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**THE FOUR MOST IMPORTANT  
BIBLICAL PASSAGES FOR A  
CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM**

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RIBBLESDALE

EARTH, sweet Earth, sweet landscape, with leaves throng  
And louched low grass, heaven that dost appeal  
To, with no tongue to plead, no heart to feel;  
That canst but only be, but dost that long--

Thou canst but be, but that thou well dost; strong  
Thy plea with him who dealt, nay does now deal,  
Thy lovely dale down thus and thus bids reel  
Thy river, and o'er gives all to rack or wrong.

And what is Earth's eye, tongue, or heart else, where  
Else, but in dear and dogged man?--Ah, the heir  
To his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn,  
To thriftless reave both our rich round world bare  
And none reck of world after, this bids wear  
Earth brows of such care, care and dear concern.

--Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)

*I. INTRODUCTION*

In the upper reaches of Michigan's lower peninsula near the small town of Mancelona stands the Au Sable Institute, an evangelically based education center for promoting a Christian environmental stewardship. The philosophy of the Au Sable Institute reads in part as follows:

The Board, faculty, and staff of the Au Sable Institute confess that God is owner of all. Humankind is not the owner of that over which it has authority. Human authority is more that of trustee than owner. The scope of this trust is global. Since all creatures depend on the earth for life, health and fulfillment, stewardship is

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the responsible use and care of creation. This is a clear and repeated testimony of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this article to focus exclusively on this clear and repeated biblical testimony. While previous articles in this series have attended to scientific, political, and historical dimensions of the environmentalism issue there has been as yet no closely focused examination of biblical material on the issue in this venue.<sup>2</sup>

It is not as though no biblical attention has been paid elsewhere. There is an encouraging recent growth in both the amount and the quality of writing addressing environmentalism from a more purely scriptural perspective.<sup>3</sup> Much of this material, however, has arrived in the form of book-length treatments or collections of essays each dedicated to various parts of the biblical witness. It is our belief that it will prove useful to Christian teachers, and especially pastors, to have a more compact and more easily accessed treatment of the most essential biblical materials. Hence our focus on the "most significant" passages.

In their article "Evangelicals and Environmentalism: Past, Present, and Future," Grizzle, Rothrock, and Barrett share the results

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in W. Granberg-Michaelson, ed., *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) vii. The present author has no formal connection with the Au Sable Institute.

<sup>2</sup>Some may argue that the sequence here is backwards. In his excellent earlier article "Bridging the Gap: Christian Environmental Stewardship and Public Environmental Policy" (Trinity Journal 18NS [1997]), F. Van Dyke speaks of writings which focus primarily on the biblical and theological dimensions of environmental stewardship as a "constructive first step" (p. 142). A few pages later he adds, "As Christian witness in environmental stewardship has matured beyond merely articulating what the Bible and Christian tradition say about the care of God's creation, so this maturity has taken tangible form on many fronts. These have included the production of writings by Christians with deliberate implications for environmental policy" (p. 150). Late in his article and as something of a thesis, Van Dyke states, "Ultimately, the reason and logic of the Christian position must be based not on biblical data only, but on sound and original study, supported by the Christian community, of the basic properties and behaviors of ecosystems, and by a clear and first-hand understanding of the technical application of management practices toward the solution of environmental problems" (p. 168). Clearly Van Dyke's concern is with public policy, and so I understand his reference to a "Christian position" to be a "position" assumed in the process of formulating public policy and encouraging specific public action. Given this understanding, I agree with his thesis and applaud its intent. But leadership in such public thought and action is the responsibility of relatively few people. For Christians more broadly considered whose responsibility it is to think and behave in a Christian manner, the "reason and logic" of their Christian position (i.e., world view) must be unapologetically grounded in biblical data only and simply find corroboration in professional scientific study. Thus our present effort.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Granberg-Michaelson, *Tending the Garden*; C. B. DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); F. Van Dyke, D. C. Mahan, J. K. Sheldon, and R. H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996). Mention should also be made in this connection of the charming pictorial booklet, ideal for family use, *The Garden of God: Selections from the Bible's Teaching About the Creation* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1992).

of a national survey of pastors in which the participants were asked, "What are the most important obstacles to further development of an effective philosophy of creation that involves appropriate environmental concern and action by evangelicals?" The most cited "obstacle" (identified by well over half the participants) was "the lack of teaching and preaching on the environment, particularly the failure to develop a robust theology of the creation."<sup>4</sup> This lament is voiced repeatedly by those committed to getting a responsible Christian presence felt in our society as it addresses issues of environmental concern.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore the intention of this article to be something of a primer for pastors and teachers who have a desire to include as a part of their larger ministry of public instruction and encouragement, truth concerning mankind's responsibility before God toward his creation (a desire we would want to encourage in all pastors and teachers) but who to date have not had the opportunity adequately to study and process the potentially overwhelming amount of material dedicated to the subject. In short, this article gathers and begins to operationalize the foundational biblical thought necessary for a faithful Christian proclamation regarding the environment.

At this point it may be necessary to address a fundamental question. Why is it important to preach and teach this? Shouldn't we concentrate our limited time on the more pressing concerns of the gospel and Christian life? While the "environmental issue" is one of particularly poignant current concern about which Christians should be able to think and speak from within a Christian perspective, if for no other reason to engage in potentially productive discussion, if it is considered separately, as some interesting topic, it does pale in comparison to the importance of other Christian categories. It is only when it is seen as of a piece with our larger responsibility before God that it assumes the place of something worthy of our time and careful consideration. A piece of history from the environmentalism debate will be instructive for us here.

Soon after the emergence of "environmentalism" as a movement, accusations were leveled against Christianity, blaming it for the current ecological crisis.<sup>6</sup> As a Christian voice began to be raised on the issue of environmentalism, much time was spent refuting these accusations. It now appears that those accusations, at least in some scholarly quarters, are being retracted. However, at least some Christian writers were willing to own some blame. In response to the attempt by some Christian writers to place the blame at the feet of

<sup>4</sup>R. E. Grizzle, P. E. Rothrock, and C. B. Barrett, "Evangelicals and Environmentalism: Past, Present and Future," *Trinity Journal* 19NS (1998) 21-2.

