeking to develop lifestyles modeled on its founding years. They are identifying religious faith with nationalism and political power, much like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad movement of fundamentalist Hinduism. Fundamentalist Christianity has identified biblical faith with other-worldly spirituality and docetic Christology has made millenarianism a priority and has reduced mission to verbal evangelism. Where the church—fundamentalist, evangelical, or liberal—has failed to address the issues of our time and lost its Gospel

¹ Jurgen Moltmann, 'The Ecological Crisis: Peace with Nature', in an address given to ANZATA/ANZSTS conference 1987.

² 'Planet of the Year: What on Earth Are We Doing?' *Time* 133 (2 Jan. 1989), and 'The Wounded Earth', *India Today* (15 June 1992), 69–100.

³ Wounded Earth, 100.

message, people are leaving in great numbers in search of human identity and global survival.

Disillusioned by scientism and repelled by fundamentalism, people are consciously or unconsciously turning to the New age Movement. This is not a single ideology or religion, but a growing stream with many branches and tributaries. It is the coming together of the revival of pagan religions, the occult, eastern religious movements, especially those associated with the gurus of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and Taoism, the fusion of quantum science and cosmic spirituality and monistic philosophies of the West. As many have surmised, this growing movement could be as significant for western society as the Enlightenment has been. Whereas the Enlightenment marked the dominance of rationalism and deism in science, religion and philosophy, so the New Age Movement marks a turning to what we may call 'cosmic consciousness' and to pantheism.⁴

The third option is biblical Christianity. This hope for humanity is grounded in an authoritative and relevant Bible as the Word of God, and in the unity and diversity of the triune God—sovereign Father, redeeming Son and life-giving Spirit. God is both Creator of the cosmos and Redeemer of all who in faith turn to Jesus Christ. Biblical Christianity, unlike deism or pantheism, holds together in harmony God who transcends and is separate from creation and God who is incarnate in creation in Jesus Christ and who gives it life. The Gospel is good news for those enslaved by sin and evil and for creation in need of 'liberation from bondage to decay' ([Rom. 8:21](#)). God's Christian p. 211 New Age will be consummated on the Day of Judgment when evil will be destroyed and God will create 'a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness' ([II Peter 3:13](#)). The message to the world is that this transformation of the whole of nature began with the coming of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ, continues today through the New Community as God's vicegerent and will assuredly be fulfilled according to the purpose of the Divine Majesty. We now turn to a more detailed understanding of the Creator's response to creation.

GOD IS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

The opening words of Genesis, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth', are the foundation of all biblical theology. Paul interprets this fact in terms of the supremacy of Christ: 'for by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things 'hold together' (Coloss. [1:15-17](#)). The personal act of God is manifested in three centers of personal activity. This relatedness in the Triune God is the foundation of relatedness to the Creator of all living forms of creation. It is the basis of the unique relation of humankind—male and female—created in the image and likeness of the Creator. Exponents of the New Age Movement have reacted against the deistic tendency in orthodox Christianity that has over-emphasized God's transcendence at the cost of God's immanence, as when Christians deny that ecology is a concern of Christian theology and mission. We acknowledge that as evangelicals we have been guilty of this imbalance. Our Christology has erred on the side of docetism and in our evangelism we have been insensitive to humankind's relationship to nonhuman creation.

The doctrine of creation is the watershed between the Christian faith and eastern faiths, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, as well as the new Age Movement. In each case the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is rejected in favor of monism in philosophy and

⁴ See Gavin McGrath, 'The Significance of the New Age Movement', *Churchman*, 1 (1991). Ernest Lucas, 'Science and Christian Belief', 4 (April 1992): 13-25.

pantheism in religion. God is the timeless cosmic energy symbolized in Nataraj, the dancing Shiva. Creation is maya or illusion, less than Ultimate Reality. The impersonal transcends the personal. The human soul flows from and returns to the sea of unconsciousness, the universal mind. In response, biblical thought emphasizes that the Creator rules in providence over all of creation. God sustains it in loving care and justice, but neither merges with it nor is dependent upon it for God's existence. The Psalms abound in God's joy in God's control of the [p. 212](#) cosmos: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands' ([Ps. 19:1](#)). The whole of [Psalm 104](#) for example is a song of praise to the Lord who provides for creation: 'Even the lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God' (v. [21](#)). 'May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works' (v. [31](#)). Praise the Lord.

