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# Faith and Reason Active in Love: The Ethics of Creation Care

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## I Our Situation

*On the one hand:*

A 2012 World Health Organization (WHO) study found that 3.5 million people die early annually from indoor air pollution and 3.3 million from outdoor air pollution.<sup>1</sup>

Many of these deaths occur in China and India.

Unsafe water causes 4 billion cases of diarrhoea each year, and results in 2.2 million deaths, mostly of children under five.<sup>2</sup>

LatinaLista—Earth Day 2013

should have been more than just a 'celebration' of the planet or even a further raising of awareness of the consequences of climate change. Earth Day 2013 should have served as the beginning of a panic attack among global communities that the future of the planet is not just extremely fragile but imminently life-altering for all inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

*On the other hand:*

In 1968 Stanford professor Paul Ehrlich predicted 'The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate.'<sup>4</sup>

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1 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/air-pollution-deaths-green-energy\\_n\\_3045828.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/09/air-pollution-deaths-green-energy_n_3045828.html). Accessed May 27, 2013.

2 [http://www.unwater.org/wwd10/downloads/WWD2010\\_Facts\\_web.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/wwd10/downloads/WWD2010_Facts_web.pdf). Accessed December 2, 2013.

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3 <http://latinalista.com/2013/04/earth-day-2013-should-serve-as-the-beginning-of-an-environmental-panic-attack>. *LatinaLista* of April 22, 2013. Accessed May 27, 2013.

4 Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, (Ballantine Books, 1968), prologue, no page number.

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'The ban on DDT,' says Robert Gwadz of the National Institutes of Health, 'may have killed 20 million children.'<sup>5</sup>

*And yet:*

1. This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears  
all nature sings, and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.  
This is my Father's world: I rest me  
in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;  
his hand the wonders wrought.
3. This is my Father's world. O let me  
ne'er forget  
that though the wrong seems oft so  
strong, God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world: why  
should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is King; let the heavens  
ring! God reigns; let the earth be  
glad!<sup>6</sup>

A serious discussion of environmental ethics has to face massive contradictions. Many millions, usually the poor, are dying annually as a result of air, water, and indoor pollution; the consequences invite comparisons with the Holocaust. On the other hand, the terrible predictions of 45 years ago, represented by Paul Ehrlich, were clearly false; there are not hundreds of millions starving to death each year.

At the same time, some have gone beyond angst into a self-confessed state of panic about the environment, often citing global warming; other thoughtful

people are divided, some seeing past efforts to protect the environment as quite effective, while others see much environmentalism as foolish naiveté, represented by the self-destructive ban on DDT. Some want new environmental ethics to protect humanity, while others say humanity is the problem and want to replace human-centred 'speciesism' with a 'Land Ethic' or an 'Eco-centric Ethic,' claiming previous Christian and philosophical ethics wreaked havoc because they were *too* interested in human well-being.

We must, however, be careful about what types of answers we expect to find in the Bible. The Bible does not address every hot topic. The Bible does not tell us what portion of climate change is caused by humans and what has other causes. The Bible does not tell us if the greater risk to human well-being is global warming or the onset of another ice age, which some predict. The Bible does not tell us how to reduce air pollution in the metropolises of the developing world, the cause of massive suffering. Nor does the Bible tell us the exact relation between local health risks and global environmental problems.

However, the Bible does give us an overall perspective on God, humanity, and the world, freeing us from religious distortions, some of which make environmentalism into a religion-substitute against a history of anti-environmental philosophy. Furthermore, attention to nuances in the Bible will help us develop a balanced, responsible environmentalism that can be applied, that contributes to moral discussion in a religiously mixed world, and that supports our presentation of the gospel in the global environmental discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Finkel, 'Malaria,' *National Geographic* (July 2007) <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/07/malaria/finkel-text>. Accessed May 27, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> This famous hymn was written by Pastor Malbie D. Babcock in 1901.

Both for the sake of contributing to moral discussion in the public square and of supporting the global presentation of the Christian faith, we should emphasize the relation between faith and reason, both of which must be motivated by care for people and nature, which are both God's creation.

## II Faith and the Unity of Divine and Human Creation Care

God's Word articulates a creational unity of God's natural physical laws, God's moral law, and God's continuing care for his creation, which provides the basis for human creation care, including loving our neighbours environmentally. In secular cultures people commonly embrace dualisms which separate natural science from ethics and the ethical treatment of people from care for nature.