<sup>5</sup>See, for another example, Van Dyke, et al., *Redeeming Creation*, 148, 175-6.

<sup>6</sup>Most notably, though by no means exclusively, by L. White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967) 1203-7. There is an almost obligatory reference to this article in virtually every Christian treatment of the issue.

irresponsible Christians in order to protect Christianity as a set of ideas, James Nash insisted,

It will not do to draw a neat distinction between Christianity and Christendom, between the faith itself and perversions of it by its practitioners. That distinction may be formally or logically true, as I agree, but it is facile and unconvincing when applied to history. We cannot so easily distinguish between the faith and the faithful.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Nash's warning, my attempt in what follows is to focus on "the faith" as set forth in the Scriptures, independent of its practice by Christians. By so doing I am seeking to contribute to a more faithful expression of true Christianity by those who call themselves Christian. The fact that many Christians have become captive to a world view that unduly elevates economic progress makes it absolutely necessary for Christian pastors and teachers to address the matter head-on-and for better or worse the issue of environmental stewardship is integrally involved in this clash of world views. Thus, preaching and teaching a Christian environmentalism can, in our day, play a significant role in facilitating the movement of people away from lives of self-interest and toward an earnest devotion to a Christian way of life, and must occupy a place in the total teaching of Christians to pursue and honor the accomplishment of the purposes of God in his earth. The mandate to care for the earth, a mandate fundamental to man's being and seminal in his relationship to God, has not been abrogated. Environmental stewardship is therefore a matter of both Christian obedience and Christian piety. And, it is our confidence that a clear and straightforward teaching is presented in Scripture upon which morally responsible teaching and action can be based.<sup>8</sup>

Before we look at the biblical passages chosen it may be helpful to speak a word regarding the selection process. There is an almost inexhaustible number of passages which might be treated in connection with a discussion of a Christian environmentalism. The Psalms alone are filled with references to God as Creator and in relationship to his creation. The Prophets contain repeated references to the network of issues related to justice and human greed, a major one being that of land use. Many biblical writers, in both Old Testament and New, speak with an eye toward a future in which the transformation of creation figures largely. However, within this abundance, a fairly well-defined canon of Scriptures emerges which

<sup>7</sup>J. Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 72.

<sup>8</sup>That H. P. Santmire does not share this optimism is suggested by the title of his book *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). See especially pp. 8-9. I am proceeding under the conviction that the Bible does provide clear instruction regarding our responsibility toward creation from which principles instructive for thought and life can be legitimately inferred.

provides, though in basic form, a complete theology of creation. While other passages will be referred to in the discussion, the four passages selected are sufficient to the task.

## II. THE FOUR BIBLICAL PASSAGES

### A. Psalm 104

One might expect an attempt to articulate a biblical Christian environmentalism to begin with Genesis 1 and its majestic statements of the foundational truth that God is the Creator. While that truth deserves pride of place, we will use Psalm 104 to highlight it. For in this psalm we find not only the assertion of the truth that God created the world but also the expression of corollary truths such that the psalm presents a more fully developed picture of the relationship that exists between God and creation. Thus it brings the reader to a more heightened awareness of the response appropriate to the foundational truth it declares.<sup>9</sup> It might even be argued that if one had to choose but one passage to support a Christian environmentalism it should be this psalm; and if one had to choose but one verse it would be Ps 104:24. "How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."

The contribution of Psalm 104 might be summarized as follows:

1. God created the earth and all things in it, and he continues to sustain the earth and all things in it by the loving exercise of his sovereign power.
2. The earth and all things in it belong to God by virtue of his creative work, and all things find their reason for being fundamentally in relation to him.
3. The earth and all things in it were created perfectly--each creature in itself and the entire creation in its interrelatedness.
4. Even after the entrance of sin into the created order this perfection still shines through so as to be perceivable by man. Thus, creation continually bears witness to the perfections of God and promotes in man praise toward God.

While the foundational truth of God's creative work operates as an underlying assumption throughout most of Psalm 104, there are a few places where the psalmist explicitly asserts it (e.g., vv. 5-6), and

<sup>9</sup>There is a fairly obvious structural parallel between Psalm 104 and the creation account in Genesis 1. This parallelism supports our decision, for it argues that Psalm 104 is a self-conscious attempt to interpret and flesh out the Genesis account. For an analysis of this parallel, see, for example, D. Kidner, *Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975) 368.

at a moment of culmination in the psalm he breaks out with the passionate declaration to God, "*Thou* hast made. . ." (v. 24). Clearly, the heavens and earth exist as a result of the exercise of God's sovereign creativity. The unique emphasis of this psalm, however, is on God's sustenance of his creation. "He makes springs pour water. . . He waters the mountains. . . He makes grass grow. . . The trees of the Lord are well watered" (vv. 10, 13, 14, 16). And after providing a representative cataloging of some animal denizens of forest, mountain, badlands, and sea, the psalmist summarizes, "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time" (v. 27). All creatures are completely dependent on God. When God provides, his creatures are satisfied (v. 28). When he "hides his face," they are terrified (v. 29). When God sends his "Spirit," there is new life (v. 30). When he takes breath away, life ceases (v. 29). Here is a significant extension of the Genesis account. Yes, creation exists only because it was called into existence by God. But it continues to exist only because of the continuous care of its Creator.

Second, growing out of this primary claim of the text is the implication of theocentricity in creation. By virtue of having been created by God, all creatures belong to him. They are, says our psalmist, "your possessions" (v. 24); "*his* works" (v. 31). "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Ps 24:1-2; emphasis added). But not only have all creatures been created *by* God, they have been created *for* God as well, and thus they find their primary reason for being with reference to him. This is a point of no small significance in the current discussion regarding environmentalism.