Paul takes up the theme of providence in the context of the righteousness of God's wrath against those who suppress the truth by their wickedness: 'for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made' ([Rom. 1:20](#)). Because of this general revelation of God's providence in nature, all of humanity is without excuse before God. Further, Paul uses this knowledge of God's providence in his evangelism with pagans, as his preaching at Lystra ([Acts 12:15-18](#)) and at Athens ([Acts 17:22-31](#)) so well illustrates. Ignorance and idolatry have their counterpart in our modern secular and materialistic society. God's providential care of creation is perhaps the bridge to communicate Christ as Savior and Lord over all of life. It may be the only way to communicate the good news to the seekers of the New Age of Aquarius. People are looking for an integrated world-view that makes sense of their experience and gives hope for the survival of the human race.

All too often we theologians and evangelists are answering questions people are no longer asking. To an increasing number of people Christianity is viewed as irrelevant. The New Age case for nature as a self-sustaining, living organism, in contrast to the perception of the Christian reduction of nature to an object, needs careful evaluation. The biblical concept of providence suggests that God does have a living relationship with all of creation, animate and inanimate. However, nature is a living organism only because all of nature is dependent upon God. To postulate the concept of nature as an independent or evolving organism is to open the door to idolatry. The roles of the Creator and creation are reversed. It is not surprising that the New Age, as does eastern religions, portrays nature as the goddess, Mother Earth, the creative life-force of all existence.

Wherever God and nature meet, there is mystery. Throughout the history of the church there have always been those who have lived on the frontier of this mystery, going beyond the limits of the senses, beyond verbal communication, to experience God's presence. But in doing so, those who have stayed within the bounds of biblical revelation have not lost their rationality nor the wonder of their personal relationship to God. For a few godly men and women it has [p. 213](#) been an enduring experience; but for most seekers after God it has been a more momentary experience.

Evangelicals are activists and generally know little of contemplative prayer, fasting, and meditation. Few are able to be still and silent before their Creator. In contrast, A. W. Tozer, a leader of the Christian and Missionary Affiance, is a good example of one who drew deeply from the wells of the teaching of St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich, as well as from William Law and John Wesley. Today some are finding inspiration in the writings of Thomas Merton. In part, the charismatic movement draws its inspiration from this tradition. Paul the apologist and active evangelist had a deep sense of the mystery of God. His prayer 'without ceasing' for the churches and his thirst to live for Christ ([Gal.](#)

[2:20](#)) point the way. But our supreme model is the Lord Jesus Christ whose high priestly prayer ([John 17](#)) is a window to seeing his oneness with the Father.

Christian mysticism or, more broadly, Christian spirituality is a priority for all of us living under the pressures of modernity. Matthew Fox, the North American Dominican priest and advocate of New Age thinking has popularized the concept of 'creation spirituality'.⁵ His understanding of spirituality differs radically from that of orthodox Christianity. He rejects the notion of a transcendent God who can be known rationally. His creation spirituality requires the absorption of the human psyche into the unconscious mind of Mother Earth. He rejects the God-centered theology of sin and redemption in the cross of orthodox spirituality and teaches a nature-centered spirituality, a form of panentheism bordering on pantheism. Fox draws his inspiration from the neoplatonism of the medieval mystics, especially Meister Eckhart, from the cosmic evolution towards unity of Teilhard de Chardin, the perennial philosophy of Aldous Huxley, the nature mysticism of the North American Indians and Celtic paganism. God is external to creation. For Fox, creation spirituality is the deification of mankind and nature as the basic ethic to motivate human response to the ecological crises of our time. As with all leaders of the New Age movements, Fox is unashamedly syncretistic and this has a strong appeal to both secular mankind and the devotees of eastern gurus of mysticism.⁶ p. 214

