

## Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology

# Creation care

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## Editorial

Dan Epp-Tiessen

**I**n the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
(Gen. 1:1)

Genesis 1, the hymn of creation that sets in motion the entire biblical story, may be one of the most neglected biblical texts in contemporary Christianity. Imagine that you have a close friend who is a gifted artist. This friend creates a painting that is a masterpiece in terms of its enormous variety of images, its vivid splashes of colour, its mind-boggling size, and the intricate inter-connectedness of its infinite number of features. The artist displays the stunning masterpiece publicly, so that all may be blessed by its beauty. But vandals begin to deface the canvas, using knives to hack, slash, and even obliterate many of the animals and plants so lovingly crafted by your friend. The vandals splash heavy black paint across the canvas, transforming magnificent landscapes into shadows of themselves. Sadly, people who claim to be close friends of the artist seem to be among the vandals.

What is the appropriate response to a magnificent work of art, especially one created by a friend? Is it not respect, protective care, reverence, and praise for both the artwork and its creator? Christians have reason to be absolutely passionate about creation care. We worship and claim to be best friends with the master artist who has created this amazing world in which we are privileged to live. We literally live within God's great work of art. Who should be more conscious and protective of its beauty than a people whose scripture begins with the story of the artist at work creating the earth, its marvellous plants and animals, and then its crown jewel—humankind?

Many of the creation myths told by ancient Israel's neighbours depicted the world as the accidental by-product of a cosmic struggle among the gods. When one particularly powerful deity

defeated his archenemy and killed her, as an afterthought he created the world out of her dead body. Genesis 1 tells a profoundly different story. God speaks the world into being in an orderly and purposeful manner, pausing along the way to observe and evaluate his work and declare, “It was good.” At the end of six days, when creation is complete, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (1:31).

**Christians have reason to be passionate about creation care. We worship and claim to be friends with the master artist who has created this amazing world.**

One could make a case that Genesis 1 is the most foundational text of the Bible. Some may claim that God’s salvation is more foundational than God’s creation. But without creation, there is nothing to save. As Creator, God cares so deeply about creation that when sin enters the picture and begins its destructive work, God initiates the grand

project of salvation. God works to save both humanity, which has become alienated from its maker, and creation itself, which “has been groaning in labour pains until now” (Rom. 8:22).

This issue of *Vision* represents a summons to embrace Genesis 1 and its implications. The bookends of this issue, the opening sermon by Henry Janzen and the closing reflections on a spirituality of creation care by Susan Classen, invite attentiveness to the majesty and mystery of creation, suggesting that such attentiveness will lead to greater amazement and delight, which in turn will generate praise and deeper gratitude for God’s infinitely precious gift of creation. Jürgen Schönwetter makes similar points by describing how his love of plants, of gardening, and of eating the fruits of the soil inspire praise of the Creator and awareness of human dependence on the grace of God. Implicit in these pieces and others is the insight that creation care best begins not with guilt at how humankind is destroying creation (although such guilt may have its place), but with delight, amazement, reverence, gratitude, and praise, all inspired by attentiveness to the wondrous nature of God’s handiwork.

Steven Bouma-Prediger’s article surveys the biblical story from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, in order to demonstrate how determined God is to preserve and redeem the natural world so carefully created in Genesis 1. Ultimately salvation is not about

Christians being whisked out of this broken and sinful world to heaven but about God healing and renewing this broken and sinful world. Wilma Bailey's reflections on Genesis 1 focus on the role humans are called to play in relation to the other elements of God's creation.

Immediately following the Genesis creation story stands the account of human rebellion in the garden and the unleashing of sin into a good creation. In the Bible, human sin and the welfare of creation are intimately linked, as illustrated by the flood story and the prophets' insistence that human sin sets in motion a chain of events that includes devastation of the natural order. Joanne Moyer's insightful article highlights some of the contemporary ways human sin manifests itself in Western attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, and practices that facilitate the desecration of God's creation. The reflections of Aboriginal pastor Adrian Jacobs remind us that other cultures have understandings of creation that differ markedly from those typical of the West, and that the Western worldview is not necessarily a true reflection of God's reality.

If God is at work to redeem creation, then surely the people of God ought to live in ways that participate in God's redemptive work. Ray Vander Zaag analyzes the relationship between peace-building and creation care. He concludes that engaging in a broad spectrum of justice- and peace-building efforts (pursuing the biblical vision of *shalom*) is one of the most significant forms of creation care, because the natural world is often a major casualty when there is conflict, injustice, and unequal appropriation of resources. Cathleen Hockman-Wert reminds us that food is one of God's most wonderful gifts. Foods come with histories or stories that we become a part of as we eat those foods. Thus, eating provides an opportunity to participate in the story of creation's destruction, or to participate in the story of God's redeeming of creation.

In one way or another, all the articles in the issue remind us that

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Gen. 1:31)*

# The heavens declare ...

## A sermon on Psalm 19:1–6

H. Henry Janzen

**D**o you ever look up in the black of night and ponder the staggering immensity of the starry expanses? Imagine this: Suppose our colossal sun were shrunk to golf-ball size. On that scale, our homey planet is a mere grain of sand, five meters away. And the nearest star would be some 1,200 kilometers away.<sup>1</sup> And that star is right next door, just four light years away. Most stars are hundreds, thousands—even billions—of light years distant. And they are numberless. The Hubble Space Telescope recently looked deep into space, at a tiny patch of sky covered by a pinhead at arm's length. In that miniscule patch of sky were thousands of galaxies, each with billions of stars.<sup>2</sup>

I contemplate such vastness, and my feeble mind first stutters and flutters, then collapses into a quivering mush. And when it

**When last did you watch as a newborn's hand curled gently around your finger, and wonder how that perfect supple softness came to be? All around us every day are ordinary things, which, if they appeared to us only once, would dazzle us.**

reboots, from deep come the questions: What is behind all this? *Who* is behind all this?

Long ago, a poet peered up at these heavens. He saw the same stars, posed the same questions, then said: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1).<sup>3</sup> Today, not everyone agrees, it seems. Stephen Hawking, the famous physicist, said: "We are such insignificant creatures on a minor planet of a very average star in the outer suburbs of one of a hundred thousand million galaxies. So it is difficult to believe in a God that would care about us or even notice our existence."<sup>4</sup>

Biologist Jacques Monod offers this dismal outlook: "The ancient covenant is in pieces; man knows at last that he is alone in the universe's unfeeling immensity, out of which he emerged only by chance."<sup>5</sup>

When you survey the heavens, maybe tonight, what do they tell you? And when you clasp a fragrant blossom, tenderly hued beyond any painter's reach; when you hear the wistful cooing of a mourning dove somewhere in the pines; or when in winter you behold your brittle, frozen apple tree, knowing soon it will leap ecstatically to life—what do these declare to you?

These are questions I keep mulling over. Maybe you do, too. I have few final answers—my faith's still too frail, my sight still too dim—but maybe we can reflect on these questions together. And while you ponder, I'll offer, as background verbiage, some musings from my own wrestling with these questions.

### **See the wonder. Feel the awe.**

What do the heavens declare? To answer, maybe first we need to see—really see—them, with eyes alight and hearts alive with wonder. The simplest things, if we but look, have elegance and harmony that take the breath away.

Take, for example, your crusty breakfast toast. Not long ago, its carbon was wafting about in summer breeze as CO<sub>2</sub>, until some leaf of wheat, by light of the sun, snatched it down, trapping it in starch. Soon, now, it will burn in your cells, maybe to fuel this very moment's thought, and then your lungs will set it free again. Once loose, the CO<sub>2</sub> may blow across lands, across oceans, maybe to enter a tropical palm, resting there until the wood decays, then to fly again, ending up perhaps in oriental rice, from which some smiling child will subtly breathe it out again.

**The carbon atoms flit and twirl around the globe in endless dance to the rhythm of the sun. How can you not be amazed at your morning toast, so seamlessly tied to the cadence of life all around?**

And so the carbon atoms flit and twirl around the globe in endless dance to the rhythm of the sun. How can you not be amazed at your morning toast, so seamlessly tied to the cadence of life all around?

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins. Do you see it? Do you stop to look, to admire its poetry, to feel its pulse and rhythm? When last did you gaze at a star and exult in its light, knowing you're looking way back in time, perhaps to Menno Simons' day, when the light left that star? When last did you take a bean, dry and dead, plop it in

a pot, and shout in amazement when from its buried husk sprouted a turgid, arching green? And when last did you watch, enthralled, as a newborn's delicate hand curled gently around your finger, and wonder how that perfect supple softness came to be?

Paraphrasing John Donne: All around us every day are ordinary things, which, if they appeared to us only once, would dazzle us, igniting awe and exultation.<sup>6</sup> One biologist, writing about a human cell, said: "People ought to be walking around all day, all through their waking hours, calling to each other in endless wonderment, talking of nothing except that cell."<sup>7</sup>

What has happened to us, that we can shuffle listlessly through the maze of marvels erupting all about us? Where are the poets, the sages, the psalmists to enflame again our wonder? In the flurry of miracles springing, swirling, splashing all around us, how can we sit sullen, even in our churches, dully debating only doctrines and dogmas? Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes:

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God:  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.<sup>8</sup>*

Only those who *see* take off their shoes, she says. What do the heavens declare? To know, first we need to see the wonder and shrink in humble awe.

### **Listen for the voice of a Creator.**

And then we need to listen for the One *behind* the wonder. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is waiting for God to pass by. "Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:11–12).

God is not in the mighty marvels of nature, not in the flaming stars or pastel apple blossom. But when we wait in silent solitary wonder, there sometimes comes to us a gentle whisper.

Some scientists may say: "Give up on a personal God; if there at all, God is some cold, uncaring, mechanical force."<sup>9</sup> *That* I am



not ready to accept; I long not just for a Creator but also for a Redeemer. Most of us do, I think, at least in humble moments.

Chet Raymo, a physicist, tells how his childhood faith, once vibrant, has slowly slipped away. And now, it seems, he mourns its loss. He likens faith to a plover, a stealthy, secret bird, rarely seen, that hides on lonely hillsides, occasionally singing a soft, sighing song faintly in the distance. "I don't know what happened to my plover, but it has certainly flown the coop.... I can't say exactly when it was that the God of my youth took to the upland rains.... One day I woke up and the plover was gone ... and something deep inside me knows that it is gone forever. In the dark hours of the night, in starlight, I listen for the scrawny cry. Is it the wind or the plover there on the hill behind the house?"<sup>10</sup>

We all, I think, yearn for the whisper of a Creator, and more, a Redeemer. "O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer," says the psalmist (Ps. 19:14). I won't say that creation always trumpets God's presence; I won't contend that the wonders we see are proof irrefutable of a God who loves us. For often God is heard in the quietest whisper. "God is polite, knocking only gently," says one physicist, "We have to listen carefully if we are to hear the report."<sup>11</sup>

**Can I be honest? I don't always detect the Creator-Redeemer in starry night; I don't always discern God's voice. And when I do, it may be like faint stirrings of wind in the poplars at night.**

And so we watch and we listen, awaiting a voice from the stillness, awaiting the warmth of a breath in the quiet cool. And how better

to listen than in worshipful hush under starlit sky, or in bewildering prayer over sprouted bean, or in the thrall of an unseen meadowlark's evocative trill. And when the whisper is heard, only one response seems right: to worship. Some forty years ago, Buzz Aldrin stood on the moon. And there, in solemn wonder, he did something not told us then: he celebrated communion.<sup>12</sup> He worshiped.

Can I be honest? I don't always detect the Creator-Redeemer in a starry night; I don't always discern God's voice. And when I do, it may be like faint stirrings of wind in the poplars at night. Was that his voice? Or like the sudden scent of spring-to-be in a January breeze. Was that his breath? But I keep looking, listening, straining to know the one behind the wonder. And when God

seems near, I am ready, even before I am sure, to bow in awe and humbly to worship.

### **Choose to participate. Choose to believe.**

To know what the heavens declare, first, maybe, we must see the wonder—and then listen for a Redeemer behind the wonder. And third, if we dare, we choose to believe, even *before* the heavens loudly declare.

**Believing is behaving as if it were so. Do I believe there's a Redeemer who longs to enfold me and embrace all creation in eternal harmony? Then I will let that hope imbue my every word, my every touch, and even my sorrow when I fail.**

Alan Sandage, an astronomer, spent decades peering into the heavens, searching its radiant expanses. He too was perplexed by its origins. “I never found the answer in science,” he said. “To stop the divine discomfort, I had to do something... [I] decided to believe.”<sup>13</sup>

That is my response, too. I admit that sometimes, alone beneath the starry, far-flung vastness, I whisper with the psalmist: What am I that you should be mindful of me? (Ps. 8:4). Sometimes to my clouded thoughts

comes by stealth the question: Is faith just an illusion, prompted by my yearnings? Sometimes, even, I clamber up behind a pulpit and I quaver: How certain *am* I of what I now will say? But yet I choose to believe.

Faith is a little like science. The scientist, in probing a question, posits a reasonable answer—a hypothesis—and then scampers to the lab to test it. So it is with faith, except now the laboratory is not some cluttered bench with bubbling tubes and tangled wires. Now the lab is all of life, each moment an experiment. Each joy, each hurt, each jolt of wonderment is data jotted into memories.