A crucial step toward overcoming such dualisms, reconciling environmental science and ethics, is to recognize the unity and goodness of God's work in creation and providence. The 'natural law' is the complex unity of God's moral law given to all mankind with God's scientific law, by which he governs all of non-human nature, grounded in his creation and continuing care for his world (common grace and providence). This unity, taught in the Bible, unifies our environmental ethics.

God's law-giving activity in creation and his sustaining care fit together. God is both Creator and Sustainer of the world in its entirety, human and non-human (Ps 104; Heb 1:3; Col 1:17; Neh 9:6). The Old Testament describes natural physical laws and God's moral

laws for humanity in parallel; the two words used for 'decree' or 'ordinance' (Hebrew: *choq* and *cherah*) refer to both moral principles (Deut 4: 1-45; 5:1-31; 6:1,20; 8:11; 10:13; 11:1; 28:15,45; 30:16; 2 Sam 22:23; Ps 18:23) and ordinances governing the non-human creation (Jer 5:24; 31: 35,36; 33:25; Job 28:26; 38:33).<sup>7</sup> God's sustaining care forms the background for human moral responsibility (Ps. 89:9-15).

Helmuth Egelkraut describes this unity of scientific laws, moral commandments, and God's care for creation: 'This world, as a creation of God, has been given certain decrees which ensure its continuation.'<sup>8</sup> Natural laws are God's laws for nature. Nature does not give the laws of nature to itself; its laws are not self-existing. Laws of *creation* or *creation* ordinances are the description of God's laws governing nature and humans.<sup>9</sup> God's first group of commands to humanity, including care of creation (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15), are an organic part of God's natural law.

In Psalm 148:6 we read about the heavens: 'He set them in place forever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.' In Jeremiah 31:35-37 the creation ordinances are described as unchangeable decrees coming from God. According to Jeremiah 33:20-26, God made a 'covenant with the day'

<sup>7</sup> Both terms are used parallel for the moral law in Deuteronomy 6:1, 2; in Jeremiah 31:35, 36 they are used for God's rule over nature.

<sup>8</sup> Helmuth Egelkraut, 'Gott, der Schöpfer und Erhalter und sein Gebot,' 40 Jahre Evang. Missionsschule in Unterweissach: Freundesbrief Nr. 116 (Oct., 1988) 26-30, here 29.

<sup>9</sup> This unity of the natural law governing humans and nature was a standard theme in Christianity in most of our history.

and with the night. Thus the 'fixed laws of heaven and earth' have been 'established' and are as certain as God's covenant with David.

Parallelism describing God's decrees in creation and his ordinances for humanity abound in the Psalms and the Prophets: 'He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel' (Ps 147:18-19). 'Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord' (Jer. 8:7).

Other biblical terms describe the unity of God's relation to humankind and nature, which we mistakenly separate. Jesus 'rebuked' (Greek: *epitimaō*) the elements (Mk 4:39; Lk. 8:24), as well as the demons (Mt 17:18; Mk 1:25; 9:25; Lk 4:35; 9:42). In the Old Testament God 'rebuked' (Hebrew: *ga'ar*; 28 times) his enemies (Is 17:13), as well as the sea (Is 50:2; Nah 1:4; 2 Sam 22:16; Ps 18:16; 104:6-7; 106:9) and the 'pillars of the heavens' (Job 26:11).

We should understand this unity of God's law governing nature, God's moral law for humans, and God's care for creation in association with several additional theological principles. Some will be briefly summarized; others will be explained:

### 1. The unity of work ethics and environmentalism

There is an ultimate unity between God's continuing care for his creation and his mandate that humans become fruitful and work in his world. There is

not a conflict between Christian work ethics (leading to community and economic development) and Christian environmental ethics (leading to a cleaner and healthier world). The same God who created us with a mandate to work in his world has also commissioned us to care for his world. And as God cares for his creation by means of his decrees, we trust that he will sustain his world while we imitate him in his world.

Humankind was created for purposes pleasing to God. God made humankind in his image to be the ruler of the earth and gave him the responsibility of preserving and developing creation. This creation mandate is not added on to human nature as a task which is alien to what we are naturally or which people can avoid; it is an organic part of how God has made us. (This means that God's creation mandate forms the hidden theological assumption for creation care even when God is ignored.)