CREATION IS 'VERY GOOD'

Five times in the creation story of [Genesis 1](#) it is stated that 'God saw that it was good' (vv. [10](#), [12](#), [18](#), [21](#), [25](#)) and in summary, 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good' (v. [31](#)). Each time *kitob* is used in [Genesis 1](#) it refers to God's approval of a particular act of creation. This has usually been interpreted as meaning 'perfection' or complete harmony with the rest of creation. Some interpreters limit it to 'efficient' or sufficient to fulfill the purpose for which it has been created.

Creation as morally good is a concept that begins with the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil' located in the center of the Garden. The belief that creation is good and not evil is fundamental to a Christian response to nature and in particular to our present ecological crises.

In Greek thinking, which shaped early gnosticism and later the Age of Enlightenment, the immaterial and uncreated soul is perfect and good, while the material body is finite and imperfect, a hindrance to the perfection of the soul or mind. In oriental thought the body is either *maya* (illusion) or evil and to be eliminated. The goal of salvation is *moksha*, the liberation of the soul from the body. Deliverance from *karma*, the wheel of conscious existence may require endless reincarnations of the soul. This is a distant and dismal hope to those oppressed and suffering in this life. By contrast, in Hebrew thought mankind is a psycho-somatic whole or in the words of Wheeler Robinson, an 'animated Body'. The body then has value because humanity—male and female—was created good. The Christian hope lies in the resurrection of the body and the transformation of the whole person, body-spirit, into the image of Christ. The fact that a growing minority are turning from the hope of resurrection to the vague expectation of reincarnation indicates the impact that eastern religions and New Age philosophy are now making on historic Christendom.

⁵ Mathew Fox's writings include: *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality* (Sante Fe: Bear & Co., 1983), *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, *The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1988).

⁶ For an incisive critique, see Margaret Brearley, 'Matthew Fox and the Cosmic Christ', *Anvil* 9 (1992): 39–54.

If future lives are multiple, then this life has limited value. Compassion for suffering dries up—life is cheap. In India I have seen people lying on the streets in the last stages of death. Nobody cares. In the next life their chances of health and prosperity may be better. It takes the compassion for the dying of a Mother Theresa to awaken people's consciences to the value of this life. The fatalism of *karma* is no answer to human suffering and death. Compassionate service and social justice begin with the biblical concept, 'God saw all that he had made and it was very good'.

The so-called Protestant work ethic begins with the understanding that creation is harmoniously integrated and morally good. The Lord p. 215 God put human beings in the Garden 'to work it and to take care of it' ([Genesis 2:15](#)). We are motivated to work hard as an act of worship to the glory of God. To farm a field well, create a beautiful garden, construct a good chicken coop, make an aesthetically pleasing child's toy, or cook a tasty meal brings immense satisfaction to the human creator as it did to the Creator-God to see that everything God has made was very good. All of creation has this value of satisfaction in the sight of the Creator and for the delegated and dependent human creator.

LIMITS TO THE IMAGE OF GOD

The biblical account of creation affirms that humankind is a part of creation but distinct from it. 'The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth' ([Genesis 2:20](#)). On the sixth day of creation, God created both Adam and all the creatures that move along the ground ([Genesis 1:24f](#)). It is said that we are separated from chimpanzees by less than two percent of our DNA⁷ and that the difference in the reasoning capacity of an ape, a porpoise, and a man is one of degree, not kind. Human beings have the capacity to relate to the nonhuman creation in a remarkable way, whether we think of St. Francis of Assisi or an ordinary man and his dog.