Believing is just behaving as if it were so. Do I believe God created heaven and earth? Then I will live assuming it so, caring for what God makes and then pronounces good. Do I believe this life here is not yet the end? Then I will seek to follow more timeless, undying dreams. Do I believe there's a Redeemer who longs to enfold me and embrace all creation in eternal harmony? Then I will let that hope imbue and soften my every word, my every touch, and even my sorrow when so often I fail.

Francis Collins is a geneticist, leader of the Human Genome Project. In his biography, *The Language of God*, he argues persuasively for belief, but what moves him most, it seems, is not mere logic, but the adventure of faith applied. Collins once interrupted his high-flying science to volunteer as doctor in a backwater African clinic. There, despondent, feeling futile in the overwhelming hurt, his hope was revived by a humble farmer, gravely ill. Said the farmer: “I get the sense you are wondering why you came here. I have an answer for you. You came here for one reason. You came here for me.”<sup>14</sup>

Believing is just behaving as if it were true. How can I know a Creator, if I have no part in his creating? Or a Redeemer, if I have no part in his redeeming? Believing is committing, casting our

**I look at the piece of creation most unfinished of all: I look at us—fractious, feeble, flawed—and yet, somehow, from this frailty come flashes of goodness deeper than us: an outstretched hand, a forgiving smile, an unmerited mercy.**

pitiful little into the growing wonder unfolding about us. And in this active believing, this experimenting, we will see, soon enough, what the heavens declare.

And the evidence, for me, is so enticing, so reassuring. I traipse through a garden in spring, smell its earth, see it bounding to life, and I detect a Creator’s lingering fragrance. I watch the rhythms of nature—renewing, reviving, re-growing, restoring—and I sense a divine loving hand, intent on redeeming. But most convincing: I look at the piece of creation still most unfinished, most vexing, most bewildering of all: I look at us. I look at

us—fractious, feeble, flawed—and yet, somehow, from this frailty come flashes of goodness deeper than us: a soothing word, an outstretched hand, a forgiving smile, an encouraging nudge, an unmerited mercy. Here now, here among us are wonders, miracles divine, more splendid even than the spiralling galaxies.

I see these glimpses of a Redeemer’s miraculous touch, and hope surging again, I keep on believing. I keep on searching, trying to follow, looking for more marvels and wonders to come.

### **Closing thoughts**

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis tells of a frozen land locked in perpetual winter by a tyrant witch. But as

the children who stumble into this place wander about, one day the ice begins to crack, flashes of green begin to show, a flower pops through here and there. And the children know that Aslan, the Lion Saviour, has come to Narnia and is roaming about.

That also is my sense as I look about creation. Some days this remote little corner of the universe seems a dismal and pitiful place. When bombs erupt and orphans weep and soot obscures the sky, I cringe and cower in despair. But yet I sense something's happening here on this "minor planet of a very average star." Someone, it seems, is roaming about, lifting, restoring, creating, calling—breathing warmth. And isn't it just like him to build something momentous and vast from dust in forgotten corner? Isn't it like him to redeem an extravagant universe, starting with mere insignificants like you and me?

Not long ago, I wandered out into the darkness. The night was cold, the fields barren and bleak. I looked up at the heavens—vast and black, save for the myriad scattered glimmers of light from a thousand glittering suns, so very far away. I felt melancholy, small, alone. And then ... Did I hear, from the silent glimmering heavens, a whisper, eternally old, declaring the glory of God? And did I bow down, in awe, and murmur my thanks?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Similar calculations can be found in various sources, including Werner Gitt, "Incomprehensible Magnitude, Unimaginable Distance," in *The Book of the Cosmos: Imagining the Universe from Heraclitus to Hawking*, ed. Dennis Richard Danielson (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub., 2000), 418–22.

<sup>2</sup> Photo and similar explanation appears in many sources; including [http://www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/starsgalaxies/hubble\\_UDF.htm](http://www.nasa.gov/vision/universe/starsgalaxies/hubble_UDF.htm); Terence Dickerson, *The Universe and Beyond*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Buffalo: Firefly Books, Ltd., 2004), 133.

<sup>3</sup> Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Michael White and John R. Gribbon, *Stephen Hawking: A Life in Science* (London: Viking, 1992), 166. White and Gribbon also note, however, that "Hawking ... is not an atheist; he simply finds the idea of faith something he cannot absorb into his view of the Universe."

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 250.

<sup>6</sup> "There is nothing that God hath established in a constant course of nature, and which therefore is done everyday, but would seem a miracle, and exercise our admiration, if it were done but once." From John Donne, "Sermon XX. Preached at St. Paul's upon Easter Day, 1627," *The Works of John Donne: With a Memoir of His Life by Henry Alford* (London: Parker, 1839), 390.

<sup>7</sup> Lewis Thomas, *The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 156.

<sup>8</sup> From Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, Seventh Book (London: J. Miller, 1864). See <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barrett/aurora/aurora-7.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Albert Einstein, "Religion and Science," *New York Times Magazine*, November 9, 1930, 1–4; see <http://www.sacred-texts.com/aor/einstein/einsci.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Chet Raymo, *The Soul of the Night: An Astronomical Pilgrimage* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985), 55–57.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald L. Schroeder, *The Hidden Face of God: How Science Reveals the Ultimate Truth* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 28.

<sup>12</sup> See Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 160; see also [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buzz\\_Aldrin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buzz_Aldrin).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, "Scientists and Religion in America," *Scientific American*, September 1999, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Collins, *The Language of God*, 217.

### **About the author**

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## For this world A prayer

Walter Rauschenbusch

**O** God, we thank thee for this universe, our great home;  
for its vastness and its riches,  
and for the manifoldness of the life which teems upon it  
and of which we are part.

We praise thee for the arching sky and the blessed winds,  
for the driving clouds and the constellations on high.

We praise thee for the salt sea and the running water,  
for the everlasting hills, for the trees,  
and for the grass under our feet.

We thank thee for our senses  
by which we can see the splendor of the morning,  
and hear the jubilant songs of love,  
and smell the breath of the springtime.

Grant us, we pray thee,  
a heart wide open to all this joy and beauty,  
and save our souls from being so steeped in care  
or so darkened by passion  
that we pass heedless and unseeing  
when even the thornbush by the wayside  
is aflame with the glory of God.

Amen.

Excerpted from "For this world," in Walter Rauschenbusch, *Prayers for the Social Awakening* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1910), 47.

# Creation care and salvation

Steven Bouma-Prediger

**R**ivers and trees. Rivers and trees. The Bible begins and ends with rivers and trees. Our holy scriptures are filled with ecological wisdom, if only we have the eyes to see. Creation care and salvation are very much interconnected. What follows is a short list of texts, with brief commentary, that illustrate this important connection.

## All creatures great and small (Gen. 1:9–21)

The ocean wind smelled of salt and just about blew my hat off. Our eyes were keenly focused on the water. Then we spied them—a pod of pilot whales swimming, so effortlessly, a mere twenty yards off the starboard bow. Beautiful creatures they were—graceful, playful, winsome.

**Salvation includes all manner of things earthy and earthly. The redemption of all things broken and bent. Salvation, Isaiah and Jesus remind us, is not about our souls going to heaven but about God's shalom coming to us here on earth.**

I plopped down in the canoe and rinsed my muddy feet with lake water. Most of the mud from the mucky portage trail came off, but one patch between my toes did not. Slowly I realized that the “mud” was a rather large leech. With some force I gently pulled the creature from my toes and placed it on my canoe paddle for all to see.

All creatures great and small, God creates them all. So scripture teaches. The pilot whales and the leeches, the monsters of the deep and the minnows of the shallows. The sparrows and the swallows, the warblers and waxwings and woodpeckers. God sees them and says they're good. And so should we.

## God's blanket of blessing (Gen. 1:22)

We are familiar with the text that speaks of God blessing humans and calling them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), but we

often forget that God also blesses our nonhuman neighbors—in the case of Genesis 1:22, the aquatic and avian creatures. On the second day of the Genesis 1 creation story, God creates habitats for water and air creatures, and on the fifth day God creates inhabitants to dwell in those habitats. And God spreads his blanket of blessing on these creatures—shrimp and suckers, kites and kingfishers—and commands that they be fruitful.

We humans are not the only creatures that God wishes to multiply and fill the earth. The earth is home not just for us; it's also home for sea creatures and land animals, creeping things down low and winged birds on high. We must share our home planet with these nonhuman neighbors.

### **The goodness of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:28–31)**

God saw the humans whom he had made, and declared that they were very good. Right? True enough, but it wasn't only humans. Genesis 1:28–31 is quite clear. God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good.

Here in the first chapter of the Bible we read that the work of God's hands is good. Indeed, it is very good—a ringing judgment that suggests beauty and peace, as well as what we think of as goodness. And this affirmation includes everything. Marmots and muskrats and mountain lions. Goldfinches and barred owls and chickadees. Butterflies and cicadas and burying beetles. All these and so many more are included within God's "very good." Creation includes all things, and so, we shall see, does salvation.

### **To serve and protect (Gen. 2:15)**

Chicago police cars carry the slogan "We serve and protect." According to Genesis 2:15, God took the human earth-creature and placed us in the garden to '*abad* ("serve") and *shamar* ("protect") it. That's our job: to serve and protect the garden that is the earth. Our calling is to be creation's cops, serving and protecting this place so that it and we may flourish. Our God-given vocation is to bring about shalom on this our earthly home—to foster the flourishing of all things. Made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–28) and from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:5–7), we earth creatures are called to represent God and rule as God does, with justice and righteousness. To serve and protect.



### **Covenant with creation (Gen. 8:1–9:17)**

In Genesis 8:1–9:17 it is clear that God remembers Noah and his human kinfolk. But God also remembers the animals—wild and domestic—with Noah in that floating species preserve of an ark. God’s remembrance includes more than humans. We should not be surprised, since Genesis 6:18–22 tells us that God commanded Noah to take two of every species of every living thing into the ark, male and female, with adequate food not only for the human but also for the nonhuman passengers. The Bible tells us again and again that God remembers. Because of God’s steadfast love, God’s

**The bow in the clouds is a sign of the covenant between God and the earth. Yes, that’s right. Eight times in ten verses, scripture tells us that God’s covenant is with more than humans; it is with the earth itself.**

memory is long and sure and true. God remembers us and all our nonhuman kin.

Furthermore, we are told that the bow in the clouds is a sign of the covenant between God and the earth. Yes, that’s right, God and the earth. Like a steady drumbeat, eight times in ten verses (9:8–17), scripture tells us that God’s covenant is with more than humans; indeed, it is with the earth itself. We tend to think that God is interested only in us humans. But the Bible tells us otherwise. And while we take comfort in seeing the rainbow, the passage tells us that it serves as a reminder

primarily to God. As Frederick Buechner puts it, the rainbow is like a string tied around God’s pinky, lest God forget his everlasting covenant. God sees the rainbow and remembers his covenant with creation.

### **Living sustainably (Deut. 22:1–7)**

Deuteronomy 22:1–7, a text tucked into an obscure part of the case-law of the Torah, illustrates a principle for living wisely and well. If hungry, you may take the young or the eggs from a bird’s nest, but leave the mother. In other words, you may take the fruit, but leave the fruitfulness. Live sustainably.

Currently we are not living in sustainable ways in the world. Our present way of life in North America is like taking the mother along with the fledglings and the eggs. If everyone on the earth lived like us, we would need three planets. We have only one. So this pattern of overconsumption cannot last. It will not

last. What would it look like to take this text seriously? How could we live more in step with God's plan for living well?

### **All creatures praise the Lord (Psalm 148)**

Can sea monsters and cedars, snakes and sandpipers give praise to God? Can trees and rivers clap their hands in praise to God? Is

**This joyous psalm is an invitation calling on all creatures—in heaven and on earth—to offer praise to God the Creator and Redeemer. Angels and shining stars. Mountains and fruit trees.**

this talk in Psalm 148 about nonhuman creatures praising God just a figure of speech? Perhaps the psalmist just got carried away.

This joyous psalm is an invitation calling on all creatures—in heaven and on earth—to offer praise to God the Creator and Redeemer. Angels and shining stars. Mountains and fruit trees. Humans young and old, women and men, royalty and paupers. All creatures are called on to sing praise to God. This creational doxology is not commanded.

Praise is simply fitting for creatures who are given life and redeemed by a loving God. So, says the psalmist, let's sing. Each of us in our own creaturely way, let's join in the hymn of praise.

### **God's good future (Isa. 65:17–25)**

The daily newspapers give sad testimony to the onslaught of distress we bear: war, famine, poverty, hunger, homelessness. We yearn for a time when things will be radically different, when life will be good and right and whole. In Isaiah 65:17–25, the prophet too yearns for that bright future, when delight abounds and the sounds of weeping will be heard no more. A time when infants grow to old age and the aged grow old with grace. When those who build houses inhabit them and those who plant vineyards eat their fruit. We long, in short, for shalom—the flourishing of all things, the coming together of God and us and our nonhuman neighbors in a rich tapestry of delight, a world no longer bent or broken or out of kilter.

We Christians proclaim that in Jesus this good future has broken into the not-so-good present. And we acknowledge that we are called to follow this Jesus—who made this good future real in his life, who brought heaven to earth. This salvation, as Isaiah

describes, includes all manner of things earthy and earthly. The redemption of all things broken and bent. Salvation, Isaiah and Jesus remind us, is not about our souls going to heaven but about God's shalom coming to us here on earth.