The Bible starts in the Garden and ends in the Eternal City, because the development of civilization is not only a human necessity related to human well-being; it is also God's plan for the ages. From our human perspective, civilization and the development of our environment comprise a sub-creation, applying God-given human creativity to God's original creation; from God's perspective, according to the Bible, civilization is an implementation of God's plan.

For this reason, we believe that technophobia, the fear of significant technological growth, cannot save our environment. Only if we apply the cumulative intelligence and research inquisitiveness expressed in technology resulting from a strong work ethic can

we be environmentally responsible. Christian ethics seems designed for this combination of environmental care and technological development.

Günther Rohrmoser summarized these two sides which must be emphasized simultaneously. Humanity needs a worldview that places the human race into a moral position of responsible superiority over nature. 'Humankind is not only to come to know that he is lord and possessor of nature, but also to know that he is not merely a part of nature. Rather, he is to experience that nature has been entrusted to him.' This is a role which 'corresponds to the statements made within Christianity's account of creation, which brings with it the theological potency to develop this position in order to solve the basic problems of our society. The creation mandate does not mean to dominate nature. Rather, it means to conduct culture-shaping activity and to develop and unleash the hidden possibilities.'<sup>10</sup>

The lordship humanity has over the earth must serve both humankind and the rest of creation, bringing creation to its intended goal; complementary biblical principles must be held together. In Genesis 2:15 humanity receives the dual mandate to 'work' the world and 'to take care of it,' always in light of God's purposes and human needs. Some have falsely separated using the creation from caring for the creation, but biblically they belong together: 'A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel' (Prov 12:10).

Sabbath rest applies to livestock for

their needs (Ex 20:10; Deut 5:14). The land receives a Sabbath rest to serve wild animals by producing food for them (Lev 25:7; Ex 23:10-11). Rules protected animals as well as human beings: 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain' (Deut 25:4). The angel's first criticism of Balaam was that he beat his donkey (Num. 22:32).

That humanity is to preserve the creation does not place human beings on the same level as the creation; it distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation. While the creation is to be preserved, the creation also serves humanity. In war, for instance, the trees providing food which belonged to the enemy were not to be cut down (Deut 20:19-20), for they expressly served to nourish people. A similar stipulation protected birds in Deuteronomy 22:6-7. That the earth, especially farmland, was to lie fallow every seventh year (Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7) was a conspicuous rejection of exploiting the soil.

Humanity, acting as steward, has received the earth on loan from God and is responsible for its preservation. This is our Creator's work ethic for humanity, created in his image. Our care for and development of creation must reflect and image God's care for and development of his creation.

## 2. The unity of love of neighbour and environmental ethics

There is an ultimate unity between loving our neighbours and the biblical work/environmental ethic. As early as Leviticus 19:18, God instructed his people to 'love your neighbour as yourself' as a summary of the moral law. It

<sup>10</sup> Günter Rohrmoser, *Landwirtschaft in der Ökologie und Kulturkrise* (Bietigheim, 1996), 130-131.

should be noted that the command to love people came after God's creation ordinances, thereby showing that the love command assumes God's creation ordinances to develop a civilization and care for creation. This addresses foundational questions in environmental ethics: Are economic development, love of neighbours, and care for creation compatible with each other?

In more detail: should we sacrifice economic and technical development to protect the environment? Should we prefer that a billion remain in primitive conditions so they do not cause pollution? Do the interests of the millions dying from pollution stand in conflict with the interests of the entire human race in reducing pollution? Will helping individuals suffering from the results of pollution help or hurt humanity and the ecosystem?

Answers to such philosophical questions are brought *to* the study of the environment, not learned *from* the study of the environment. Our answers to these questions are derived from the Bible. We believe there is compatibility among our God-given moral responsibilities to love our neighbours, to care for creation, and to develop civilization. Phrased differently, we believe that there is unity among an energetic Christian work ethic, creation care, and love of neighbours in need. That complex compatibility requires implementing all the creativity God has given us. It means we expect that loving the poor, whose poverty is linked with horrible pollution, can lead to a type of economic development that is both better for such people and better for creation.

### 3. Creation care in all the mandates

As described in the Bible, human life was given structures designed by God, each with distinct purposes and responsibilities, the 'mandates.' Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, 'The Bible knows of four such mandates: work, marriage, the state, the church.'<sup>11</sup> God's purpose that we care for the creation was built into humanity in a manner that precedes the distinction into the separate mandates. This means that creation care must be implemented in appropriate ways in all the mandates.