That God finds pleasure in his creation is a consistent testimony of Scripture. It is this that motivates the psalmist's desire, "May the Lord rejoice in his works" (v. 31). But can it be said that this pleasure of God in his non-human creatures is a sufficient explanation for their being? It is one thing to find pleasure in something that exists. It is another thing to say a thing exists for that reason.

There is no question that creation exists, at least in part, for the purpose of nourishing mankind. "He makes. . . plants for man to cultivate-bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart" (vv. 14-15). But does this reference to man exhaust the non-human creatures' reason for being? Or, to ask it positively, does non-human creation find any reason for being, independent of man? Psalm 104 suggests it does. Before we examine that suggestion, however, it will prove useful to consider the opposing position.

Representative of this position is Thomas Sieger Derr, who willingly describes himself as an "unreconstructed" anthropocentrist.<sup>10</sup> Derr is positioning himself vis-a-vis the

<sup>10</sup>T. S. Derr, J. A. Nash, and R. J. Neuhaus, *Environmental Ethics and Christian Humanism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 17.

biocentrism which dominates much of secular environmentalism and which holds "nature" or "the life process" as the primary value. Against this, Derr is reasserting the conviction that man is decidedly above nature and that nature exists to sustain human life.<sup>11</sup> As a "Christian" humanist Derr is quick to add that man is made for God but he is adamant ("unrepentant" he says) in his anthropocentrism. Man's needs are a sufficient explanation for the existence of non-human creation.<sup>12</sup>

While Derr, and others like him, are right in distancing themselves from the biocentrism of secular environmentalism for explicitly religious reasons, their mistake is in not distancing themselves far enough. Derr would no doubt affirm a theocentric world view, but within that world view, I would argue, there needs to be a theocentric view of non-human creation.<sup>13</sup> Nature certainly was made with man in mind but man's needs are an insufficient frame of reference entirely to explain creation.<sup>14</sup> Only God can supply such a frame of reference.

Our psalm, along with other passages (Job 38-41 in particular), speak to the fact that creation does not exist solely for the sake of man. In his speech to Job, God clearly implies that some creatures exist simply for his own delight.

Look at the behemoth,  
which I made along with you  
and which feeds on grass like an ox.  
What strength he has in his loins,  
what power in the muscles of his belly!  
His tail sways like a cedar;  
The sinews of his thighs are close-knit.  
His bones are tubes of bronze,  
His limbs like rods of iron.  
He ranks first among the works of God.  
(Job 40:15-19)

While God may not be chuckling gleefully as he provides this description, it is evident that he is taking great delight in a prize

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 23-8.

<sup>12</sup>A virtually identical stance is taken by E. C. Beisner in the article which appeared earlier in this series, "Imago Dei and the Population Debate," *Trinity Journal* 18NS (1997) 173- 97.

<sup>13</sup>Derr does acknowledge the possibility of some value in creation beyond human nourishment, but he is unwilling to speculate as to exactly what that value is, "not being privy to the mind of God" (*Environmental Ethics*, 140, cf., p. 23). I will argue that, because of the presence of certain passages in our Bibles, it is not necessary to speculate.

<sup>14</sup>One might be more attracted to this position if by "man's needs" was meant more than just food and shelter. Certainly man has a need to have his soul uplifted, and we know that God created the heavens and the earth in part to achieve that very purpose (see Psalms 8 and 19). However, even with this expanded definition of human need, it remains an inadequate frame of reference satisfactorily to explain the reason for creation's existence.

creation and is happy to point out "how utterly and awesomely useless (to us) are some of the creatures he has made."<sup>15</sup> After extending his point by means of a similar description of "leviathan" (41:1-10), God emphatically declares, "Who has a claim against me that I must pay? *Everything under heaven belongs to me*" (41:11; emphasis added). Against Job's presumption God is graciously offering the reminder that he does not owe man anything. While somewhat less dramatically, our psalm makes a similar point.

The trees of the Lord are well watered,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
There the birds make their nests;  
the stork has its home in the pine trees.  
The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
the crags are a refuge for the coney.  
You bring darkness, it becomes night,  
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.  
The lions roar for their prey  
and seek their food from God.  
The sun rises, and they steal away;  
they return and lie down in their dens.  
There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
teeming with creatures beyond number-  
living things both large and small.  
There the ships go to and fro,  
and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.  
(vv.16-18, 20-22, 25-26)

Here we are shown that it is not just man's needs, certainly not his physical ones, that explain God's manifold creation.<sup>16</sup> Apparently God has a vital interest in scurrying pikas, nesting storks, tiny marine creatures, and the prowling nocturnal animals of the deep forest and jungle. He has given them each appropriate shelter and he

<sup>15</sup>Yan Dyke, et al., *Redeeming Creation*, 49.

<sup>16</sup>Of particularly charming interest is this reference to a frolicking "leviathan" (probably in this case a cetacean). One might argue, especially upon observing the great benefits that several human cultures have derived through whaling, that the primary reason for the existence of whales is the provision of food for man. Certainly God has provided for man in this way. But what is this reference to frolicking? The word translated "frolic" speaks of laughter and merry-making-sporting whales of all things. Of what value is that to man, especially considering all the frolicking that goes on out at sea unobserved by human eyes? (That man in his ships has the occasional opportunity to observe such sporting is only another blessing of God.) It should also be remembered in this connection that having already brought the entire animal kingdom into being God then told Adam and Eve that every plant and fruit-bearing tree was theirs for food (Gen 1:29). That God made the same provision for the animals only highlights the fact that animals were not on the menu. Of what practical use to man were the wild animals during the period up to God's declaration to Noah that "now" meat was for eating too (Gen 9:3)?

satisfies their bellies with "good things" (v. 28). And all this interest is for the creatures' own sakes without reference to man's physical sustenance.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the psalmist makes a point of drawing a sharp line between the economy of these beasts and the economy of man. "The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away: they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening" (vv. 21-23; emphasis added). A life unrelated to the needs of man is forever going on. Therefore, any ardent anthropocentrism must be radically, perhaps categorically, qualified. Though man is undeniably the focus of God's creative and redemptive work there is an almost overwhelming fecundity to life that simply cannot be explained by reference to human nourishment and comfort. Again, only God can supply an adequate frame of reference. It is precisely this theocentrism that will rescue us from the greed or indifference that ; so easily invade an anthropocentric view. Keeping God at the center of the universe will help us to behave.