At the same time, humankind is distinct from the rest of creation. God created human beings in God's own image, male and female. Despite the fact that the phrase, 'image of God' occurs only once in scripture ([Genesis 9:6](#)), apart from the classic statement of [Genesis 1:26-27](#), the concept of the image of God is the watershed in our understanding of the ecological issues of our time.

It is now generally agreed that this image is a relational image, a relationship between persons. It is a relationship between God who is three centers of personhood and human beings who are male and female. It is therefore a social or corporate relationship that goes beyond individualism and is symbolically expressed in the church as the Body of Christ. It excludes a relationship that ends in monism or pantheism. It is also a moral relationship reflecting the attributes of God—holiness and love—which are possible only in the social relationships of two or more persons. Because God's moral qualities are absolute and changeless, humankind's ethical relationship involves absolutes that transcend cultural differences. Biblical ethics are p. 216 centered not in the relative needs of humanity, but in the will of God. Humankind's response to nature is based not on nature's utilitarian value for human fulfillment, nor on the autonomous value of nature itself, but on the value in relationship between the Creator and the creature. This relationship is expressed in covenants that the Creator-God makes with creation. In the case of Noah, it was a cosmic covenant of blessing and future security that God made with him and his descendants and with every living creature on earth ([Genesis 9:11](#)). The sign of this blessing was drawn from nature itself—a rainbow—a sign of harmony and unity in diversity. The covenant

⁷ Cited in R. J. Berry, 'Christianity and the Environment: Escapist Mysticism or Responsible Stewardship', *Science and Christian Belief* 3 (April 1991): 10.

was based on Noah's response to God's ethical demands. It is a covenant with God who is both Creator and Redeemer. God's covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David likewise promise blessings of land, children, and material gain, as well as the spiritual blessings of being the people of God.

The relational basis of Christian ethics is amplified in Paul's understanding of conscience, universal to all humans, as the law of God written in their hearts, bearing witness to their response to the divine law ([Romans 2:12-15](#)).

The quality of our response to environmental issues will depend on the quality of the relationship of the image of God in humankind. The consequence of the Fall so graphically described in [Genesis 3](#) was that this image of God relationship was perverted and blurred. The conscience was seared and subject to human manipulation. Paul argues that when people suppress the truth and glorify themselves, their thinking becomes futile and their foolish hearts darken. They exchange the truth of God for a lie, create God in their own image or in that of the natural world, and become slaves of the idols they have created. They become sexually depraved. Death is the final judgment of God's wrath ([Romans 1:18-22](#)).

The story of idolatry from Baal to our present world is one of enslavement and death. This same tragic story is being enacted before our eyes, whether in the alternatives being offered by fundamentalist religions and ideologies or by the New Age Movement. Matthew Fox subsumes all religious symbols and values under Mother Earth. She is Jesus Christ crucified. She is the cosmic Christ. She is cosmic consciousness. She creates her own ethic. The sacredness of the *phallos* is restored as the god-image, the liberator of spirituality and the renewer of cultural and environmental values.⁸

The history of cultic sexuality from Baal to Artemis of the Ephesians, [p. 217](#) to tantric Hinduism and to Rajneesh all follows the same pattern, one that is summarized by Paul in [Romans 1:24-32](#). Thus, arguably, the biblical ethic is the only valid alternative to save the world from nuclear and ecological death, for the crisis is primarily an ethical one.

The limiting of the image of God to human being is a critical issue in this debate. Ronald J. Sider reports that the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation consultation held in Seoul, Korea, in March 1990, failed to affirm humanity's special status as bearers of the divine image to whom alone the Creator assigned the task of caring for the rest of creation. By the deletion of the word 'alone' in the official document, humanity's moral responsibility for the care of creation is undermined.⁹ The New Age movement finds its ethic for the protection of the environment in the sacredness of all living beings. But if all life is sacred, then humankind has lost control of creation. The motive to destroy the useless cattle, harmful rodents, and dangerous reptiles is lost. In India the snake is worshipped as a manifestation of the spiritual power of the god Shiva. It is always distressing to see diseased and deformed animals being allowed to suffer simply because all life is sacred. The sight of neglected pavement dwellers suffering from malnutrition and disease lying in front of a Delhi bird hospital has often caused me to ponder the discrepancies in the value of life.