Caring for creation is not so much a responsibility for a particular mandate as it is a responsibility that has to be carried out in a distinct manner in each mandate. This means that a business (resulting from the work mandate) has different type of environmental responsibility than does a family (resulting from the marriage mandate). The state has a type of duty in relation to the environment (writing and enforcing reasonable laws) which is different from that of the church (articulating an ethics of creation care).

### 4. The unity of human and divine creation care

Human care for creation both already is and must become an image of God's care for his creation. It is a mistake to think either that God's care for his world makes our care unnecessary or that we can protect creation without God's direct involvement. Bonhoeffer drew attention to the difference be-

<sup>11</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethik*. (München, 1949), 70.



tween the creation of humankind and the creation of the rest of the universe. He interpreted Genesis 2:7 ('. . . the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being'):

Body and life are completely intertwined at this point. God breathes his spirit into the human body. And this spirit is life, making the human being alive. God creates other life through his word. He gives humanity something of his life, something of his own spirit. Human beings as such simply do not live without the spirit of God.<sup>12</sup>

Gustav Friedrich Oehler points out an additional aspect of the image of God: 'The form of humankind was to be so created that when God revealed himself, it could serve as a presentation of himself.'<sup>13</sup> Rather than replacing or competing with God's creation care, it is the breath and Spirit of God within us that makes human creation care possible so that our care for creation assumes the direct activity of God caring for his world.

## 5. God's natural law for the nations

God's law was given both to promote well-being among the people of God and to be contributed from the people of God to the surrounding nations. In Deuteronomy 4:40 we read, 'Keep his

decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you.' Knowledge of God's moral/scientific law is clearly intended for human well-being, but this is not narrowly related to the people of God. The Old Testament gives hints that God's natural law communicated through his people could contribute to the lives of their neighbours. In Deuteronomy 4:6 the people were told, 'Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations.'

These hints form the background for Jesus' teaching his disciples, 'You are the light of the world' (Mt 5:14). Not only is the gospel to be communicated from believers to the rest of the human race; there is also moral/scientific wisdom and that can and should be communicated from the people of God to the wider world, which should contribute to the well-being of wider communities.<sup>14</sup> If the exiles in Babylon were to 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile' (Jer 29:7), we should not do less.

## 6. Knowledge of God's law and modern science

This biblical viewpoint, that both the natural moral/scientific law and God's written law arise from the same creation-sustaining work of God, has contributed significantly to the development of modern science, especially

<sup>12</sup> Otto Dudzus (ed.), *Bonhoeffer Brevier* (München, 1963), 81-82, quoted in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Schöpfung und Fall: Eine theologische Auslegung von Gen 1-3* (München, 1958<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>13</sup> Gustav Friedrich Oehler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. (Stuttgart, 1891<sup>3</sup>), 227-228.

<sup>14</sup> We are thinking here of what the Reformation called the civil or political use of God's law, which, like all the proper uses of God's law, is always distinct from the gospel while having a relation to the gospel.



in the very formative early modern era. This has been a crucial way in which Christianity has contributed to the well-being of many people.<sup>15</sup> If the cultures shaped by the Bible had not believed in God's creation ordinances, scientists would never have searched in such an intensive manner for natural laws! Though telling the story at length is beyond our purposes, we rejoice that God contributed key ideas that led to the benefits of science partly through the central beliefs of Christians. The biblical view of the creation order has had huge and constructive consequences which must be developed for creation care.

This set of theological truths is foundational for our view of science and environmental ethics. There is an ultimate unity in God's care for creation between valid moral principles and the laws discovered by science; as prescribed in the Bible and seen in history, God has brought great benefits to the entire human race through principles, ideas, and values articulated among the people of God.

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**15** On the Middle Ages see Karl Knauf, 'Gott, Naturgesetz und Zahl: Schöpfungstheologische Wurzeln der abendländischen Naturwissenschaft in der Naturphilosophie Robert Grossetestes,' *Glauben und Denken: Jahrbuch der Karl-Heim-Gesellschaft* 6 (1993), 156-186. See also Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Crossway, 1994). Pearcey and Thaxton were influenced by Francis Schaeffer, who argued that the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'rested upon what the Bible teaches.' *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Vol. 5, p. 157. Schaeffer's interpretation of this history followed Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 1925.

We see an ultimate unity among God's creation decrees for his world, his moral laws governing human behaviour, and the well-being of our neighbours. We expect to find unity among loving our neighbours, treating God's world properly, a vigorous work ethic, and honest science.