The third major contribution of Psalm 104 has to do with the perfection of God's creation. It is in v. 24 that this emerges most powerfully. "How many are your works, O Lord! *In wisdom* you made them all" (emphasis added). This reference to divine wisdom operating in the making of "all" of God's creatures speaks of the perfection inherent in each different species. Every animal and plant species that exists owns perfection as a result of the exercise of God's wisdom in creation. John Calvin wrote,

God has been pleased to manifest his perfections in the whole structure of the universe. . . . On each of his works his glory is engraven in characters so bright, so distinct, and so illustrious, that none, however dull and illiterate, can plead ignorance as their excuse.<sup>18</sup>

But the conceptual pressure from the larger message of the psalm tells us that not only was each individual species made perfectly but that God's wisdom is seen in the perfection of the way individual species relate to each other to form biotic communities occupying well-defined life zones.

<sup>17</sup>The beginnings of an argument for a Christian environmentalism are found here. Since God loves and cares about these creatures, and since being a Christian means embracing and reflecting God's values, then it follows that we too should care for these creatures. Nash puts it this way: "Ethically, since fidelity to God implies loyalty to divine valuations and affections, we are called to image the values of the ultimate Valuer--indeed, to mirror the love of Christ toward all God's beloved, not only humanity" (*Environmental Ethics*, 108). This should not be read to imply that we love non-human creatures equally with humans. Instead the quality and quantity of our love should "mirror" that of God's. This way, as Nash more succinctly puts it, "Respect for biotic interests. . . is theocentric respect for the biotic values of God" (p. 109).

<sup>18</sup>*Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; ed. J. T. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 1.4.2.

He makes springs pour water into the ravines;  
 it flows between the mountains.  
 They give water to all the beasts of the field;  
 the wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
 The birds of the air nest by the waters;  
 they sing among the branches.  
 The trees of the Lord are well watered,  
 the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
 There the birds make their nests;  
 the stork has its home in the pine trees.  
 (vv.10-12,16-17)

This careful ordering of ecosystems is, says the psalmist, a demonstration of divine genius.

Closely related to this third contribution, in fact flowing out of it, is the fourth, which speaks of the impact of the perfection of the creation upon man. By the time the psalmist took up his pen, sin had long since invaded Eden and left its mark upon creation. Of this the psalmist is not unaware. He speaks of prowling lions roaring for their hapless prey (v. 21). He knows that terror and death are common among man and beast (v. 29). He does not avert his eyes from the destruction of earthquake and volcano (v. 32). He openly acknowledges the existence of wicked men (v. 35). He sees that nature is, in fact, "red in tooth and claw." Nonetheless, he observes creation and cannot restrain his praise.

Praise the Lord, O my soul.  
 O Lord my God, you are very great;  
 you are clothed with splendor and majesty. (v. 1)

How many are your works, O Lord!  
 In wisdom you made them all. (v. 24)

May the glory of the Lord endure forever. (v. 31)  
 I will sing to the Lord all my life;

I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. (v. 33)  
 Praise the Lord, O my soul.  
 Praise the Lord. (v. 35)

Despite the intrusion of sin and its marring effects there remains a powerful and clearly visible witness in creation to, as the apostle Paul puts it, the "eternal power and divine nature" of God (Rom 1:19-20). The heavens still declare the "glory of God" and the skies still proclaim his "handiwork" (Ps 19:1). Particular characteristics of God are revealed in his works. The author of Psalm 104 could actually *see* evidence of God's wisdom and wealth. Therefore he is

drawn to praise God for these specific attributes. Herein we see the doxological value of creation.<sup>19</sup>

Psalm 104 presents more than just propositional truth. It models for us the response appropriate to our discovery of God's manifest presence in creation. As God's people are moved to cry "Glory!" when they observe the thunderstorm approach from over the Mediterranean (Ps 29:3-9); as Solomon is awestruck as he watches one of God's eagles soaring the thermals (Prov 30:18-19); so should we respond with appropriate humble praise when creation points us beyond itself to an all-wise almighty God.

There are clear environmental implications here. If "all" of God's works were made with wisdom, then each one has the ability to speak to man of that wisdom. Thus every loss of species is a diminution of man's opportunity to observe the perfection of God. In John's vision of the heavenly throne he hears the elders sing to the Lord, "You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, *for* you created all things" (Rev 4:11; emphasis added). Any destruction of creation removes from man a cause for giving honor to God. Every species, every ecosystem, reveals the wisdom of God and thus exerts a powerful doxological influence.<sup>20</sup> We must remember that God also told at least all the birds and all the marine creatures to "be fruitful and *increase* in number" (Gen 1:22; emphasis added). Thus we must find a way to co-exist with these creatures in a mutual fruitfulness, one which recognizes and honors the wisdom of the Lord and lets "all things, their creator bless."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup>John Calvin captures this so marvelously when he speaks of creation as "this most beautiful theatre" of God's works (*Institutes* 1.14.20).

<sup>20</sup>To this doxological influence might be added an evangelistic influence. Aldo Leopold, the beloved patron saint of the environmental movement, was not without religious leanings and a certain level of biblical literacy. In his journals he wrote, "What value has wildlife from the standpoint of morals and religion? I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were a hundred-odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow, and each performing yearly sundry thousands of miles of migration about which scientists wrote wisely but did not understand. No 'fortuitous concourse of elements' working blindly through any number of millions of years could quite account for why warblers are so beautiful. No mechanistic theory, even bolstered by mutations, has ever quite answered for the colors of the cerulean warbler, or the vespers of the wood thrush, or the swansong, or--goose music. I dare say this boy's convictions would be harder to shake than those of many inductive theologians. There are yet many boys to be born who, like Isaiah, 'may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this.' But where shall they see, and know, and consider? In museums?" (*Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold* [Minocqua, WI: Northword, 1991] 246).