DOMINION OR DOMINATION OF NATURE

⁸ Brearley, 44f.

⁹ Ronald J. Sider, 'Reflections of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation', *Transformation*, (July-September 1990): 15.

Beginning with Lynn White's essay on 'the historical roots of our ecological crisis' (1967) which was followed by Ian McHarg's *Design with Nature* (1969), there has been widespread criticism of the [Genesis 1:26–28](#) story of God commissioning humanity to have dominion over creation and subdue it. McHarg described the story as 'one text of compounded horror which will guarantee that the relationship of man to nature can only be destruction'.¹⁰ It is interpreted as a declaration of war on nature.

To correct this misunderstanding, the text must be viewed in its context. The Hebrew term *radah* is a strong word for the dominion of a superior over an inferior person as in the rule of a king, while *kabas* ('subdue') is an equally strong word meaning 'to trample upon' (von [p. 218](#) Rad).¹¹ The text could be construed to mean domination, but the context suggests otherwise. Dominion over nature is directly related to being created in the image of God. It is therefore an essential part of what it means to be human. God delegates to humankind the responsibilities of God's providential care of nature. Thus to be truly human means to be accountable for the stewardship of creation. To fail to exercise this stewardship is to be subject to the severe judgment of God as is so clearly shown by Christ's parables on the stewardship of talents ([Luke 19:11–27](#)) and of the tenants ([Luke 20:9–19](#)).

In the Genesis account God makes humanity a vicegerent or steward accountable to God. Furthermore, stewardship always implies servanthood. In the light of Christ's self-understanding as the suffering servant of Isaiah and as the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, it is clear that servanthood involves suffering and self-negation. This is the opposite of domination and oppression. The motive of the true steward is to seek the glory of the master—in this case the Creator of the universe.

The account of the Fall in Genesis suggests that when Adam and Eve rebelled against God they lost control of creation. The woman's suffering in child-bearing increased and she accepted her husband's domination ([Genesis 3:16](#)). Adam lost control over the tilling of the soil. Work became a burden. It appears that the harmony of the ecosystem was broken. Thorns and thistles outgrew their purpose and became a burden. Death lost its natural function. The members of the animal kingdom lost their fear of humans. Adam and Eve were turned out of the Garden never to return.

It is a psychological fact that the weak try to manipulate and dominate others. When men and women lost their true dominion as responsible stewards, men began to oppress women, violence—beginning with Cain—became a way of life, greed and autonomy became every person's dream, as exemplified in the story of Babel ([Genesis 11](#)). Shalom in society disintegrated. Today the seekers of the New Age are striving to recover harmony in the ecosystem, a goal that motivates the Green political parties of Europe. By attempting to make a paradigm shift in human consciousness, they hope to usher in a new earthly paradise.

However, until the reality of the Fall is acknowledged, the restructuring of society is doomed to failure. Because of the Fall the [p. 219](#) recovery of the original creation blessing is impossible. There is no saving knowledge of God through fallen creation. 'Creation spirituality' is a myth of the imagination of natural persons. There is hope neither for human survival nor of a cosmic shalom unless the Creator directly intervenes in human history. This we believe happened in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Lord from heaven who emptied himself of his divine glory and suffered death for all.

¹⁰ Cited in Berry, 4f.

¹¹ See Steve Bishop, 'Green Theology or Deep Ecology: New Age or New Creation', *Themelios* (1991): 8. William J. Dubrell, 'Creation, Covenant and Work', *Crux* 24 (September 1988): 17.