### III Christian Ethics in Dialogue with Environmentalism

Though modern environmentalism demonstrates the conflict with God that characterizes fallen humanity, the recognition of creation care as a moral duty by people of many faiths or no faith is based on God's unrecognized demand. Because God is continually communicating his moral demands (general revelation), even if God is denied, people commonly recognize moral responsibility.

The many intellectual attacks on the Christian faith coming from writers accusing Christianity of contributing to environmental problems must be seen within the context that people are in conflict with God while God continues to provide those people with everything that makes human life possible. God even provides some knowledge of right and wrong to those who deny him!<sup>16</sup>

This conflict-filled relation is described throughout the Bible. For ex-

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**16** A few examples of this attack on Christianity: Eugen Drewermann, *Der tödliche Fortschritt: Von der Zerstörung der Erde und des Menschen im Erbe des Christentums* (Freiburg, 1991); Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,' *Science* 155 (1967); and Carl Amery, *Das Ende der Vorsehung: Die gnadenlosen Folgen des Christentums*. (Reinbek, 1980; reprint of 1974 ).

ample, in Romans 1, echoing Genesis 2, where humans were to name (from a position of responsibility over nature) and be accountable for the rest of creation, we see a reversed relation between humans and nature resulting from sin. This means that people create substitute gods to try to replace the Creator, but by this process they also reverse their own relation to the rest of creation, imaging something in creation to be an authority. This continues a related Old Testament theme, the prophets' battle against the nature gods Baal and Asherim, which was simultaneously a battle against the idolization and glorification of nature.<sup>17</sup>

Humanity loves the thought that we are not responsible for the environment but rather that the environment is responsible for us. Just as Adam pushed the guilt for the fall onto Eve and Eve pushed the guilt onto the snake (Gen 3:12-14), humanity, with ever new religious tricks, tries to avoid responsibility for the environment and for our neighbours.

### 1. Environmentalism as substitute religion

The modern environmental movement sometimes pursues nature idolatry to the point of abrogating the difference between humans and the rest of earthly creation. For example, the preamble of the 'Earth Charter,' issued by non-governmental organizations after the international conference on the environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, claims: 'We are the earth, the people,

plants, and animals, rains and oceans, breath of the forest and flow of the sea. We honour Earth as the home of all living things.'<sup>18</sup>

The creation is put in the place of the Creator, the earth and rain are personified and placed on an equal footing with human beings, and the earth is worshipped. It is no wonder that the environmental movement is criticized as a substitute religion with its own ethic and eschatology, melding the esoteric with valid environmental concerns.<sup>19</sup> Without trust in God's sustaining grace, it is not surprising that unduly pessimistic scenarios are maintained while real improvements in the environmental situation go unmentioned.

Given the way in which, on an ultimate level, venerating earth involves reversals and denials known of moral/spiritual truth, it is not surprising that former environmental activists have criticized environmental organizations for justifying their existence by twisting facts. Religiously driven reversals of the human-to-nature relationship lead to deadly consequences which are often related to denying knowable truths. The problems in environmentalist organizations are not merely how particular environmental issues are described and addressed. The problems include the religious worldview/philosophy of life from which environmental problems are perceived and described.

<sup>17</sup> See Georg Huntemann. *Vom Überlebenskampf des Christentums in Deutschland* (Herrford, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> *Nach dem Erdgipfel: Global verantwortliches Handeln für das 21. Jahrhundert: Kommentare und Dokumente.* (Bonn, 1992), 253. This is an early version of the 'Earth Charter.' Later versions reduced the level of religious rhetoric.

<sup>19</sup> See as an example Alfred Konstanti. *Göttliche Umwelt* (München, 1992).

In contrast with such idolatry-driven environmental ideology, healthy political policy growth and the growing sense of responsibility related to the environment, with their growing successes,<sup>20</sup> are morally responsible reactions to well-identified problems. This is the proper use of God-given moral and practical reason, which quietly assumes a relation between humans and the earth closer to biblical teaching than to the teaching found in idolatrous environmental philosophy.

## 2. The environmental critique of western moral philosophy

In recent centuries western ethical theory has been anthropocentric, whether this has been expressed in terms of *human* duty, consequences of our actions on other *humans*, the *human* social contract, or the development of moral virtue among *humans*. This common criticism coming from environmentalists is correct. Western ethical theory is also weak because it neglects sin as a theme, a related part of anthropocentrism.