### **On earth (Matt. 6:9–13)**

In the doxology we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him all creatures here below." In the Apostles Creed we pledge allegiance to God the maker of heaven and earth. In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." Our faith is earthy and earthly. God's will be done here on earth—in our homes, schools, workplaces. Today, right now, at this time, may God's will be done. We pray and work for that day when shalom will be fully realized in this present world.

Christian faith is not about going to heaven but about heaven coming to earth. It is about God's will fully realized—that's what heaven is—here on earth. May it be so.

**Tutored by the earthly vision of the Old Testament, we should want to be left behind—for when Jesus returns, the earth will not be obliterated but transformed into the place God intended.**

### **Left behind (Matt. 24:36–42)**

The Left Behind novels are wildly popular. As a result many Christians fear being "left behind," for they equate that fate with suffering and damnation.

The biblical view of the future is quite different. "For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man," Jesus says in Matthew 24:37. Before the flood "they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," and "they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away." So it will be, by analogy, when the Son of Man comes. Two will be in a field; one will be taken, one will be left. Two will be grinding grain; one will be taken, one will be left. In other words, those who are taken away go to their death.

Contrary to what many believe, those who are left behind are saved from destruction. God's good future is not about being raptured off the planet. Just as we should expect, tutored by the earthly vision of the Old Testament, we should want to be left behind—for when Jesus returns, the earth will not be obliterated

but transformed into the place God intended. Left behind—that is where we want to be.

### **Creation groaning and waiting (Rom. 8:18–25)**

Creation is groaning, says Paul in Romans 8:22, like a laboring mother giving birth. Creation has been subjected to futility not of its own will but because of human sin. So the world God made is not able to achieve its potential. The goals for creation remain unrealized. But creation also waits with eager longing, like a child on tiptoe peeking through the keyhole to see what lies under the Christmas tree. Eagerly creation waits with bated breath for us to get our image-bearing act together and be who God calls us to be—divine image-bearers who serve and protect creation.

Though by the fall we became alienated from the natural world, in redemption our relationship with the earth is being restored. As the old Christmas hymn puts it, redemption extends “far as the curse is found.”

### **Cosmic reconciliation (Col. 1:15–20)**

Colossians 1:15–20 tells us that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves; God brings about reconciliation. In Christ God reconciles all things to himself. So redemption does not mean the annihilation of creation but its renewal. Salvation is not escape from the earth but its reclamation.

But this peacemaking reconciliation is bloody. It costs the Messiah his life, on a torturous cross. Only in this way—by non-violently taking on the taint of sin and absorbing the power of evil—could relationships be restored: with God, with other people, with our true best selves, and with the earth. Cosmic reconciliation. The restoration of creation. All things renewed.

### **Meeting the King (1 Thess. 4:13–18)**

The wedding guests rushed out to meet the bridegroom, to join his bridal party as he entered the wedding hall (Matt. 25:6). The Christians in Rome journeyed forty-three miles to meet Paul and become part of his entourage as he entered the capital city (Acts 28:15). Like Matthew 25:6 and Acts 28:15, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 is about going “to meet” (the same word in Greek in all three texts) a visiting dignitary, in order to escort him back to

where the greeters came from. This passage does not describe “the rapture”—believers being whisked off the earth. It describes just the opposite: the celebratory parade to earth of Christ the King and his followers. This text proclaims the joyous coming of Christ the King to the earth and the ecstatic response of his followers.

Christ is coming. And those believers who are alive will be caught up, with the dead, to meet Christ in the air, so they all might be part of Christ’s glorious parade back to earth. Paul’s picture here is not about escaping from the earth. It is about greeting the King as he returns to establish shalom on earth. The Christian view of the future, as we have seen already, is earthy and earthly.

### **The Day of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:8–10)**

Scoffers ridicule those who hope for Christ’s second coming.

1 Peter 3:8–10 replies that God is not slow, but patiently forbearing, not wanting any to perish. The Day of the Lord will come, but it will come like a thief, when nobody expects it.

And on that day, after a purifying fire, the earth and all the works done on it will be disclosed. The heavens and the earth will not be destroyed. They won’t be burned to nothing. They will rather be found by God, pure like glistening silver cleansed by fire of all impurities. The Greek verb in the last clause of verse 10 indicates that God’s grand “Eureka!”—“I found it!”—will resound throughout the cosmos, as an earth that is good and right is disclosed. A Christian view of the future is earth affirming. God will not destroy what he so lovingly makes, faithfully sustains, and patiently redeems.

### **A new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1–5)**

John’s vision in Revelation 21 of God’s good future staggers our imagination. He begins, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.” It is important to realize that the Greek word for “new” used here does not mean absolutely new. It means new in quality, not existence. New means renewed, not brand new. John speaks of a renovated heaven and earth. God does not junk the world and start all over. God renews the earth and brings it to fulfillment.

Notice also that the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to earth. We do not go to heaven. Heaven comes to us, just as we

should expect from a God who graciously takes the initiative to redeem us with his love. God comes to us when we are unable or unwilling to go to God.

In addition, notice where God is. “Behold,” says the voice from the throne, “the home of God is among humans.” As with the Israelites in the Judean wilderness, as with the Word made flesh, so also here God pitches his tent with the likes of us. Underlying

**Salvation is not the replacement of a creation destroyed by God but the renovation and renewal of what God has lovingly made and providentially sustained.**

these stories, like a common thread, is the same Greek word. God will make his home among us. And because of God’s homemaking presence, God will wipe every tear from our weeping eyes, death will be no more, and mourning and crying and pain will be no more. Shalom, at last, will reign.

“Behold,” the voice continues, “I am making all things new.” Not all new things, but all things new. There is, literally, a world

of difference between these two. Not all new things, but all things renewed, refurbished, renovated, redeemed. Salvation is not the replacement of a creation destroyed or abandoned by God but the renovation and renewal of what God has lovingly made and providentially sustained. All things new. God dwells with us. Heaven comes to earth.

### **The true wealth of nations (Rev. 21:22–27)**

John describes no typical city. This city, the new Jerusalem, is in many ways unusual. It comes down out of heaven. It is a cube, symbolizing perfection. It is filled with God’s glory, so it needs no sun or moon for light. Its lamp is the Lamb that was slain, who now reigns as Lord. Its gates never close. This is a most unusual city.

And the rulers of the earth bring their glory into this city, as do people of all kinds: they bring the glory and honor of the nations. The great vision of Isaiah 60 comes to life in Revelation 21:22–27. All that is good and whole belongs to this luminous city. Vegetables grown with tender care. Canoes crafted with venerable skill. Tales laced with wit and wisdom. Swords shaped into peaceful plowshares. All this and more, cascading like a mountain stream into this marvelous city. The true wealth of nations.

Salvation is not about escaping to heaven, but about heaven on earth. Salvation is the redemption and fulfillment of creation.

### **Healing leaves (Rev. 22:1–5)**

In Genesis 2 we read of four rivers and two trees. In Revelation 22 we find one river and one tree. And as in Ezekiel 47, the river of the water of life flows, bright as crystal, from the throne of God and the Lamb right through the middle of Main Street. On both sides is the tree of life, putting forth twelve kinds of fruit, one for each month, so there is always food to eat. And the leaves of this tree are for the healing of the nations. No more trees felled to make battering rams to lay siege to medieval cities. No more trees cut to make sailing masts for colonial warships. No more trees toppled to make paper for propaganda to fuel the fires of ethnic cleansing and human hate. These trees are for the healing of the nations. For shalom.

Much more could be written, but I trust enough has been said to demonstrate that in the biblical story creation care and salvation are intimately interconnected. Indeed, caring for the earth is part and parcel of the gospel of salvation. It is as false to claim that concern for the earth is not a legitimate feature of Christian discipleship as it is to claim that care for the earth is the sum total of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. As the Evangelical declaration on the care of creation puts it: “We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of creation.”<sup>1</sup> In sum, care for the earth is an integral feature of Christian discipleship. May God empower us through the Holy Spirit to walk the path of his Son Jesus in being faithful keepers of the earth.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> “On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation”; go to <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/declaration.php>. For more on creation care, see Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision of Creation Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); and David Koetje, ed., *Living the Good Life on God's Good Earth* (Grand Rapids: FaithAlive Resources, 2006).

### **About the author**

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## Roots, branches, and seeds

### Exploring Western society's exploitative tendencies

Joanne M. Moyer

**A** perusal of the science and technology headlines on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Web site reveals an oil spill, a record year for greenhouse gas emissions (2006), concerns about tuna conservation, and threats to polar bear and bowhead whale populations—just today's examples of how human activities are endangering our planet. Addressing such problems is likely to occupy the attention of earth's societies in coming years, a challenge that theologian Thomas Berry has named the "Great Work" of this period in history.<sup>1</sup>

This great work will involve many practical components: scientific research, technological innovation, political instruments, international agreements, and changes in individual

**We must ask not only how we can live better but also why we live the way we live. Why is our society so destructive of the earth? Why do we feel entitled to use the gifts of the land indiscriminately?**

lifestyles. But none of these practical measures will suffice in the absence of a profound examination and transformation of the values, beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews that condone and encourage behaviour destructive to the earth. We must ask not only how we can live better but also why we live the way we live. Why is our society so destructive of the earth? Why do we feel entitled to use the gifts of the land indiscriminately? Why do we take for granted the life-giving processes of natural ecosystems? Why

do we assume that they will provide these gifts indefinitely in the face of our overuse?

A multitude of factors and ideologies have accumulated and combined over the many centuries through which Western society has developed into its present form. Many of these ideologies have roots in biblical and Christian traditions, in classical Greek and Roman philosophies, and in the worldview that developed



during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods in Europe. Particularly important are conceptions of the human, convictions about the relationship between humans and the natural world, and beliefs about God. Equally significant are the ways these ideas have branched into societal institutions such as science, technology, and the economy.<sup>2</sup>

### **Roots: Conceptions of the human**

At the heart of the modern Western worldview is a fundamental conviction that human beings occupy a position superior to everything else. This anthropocentrism can be traced to Judeo-

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Christian scriptures, starting in the first chapter of Genesis. The Judeo-Christian view of the human being is radically elevated in relation to both the divine and the nonhuman, as humankind is created in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26). In contrast to other ancient religions, in which humans are either indistinguishable from the rest of nature or merely

playthings of the gods, Christian tradition sees humans as creatures of importance and worth. We are called into covenant relationship with God, and for our sake God has taken human form and died.

Another factor in elevating the human species in Western thought is a worldview based on divisions between spirit and matter, mind and body, and nature and culture. Dualism of this kind derives from various traditions in classical Greek philosophy, including Neoplatonism and Gnosticism. These philosophies divide the spiritual world from the material world. The material or physical world is fallen and evil, while the world of spirit is good.

These dualistic philosophies hold that human beings inhabit both realms, having both a physical body and a spirit. This type of dualism is present neither in the Jewish scriptures nor in the earliest expressions of Christianity. But as the Christian faith spread into the Greek world through the early missionaries, Greek ideas merged into Christian theology, and spirit/matter dualism found its way into the Christian faith. Theologians such as Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254 CE) and Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274 CE)

viewed nature and matter as degraded and low, and life in the material world as a sort of purgatory. For them, salvation is found through release into our original spiritual state.

For many centuries, recognition of the power and sovereignty of God and focus on matters of faith held in check the anthropocentrism of the Jewish scriptures and the dualism of the Greeks and early Christians. But as European societies emerged from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, new philosophies boasted a proud faith in humanity. The supremacy of the divine slowly eroded, and human beings achieved a more godlike status. In consequence, the charge to subdue and have dominion over creation became a call to mastery of nature. The intervening centuries have seen an intensification of our anthropocentric outlook, resulting in a sense of human entitlement to nature's gifts and a selfish disregard for the consequences of our actions for anything but our own species.

The philosophies of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment also reinforced a dualistic worldview. The humanism of this period

**While biblical perspectives encompass both physical and spiritual renewal and blessing, the idea of salvation as the removal of believers from the earth has captured the imagination of many Christians.**

focused on our ability to reason; it celebrated rationality, logic, and objectivity above other ways of knowing and thinking. In this context, the spirit-matter dualism of the Middle Ages shifted to a distinction between the mind, which is associated with logic and rational thinking, and the body, seen as a slave to emotion and material needs. René Descartes (1596–1650) immortalized this view in the simple phrase “I think, therefore I am.” Beings who can engage in thought are separated from and elevated above beings

that are seen as unthinking, and the mind and human culture are seen as superior to the body and nature. Nature is not only inferior to culture, but also, continuing in the Greek tradition, viewed as flawed and fallen.

These dualistic ideas have found expression in many aspects of Western culture. For example, ecofeminist analysis shows how dualistic divisions between men and women and between culture and nature are connected, and how these divisions have condoned and encouraged both the subjugation of women and the

exploitation of nature. Widespread and ancient traditions associate women with the body and nature, and men with the mind and culture. Accordingly, men—with their physical power and supposed superior rationality—are the builders of culture and are destined to dominate both women and the natural world.

Spirit-matter dualism has also continued to influence the Christian understanding of salvation. While biblical perspectives encompass both physical and spiritual renewal and blessing, the idea of salvation as the removal of believers from the earth has captured the imagination of many Christians. It is assumed that Jesus' second coming will culminate in a complete destruction of the fallen material world, after which the spirits of the faithful will dwell with God in heaven. Those who wait for this spiritual salvation often deem irrelevant any concern for the welfare of the created material world. Some Christians even argue that the

faithful need not work for environmental stewardship and sustainability, because environmental degradation is a clear sign that the end is at hand.