THE CREATOR-REDEEMER GOD WHO ACTS

The God of creation is also the God of redemption. The cross was in the plan of God from the creation of the world. God's children were chosen to be holy and blameless before the creation of the world. In love God predestined us. In the fulfillment of time God plans to bring all things together under Christ ([Ephesians 1:3–10](#)). Luther rightly emphasized that redemption is within the framework of creation. Our lack of concern about environmental issues suggests that we fail to acknowledge the interdependence of creation and redemption. All too often our concern is for the eternal life of the soul apart from the resurrection of the body and the re-creation of all of God's creation. A cosmic creation demands a cosmic redemption. As Paul emphasizes in [Romans 8](#), the whole creation groans for liberation. We (the first fruits of the Spirit) groan inwardly as we wait in eager expectation for our adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies (vv. [19–27](#)). In the light of the finished work of the cross we eagerly look forward to the consummation of the kingdom when Christ returns to the Earth to judge and reign.

Jesus Christ is the Creator and Redeemer. By him all things were created and in him all things hold together ([Colossians 1:15, 17](#)). He is the one who reconciles all things in the cosmos and makes peace through his blood shed on the cross (v. [20](#)). Salvation was a once and for all act in the past, a present and progressive experience, and an eschatological promise of Christ's return to reign on the Earth. The hope of the resurrection is more than a return to pre-Fall harmony; it is a total transformation—a new person, a new society, and a new creation. The resurrection of Christ points to a continuity with creation and a newness that transcends creation. His resurrection is the way of our resurrection. Paul illustrates the continuity and newness of the resurrection by the seed which is planted, dies, and springs up to bring forth a harvest. The first Adam became a living being. Christ the last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. We who were born in the likeness of Adam [p. 220](#) are being transformed into the likeness of the man from heaven ([I Corinthians 15:35–49](#)).

The hope of resurrection is good news to those who are nature worshippers. It was good news to the pagan philosophers of Areopagus; it is to those who believe the body to be the prison house of the immortal soul. To those who have no hope beyond endless reincarnations, the biblical hope of being transformed into the image of the risen Christ in one lifetime can be the starting point of meaningful dialogue. The transformation of the whole of creation is grounded in God who creates and redeems. Reference has already been made to Paul's understanding of the liberation of groaning nature. John climaxes the apocalyptic vision in the last two chapters of the Book of Revelation with the proclamation, 'I am making everything new' ([21:5](#)). This includes the promise of a new heaven and a new Earth, the coming of the Holy City, the new Jerusalem in which all suffering and death are eliminated and the healing of the nations by the leaves of the tree of life located in the center of the city. The curse of the Fall is removed. The Lamb reigns. God is a sovereign in providence over and the redemption of creation. However great the fear of nuclear or ecological death may be, our trust is in God who reigns and who will not reject his covenant relationship with his people. From the refiner's fire ([II Peter 3:10](#)) will come forth a new and transformed earth.¹² Praise the Lord.

SOME FINAL REFLECTION OF RESPONDING TO THE EARTH

On keeping the Sabbath

¹² See on this text Wim Rietkerk, *The Future Great Planet Earth* (Landaar: Nivedit Good Books, 1989), 17f.

From a biblical perspective keeping the Sabbath is a key to the protection and care of the environment. God rested on the seventh day of creation as the climax and completion of God's work. God blessed it and made it holy ([Genesis 2:1-3](#)). The keeping of the Sabbath was given prominence in the Decalogue ([Exodus 20:8-10](#)). It was to be a day of worship and renewal through resting from all labor. The principle of the Sabbath was extended to the whole of creation. The Sabbath year was to be a Sabbath of rest for the land ([Lev. 25:2-5](#)). The jubilee year was to reinforce this principle by reminding Israel that the Earth is the Lord's. They are tenants and they 'must provide for the redemption of the land' ([Lev. 25:23F](#)). Failure to care for the land [p. 221](#) brought exile as God's judgment ([II Chr. 36:21](#)).¹³ In addition, tithes were to be a constant reminder of the people's stewardship of the land and all living beings. The partial failure of the recent Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro is a further reminder that the ecological crisis is a moral one of the nations' unwillingness to restrain greed and selfishness and to share the Earth's resources for the good of humanity. The Sabbath is a regular reminder to stop and reflect and to regain our perspective on our stewardship. Christians must give leadership by keeping the Sabbath. This keeping of the Sabbath is a key to restoring and maintaining an eco-balance in nature and fulfilling the creation mandate of a sustainable earth.