However, offering a 'land ethic' or an 'eco-centric' ethic in place of supposed 'specicism' contributes to neglecting the millions of people dying from pollution. Moral values simply cannot come from impersonal nature or ecosystems; they can only come from the Creator of humanity and of nature, who has spoken in both crea-

tion and in redemption! For that reason one should not say: 'Leave the ways of humankind and follow the ways of nature.' Rather, the way to go is 'Leave the ways of humankind and follow the ways of the Creator.' Our Creator is the one who sustains nature and has entrusted care for creation to us. We must understand humanity and nature before God or we will distort the human to nature relationship.

Some older Christian writers already far surpassed anthropocentric ethics without becoming eco-centric. A nineteenth-century example is the theologically conservative Danish pietist Hans Lassen Martensen, who decried abuse of the environment.<sup>21</sup> He not only viewed an understanding of sin as crucial to serious ethics; a lengthy quotation demonstrates his attempt to find a balanced understanding of nature.

The Christian view of nature and regard for nature offers a sharp contrast to an ascetic and pessimistic failure to consider nature which also degrades nature, whereby everything physical is seen as evil and in every natural beauty a demonic temptation is perceived. However, the Christian view is also opposed to the optimistic pagan view which does not want to see the undeniable disturbances of nature, which assumes the 'vanity' (impermanence) to which nature is subjected, which incessantly destroys nature's own structure and purpose (e.g., when a worm in nature secretly eats a blos-

<sup>20</sup> See also the critical investigation of the environmental movement by two of its leading German representatives: Dirk Maxeiner, Michael Miersch. *Öko-Optimismus* (Düsseldorf, 1996<sup>3</sup>); Dirk Maxeiner, Michael Miersch. *Lexikon der Öko-Irrtümer* (Frankfurt, 1998<sup>5</sup>)

<sup>21</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen, *Die individuelle Ethik. Die Christliche Ethik: Spezieller Theil: Erste Abtheilung* (Gotha, 1878), 331-338, 'Die Liebe zu der unpersönlichen Creatur.' Published in Danish in 1854.

som and when the worm of illness and of death chews at the roots of human life, just when both should be unfolding in their respective beauty), and which calls us to admire as perfection in nature the terrifying war of all against all the animal world presents before our eyes, that 'fight for survival' in which the stronger creature torments and eradicates the weaker ones or where organic beings such as those swarms of insects spreading disaster, just like all the bugs which belong to the perfection in nature.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The environmental critique of Christian beliefs

The already mentioned attack on Christian beliefs coming in many forms from environmentalists is mistaken. Though Christians must be called to new efforts to care for God's world, this requires a new appreciation of core Christian beliefs, not a rejection of Christian beliefs in order to promote environmental responsibility. In this regard we note the comprehensive historical investigations of Udo Krolzik, *Umweltkrise: Folge des Christentums?* (English translation of the title: *The Environmental Crisis: A Consequence of Christianity?*). His summary merits quotation.

In answering the question of whether the environmental crisis is a consequence of Christianity, we can start with the following insights: It can be shown that the development of technology in the 12th and 13th centuries was indeed motivated and legitimated by Christianity, but it

was in no way characterized by an exploitative relationship to nature. It was not until the Renaissance dismantled the God-ward references for both humanity and nature that an understanding of humanity and nature emerged which gave nature its own value and denigrated it to pure means. This understanding, however, was limited up to the end of the 18th century by the Western conception coming from the monks that humankind, as God's worker, was to successfully bring expression to nature through cultivation. The representatives of this understanding rejected the view of the world as a machine. It was not until bourgeois commercialism that the idea of the world as a machine began to become a reality and to exploit nature. Since the environmental crisis has developed after the Industrial Revolution, it can be said that it is not actually a consequence of Christianity but that rather the consequence of secularization and of the self-referential focus of humanity associated with it.<sup>23</sup>

We need a renewal of care for God's world that arises out of central Christian beliefs, not a rejection of Christian belief in order to protect creation.

### 4. Technology

In 1960, when Europe was less post-Christian, Gunther Backhaus could still entitle a book . . . and subdue it: *The Influence of the Christian Faith on the Development of Technology* (original Ger-

<sup>22</sup> Martensen, *Ethik*, 332.