**The monotheistic faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob removed the gods from nature, which effectively eliminated a significant restraint in the relationship between humans and their surroundings.**

### **Roots: Conception of the divine**

Another important root of Western society's exploitation of the earth is our conception of the divine. Many cultures believe that divine spirits inhabit everything (rocks, trees, waters, and animals), and that people must placate these spirits before we can use their habitats.

Thus the resident spirits function as a protection against overuse. The monotheistic faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob removed the gods from nature, which effectively eliminated a significant restraint in the relationship between humans and their surroundings. Devoid of its resident spirits, nature could more easily be objectified and viewed instrumentally as a means to human ends.

The monotheism of Jewish faith contributed to another radical shift in our conception of the divine and of reality. In removing God from nature, this faith placed God within history, walking with God's people through the generations. Societies that worship nature gods tend to have a cyclical worldview attuned to the movement of the seasons. In contrast, the reality of the Judeo-

Christian God of history is linear. In this view, history has a beginning and an end. In between these events lie possibilities for change, development, and progress.

A historical orientation with a commitment to progress has both shaped and driven Western society, and the pursuit of progress, one might argue, has yielded our society's best and its worst. Progress has been at the root of many artistic endeavours, advancements in medicine and improved health, the search for greater knowledge, and striving for justice and equality among people. At the same time, it has fuelled the West's quest for economic and political dominance of the globe. It has driven the violent colonization of foreign countries through the subjugation of both their peoples and their lands. Most important, progress has propelled Western science, technology, and economic pursuits; these secular institutions have provided the tools, resources, and impetus for the use of the natural world and for its destruction.

### **Branches: Science and technology**

Without the knowledge and tools provided by science and technology, human impact on our planet would be very different. For example, advancements in medicine have decreased mortality rates among human populations, allowing our species to multiply at a rate that is beginning to put enormous pressure on the resources of the planet. At the same time, discovery of ways to unleash the energy stored in fossil fuels has increased the power and scope of our resource extraction, transportation, manufacturing, and construction systems.

Science is a type of knowledge based on the systematic collection of information through observation, producing a body of verifiable theories or models. It seeks to be predictive by explaining causal relationships, and it favours data that can be measured numerically. The scientific process requires rigorous testing, which confirms the reliability of the information it produces. Other sources of knowledge—including tradition, intuition, personal experience, and religious faith—are more subjective and less amenable to measurement and proof. As the scientific process has developed, the pursuit of knowledge has narrowed, other sources of knowledge have increasingly been dismissed as inferior or irrelevant, and science has become the favoured form of knowl-

edge in our society. Together science and technology—which is essentially the practical application of scientific knowledge—have become a belief system or faith in their own right. The primary goal of this belief system is to unlock the secrets of the universe for the purpose of human gain.

Science and technology have both fed and been driven by an instrumental view of nature, which sees the natural world as a means to human ends. The systematic investigation of nature that began during the Renaissance was made possible in part by the desacralization of nature brought about by Hebrew monotheism and by the degrading of nature through spirit-matter dualism. The project of scientific investigation itself, however, further stripped nature of any remaining spirit or soul. A hallmark of scientific study is objectivity, an element of the process that contributes to its reliability, but objectivity also disengages observers from what they are observing. People in the West increasingly view nature as a blind and mechanical object that deserves no respect in its own right and has worth only in its usefulness to human designs.

**Together science and technology have become a belief system or faith in their own right. The primary goal of this belief system is to unlock the secrets of the universe for the purpose of human gain.**

Another consequence of the narrowing focus on science and technology has been a disregard for ethics and values. Ethics is a branch of philosophy dealing with values, which are beliefs about what is desirable. As such, these knowledge processes play a key role in decision making. Because ethical dialogue cannot be tested or measured objectively (though it can be rational and

systematic), it is often dismissed in decision-making processes, in favour of scientific knowledge.

But despite its commitment to objectivity, the scientific enterprise is as value laden as any other human endeavour. Inherent in our all actions and technologies are values, and though we may not recognize them, they still guide our activities, possibly in directions that are not in our best interest or in the interests of our planet. Science can only tell us what is and what might be, which are important subjects for discussion, but it cannot tell us what ought to be, and that is the most important question in decision making.

A world guided by science and technology, in which ethics has a diminished voice, is characterized by several things. People are increasingly segregated from the natural world and therefore blind to consequences of their activities. This separation reinforces an instrumental view of nature by isolating people from the personal interactions with the natural world that are essential to breaking down this view. At the same time, information and knowledge are produced and broadcast at an ever faster pace, which means that society has a decreased ability to evaluate the information or to consider the consequences of its application. The ever-increasing production of knowledge is a hallmark of progress, but those generating this knowledge and information are under no obligation to ensure that it is used responsibly. People assume that any mistakes can be rectified with further advances in knowledge. And so the treadmill continues, producing increasing volumes of information and knowledge, but little wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

### **Branches: The economy**

The economy and our slavish concern for its well-being and constant growth are arguably the most significant factors in producing our extractive and consumptive society. The economy works in tandem with science and technology by providing the monetary resources necessary to further acquisition of knowledge and its application, which in turn fuel further growth in the economy. And all this activity uses natural resources, carves up the wilderness, and produces waste and pollution. Etymologically, the word *economy* refers to the management of the household. As a society, however, we are concerning ourselves with managing only a tiny part of our household. Our economic focus could be compared to that of a family concerned only with the size of their bank account and the scope of their monetary transactions, while their yard slowly fills with garbage and their house crumbles.

The discipline of economics, as we know it, was invented by Adam Smith (1723–1790). He suggested that because of certain universal laws (the “invisible hand”), when all human beings act according to their own selfish interests in economic activity, an efficient and equitable flow of goods and services will result. The competition between selfish actors is key in this equation, which is the basis for the free market economy that now dominates the

world. Many good things can be said for the market system of economics that grew from Smith's work, but it has some deep flaws that are rarely considered.

One basic flaw in economic theory is a fundamental disconnect between that theory and the natural sciences. In the eighteenth century, when Smith was developing his theories, the impact of a human population of today's size could not have been imagined. Nor did Smith have the benefit of the knowledge and understanding of the natural world that we have acquired today. It is therefore no surprise that he did not take into account a number of physical realities, the consequences of which are becoming increasingly clear.

Economic activity ultimately relies on the natural environment for raw materials and for the assimilation of wastes that are produced. For this reason, basic physical laws describing the nature of energy and matter are essential to the economy. First, neither

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energy nor matter can be created or destroyed; energy flows, and matter cycles, from one form to another. Furthermore, as energy flows, it changes into forms that are less useful. In other words, there is a tendency for disorder to increase. This means that the energy and matter available for use have limits, and that all the materials and energy that pass through the human economic system exit the system in a degraded form.

While nature's mechanisms can process waste and regenerate materials, these mechanisms can be overwhelmed by the pace and scale of human enterprise. Furthermore, because of this tendency toward disorder, any complex and dynamic system that is developing and growing requires constant inputs of energy and matter to maintain or increase itself. In the case of the human economy, this energy is taken from the natural world, thus decreasing nature's internal order and development. The result is expanding human activities that are capable of disrupting the fundamental natural processes that support all life on our planet.<sup>4</sup>

While it is hardly surprising that Smith's original economic theory did not account for these physical realities, it is surprising

that economic theory has not changed and adapted as scholarship in other disciplines has advanced. Instead, many economists continue to dismiss those who suggest that economic activities threaten to overreach the earth's capacity. They insist that economic processes and technology will ensure that new resources and techniques can always be found to replace what is depleted.

At the same time, economic theory has not remained entirely static. Over the centuries, it has become increasingly focussed on mathematical modelling, efficiency, and most important, economic growth. Adam Smith first introduced the idea that societies should pursue economic growth for their betterment, as a way to improve the material well-being of individuals and society. A larger economy would provide more goods and services to more people, without requiring any redistribution of wealth. Smith and other early economists assumed that at some point the economy would reach a sufficient size, rendering further growth unnecessary. Over time, this assumption has been lost, and growth in and of itself has become the single most important economic goal.<sup>5</sup> Growth has been touted as the panacea for all manner of ills, including underdevelopment in the Global South, winning the Cold War, achieving full employment, battling inflation, and protecting the environment.

The latter argument assumes that more prosperous countries can better afford to adopt cleaner technologies and clean up any pollution that still occurs. We can find evidence for this trend in industrialized nations with some types of pollutants, but not for carbon dioxide, which continues to increase with economic growth. This argument does not address the issue of resource depletion. Nor does it account for the fact that many wealthy countries have exported their dirtiest industries to poorer countries. In other areas, economic growth has only addressed in mediocre fashion (at best) the wide range of problems to which it has been applied. And yet we continue to cling to economic growth as a solution, despite the fact that it also produces a whole range of problems, including the depletion of natural resources, pollution, and many social ills.

Why does our faith in economic growth endure? The omission of physical laws from economic theory, as described above, is a primary reason. Our national accounting systems, such as calcula-



tions of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), also contribute by making no distinction between beneficial and harmful monetary transactions within the economy. In fact, many social and environmental costs of economic growth, such as pollution remediation, health-care expenditures, and crime prevention, are counted as positive contributions.<sup>6</sup> Finally, economic growth is simply the easiest solution to many of our problems. Without growth, governments would need to make difficult choices about allocation of resources, while continued growth promises plenty for all without asking sacrifices of any.

### **Seeds of hope**

A discussion such as this one cannot hope to cover all the issues that are worthy of note. Some significant omissions include attitudes toward wilderness, the role of private property laws, the links between poverty and environmental degradation, the growing power of corporations in the economy, advertising and its effect on consumption, and short-term political agendas.

But while the forces working to maintain our consumptive status quo are many, they do not go unchallenged. Many of the ideas, beliefs, and movements discussed above are still alive and

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well in Western society, but seeds of change are germinating and growing, seeds that may eventually flower into a sustainable society. Through a growing understanding of ecology, natural resource managers are developing management techniques that adapt to natural processes rather than trying to control them. Dialogue between economists and ecologists is producing radical changes in economic theory. Environmental ethicists are working to dismantle the anthropocentric biases of our ethical systems, and they are striving to bring animals, plants, and the land itself into our

realm of moral consideration. Postmodern and feminist thinkers are introducing a more holistic worldview that embraces rationality, emotion, intuition, and other subjective perspectives.

And the leaders of many religions and Christian denominations are declaring their commitment to caring for the earth, and are

reexamining their scriptures and traditions for ecologically conscious imperatives. Through the growth of these seeds, we can channel our quest for progress into building our Great Work, “a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>The next two sections are based primarily on the following sources: John B. Cobb, Jr., *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994); David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” in *Earth Ethics: Introductory Readings on Animal Rights and Environmental Ethics*, ed. James P. Sterba (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 19–26.

<sup>3</sup>David W. Orr, “Slow Knowledge,” in *Outlooks: Readings for Environmental Literacy*, ed. Michael L. McKinney and Parri Shariff (Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1995), 9–13.

<sup>4</sup>William E. Rees, “Achieving Sustainability: Reform or Transformation,” *Journal of Planning Literature* 9, no. 4 (May 1995): 343–61.

<sup>5</sup>See Cobb, *Sustaining the Common Good*.

<sup>6</sup>Herman E. Daly, *Steady-State Economics* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1991); Robert U. Ayres, “Limits to the Growth Paradigm” *Ecological Economics* 19, no. 2 (November 1996): 117–34.

<sup>7</sup>Berry, *The Great Work*, 3.

## About the author

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## Creation speaks

### An Aboriginal Christian's reflections

Adrian Jacobs

**C**reation has a voice. Creation tells, declares, proclaims, and pours forth speech. Creation displays knowledge, and its voice goes out to the whole world.

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world. (Ps. 19:1–4)<sup>1</sup>*

#### Hearing the witness of creation

When westerners hear about Balaam's conversation with a donkey, they want to investigate the donkey's anatomy, to understand how it could talk. (Never mind that Western Christianity's emphasis on original sin is rooted in a story about a talking snake.) Aboriginal people, like Middle Eastern people, are much more likely to want to know what the donkey said.

Western Christianity has been afraid of hearing the voice of creation. Those who suggest that the words of Psalm 19 are true immediately confront charges of animism. But according to the Apostle Paul, creation is alive; it waits, is frustrated, has a will, and groans:

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of*

*the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:19–23)*

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds praised God. Disturbed by the noisy celebration, the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples. Jesus responded, “If these were silent, the stones would shout out” (Luke 19:40). Creation praises the Creator. If we truly hear the voice of creation, we will be directed to the Creator and to Jesus Christ the Co-Creator.

### **Those who fear God and do what is right**

According to Romans 1:18–20, God’s awesome power and divine nature are revealed through creation. Creation communicates clearly enough about God’s will that humanity in its wickedness is left without excuse. The witness of creation makes people accountable. Human beings are answerable for their response to creation’s revelation of the Creator’s judgment and mercy.