On the Mission of the Church

People are giving more to Christian aid and development agencies in response to the escalating human crises around the world and less to the missionary agencies of the church. Many mission agencies—at least in the United Kingdom—are facing increasing deficits in the funding of their workers and projects. One of the reasons for this crisis is that people do not see the relationship of evangelism and church growth to human suffering caused by the breakdown of society through economic greed, violence, war, and the destruction of the environment. The enormity of the symptoms that God's mission in redemption cannot be separated from God's mission in creation. The church is God's unique agency for evangelism (as the Lausanne covenant affirmed), and for bringing in a just society and a sustainable Earth. Thus, it is imperative that churches and para-church development agencies work for greater integration and harmony in their programs. They must together articulate a biblical world view and lifestyle that puts evangelism in the context of the social and justice the issues of our time. The Gospel and Contemporary Culture movement in Britain spearheaded by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin is working towards this goal. At their recent consultation on 'The Gospel as Public Truth', Dr. George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, stated, 'A Decade (of Evangelism) which ignores the issues which you are debating in this consultation is doomed to failure'.¹⁴ This is a salutary warning and a challenge. [p. 222](#)

On Wisdom

In the complexities of our modern world, wherein moral issues are sometimes more gray than black and white and wherein human justice and the sustainability of our earth seem to be getting more remote, we cry out for wisdom. As evangelical Christians we need to be still and meditate on the words of the Proverbs: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge' ([1:7](#)). On the gates of the old Cavendish Laboratory (Physics Department)

¹³ Steve Bishop, 9f, and Dubrell, 23f.

¹⁴ *The Church of England Newspaper*, 24 July 1992.

in Cambridge University is carved the text from [Psalm 111:2](#): 'Great are the works of the Lord, pondered over by all who delight in them'.¹⁵ My God grant all of us this wisdom.

Dr. Bruce Nicholls is the Editor of *The Evangelical Review of Theology*. p. 223

III

The Praxis of Sustainable Development

'Faith without works is dead' ([James 6:26](#)). It has been the burden of Christians in every generation to determine what their faith means for public life. The problems of 'practical theology', when applied to Christian environmental stewardship, lead to an environmental ethic.

What does Christian ethics have to say about how we must treat such resources as water and land? In this section, Neil W. Summerton develops a number of principles by which Christians and non-Christians might share in fostering 'sustainable' development. Fred Van Dyke analyzes the sorry state of land preservation by the United States Forest Service and recommends major alternatives in policy and in providing Christian education for land stewards. Taken together, these essays point the way for a Christian environmental ethic. p. 225

Principles for Environmental Policy

Neil W. Summerton¹

In the secular, pluralist Euro-Atlantic world it is comparatively rare for governments overtly to claim the sanction of a particular morality for their policies and actions, much less for their international agreements. Environmental policy stands out as an exception, however. Over the last twenty years, environmental action has come to be based on a bundle of normative principles summarized collectively as 'sustainable development'. For example, the United Kingdom government's new departure in environmental policy of July 1990 made its foundation and starting point 'the ethical imperative of stewardship which must underlie all environmental policies. Mankind has always been capable of great

¹⁵ Cited in Berry, 13f.

¹ While the writer is at present Head of the Water Directorate in the Department, the views expressed in this article are his own and are not to be taken as expressing the views of the UK Government or of the Department on the matters discussed. However, he is grateful to colleagues for comments on an early draft of the essay.