<sup>23</sup> Udo Krolzik, *Umweltkrise: Folge des Christentums?* (Stuttgart, 1979), 84.

man title: ... *und macht sie euch untertan: Der Einfluß des christlichen Glaubens auf die Entstehung der Technik*). The book views the statement to 'fill the earth and subdue it' as responsible for the emergence of technology in the Christian West and as having done so in a positive manner. His summary: 'The Bible is the precursor of technology.'<sup>24</sup>

However, if technology is not subject to God's commands and becomes subject to either human-centred or humanity-denying ethical concepts—as does everything detached from God—technology becomes a threat to both humanity and creation. Some do not dare mention this. Instead of returning to the creation ordinances, they let themselves be talked into believing that the call to 'fill the earth and subdue it' is responsible for our present misery.

When people protect the environment, whether or not this is clearly articulated, it is done in response to God's commands built into creation,<sup>25</sup> not because nature has any claim in itself. It is a basic problem of the environmental movement that polluters are pronounced guilty from enormously high moral ground. However, without God such critics can neither dispense the moral force to truly change anything in a world ruled by mammon nor live themselves by the standards which they apply to others.

The Christian West brought about modern technology but attributed to it a subordinated significance. The authority humanity has over the earth (Gen 1:26-30), the mandate to subdue the earth, as emphasized, includes *building up* and *preserving*: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it' (Gen 2:15). 'Building up' means to progressively and continuously alter something. It thus means, among other things, to develop by means of technology, preserving with conservational safeguards what is at hand. Both facts belong together.

It is delightful that within the framework of environmentalism Christian expressions and ideas have celebrated a revival in the mouth of opponents of Christianity. Suddenly such frowned-upon expressions as responsibility, guilt, and even 'preservation of creation' (biblical ideas!) are on everyone's lips. One knows too well that humanity—particularly in the Christian West but also elsewhere—is best motivated ethically when the element of responsibility is to a higher authority.

We perceive in this feature of the environmental movement an internal and hidden theological conflict that should be made explicit. Many environmentalists sense their need for a higher source of moral authority, outside of secular anthropocentric ethical theories, quietly making reference to the general revelation of God's moral law and the Christian tradition of morality, while they remain in conflict with Christian beliefs.

<sup>24</sup> Gunther Backhaus. . . . *und macht sie euch untertan: Der Einfluß des christlichen Glaubens auf die Entstehung der Technik*. Theologische Existenz heute NF 84 (München, 1960), 3.

<sup>25</sup> See the excellent article by Peter J. Leithart. 'Biblical Perspectives on the Environment,' *Contra Mundum: A Reformed Cultural Review* Nr. 2 (Winter 1992), 28-33.

## 5. Reason and the human to creation relationship

Because some theological claims (e.g., justification by faith alone) are purely a matter of faith, they rarely become culture-shaping. In contrast, our teaching about human nature and the role of humans in the universe is a matter of both faith and reason, making it a truth that is more easily contributed to our surrounding cultures. We can articulate our understanding of human nature in terms that are both faithful to the Bible and also partly accessible to reason in order to contribute to environmental ethics in our multiple cultures. Many people who do not yet believe in Jesus can benefit from our view of the human-nature relation which supports environmental responsibility. This step also replies to the hunger of our time for a definition of humanness.

In environmental ethics one sees many misconceptions of the human-to-nature relationship. Some deny human dignity and, by implication, also deny human responsibility. Others move toward worship of nature, as if nature is our creator. Some view the world as a vast machine of which we are merely pieces, while others view the earth as a spirit of which we are parts.

We are made in the image of God: what separates humans from animals is what humans receive directly from God's Spirit. People have a distinct role and dignity always in relation to the rest of creation. We should notice characteristics which are viewed in the Bible as being typically human with which, we think, social-scientific reason should agree:

- Thinking: humans think as does God
- Conscience: humans can assess

and decide, as does God

- Speaking: humans speak, and so does God
- Writing: humans can write, and so does God<sup>26</sup>
- History: humans can retain their own knowledge, planning, and action and pass them on
- Individuals can build upon the experience of prior generations. God is a God who makes history
- Creativity: humans are able to create beauty as can God
- Community: humans communicate and love of their own accord, as does God

Because the environment is discussed within secular and multi-religious societies and because the meaning of humanness is always a theme, we should emphasize that Christian claims about human nature are partly faith but also partly reason. Our teaching on the image of God is a matter of faith, learned from the Bible, but many of our particular claims about what it means to be human are also confirmed by the sciences, even if science alone provides no ultimate interpretation. Such penultimate reasonable truths about human nature learned by science and observation should be brought into the global multi-religious discussions of human nature related to the environment. One illustration must suffice.