**Before European settlers came, Aboriginal people were answerable for their response to the witness of creation to its Creator. Evidence of a true response to creation’s witness is a righteous life and reverence for the Creator.**

Before European settlers came to North America with the gospel of Jesus Christ, Aboriginal people were answerable for their response to the witness of creation to its Creator. Evidence of a true response to creation’s witness is a righteous life and reverence for the Creator. Peter told Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christ, “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35). A prayerful and

generous man, Cornelius was responding to the God of Israel, the Creator, according to the light he had.

With Hiawatha, Deganawidah (a Huron adopted among the Mohawks) founded the Five (later Six) Nations Iroquois Confederacy. Iroquoian oral history recalls a time of fratricidal warfare

and cannibalism among the Iroquoian people, prior to the coming of Deganawidah. His influence ended this fighting among brothers and united the Iroquois into a strong confederacy through the Great Law of Peace. This pre-Columbian constitution codified standards of human dignity in a consensual decision-making process. Deganawidah was the kind of person described by Peter: he feared the Creator and did what was right.

We revere this cultural hero. Oral tradition declares him born of a virgin, one who will return to the earth as the Peacemaker, and whose name should no longer be spoken except reverently in official settings. Was Deganawidah born of a virgin? No. Only Jesus Christ has been born in this miraculous way. Was Deganawidah the appearance of Christ to the Iroquoian people? No. He was a man who responded favourably to the Creator's influence through creation and conscience.

To the Romans, Paul wrote, "When Gentiles [or Aboriginals], who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them" (Rom. 2:14–15). The Iroquoian people repented of their warfare and cannibalism under the influence of Deganawidah. This man did what was right because he had great respect for the Creator.

### **The Creator's attitude toward animals**

The law of Moses reveals God's care for animals and lays out standards for human care for them, as specified in Exodus 21–23. Animals who injure humans or other animals face judgment (Exod. 21:28–36). Animals have value, and penalties are to be imposed on those who steal them. People are responsible for their animals' actions. One who finds a lost animal incurs obligations to care for it. Animals are to be granted the rest of the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath year every seven years, and the year of jubilee every fifty years.

Firstborn animals are to be dedicated to the Lord (Exod. 34:19–20; Lev. 27:26–27). The blood and fat of animals are sacred (Lev. 7:22–27; 17). To teach people about the holiness of God, the law divides animals into clean and unclean categories

(Leviticus 11). Animals are to be purebred (Lev. 19:19). Bestiality is condemned (Lev. 18:23; 20:1, 5, 16). Animals without defect or blemish are types of Christ, reflecting his purity and sinlessness (Lev. 22:17–25, Heb. 9:14).

The law of Moses enjoins a compassion for animal life not unlike today's concern for the preservation of species. The strange prohibition against boiling a young goat in its mother's milk (Exod. 34:26) can be seen as an expression of that compassion: the life-giving milk of the mother goat is not to be the cooking agent for the kid. No physical harm to humans comes of cooking a young goat in its mother's milk. Rather, the practice violates values we usually apply only in human contexts. Consider, for example, our repugnance toward using cosmetics made from fetal tissue. This practice may not bother the reductionist, who sees an aborted child as so many stem cells. But Christians know they are dealing with the body of one made in the image of God.

Solomon the wise said, "The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel" (Prov. 12:10). The command "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" expresses an intention to pay labouring animals well in food (Deut. 25:4). The New Testament Epistles quote this scripture twice, to encourage generous support for those who preach and teach (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1–18). Paul in effect uses an ox as a type of a minister of the Word of God.

### **Jonah's care for a plant and God's care for animals**

God commissioned Jonah to proclaim God's judgment on Ninevah. Jonah's preaching resulted in the repentance of everyone, from the king to the least Ninevite. Even the animals fasted and wore sackcloth. "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it" (Jon. 3:10). God's compassion displeased Jonah. He had resisted going to the Ninevites, precisely because he knew that God abounds in mercy and is so ready to relent from punishing. God's mercy made Jonah angry enough to want to die.

In one day God caused a plant to grow up to shield Jonah from the heat of the day. The next day the plant withered and died, and again Jonah became angry enough to die. God proceeded to

give Jonah a great lesson on divine compassion for people and animals: “Then the LORD said, ‘You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, *and also many animals?*’” (Jon. 4:10–11; my italics). God cared about the people and the animals of Nineveh.

### **Creation in harmony with God the Creator**

The Bible is full of examples of animals that were obedient to the Creator. At creation, animals permitted Adam to name them. Pairs of all the animals of the earth found Noah’s ark and obediently went in, while most of humanity obstinately refused to enter and be saved. This picture conforms to the Hopi recollection of the people who perished in the flood: they were selfish and evil. Sometimes the rest of creation has been more obedient to the

**Sometimes the rest of creation has been more obedient to the Creator than humans are. To our shame, we are at times rebuked by creation.**

Creator than humans are. To our shame, we are at times rebuked by creation.

According to Exodus 4–12, an obedient creation enacts God’s presence and judgment. The rods of Moses and Aaron became snakes as a sign of God’s presence with these leaders of Israel. Water turned into blood. Frogs, gnats, flies, locusts, and hail all did their part to execute God’s judgment on Egypt. A plague descended on livestock and boils on people. Light refused to shine on the Egyptians, and death took their firstborn. These stories reflect what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote that God’s judgment is revealed through creation.

As the Exodus story unfolds, creation again cooperates with God in providing for and protecting the children of Israel. The Red Sea opened to let them escape, and then closed upon Pharaoh’s army in judgment. When Moses threw a branch into the water, bitter and unpalatable water became sweet. Heaven rained down bread, quail flew in to feed hungry Israel, and water gushed out of a rock that followed Israel in the wilderness (see 1 Cor. 10:4). This rock was a type of Christ.

As Israel entered the land of Canaan, the hornet aided their conquest (Exod. 23:28; Josh. 24:12). Ravens brought meat and bread every day to Elijah during a drought (1 Kings 17:6). The universe stood still for Joshua for almost a day (Josh. 10:12–14). The earth reversed its rotation as a sign to Hezekiah that he would be healed and live fifteen more years (Isa. 38:7–8). Hail fell upon the enemies of the people of God (Josh. 10:11; Ps. 18:11–15). Germs, fire, seismic activity, and snakes executed God’s judgment on rebellious Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 33:35; Num. 11:1-3; 11:33–34; 14:37; 16:31–35; 21:4–9; 24:8–9).

### **Creation that obeyed Jesus, the Co-Creator**

Again in the New Testament scriptures, an obedient creation serves God. A virgin conceived to clothe the Son of God with flesh. A star appeared that “spoke” to and led wise men to Jesus. Water turned into wine in the first miracle Jesus performed. Sickness yielded to the touch and voice of Jesus. Demons obeyed his command. Gravity yielded to allow Jesus to walk on water and to rise from the Mount of Olives after his resurrection. A command from Jesus stilled a storm. Death gave up its captives to Jesus. A fish scooped up a coin to give to Peter to pay some taxes. A donkey colt that had never been ridden carried Jesus into Jerusalem. A cock crowed on cue to rebuke Peter in his denial of the Lord. An obedient creation reveals Jesus’ authority over it.

### **Creation obeys the Holy Spirit–empowered church**

In the Acts of the Apostles, the forces of creation continue to be subject to Jesus Christ and his disciples as they act in the power of the Holy Spirit. Sickness gave way to the touch, command, and even shadow of the apostles and other believers. Death yielded to Peter’s command and could not keep Paul at Lystra. Evil spirits had to obey the voice of Christians. Death fulfilled Peter’s pronouncement of judgment on Ananias and Sapphira for their sin of lying to the Holy Spirit. Doors opened of their own accord to let Peter out of prison. Worms ate proud Herod (Acts 12:23). While the prisoners Paul and Silas worshiped the Creator, an earthquake shook the doors open and loosed the chains of every prisoner. Creation recognizes the authority of the Creator and the Co-



Creator Jesus in the Holy Spirit—empowered commands and actions of the church.

A. J. Gordon cites the testimony of church history to support his call for a present-day ministry of healing in the church.<sup>2</sup> The church fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement testify to post-apostolic healings in the church.<sup>3</sup> Church historians have attested to healings into the fourth century.<sup>4</sup> Reformation movements in the church—among Waldenses, Moravians, Huguenots, Covenanters, Friends, Baptists, and Methodists—include testimonies of healings.<sup>5</sup> The modern Pente-

**Aboriginal people have an awareness that life is not completely as the Creator originally intended. Something has disturbed the initial harmony. Sin is disharmony created by selfishness and greed.**

costal/charismatic movement abounds with accounts of healings. The Creator is still the Creator and able to re-create as the human situation demands.

### **God the Creator and the Re-Creator**

Nothing less than a God who is Creator can satisfy the spiritual sensibilities of Aboriginal people. To the Aboriginal mind, a Creator who can still create is a true Creator. Do not preach a disempowered one-time creator who is impotent in the face of human need. God's

name is I Am, not I Was, or I Will Be. God always was, and is, and ever will be. The Creator never changes.

God is not only Creator but is also Re-Creator. Human sin and the death that follows it have necessitated the Creator's re-creative power. The one who has created is able to re-create those who have become children of the devil through sin.

Aboriginal people have an awareness that life is not completely as the Creator originally intended. Something has disturbed the initial harmony. Sin is disharmony created by selfishness and greed. The maker/trickster Nanabozho is falling into his own traps. The Peacemaker is gone, and things are falling apart. The Ghost Dancer looked forward to a messianic age of new creation or re-creation. The Aboriginal prophecies of the last days are being fulfilled as the old ways pass away. The people are gathering, and fewer know what they are supposed to do. They anticipate a golden age of universal goodwill. I believe that Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of these Aboriginal longings and needs.

### **The influence of the Creator now and yet to come**

Jesus came proclaiming the kingdom of God, which is nothing less than the spreading persuasive influence of the Creator on earth. The Creator's love for all creation challenges our sinful selfishness and greed. Evil spirits that mar and corrupt God's creation are soundly defeated by the master of all spirits, Jesus Christ. Sickness now yields to the touch of Jesus' hand and the hand of his representatives on earth. People are seeing their need for a Saviour and are calling on the name of Jesus Christ. Those who drink to excess become sober. Liars become truth tellers. Abusers take responsibility for their actions and ask for forgiveness. Thieves begin to work and give to others. So-called elders quit their immoral ways. "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus Christ is powerful enough to re-create us. Then he can gradually restore us to all the Creator intended when he made us. This lifelong process of growth follows our re-creation. A person grows spiritually through the Word of God, communion with the Holy Spirit, participation with other believers in the body of Christ, and through dialogue and interaction with people who do not yet know Christ as Lord of their lives.

### **A Mountain Ute, an Onkwehonweh, and the Re-Creator**

"Are you a brother?" came the challenge from the stocky Mountain Ute Indian as my Lakota friend and I settled into the steamy comfort of the hotel hot tub. We were set to enjoy a relaxing evening conversation, after meeting as the Native American Advisory Council for the International Bible Society. We were not expecting such an aggressive question.

We introduced ourselves and our vocation as ministers. What we could gather from this Ute Aboriginal was his advocacy for a native revolution. His basic premise was, "If you really are a native brother, then you must be for revolution, as I am." Because we are ministers of Jesus Christ, he doubted that we were truly native. In our advisory council meetings, I promoted the contextualization of Christian truth in the Aboriginal worldview. I shared Paul's approach to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:16-34, and now it was my opportunity for a practical application of these principles.

I told of my understanding of God as Creator. Our Ute friend continued to argue aggressively against us. I continued to speak about God as Creator and said that God had made me Onkwehonweh. After a half-hour of spirited conversation, the Ute asked me, “Do you live as Onkwehonweh?” I said, “Yes,” and explained some of my Iroquoian values. I then asked him if he lived as Ute. With a noticeable quietness in his voice, he answered, “No.” I then proceeded to explain how we humans do not live as the Creator made us, and that is why we need Jesus Christ. At this point I shared my testimony about how Jesus Christ became my Lord and Saviour. In a contemplative tone, he said, “That’s neat.” I believe it was my approach that sought to identify with his native consciousness of God as Creator that opened his heart to the message of my own reconciliation with our Creator.

Though our conversation lasted only about forty minutes, I believe we were part of the process that is leading him to an acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. Our prayer then and now is that other labourers may reach him with a further incarnational witness. May he too be in the great throng of worshipers from every tribe, people, tongue, and nation that stands before the throne of God, the Creator and Re-Creator.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of Healing: Miracles of Cure in All Ages* (Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1882; repr. Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1961). Citations are to the Christian Publications edition.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 60–61.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 61–64.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 65–84.

## About the author

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## The time of our lives

David Waltner-Toews

**I** am having the time of my life  
digging up an old pine stump  
with my daughter  
in the bright fall sunshine.  
Everything I need to know about life  
and death is in this moment.

The spade is singing  
among the white-collared mushrooms:  
Praise to the Fungi Imperfecti,  
the Fusaria and the Cladospores.  
The hatchet chops a tune  
into the wood's soft heart:  
Praise to the wood lice, the earthworms,  
millipedes, hister beetles, common black  
ground beetles, the slugs like ushers  
waving their antennae at the calamitous lightspill.  
Please close the door. The show's in progress.  
Praise to the unseen saints of Gaia,  
the Bacilli, the Clostridia,  
and the pearly Micrococci.

Praise to the myriad of unseen  
crawlies, the forgotten ones,  
the bond breakers, hewers of cellulose  
who make possible this uprooting.