<sup>21</sup>Derr's backhanded dismissal of efforts to protect endangered species by reference to two(!) cases of marginal relevance is both surprising and disturbing (*Environmental Ethics*, 72). That habitat depletion and fragmentation at the hands of human greed are endangering species is an incontestable fact. What is even more disturbing is this statement made in reference to environmental choices we face: "There is, moreover, very little of specifically or uniquely Christian content to such decisions" (p. 76). For that to be true the word "Christian" would have to have a very slim definition indeed.

*B. Genesis 1-2*

Given the fullness of Psalm 104 and its unique relationship with the opening chapters of Genesis, we will find, as we turn to those chapters, that much of their ground has already been covered. Thus we will treat a good part of the contribution of Genesis 1-2 in a more brief and summary form. There is one contribution of these chapters, however, which stands, in order of importance, second only to the statement that God is the creator of the universe. A primary concern of theology, much more, of a Christian environmentalism, must be that of determining mankind's proper place and role before God in the context of creation. It is in addressing this concern that Genesis 1-2 delivers its greatest value.

The contribution of Genesis 1-2 might be summarized as follows:

1. God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.
2. All that which God created he pronounced good, i.e., it existed exactly as he intended it.
3. Of all his creation God created only man in his own image, thus causing man to occupy a position distinct from and above the rest of creation.
4. God blessed both human and non-human creation by imbuing both with powers of procreation and encouraging both to exercise those powers liberally.
5. God gave to mankind the responsibility of mastery over non-human creation, and he commanded him to exercise that mastery toward the preservation of, and fuller realization of, creation's goodness.

With reference to the first of these truths, not much more can be said than what Gen 1:1 so starkly announces out of the silence: "In the beginning God created. . . ." As many have observed, the profundity of these first five words of Scripture is almost without comparison. Only the great biblical statements of God's redemptive act, as found in places like John 3:16 and Rom 5:8, match the magnitude of this opening claim of the Bible. The first two chapters of Genesis give us two well known accounts of the creation history, each with a measure of detail, but their first truth is that all creation came into being because God called it into being.

God's creative activity was not without intentional design. When the Genesis account so regularly communicates God's observation of the "goodness" of his work (vv. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), it is telling us that things have turned out exactly as God wanted them. This is not to suggest to the reader of the account that some other possibility existed, i.e., that God might have botched it. These references to creation's goodness are not primarily there as a commentary on the quality of God's creativity and power. These things are assumed.

The references are there simply to tell the reader, and rather emphatically, that the creation perfectly is what God intended it to be. Each thing stands in its proper relationship to God, and each thing glorifies God by being exactly what God intended it to be.<sup>22</sup>

What did God intend creation to be? While the answer which Genesis 1-2 supplies to this question does not account for the entirety of God's intention for creation, it does speak very concretely of a specific part of God's intention. Apart from its repeated use throughout Genesis 1, which we have already noted, and apart from its use in the designation "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," the word translated "good" appears only twice in its positive sense (cf. the "not good" of Gen 2:18) in Genesis 1-2, and these two occurrences tell us something about God's intention for creation by telling us something about how creation is "good."

"Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Gen 2:8, 9). Clearly the writer of Genesis wants us to understand that these trees God made to grow in Eden were designed with man in mind. He very intentionally made the fruit of those trees to be visually attractive to the human eye, tasty to the human palate, and nourishing for the human body. A few verses later we read that there is gold in the land of Havilah where the river Pishon flows and that "the gold of that land is good" (v. 12). Two other mineral substances are subsequently named, and each of these three substances has the distinction of being considered highly valuable by man. These things (and in particular the gold) are "good," the clear implication being that they are good by virtue of their usefulness to man.

By these two more casual references to the goodness of certain parts of creation the author of this account gives us some understanding of God's design for creation. God intended at least some parts of creation to be specifically for human nourishment and use and these parts are good in that they are what God intended them to be.<sup>23</sup>

The third significant contribution of Genesis 1-2 begins to move us in the direction of defining man's unique role in creation. While we will deal more fully with that specific role below it is necessary here to establish the distinctiveness of human creation. Robert Meyers, in his essay "Invitation to Wonder: Toward a Theology of Nature,"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>It is this that explains passages like Psalm 148, where all of creation, including "lightning and hail, snow and clouds, . . . mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, . . . young men and maidens, old men and children" (vv. 8-12), is seen as capable of praising God.

<sup>23</sup>About the intention of some other parts of creation and about the intention of creation as a whole we have already spoken under our treatment of Psalm 104.

<sup>24</sup>In Granberg-Michaelson, *Tending the Garden*, 30-49.

observes several details from the Genesis accounts which serve to highlight the uniqueness of man.

1. Creation on the sixth day, after all other creative work had been accomplished (Gen 1:31).
2. The unique language with which the divine decision to create [man] is announced. Instead of the impersonal imperative "Let there be," there is a divine statement in the first-person plural: "Let us make man in our image. . ." (Gen 1:26).
3. The creation of humankind in the image of God (Gen 1:27).
4. The special emphasis upon human creation as community: "Male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).
5. The unique manner in which humans, male and female, are formed—the former from the dust of the ground, with the breath of life breathed directly into his nostrils (Gen 2:7); the latter with a rib taken from the side of Adam (Gen 2:21-22).
6. The granting to humankind of dominion over all things including all animals, no matter how strong or grand they might be (Gen 1:28).
7. Humankind's being granted the responsibility of naming the animals, which are brought before Adam by God himself (Gen 2:19-20).
8. Above all else, God's direct relationship with and address to humankind as the unique crown of creation (Gen 1:28ff.; 2:16ff.).<sup>25</sup>

It is by virtue of this uniqueness and distinction, especially as represented in the *imago Dei*, that man finds himself "a little lower than God and crowned with glory and honor" with "all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea" put "under his feet" (Ps 8:5-8). To the implications of this position we will return momentarily.