Ethnologist Hermann Trimborn, in his study *That which is human is found at the very basis of all cultures*,<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> God wrote the first version of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 31:18).

<sup>27</sup> Hermann Trimborn. *Das Menschliche ist gleich im Urgrund aller Kulturen. Beiträge zum Geschichtsunterricht* 9. (Braunschweig, no date).



found commonalities among cultures. Though some claims would be more carefully expressed today, the significant commonalities noted by Trimborn merit attention. After demonstrating the enormous differences among cultures, he names two groups of commonalities. He first mentions human predispositions, the most important of which are the following:<sup>28</sup>

- the enormous capacity for adaptation to changing environmental conditions
- the acceptance of the culture into which an individual is born, including perseverance
- the creative capacity for inventiveness and change.

He also describes many activities and features common to all cultures:<sup>29</sup> language, thought, commerce, division of labour, property, clothing, dwellings, society and blood relationships, raising children, public organizations, law, the uniformity of logical consciousness, the aesthetic sense, the need for a causal explanation of the world, and the capacity for religious experience.

It is striking how this catalogue agrees with the biblical assessment, and this is particularly clear when what is addressed here is not *how* the respective points (e.g., the family or law) are constructed in different cultures but the fact *that* these activities appear in all cultures. (Primarily at the *how* level, cultures differ from each other and deviate most from biblical norms.) At the same time, it is these common cultural features which dis-

tinguish human beings from animals, either gradually or fundamentally.<sup>30</sup>

A striking similarity of Trimborn's ethnology with biblical teaching about human nature is the central role of language. Language had to be primary in his list of cultural features because it is assumed in every other feature. In the Bible we see God creating by speaking, while people shape and direct their sub-creation by means of words. Obviously, environmental ethics are words that shape our future.

The gradual disappearance of the Christian understanding of humanness—especially because of evolutionary theory—has had devastating results in the West. Our legislation sometimes protects animals better than children in their mothers' wombs. Under the previous influence of a biblical understanding of humanness, it was clear that the protection of human life had priority over the protection of animals. People no longer understand themselves or their relation to creation.

We are not surprised to see the influence of Kant, Darwin, Marx, and Freud in this loss of understanding of our humanness.<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud described two great wounds to the 'self-love of humanity:' the Copernican Revolution

28 Trimborn, *Menschliche*, 18.

29 Trimborn, *Menschliche*, 19-35 (most expressions have been carried over literally).

30 The question remains whether Trimborn's results purely arise from research or whether the Christian view of humanity influenced him. Science is always influenced by worldviews and cultures. A Hindu researcher might not accept all of Trimborn's results, though a Hindu may be convinced of some of these claims on the basis of evidence.

31 See Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York, 1991), 326-354.



removed the earth from the centre of the universe; and 'biological research destroyed the alleged creation privilege of humanity.'<sup>32</sup> Darwin and Marx were part of a process in which people in western civilization lost sight of their humanness.

To renew environmental ethics we must speak confidently about human distinctiveness and mention that what we say is only partly by faith; much of what we believe is also accessible to reason. And what we say answers some of the deepest existential questions which always surface in discussions of the environment. We are not cosmic accidents; God has commissioned us as his representatives to care for his earth and for our neighbours. And our neighbours have a place in God's earth which he has destined to develop from the Garden to the Heavenly City and which is also an object of God's redemption.

#### IV Conclusions

The global response to environmental problems will always be influenced

by religious, philosophical, and ideological components. Basic worldviews shape how people perceive the world, and those worldview-influenced perceptions will shape the actions of individuals, organizations, and nations. We have articulated themes which Christians can use to act responsively and creatively in regard to creation care which should also equip Christians to enter into a significant critical dialogue with the religious convictions of other people that are shaping their approaches to environmental care. We have to understand humanity and nature before God, or we else will distort our understanding of humanity or nature.

Our goals must be multifaceted: to equip people for responsible and compassionate action, while also demonstrating the compelling power of the Christian faith in such a manner that both convinces regarding Christian truth claims and influences the global public discussion. Caring for creation is among the first commands of God recorded in the Bible. And we have to genuinely love the millions of our neighbours who are sick or dying because we have not cared for God's creation deeply enough.

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<sup>32</sup> Sigmund Freud. *Allgemeine Neurosenlehre. Teil III*. Studienausgabe (Frankfurt, 1989), 283-284 (from 'Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse,' 1916/17).