After so many years  
a friend becomes part of you.  
Where the roots begin and the earth ends,  
where pleasure, where pain,  
where wishful memory, or truth,

cannot be dissected.  
It is I myself who would be uprooted  
if I uprooted you.

Time is an arrow  
only in the briefest bug-life fragments,  
and at the meteoric limits of our growth.  
Where we live time is an inchworm,  
rhythms of seasons and spades,  
roots broken and re-sprung.  
The stump is lifting  
under the pry of my spade.  
A mouth opens below,  
a dark mouth singing  
soft fleshy things,  
singing multi-footed messengers,  
  
singing lieder of cycles—  
the carbon cycles, the nitrogen cycle,  
the water, the sulphur,  
singing of the microscopic fixers,  
singing lustily, with full synthesizer backup,  
in chlorophyllic warbles,  
  
who make me, *Hominus Imperfecti*,  
possible, and you, and our sons  
and our daughters, and  
brightly, in the blue, sharp sunshine,  
as the roots lift free, I am dug in,  
rooted,  
earthworms, beetles, fungi,  
bacilli all around me,  
skittling up the spade handle toward me, singing:

Welcome home.  
Your turn is next.

### **About the poet**

David Waltner-Toews, Guelph, Ontario, is a poet, essayist, fiction-writer, veterinarian, epidemiologist, husband, and father of two grown children. This poem is reprinted, by permission of the author, from *The Impossible Uprooting* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).

# The way the world is meant to be

## An interpretation of Genesis 1:26–29

Wilma Ann Bailey

**T**he biblical canon opens with a litany of creation. It is the first of a number of creation poems and stories in the Bible. Some are embedded in larger texts, as is the case in the book of Job. After thirty-seven chapters of wrestling with questions of disinterested righteousness, suffering, and the justice of God, the book changes tenor and in chapter 38 begins to voice an awe-inspiring description of past and ongoing creation wonders. Not the first but the 104<sup>th</sup> psalm turns its attention to God's role in the natural world.

Nor does Genesis 1 contain the oldest material in the Bible. That distinction belongs to the victory poems in Exodus 15 and Judges 5. So why does this particular creation story stand in first position in the Bible? What does its presence and content convey?

**Why does this creation story stand in first position in the Bible? What does its presence and content convey? Perhaps it is there to tell us something about the way the world is supposed to be.**

Perhaps it is there to tell us something about the way the world is supposed to be.

### **A peaceful creation**

Structurally, Genesis 1 begins with God creating the heavens and the earth and the things and beings that inhabit them. The creation work is set in a seven-day time frame, and it proceeds in a systematic and orderly fashion. Each thing is created in the order in which it is needed. After each day, the Creator reflects on the work and notes

that it is good. After finishing the project, God rests and thereby sets a precedent to be emulated by the human community.

Already this account is unique in its setting in the world of the eastern Mediterranean. Although it shares elements with other creation stories that emerged there (including the presence of the primordial sea), it rejects other elements. Other creation stories, such as Babylon's Enuma Elish, begin with the creation of the gods

and then recount the wars between the gods that end in the creation of humans and the things needed for human life and for the sustenance and happiness of the gods. The function of those stories is to support the political and social structures of the societies in which they were told.

In sharp contrast, Genesis 1 is noticeably lacking in violence and war. The way this story is told refutes theologies and ideologies that insist that violence (chaos) must precede change in the natural, political, or social worlds. This is a peaceful creation, always under the control of its Creator. But even in Genesis 1, the threat of a descent into chaos is present.

### **Male and female in God's image**

In the opening chapter of Genesis, humans are the very last beings created, and their creation unfolds in a way unlike that of the other animals. God does not simply speak them into existence, and they are made in the divine image and likeness.

Pastors, scholars, and lay people have struggled with what it means to be made in the divine image. Some have suggested that the image of God refers to qualities that humans have, such as the ability to reason or exercise moral judgment. Others point to a transcendent quality in humans; their lives do not end when their physical bodies die. One of my professors, Walter Harrelson,

**Humans image God when they do the work of God in the world. In this Hebraic way of thinking, image and likeness reside not in our being but in our responding to the relationship that we have with God.**

would say that humans image God when they do the work of God in the world. In this thoroughly Hebraic way of thinking, image and likeness reside not in our being, as in Greek thought, but in our responding to the relationship that we have with God.

The text specifically mentions that humans are created as males and females. The other animals are also created as males and females, but this characteristic is only mentioned in connection with the creation of human beings. Perhaps it is specified of

humans in order to emphasize the next point: humans—both males and females—are assigned the same duties. God charges both equally with being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth and taking care of it.

## High mountains for the wild goats

Genesis 1 lacks any reference to political entities such as the nation or state or military. Ethnic groups, including Israel itself, are not mentioned. The human creation has no stratification of

**The Creator's provision of food for animals is an affirmation that they have a right to what they need for their existence. We can extrapolate from this statement that they also have a right to their habitats.**

wealth, in which some have too much and others too little. The Creator provides all humans with the same sustenance, with plants, fruit, and seeds to eat. Green plants also serve as food for birds, animals, and creeping things. Carnivores and predators do not exist. Each of these factors removes reasons for divisions that cause humans and animals to form coalitions against one another and engage in destructive conflicts.

The provision of food for animals is also an affirmation that they have a right to what

they need for their existence. We can extrapolate from this statement that they also have a right to their habitats. The habitats provide the food that rightfully belongs to them. Psalm 104 enlarges on this idea:

*The trees of the LORD are watered abundantly,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
In them the birds build their nests;  
the stork has its home in the fir trees.  
The high mountains are for the wild goats;  
the rocks are a refuge for the coney. (Ps. 104.16–18)<sup>1</sup>*

The high mountains are not for humans; they are for the wild goats. When humans stray into these altitudes, they are invading goat territory and ought to respect the creatures that live there. Genesis 1 depicts a world created to be at peace with itself.

## No limits on consumption?

In this creation account, the language of caring for the earth is expressed in terms that probably meant to the people of the ancient world something different from what we hear when we read the text. The Hebrew word for “subdue” (*kābash*) is harsh. This language has sometimes been understood to mean that



humans are free to exploit and ravage the earth for their own benefit. But *kābash* should be interpreted not according to its dictionary meaning but according to its ancient context.

In earlier times, humans were conscious of struggling with nature in order to sustain human life from generation to generation. Genesis 3, the story of the first man and the first woman, might be read in part as a contest between the humans and the animals (represented by the serpent) for control of the garden and its resources. The serpent initiates a conversation with a human by asking a question about food habits—because both animals and humans eat, and they eat a lot of the same things. Are the resources of the garden only for the humans? “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The response, that humans may eat from every tree save one, would have been alarming to the serpent in the story. Will this new eating being demand and receive exclusive access to the garden’s resources? When humans are given access to every tree in the garden except one, they seize access to that one as well. They lay claim to all the resources of the Garden of Eden!

In the story, the garden’s owner expels the humans because they do not get it: they do not understand that the resources of the garden are not for their exclusive consumption. The resources of the garden are meant to be shared by all eating beings. Notice that the animals are not expelled. Their leader (in my interpretation), the serpent, is punished but not thrown out of the garden. When pitted against the humans in this early contest, the animal kingdom won.<sup>2</sup>

### **Natural forces and human control**

Here in Indiana we don’t worry that animals will kill our children while they are playing outside. Years ago, our predecessors exterminated the wolves, bears, and other large predators that inhabited the territories we call home. Those European settlers also drained nearly all the wetlands, to provide more land for farming and to eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes and thereby reduce the risks of mosquito-borne illness. Most of us live in sturdy houses that protect us from the elements, and from poisonous snakes and disease-carrying rats. Most of us live in areas that are not flood prone—or if they are, levies have been built to keep

the waters at bay. If our crops fail because of drought or a swarm of locusts, we do not starve, because we can afford to import food from the far corners of the globe. We have subdued, to a large extent, the acres under our control. From time to time, though, we are still reminded that some of nature's forces—earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, wild fires—elude our control.

Imagine living in earlier times, when people had less control over nature. For most of human history, people dreamed of subduing the earth but only succeeded in very limited ways. Agriculture was one early success story. Humans noticed that plants grew where seeds fell. People discovered that they could plant the seeds in another place, and they would grow there too. This discovery permitted humans to settle down. They wanted a surer source of meat and animal products. Rather than chasing a wild gazelle around in a hunt, they domesticated more docile animals that could be led to slaughter without resistance.

But cultivated land did not always yield its bounty. There were years of too little rain, and seasons when the earth simply stopped bearing. Other years saw too much rain, and the topsoil washed away. Domesticated animals were killed by wild animals or died from disease. Birds ate berries that had been carefully cultivated for human consumption. Lifespans were short, and many died of accidents, in childbirth, and from infectious diseases. Humans knew that subduing the earth was not an easy task. At times, that possibility seemed more dream than reality.

### **Responsible dominion**

Some of us idealize the past, imagining a time when humans exercised care for the earth and never took more than they needed. To be sure, when resources were scarce, people often husbanded them carefully. But when resources were abundant, people—even ancient ones—tended to be wasteful. A year and a half ago, I visited the village of Copan Ruinas (“the ruins of Copan”) in the mountains of Honduras. Though economically poor, Honduras is one of the most lush and beautiful countries in the world. The name of the village derives from the archaeological site adjacent to it. The ruins became ruins in the ninth century AD when the local Mayan elite devastated the area by cutting down every tree and removing all vegetation, in order to create

palaces and temples and open plazas for their ceremonies and amusements. When the land had been denuded and made unsuitable for growing food, the ordinary folk moved away. Environmental devastation is not a new development.

When we Canadians and Americans read the Bible, we need to take account of how our world has changed and how our current circumstances impel us to exercise responsibilities that were not ours as serfs and slaves or as naked apes among the carnivores. Today few places on earth remain where human life is possible but not present. The pressures of a burgeoning population push us to find sustainable ways to meet the needs of all with the earth's limited resources. To do so requires that we be responsible stewards of land, sea, and air. Having dominion over the birds, the fish, and everything that moves means that we need to make the earth habitable for all.

We depend on nature for our survival as a species. Destroying it will ultimately lead to our demise. What will happen when we

**We need to take account of how our world has changed and how our circumstances impel us to exercise responsibilities that were not ours as serfs and slaves or as naked apes among the carnivores.**

have cut down all the rainforests, and their oxygen-producing and air-cleaning capacities are eliminated, when the snows disappear from Mt. Kilimanjaro and the polar icecaps melt, causing the earth to absorb rather than reflect light and heat? What will happen when the fish of the sea are so filled with mercury that our children cannot eat them without damaging their brains, and when the water that we drink is contaminated with pesticides from runoff and powerful drugs that were poured into sinks and flushed down toilets?

Now we have a greater ability to know the effects of our actions, because scientists and environmentalists document the connections in ways that were not possible earlier. Computer models help us envision a bleak future that will come to pass if we do not take actions to reverse our course.

Having been made aware of environmental issues, and remembering the instruction to take care of the earth, many of us are starting to look at our lifestyles to see how they might be modified for sustainability and health. We purchase locally grown foods in order to save energy and benefit the producers, and because

eating fresher food is healthier and more enjoyable. We recycle, knowing that some of the earth's resources are disappearing forever. We turn down the thermostat in winter and turn it up in summer. And we look at the larger picture. We marshal our political means (the right to vote, to speak out, to assemble, to petition, to run for office), and our social, spiritual, and economic resources, in order to fulfill our responsibilities to rule the earth and make it the kind of place where humans and animals can live. In so doing, we resist the temptation to act as if we can lay exclusive claim to the resources of this planet, we honor the Creator's intention to provide habitats in which all can thrive, and we image God in doing God's work in the world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the NRSV.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilma Bailey, "Through the Eyes of a Serpent: A Political/Economic/Ecological Interpretation of Genesis 3," *Encounter* 67, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 81–86.

## About the author

Wilma Ann Bailey teaches Hebrew and Aramaic scripture at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana, and is the author of *"You Shall Not Kill" or "You Shall Not Murder"? The Assault on a Biblical Text*. She has served on the board of directors of Mennonite Central Committee U.S. and Mennonite Board of Education, and is currently on the board of trustees of Eastern Mennonite University. She attends Shalom Mennonite Church, Indianapolis.

# My theatre of pleasure and adoration

Jürgen Schönwetter

**I** love the rawness of nature. My mother cultivated a large garden and introduced me to gardening at an early age. Of course, in post-war East Germany, cultivating a garden was more than a pleasant pastime. It was survival. My family grew vegetables and raised animals out of necessity.

**In post-war East Germany, gardening was more than a pastime. It was survival. Although there was little room for aesthetics, my engagement with nature was more than utilitarian.**

When Germany lost the war in 1945, eastern Germany was under Soviet-Russian occupation. My father decided to stay in American-controlled West Germany, away from vengeful Soviet authorities. He had had a key position in the German armed forces. Because her husband was beyond the reach of the authorities and could not be prosecuted

himself, Mother was sentenced by the Soviets to three years in a forced labour camp.

With our parents gone, my siblings and I lived in the slums of the city of Naumburg, in Saxony. The Soviets were determined to make life absolutely miserable for us. From the age of eight until I was about twelve, I was so undernourished that the state had to step in to keep me from total starvation. Under these circumstances, I learned to love gardening. Although there was little room for aesthetics, even then my engagement with nature was more than utilitarian.