But first a brief word about the fourth contribution of Genesis 1-2. It has already been observed that God's command to "be fruitful and increase in number" was spoken not just to man.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "*Be fruitful and increase in number*

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 28. This is not Meye's complete list.

*and fill the water in the seas and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning-the fifth day.*

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:20-25)

The persistently repeated reference to each "kind" of animal tells us that God's blessing and his earnest encouragement continually to produce offspring was addressed to individual species. The writer takes pains to let us know that God clearly had every "kind" in mind. God blessed, he states, "every winged bird according to its kind." Unless we want to accuse God of duplicity, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that it is possible for man to be fruitful and multiply and each animal species to be fruitful and multiply at the same time. One should not negate the other. On the contrary, part of man's responsibility is precisely to preserve the God-intended fullness of creation. Historically what has stood in the way of this preservation is man's wrongful exercise of his dominion, a subject to which our passage now bids us turn.

The discussion of man's role and responsibility toward creation grows out of two well-defined moments in the Genesis narrative.

Then God said, "Let" us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:26-28)

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)

It is clear from these passages, especially the first, that man has been given some form of supremacy over the rest of creation. What is in question is the nature and purpose of that supremacy. Proponents of some form of Christian environmentalism have rightly accused their detractors of focusing too exclusively on the "dominion" passages in Genesis 1 and failing to honor the contribution of Genesis 2. On the other hand, some Christian environmentalists have been guilty of a too quick conflation of these texts, such that "have dominion" has been made to equal "take care

of."<sup>26</sup> While certainly Gen 2:15 should inform our understanding of Gen 1:26-28, it needs to be noted that these two passages are not addressing the exact same point. Each needs to be understood on its own terms, and each needs to be given freedom to make its contribution to the larger issue of man's responsibility toward creation.

In their historical overview of the relationship between the Christian church and environmentalism, Grizzle, Rothrock, and Barrett list the "subjectionist perspective" as that which has defined the church's stance toward the environment for most of its history. They suggest that this position derives its primary inspiration from Gen 1:28, seeing it as "a call to bring the non-human environment into subjection for the purpose of facilitating human expansion."<sup>27</sup> While clearly the terms "rule" (*rada*) and "subdue" (*kabas*) speak of mastery, and clearly these words spoken to man make of man a creature of singular status commissioned to exercise a God-given authority, the subjectionist position is, just as clearly, a result of misinterpreting these words. The call to rule over and subdue creation simply cannot bear the meaning "strong, forceful subjugation,"<sup>28</sup> given the context in which these words are spoken. God told Adam and Eve to "fill the earth and subdue it" by which he meant that man should exercise his God-given authority (i.e., "rule") over the earth as he gradually came to occupy more and more of it. And certainly, especially after the Fall, some of this exercise of authority would have to find expression in "forceful subjugation," for after the curse the creation would possess a resistance to man's dominion.<sup>29</sup> But it is one thing to exercise physical and technological prowess over a garden or a cow or a grouse or a trout. It is something very different to "rule" in this way over all "the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Just how does one "forcefully subjugate" the great host of neo-tropical warblers?<sup>30</sup> How the Arctic Tern with its almost unbelievable pattern of migration? And why would one want to?

<sup>26</sup>While pointing out a case of the first error, S. Bouma-Prediger comes dangerously close to committing the second. See his, "Is Christianity Responsible for the Ecological Crisis?" *Christian Scholar's Review* 225 (1995) 149-50.

<sup>27</sup>"Evangelicals and Environmentalism," 6.

<sup>28</sup>This is Beisner's conclusion in "Imago Dei and the Population Debate," 184.

<sup>29</sup>I am somewhat surprised by Beisner's apparent assumption that even before the Fall, creation is "something whose spontaneous tendency is to resist dominion" (*ibid.*, 185). I believe Van Dyke is more accurate when he says, speaking of God's instruction to Adam to subdue the earth, "In a world without sin, we are not unkind to Adam to point out that this would have been neither a difficult nor an unpleasant task" (*Redeeming Creation*, 91).

<sup>30</sup>While at first this brings to mind an exercise in futility, it is becoming increasingly clear that man can, indirectly, exercise that kind of power. But it is necessarily destructive of the creatures in view, and the Bible defines that kind of dominion as sin.

Not all of creation was created with man's physical needs in mind, and so significant portions of creation will not require this kind of subjection. And, as we've already observed, God's aim in Job 40-41 is to point out precisely our inability in many cases to rule in this way. Yet God clearly tells Adam to "rule" over *all* the creatures. While that rule may, and does, include some exercise of physical and technological force, clearly it speaks of something larger than that. Those who equate "dominion" with "subjugation" have committed the logical error of mistaking a part for the whole.

What then is meant by God's instruction to man to "rule over" creation? Fundamentally it is an announcement of the conferral of authority. Man is to act as the head of the household and is responsible to see that the household runs well and that all members of the household continue to function according to their God-appointed roles. While the exercise of that authority does include the freedom to use creation appropriately to sustain and nourish human life, man must not so exercise his authority as to be harmful to God's intentions for all creation. In fact, he must sometimes exercise his authority to protect and preserve God's creatures from human subjugation. His job, in short, is to function as God's steward and as such to continue to keep what God has created in conformity with his purposes and will for that creation. It is not primarily for our own well-being that we rule over creation but for God.<sup>31</sup>

Theologian and OT scholar William Dyrness has provided helpful direction in our effort to define human dominion. First, he makes the observation that the commission of the man and the woman to have dominion over creation must be understood in the context of God's ordering of the world to be fertile and productive, and his encouragement to man to enjoy that particular goodness. Second, he explores the meaning of the command to "rule" by comparing it to the demands placed on Israelite kings. He writes:

Since the word ["rule"] is that generally used of the rule of a king, I believe the key is to be found in the unique conception of "rule" that is developed in the Old Testament and that is specifically applied to Israel's kings. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 points out that Israel's king is to rule as a brother over brothers and sisters, is not to accumulate large amounts of gold, . . . Here is an organic rather

<sup>31</sup>There is, as one might expect, a persistent anthropocentrism operating within the subjectionist position. Indeed, they are virtually synonymous. Hence, Derr, even though he is willing to use a term like "stewardship," defines it as "preserving this world as a habitat fit for humanity" (*Environmental Ethics*, 32). "The steward's task," says Derr, "is responsible development" (p. 22) and it is clear that by development he means that which better serves mankind. The line between appropriate use and exploitation is a hard one to fix and an even harder one upon which to find wide agreement. For this reason I have a deep reluctance to affirm the use of the word "development" in an attempt to define stewardship, especially given what the word connotes in our day and even more because of the damage done to the environment at the hands of human "development." Again, if we could factor human greed out of human development we would be on safer ground.

than strictly monarchical view of kingship and ruling, . . . The rule that men and women are to exercise over creation, then, is one of servanthood, as a brother or sister "rules" over others in the family.<sup>32</sup>

Then, bringing his two ideas together, he summarizes:

If my thesis--that human dominion is best seen in the ideal rule of Israel's king-is valid, then we should expect that the righteous rule of the king would issue in a productive and fruitful environment, both human and nonhuman. And in Psalm 72, the great hymn of praise for the righteous king, this is precisely what we find:

Endow the king with your justice, O God,  
the royal son with your righteousness.

He will judge your people in righteousness,  
your afflicted ones with justice.

The mountains will bring prosperity to the people,  
the hills the fruit of righteousness. . . .

Let grain abound throughout the land;  
on the tops of the hills may it sway.

Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon;  
let it thrive like the grass of the field.

(vv. 1-3,16)

This rule is both a reflection of God's own righteous rule and an expression of God's purposes for all who bear his image and exercise his dominion. . . . Clearly, goodness and fertility are assumed to be natural characteristics of the earth, and the man and the woman are merely to facilitate and enjoy this bounty.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar vein, essayist Wendell Berry has supplied a helpful categorization. He speaks of two possibilities in man, "exploitation" and "nurture." Because of the usefulness of these terms to our present discussion I will allow Berry to develop his idea completely.

Let me outline as briefly as I can what seem to me to be the characteristics of these opposite kinds of mind. I conceive a strip-miner to be a model exploiter, and as a model nurturer I take the old-fashioned idea or ideal of a farmer. The exploiter is a specialist, an expert; the nurturer is not. The standard of the exploiter is efficiency; the standard of the nurturer is care. The exploiter's goal is money, profit; the nurturer's goal is health--his land's health, his own, his family's, his community's, his country's. Whereas the exploiter asks of a piece of land only how much and how quickly it

<sup>32</sup>W. Dyrness, "Stewardship of the Earth in the Old Testament," in Granberg-Michaelson, *Tending the Garden*, 53.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 54. So tied is man's exercise of dominion to the preservation of creation-wide fertility that God set down laws by which his people were to maintain an ecological sensitivity in their cultivation of the earth. The instruction to give the land a Sabbath rest (Lev 25:1-5) is only the best known of these laws.

can be made to produce, the nurturer asks a question that is much more complex and difficult: What is its carrying capacity? (That is: How much can be taken from it without diminishing it? What can it produce dependably for an indefinite time?) The exploiter wishes to earn as much as possible by as little work as possible: the nurturer expects, certainly, to have a decent living from his work, but his characteristic wish is to work as well as possible. The competence of the exploiter is in organization; that of the nurturer is in order--a human order, that is, that accommodates itself both to other order and to mystery. The exploiter typically serves an institution or organization; the nurturer serves land, household, community, place. The exploiter thinks in terms of numbers, quantities, "hard facts"; the nurturer in terms of character, condition, quality, kind.<sup>34</sup>

Berry's comments serve as something of a parable for us. When God commanded man to "rule over" creation he commanded him to do so as a nurturer, not as an exploiter.

It is in the light of this understanding of Gen 1:26-28 that the more specific responsibility given to Adam as recorded in Gen 2:15 makes most sense. Adam is placed in the garden to serve (*'abad*) and preserve (*samar*) it. He is, in other words, to exercise his dominion over the garden by managing it so as to preserve it, to enable it continually to achieve those purposes God has for it. Thus his dominion is one of service, serving-cultivating and protecting--the creation and thereby serving the creation's owner.

### C. Gen 9:8-17

The contribution of Gen 9:8-17 is single and simple but essential to a Christian environmentalism.

God has established an everlasting covenant with all living creatures of every kind wherein he has promised never again to destroy them by the waters of a flood.

The covenant contained in Genesis 9 is usually understood as presenting a promise to Noah and his family and through them to all their descendants. In fact, theologians are wont to refer to this as the Noachian covenant. It would be more aptly designated as the Creation covenant, for in it God makes abundantly clear that his promise is for every living creature.

Perhaps the most striking formal feature of the covenant is the remarkable density of repetition. In the space of these ten verses there are eight occurrences of the word "covenant," three references to the "sign" of the rainbow, three repetitions of the promise to "never again destroy by flood." Propositionally speaking, the entire

<sup>34</sup>W. Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1977) 7.

passage could be reduced to the space of one verse without any loss of content. The actual length of the covenantal pronouncement is due to a prolixity of passionate emphasis, and the thing that is emphasized above everything else is that this covenant is made with "all life" (*kol basar*), with "every living creature" (*kol nepes hahayya*). Nine times God reiterates this point, and it is clear from the emphasis they receive and the positions these reiterations occupy that God wants the point to be clear.

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with *every living creature* that was with you--the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you--*every living creature* on the earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will *all life* be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and *every living creature* with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and *all living creatures of every kind*. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and *all living creatures of every kind* on the earth." So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and *all life* on the earth."