## **Pleasure and the discovery of the Ultimate**

I take real pleasure in observing the growth and development of plants, any plants. My preference has been to grow plants I can eat. I am a grazer. Moving around in the garden and munching on herbs or vegetables gives me great pleasure and satisfies my cravings. That's my delight!

I cannot recall any period of my life when I did not have my hands—and heart—in soil. Even living in an apartment did not keep me away from my hobby. Landlords gladly accommodated my desire to get my fingernails dirty.

Before I came to Canada, my eyes were not opened to see the ultimate Source of all life. I considered myself agnostic, at best. For lack of evidence, I did not believe in God. That outlook changed during my early years in Vancouver, BC. Through Menonites, I met God in a life-changing encounter. The initial connection with the divine sparked in me a passion to know more and to fill the void of my ignorance, especially about God.

In the past, I had often wanted to bring my gratitude and appreciation to a higher being. I did not know how to do so. As I became aware that I am a child of God, my worship came to include the God of my sacred space, the garden. My ever-growing relationship with God is fed not only by reading and study but also by my realization of and appreciation for the miracle of life.

For me, gardening is a workshop of the Holy Spirit. I love singing there. My favourites include Ervin Drake's "I believe" ("Every time I hear a newborn baby cry, or touch a leaf, or see the sky, then I know why I believe"), and Brian Doerksen's songs "Creation calls" ("How could I say there is no God when all around creation calls ...") and "I believe, I believe, I believe" ("Snowflakes, gently falling, falling, each unique, whispering 'Remember the mercy of God ... remember the mercy ... ' covering the world in white and then the quiet, quiet, quiet of creation at rest").

## **Retirement**

When I retired, Columbia Bible College gave me a monetary gift. There were strings attached, though. I needed to let my colleagues know what my retirement project would be, for which this monetary gift would be used. I decided that it would go toward the construction of a greenhouse. The amount received from the college was a down-payment for an eight-by-ten-foot structure erected in our backyard.

Retirement now provides ample time for gardening—and contemplation. I have the time and interest to think more about what I am doing and what is actually happening before my eyes.

Conscience does not prick; no voice says, “You need to do more ‘spiritual’ things.” The results of my contemplation in this lively space are amazing. My observation and activity bring meaning to my life. I pray more; I praise more.

## Varieties

We have the urge to create order and uniformity in our immediate environment. But I have observed that in creation, God seems to love variety. I discovered that there are more than two hundred kinds of heritage or heirloom tomatoes. I have grown more than thirty varieties of these beauties. Shapes, sizes, colours, textures, tastes—you name it, we can grow it. Wandering through the

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jungle of my tomato plants, I am impressed with these different plants and their fruits. Their variety alone makes for a rich conversation with friends and strangers alike.

## Miracle

Tiny seeds turn into large plants with flowers and fruit, plants many times larger than the seeds. Soil, seemingly lifeless, becomes the environment for germination and growth and the eventual harvest of precious fruit. New shoots, so miniscule, so fragile, so unassuming, grow into three-metre plants. I feel

excitement when I stretch to harvest the ripened fruit—the small, the medium sized, the large, and the extra large. Each time I begin planting seeds into small containers, I feel almost naïve, believing that plants and fruit will come out of something so small and unassuming. But they do—most of the time.

## Appearance

Heritage or heirloom tomatoes by nature rarely turn out to be perfect in looks. The big growers develop hybrids to create near-perfect fruit, designer products. Their research is driven by consumers’ desire for flawless fruit of the expected shape, size, texture, appearance. Taste is sacrificed for all that. Looks are everything!

I look around me, and people are everywhere. They are different. In appearance, are there perfect human beings? Perhaps, but

they are few and far between. The cosmetics industry thrives as people pay a high price to look perfect on the outside.

It has been my life goal to do my best in my work. I have always aimed for excellence, but not for perfection. I believe our best is not good enough before God. But that is OK. God does not demand perfection. Look at nature, with all its evidence of imperfection. So I grow a variety of tomatoes that in appearance are imperfect. Oh yes, there are the occasional beauties—don't get me wrong. And when I collect seeds, I harvest them from the near-perfect specimens. The plant and its fruit need to be high quality to justify my perpetuating them.

### **God's junior partner**

A hobby gardener was busy in his garden. A passer-by stopped in amazement. She marvelled at the excellent condition of the garden. The flowers and vegetables were in immaculate condi-

**I have learned to recognize my insignificance in the process of growing things. Although I work hard to do my part, I realize how dependent I am on God's provisions and mercy.**

tion. "Amazing what God has created," said the passer-by. The gardener replied, "You should have seen this garden when God had it. Weeds grew everywhere. A total mess."

I have come to realize that my stewardship of nature is grounded in a worldview: I am God's junior partner. We are invited to assist God in taking care of the nature of which we are an integral part. We are more than spectators; we are participants. We help shape our surroundings. Perhaps that is part of what it

means to be made in the image of God. With this outlook, I would find it hard to exploit and destroy the very environment that nourishes me. God provides the ingredients, the potentials: the soil, the seeds, the promises of weather and seasons. We are allowed to use these properties.

### **Dependence**

I have learned to recognize my insignificance in the process of growing things. Although I work hard to do my part, I realize how dependent I am on God's provisions and mercy. Unless I have the right conditions, the germination factor in the seeds, I utterly fail in my attempts, however ardent my toil.



## **The cacophony of chirps**

I am not alone when I work in the garden. Although I live in suburbia, birds are constant companions. Annie and I take pleasure in having the winged animals around us. Because we like birds, we do not have pets such as cats or dogs.

With the first snow, I get bird feeders ready on our small deck. Birds are our delight. Not always, though. Sitting around our kitchen table, we can observe the variety of birds feeding and fighting. My observations of this microenvironment opened my eyes to how God may feel about us. We make our house and yard available to these critters. It is our seeds and feeders that provide nourishment in times of winter deficiencies. All the birds that come are total strangers. They fight over the food, although there is plenty. Often I hear myself mutter, “That’s not fair! You cannot fight over food that is not yours!” I can see absolutely no need for their aggression.

The birds do not seem to appreciate our generosity. They offer us no thank-you. The survival of the fittest and strongest—of the most aggressive—plays out before our eyes. Sometimes I scheme about interfering in their competition. I wonder, does God have similar feelings about us?

## **So what?**

I am so glad I was born with a passion for growing things. That passion was nourished by my mother and is shared by my wife. How privileged I was in realizing my desire to have a garden even when I was a renter. My love—and my disappointments—have prepared me for a retirement of meaningful and pleasurable engagement with the natural environment. My hobby brings not only enjoyment but also a harvest I can eat. Most of all, as I garden I continue to discover the Source of all life and growth—and death. I stand in awe and worship.

## **About the author**

Jürgen and Annie (Isaak) Schönwetter have two adult children and four grandchildren. Jürgen has served as a pastor for thirteen years and taught at the college level for twenty-four. He lives in Abbotsford, BC, where he is a member of Emmanuel Mennonite Church.

## In my garden

Yorifumi Yaguchi

**R**efugees come to my garden  
where the grasses without insecticide  
grow unweeded: a legless katydid,  
an armless cricket, a wingless grasshopper,  
a snail with its broken shell ...

After a few nights  
they are able to start  
a kind of tuning up. Tonight  
when the harvest moon floats  
high at the center of the sky,

I leave my windows all open  
and am attracted through the night  
by the maimed orchestra  
while my house keeps floating  
on the waves of the surrounding grasses.

### About the poet

Yorifumi Yaguchi, a nationally recognized poet, is a Mennonite pastor and prominent peace activist in Sapporo, the largest city in Japan's far northern Hokkaido region. These poems are reprinted from *The Poetry of Yorifumi Yaguchi: A Japanese Voice in English*, edited by Wilbur J. Birky. Copyright by Good Books (www.GoodBooks.com). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# Will riding my bicycle bring world peace?

## Reflections on creation care and peacemaking

Ray Vander Zaag

**W**ith the rise of environmental awareness and concern, churches have become engaged both in thinking theologically about creation care and in encouraging practical action for stewardship of the environment. While the broad Christian community has understood creation care and environmental stewardship as an increasingly important element of its witness and discipleship, Anabaptist churches have linked creation care with their distinctive emphasis on peacemaking and nonviolent living. As their understandings of peace have evolved from more narrow emphases on nonviolence and nonparticipation in war, to a broader, more integrated understanding of active peacemaking, Anabaptists' peace convictions have come to include bringing shalom through careful use of the environment.

**What kinds of links connect environmental stewardship and conflict? In what specific ways can our actions to care for creation contribute to reduced conflict and increased peace in the world?**

Underlying this understanding is a comprehensive peace ethic that views the original creation as characterized by abundance, interdependence, and harmonious relationships among creatures and between them and their environment. This peace ethic sees Christ's work as one of restoring that shalom. On the surface, it seems logical to believe that if we care for creation, there will be

peace: all people, regardless of their location and economic, ethnic, or social status, will have access to a healthy, abundant environment. All will enjoy good food to eat, fertile fields and forests and waters to sustain their livelihoods, the energy and material resources needed for warmth and shelter, and unspoiled places for recreation and praise of the Creator.

In these pages, I will examine more closely questions about the links between creation care and peacemaking. What kinds of links

connect environmental stewardship and conflict? In what specific ways can our actions to care for creation contribute to reduced conflict and increased peace in the world? Under what conditions does environmental scarcity produce conflict? What does exploration of the concept of environmental peacemaking tell us about our understanding of peace and our witness to peace?

A great deal depends on how we define and conceive of *creation care* and *peacemaking*, and whether our scale of analysis is local or global. Our definitions and scale of analysis will in turn shape our sense of how to respond to the linkages between creation care and peacemaking. I will provide three levels or scales of analysis, beginning with a focus on narrow definitions of peacemaking and small-scale contexts, and moving to progressively wider analyses. As will become clear, these three cases are not distinct types but rather points on a continuum, chosen to help us gain understanding of the issues involved.

### **Local scarcity and local conflict**

The link between creation care and peacemaking that is easiest to understand and respond to would occur when a local community practices poor environmental stewardship, which leads to the scarcity of a specific local environmental resource (water or productive land, for example), which in turn leads directly to violence between groups within that community, who compete for this now-scarce resource. An example from my own experience as a development worker in Haiti was the widespread deforestation of the hilly countryside there, which has led to increasing erosion and declining farm productivity, which in turn has contributed in some communities to violent confrontations between land-hungry small farmers and larger landowners.

***The link between poor environmental stewardship and scarcity.*** In this relatively simple case, the first link we need to examine is the link between poor environmental stewardship and environmental scarcity. Historically, many have viewed increasing local scarcity of land, water, forests, food, or other resources as simply the result of increasing local populations, the so-called neo-Malthusian dilemma of exponential population growth on a fixed resource base. According to this view, much environmental scarcity is a result not of deliberate or malevolent poor steward-

ship but simply of unintentional overuse by growing populations with growing consumption levels.<sup>1</sup> This analysis raises the question whether such consumption-induced scarcity should be judged as poor stewardship, particularly with respect to poor countries where people faced with limited opportunities overuse resources in an attempt merely to survive.

In contrast, a second view would see these types of environmental scarcity as the product of local and/or international

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economic, political, and social structures established by powerful groups. These structures leave ordinary people little choice but to use local resources in unsustainable ways.

Despite their differences, both views imply that environmental destruction is rarely caused by the deliberate and direct wasting or destroying of natural resources but rather occurs because of intermediary social structures.

Both understandings raise intriguing issues for our approach to creation care. The first view, in which scarcity is linked to unintentional overuse, raises the question, are limiting human fertility and population growth

elements of creation care? Perhaps more relevant for most of us reading this article, whose ecological footprints are larger than would be our fair share, that analysis also raises the possibility that creation care involves addressing our levels of resource consumption, not just avoiding intentional harm to the environment. More on that later.

The second view suggests that creation care may be more about changing both local and broader social, economic, and political systems that translate the everyday activities of households and companies into environmental scarcity. I will also return to this question later.

***The link between scarcity and conflict.*** The second link we need to examine is the link between scarcity and conflict. Does scarcity of specific local environmental resources inevitably cause conflict, or is environmental scarcity linked to conflict only under certain specific conditions? An influential scholar advocating the

view that environmental scarcities do produce violent conflict is Thomas Homer-Dixon, director of the peace and conflict studies program at the University of Toronto. He has published many case studies analyzing such scarcity-induced violence. Examples include land scarcities and conflict in Rwanda and the Mexican state of Chiapas, water shortages and violence in Gaza, and conflicts over forest resources in Indonesia.

Yet this purported link is controversial. Some research has found instead that countries and regions with abundant natural resources have experienced both the slowest rates of economic development and associated higher levels of social conflict, because of the unequal distribution of the benefits of these resources.<sup>2</sup> Resource-poor countries, in this explanation, are forced to diversify earlier into manufacturing, which leads to more stable economic and political structures, and to less conflict. Furthermore, “objective deprivation,” the mere fact that people are poor,

**The geophysical nature of global resources produces a contradiction: the link between each of us and the resource is direct, but our awareness that in each individual case the link is tiny may undermine our motivation to practice environmental stewardship.**

seldom produces strong grievances and subsequent violence. Rather, what is important is the perceived gap between actual and “deserved” access (what has been called “relative deprivation”). Even more significantly, this research found that neither type of deprivation is a good predictor of the likelihood of violent conflict; more important is a combination of sufficiently strong identity-based collectives that can organize violent action, and sufficiently weak political systems that provide little opportunity for nonviolent expression of grievances.