As Steven Bouma-Prediger observes, "This everlasting covenant, God's first and original covenant--before the covenants with Abraham or Moses or David--is with *all* creation."<sup>35</sup>

Clearly God is communicating through this covenant that all creation matters to him and that it is his determination to preserve it without diminution. And as the covenant speaks of God's solemn intention to preserve creation, it also begins to communicate, in an anticipatory way, his intention to redeem creation. Here someone may protest and accuse me of over-interpretation. After all, the covenant merely promises that there will never again be destruction by flood. Further extrapolation is unwarranted. But the covenant does speak beyond its own explicit promise. At minimum it says that God sees bird and beast as worthy of covenantal protection. He is not reluctant to group them with humans under one covenant. This itself speaks more broadly than the limits of the specific promise might at first suggest. But, more than that, it can be legitimately inferred that this covenant is representative of God's long-term intention ultimately and finally to redeem all of creation. This is an "everlasting covenant" (*berit 'olam*)-like the ones made with

<sup>35</sup>"Is Christianity Responsible for the Ecological Crisis?" 153.

Abraham and with Israel--a "covenant for all generations to come." It would seem strange for God to make such a covenant to preserve creatures from destruction by water and to express that covenant so poignantly, only to let them be destroyed by some other means. If it tells us anything, Gen 9:8-17 tells us that in God's covenantal economy, the destiny of every living creature is somehow linked with ours. It is precisely this point that the apostle Paul picks up in our final passage.

*D. Rom 8:18-23*

While it is in the climactic movement of the final chapters of Revelation that the hope of Christian environmentalism finds its most poetic and perhaps most eloquent expression, it is in Paul's letter to the Romans that the theological context for that hope is most clearly set forth. The primary contribution of Rom 8:18-23 can be summarized as follows:

1. Nonhuman creation was cursed by God as a consequence of man's sin. This curse has profoundly affected all of creation by keeping it from realizing God's original intention for it.
2. However, the condition in which creation presently exists is temporary, for at some point in the future, in connection with the glorification of the children of God, all of creation will be set free from the curse and the ongoing effects of man's sinfulness and will enjoy a glorious renewal of its ability to be as it was created to be.

The controlling reference point for Rom 8:18-23 is, without question, the fall of man into sin as recorded in Genesis 3. It is this that provides both the historical and theological context for our passage. When Paul tells us that "creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it" (v. 20), he is making a somewhat veiled but no less certain reference to God's chilling judgment on Adam recorded in Gen 3:17: "Cursed is the ground because of you." Though Paul simply refers to "the creation" in his first three references to it (vv. 19, 20, 21), in his fourth reference he speaks of "the whole creation" (v. 22) and by so doing communicates that no part of creation has been left unaffected by man's sin.<sup>36</sup>

Paul presents two specific consequences of this curse on creation. First, creation was "subjected to frustration" (v. 20). We have already

<sup>36</sup>By "creation" Paul refers to all of sub-human nature, both animate and inanimate. For an overview of the history of exegesis on this point and a defense of the conclusion here stated see C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975, 1978) 411-2.

observed that when God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in the earth he did so with specific intentions for his creation. In his cursing of creation God is purposefully frustrating his own intentions such that creation is kept from fulfilling the purpose of its existence. Creation therefore groans as a woman painfully and precariously halted in childbirth. But more than just being halted in the realization of the purpose of its existence, creation also finds itself falling apart in the meantime. It is in "bondage to decay" (v. 21), the very opposite of its original condition of fertility and good health. In short, creation was devastated by man's sin.

And as man continues to sin he continues to bring havoc on creation, both by his own direct action and by inviting the judgment of God. This is the consistent witness of the OT prophets.

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying." (Hos 4:1-3)

"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. (Zeph 1:2-3)

"My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good." I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. I looked and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. I looked and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger. (Jer 4:22-26)

Especially in this last passage, with its haunting references to the creation narratives of Genesis, we face the specter of the possible undoing of the physical world because of sin. The consistent testimony of Scripture is that creation suffers and is out of whack as a result of man's sinfulness.<sup>37</sup> It is in "eager anticipation" of its "liberation" from these consequences that creation presently "waits,"

<sup>37</sup>This fact forces us to a more nuanced understanding of human stewardship which: 1) takes into consideration the cursedness of creation; and 2) recognizes that the duty of preserving creation must be added the duty of restoring creation.

and it is to this future redemption of creation that Rom 8:18-23 speaks most eloquently.<sup>38</sup>

The images Paul uses to speak of this future redemption are powerfully emotive: the removal of an absolutely frustrating encumbrance, liberation from a killing servitude, the successful completion of a seemingly endless travail. But it is in his phrase "glorious freedom" (v. 21) that Paul strikes the most potent chord, for here he speaks of the return of creation to a state in which it can once again freely and perfectly fulfill God's purpose for it and by so doing participate in the general glory which will one day be revealed, not only in us, but as the controlling characteristic of Christ's eternal kingdom. Creation personified sees its destiny as inextricably linked with ours. On the day when we are revealed as sons of God (v. 19), and glory is revealed in us (v. 18), the day when our bodies are redeemed (v. 23), creation too will experience redemption at the hands of the one "by [whom] *all things* were created" and "through [whom] *all things*" will be reconciled to God (Col 1:16, 20).

### III. CONCLUSION

This article began with a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins which laments man's carelessness toward the earth. It ends with another Hopkins's poem which speaks, even in the face of the appropriate and serious concern enjoined by the first, an optimism which arises out of a God-centered confidence that creation will not be a casualty of human history but instead will be ultimately renewed under God's tender redemptive care.

#### GOD'S GRANDEUR

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
 It will flame out, like the shining from shook foil;  
 It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?  
 Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
 Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

<sup>38</sup>It is important to point out that Paul's primary focus in Rom 8:18-25 is on the coming glory of believers and the confident expectation they can have in that future hope. However, one simply cannot dismiss the concern with creation in this passage. There is a theological perspective which wants to do this. Representative of this perspective, which limits the history of redemption to the history of human redemption, is Derr, *Environmental Ethics*, 31-2. For a fuller representation and critique of this perspective see Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 3-7.

And for all this, nature is never spent:  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs--  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

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