All this analysis suggests that the links between poor creation care and violent conflict are usually indirect, and that creation care may not be the most important or direct way to make peace at this level. Instead, the critical social, economic, and political structures that translate scarcity into violence may be the areas where peacemaking—understood as social transformation—will be most effective. Particularly if we are outsiders in a situation of local environmental scarcity and local violence, our peacemaking efforts are probably best directed at strengthening or reforming those social

processes, so that the human factors causing poor use of environmental resources can be addressed.

### **Global resources, scarcity, and conflict**

If it is difficult to find a direct link between environmental care and conflict in smaller-scale contexts, the dynamics are significantly different when our perspective shifts to the global scale. Here creation care involves environmental resources that flow unhindered across all borders, and global-scale ecological systems that have an impact on people everywhere on the earth. Likewise, all people necessarily use these resources. The critical current example, of course, is the global atmospheric system and the key environmental resource that it provides: a stable climate. Recent years have seen this issue emerge as the critical environmental concern of our time, perhaps in part because we cannot dismiss it as a localized problem being experienced somewhere else. Instead, it threatens the health and peaceful existence of the entire human race.

*The link between poor environmental stewardship and scarcity.* The link between use of this global environmental resource and scarcity is direct. When I emit greenhouse gases, that act contributes directly to the reduced supply (increased scarcity) of a stable global climate system. And every time I ride my bicycle instead of driving, I help conserve this vital resource.

But while the link is direct, the level of my individual local contribution is small. My actions are minuscule in proportion to the size of the problem, so I am tempted to think that my choices won't make any difference. The inherently geophysical nature of global-scale resources therefore produces a contradiction: the link between each of us and the resource is direct, but our awareness that in each individual case the link is tiny may undermine our motivation to practice good environmental stewardship.

As we noted in the case of local-level contexts, overuse may not be deliberate or malevolent. The overuse of our atmosphere as a waste deposit site for fossil-fuel emissions is not necessarily a deliberate spoiling of our environment. The increase in greenhouse gas emissions is more a result of the exponential expansion of the human economy to the point that it unintentionally overwhelms the capacity of global ecosystems to absorb its by-products.

In fact, carbon dioxide, the primary greenhouse gas, is not in itself a pollutant but a necessary component of the atmosphere, and what produces climate change is the upsetting of the greenhouse gas balance. And so it has been difficult to mobilize political and popular understanding about the need to take action on climate change, because the problem is an unintended disturbance of the equilibrium of this natural system. And, like issues of local resource scarcity, this issue raises the challenging proposition that the sustainability of our environmental footprint on the global ecosystem is a key creation care issue.

***The link between scarcity and conflict.*** A link between environmental scarcity of global resources and violent conflict is difficult to isolate. A healthy global climate system is not a resource that can be captured or controlled through military action, and one cannot point to examples of violence directly linked to conflicts over greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the news is full of stories about environmental effects of global climate change. Rapid climate change is disrupting farming, forestry, and fishing systems in many places in the world, and the evidence suggests that poorer and less stable regions experience the largest negative impacts. It is quite conceivable that these disruptions will produce violent local conflicts. Some researchers, for example, have posited that regional climate change is a key factor in the current conflict in Darfur, because it has led to changing opportunities for grazing and thus to population migrations.

As the case in Darfur suggests, however, global environmental change does not produce conflict directly or immediately. Rather, global patterns produce local environmental change, which are then translated through complex and interrelated global and local economic, political, and other social structures, to produce the possibility of conflict. In the conflict in Darfur, other analysts point out that politics and government are intervening key factors: these entities have failed to address the problems of environmental stress and have probably made the situation worse by responding militarily to political disputes.<sup>3</sup>

***A reverse case scenario.*** In fact, some suggest that the direction of causality frequently runs in the opposite direction: conflict often causes environmental destruction. Environmental resources are rarely used sustainably in situations of conflict and injustice,



as—for example—when exploited and impoverished people overuse their land and forests simply to survive during times of crisis. For this reason, in some contexts working to resolve and transform the causes of violence and injustice between conflicting groups may be the most effective way to promote creation care.

### **Not resource scarcity but inequity as the cause of conflict**

Both the local and the global-scale analysis suggests that it is not resource scarcity in itself that causes conflict but rather unequal and unfair access to and control of resources. Access, control, and property rights are always defined in the context of social relations, through negotiation and debate in the political arenas of the household, the community, and the state. The implication is that, in most cases, creation care initiatives are only indirectly linked—through human social structures and processes—to

**Conflict often causes environmental destruction. In some contexts, working to resolve the causes of violence and injustice between conflicting groups may be the most effective way to promote creation care.**

conflict and peace. Actions to reform and heal these broken and unjust social structures and processes are likely the most important and direct ways to work for both creation care and peace.

This perspective is a key principle from my academic discipline, human geography. A geographical outlook sees social outcomes (such as conflict or peace) always as the result of *human* transformation of the natural environment. Geographical or environmental impacts are rarely purely natural or direct. In

our efforts to understand environmental conflict, this perspective would emphasize that abundance or scarcity in the created environment rarely affects and constrains human societies directly, except in short-term ways. Rather, the impact in the longer term is almost always mediated by human social structures: the economic and political systems, cultural norms and worldviews that shape access, effects, and opportunities.<sup>4</sup> In fact, given the overall size of the world's human population, and the technological manipulation of natural resources that is the cultural norm in most societies, the health of the environment itself and its ability to provide a healthy home for humans are products of human economic and social structures.

## **Global citizenship and the world's shalom**

This final section will expand the scope of analysis once more, from the previous narrow emphasis on actions that directly protect the environment or stop violent conflict, to broader, more holistic or integral understandings of creation care and peacemaking. With a more comprehensive analysis, we can again establish a stronger link between creation care and shalom making, though both will be seen as outcomes of a more primary focus on discipleship and service rather than as primary goals in themselves.

The first two sections of this article suggested that creation care is a matter not just of avoiding deliberate harm to the environment. Much environmental scarcity is a result of unintentional overuse rather than deliberate misuse, as growing populations and consumption levels put increasing pressure on local and global environments. Here in Manitoba, we have not deliberately caused algae blooms in Lake Winnipeg by intentionally overloading it with phosphorus and other nutrients; we have simply followed accepted practices for buying dishwasher soap, farming hogs, growing wheat and canola, and making our lawns attractive. Globally, we have not intentionally acted to disrupt climate patterns; we have simply taken advantage of the benefits of relatively abundant and easy to extract hydrocarbon energy supplies, in order to provide cheap and efficient transportation and power systems for our homes, factories, and farms. Yet cumulatively these activities are producing damaging consequences for our environment.

As we become aware of the cumulative environmental effects of our everyday lives, we should certainly make efforts to do less harm. But a commitment to creation care also requires a commitment to a range of broader activities beyond the direct individual environmentalism of driving less or using fewer pesticides, for example. What is also needed is support for systematic study of ecological and social processes, so that we better understand how our innocent actions are translated into longer-term and larger-scale environmental impacts. We need to support government action at the local, national, and international levels, to establish policies and regulations, based on solid environmental knowledge, to prevent environmental harm. And we need to support international development efforts—both direct efforts by public and

nonprofit agencies to assist those living in fragile or vulnerable environments in poorer countries, and policy reform of national and international trade and monetary policies that unfairly disadvantage the economies of poorer nations.

My inclusion of these activities in an ethic of creation care may not be what some church people want to hear. To those who want simple, direct responses, such actions may seem too political or bureaucratic. Yet I would argue that such social engagement is a necessary element of a consistent creation care ethic, and more broadly, a consistent and integral life of service and love of

**Social engagement is a necessary element of a consistent creation care ethic, and more broadly, a consistent and integral life of service and love of neighbour.**

neighbour. This social engagement can take many forms. For example, perhaps we need to see our citizenship as ministry, as we decide how to vote and participate politically. Perhaps we need to consider using our vocational gifts to follow careers in which we craft new forms of creation care.

In the first two sections I suggested that environmental scarcity is usually only indirectly related to violent conflict, and therefore creation care is also only indirectly linked to peacemaking. Yet this assertion reflects a narrow understanding of peace as the prevention or halting of violence. That understanding needs to be expanded to include the wealth of meaning found in the Hebrew term *shalom*. *Shalom* involves right relationships among peoples and between persons, and between people and the natural order, based on a right relationship with God. Peace and justice—including environmental justice—are linked in this vision of *shalom*. God is a God of peace and justice who is active in the world in a restorative way, to heal these relationships. All forms of brokenness and conflict, including but not limited to physical violence, are appropriate objects of peacemaking activity. All forms of right living build peace, in a pre-emptive way.

When we understand it in this way, peacemaking—or perhaps peace building—is clearly an element in our care for creation. The direct things we do to protect the environment, and the less direct things we do to make our local and global economic and political communities more just, do contribute to restored relationships. All our efforts to live by gospel principles of service and

“doing unto others” contribute, in the long term, to building peace and justice—to restoring shalom—in the world.

Becoming more ecologically minded will teach us important truths that also apply to peace building. Climate change has made clear the ecological truth that all the peoples of the world are in fact neighbours. We don’t live in an isolated enclave; our actions are not confined to our immediate location, and we cannot easily know all their effects. We live, ecologically as well as socially, in a big, interdependent world, and we need to understand that our actions do ripple out and affect people in many places, often in ways we don’t see.

My conclusion, therefore, is that neither creation care nor peacemaking, particularly when narrowly understood, should be the primary goal of our faithful living in the world. I see both more as outcomes or results of a primary commitment to living faithfully in response to God’s command to love God, our neighbours, and ourselves. A foundational commitment to these basic gospel commands will draw us to work out the complexities of right action, and we will contribute in small, cumulative, and interrelated ways both to better care of God’s good creation and to more peaceful relationships among earth’s peoples.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The idea of ecological footprint is important here. A measure of human demand on nature, it is defined as the biologically productive area a population requires to produce the resources it consumes and to dispose of its wastes.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Richard M. Auty, “How Natural Resources Affect Economic Development,” *Development Policy Review* 18 (2000): 347–64. There are, of course, exceptions.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Julie Flint and Alex de Waal’s *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> This assessment is similar to my understanding of the way God works—occasionally directly and personally, but more often through neighbours, communities, and peoples.

## About the author

Ray Vander Zaag grew up on a potato farm in Ontario, was a development worker in Haiti for eight years, and now teaches international development studies at Canadian Mennonite University (Winnipeg, Manitoba). Last year he rode 2,400 kilometers on his bike (mostly for pleasure) and about 14,000 kilometers in the family minivan.

# Preaching the good news with our mouths full

Cathleen Hockman-Wert

**W**hen I was a child, I ate as a child—the consummate picky eater. I didn’t like strawberries. I didn’t like watermelon. I didn’t like corn on the cob or cucumbers or peppers or peaches.

Today, having put away such childish eating habits, I now consider myself—to my mother’s amusement—something of a

**I’d like to lay some groundwork for thinking about food as a spiritual matter, and for considering the role food can play in our Christian walk. How can what goes into our mouths say something about our faith?**

food evangelist. I am neither a theologian nor a food professional of any kind, but a passionate advocate for eating good food. Evangelists tell the good news, and to me, choosing local, sustainably grown, and fairly traded food is all about good news. These are foods that not only taste good and are good for our health; they’re also good for the environment, good for local economies, good for our neighbors who farm, and good for people worldwide.

Going into all these areas is too much for one article, but I’d like to lay some ground-

work for thinking about food as a spiritual matter, and for considering the role food can play in our Christian walk. How can what goes into our mouths say something about our faith?

## **Food is a gift**

Food plays a central role in the Christian story and our theology, tradition, and practices. Scriptural examples abound. In Genesis 1, food is God’s very first gift, to humankind and animals alike.

When the Israelites wander in the wilderness, God provides a new gift of manna. Jesus’ first miracle turns water into wine, and later he feeds thousands with bread and fish. Even after the resurrection, there is the risen Christ, cooking breakfast on the shore.

It’s important to start by emphasizing that food is a gift from God, a fundamentally good and wonderful gift. This reminder is

especially important for those of us living in a culture of abundance. How fortunate many of us are to wake each morning untroubled by concerns about whether we and our loved ones will have enough nutritious food for the day. Yet how easy it can be to take food for granted, or even to see it in negative spiritual terms. Ever been “tempted” by a piece of “Chocolate Sin Cake”?

In *The Supper of the Lamb*, Episcopal priest Robert Farrar Capon sets the record straight:

*Food these days is often identified as the enemy. Butter, salt, sugar, eggs are all out to get you. And yet at our best we know better. Butter is ... well, butter: it glorifies almost everything it touches. Salt is the sovereign perfecter of all flavors. Eggs are, pure and simple, one of the wonders of the world. And if you put them all together, you get not sudden death, but Hollandaise—which in its own way is not one bit less a marvel than the Gothic arch, the computer chip, or a Bach fugue.<sup>1</sup>*

Imagine a perfectly ripe peach, a delight to every sense: that soft, fuzzy skin, rosy blush, sweet perfume, squelch of the first slurpy bite, then juice dripping down your chin. A wondrous thing! I have to conclude: God cares, really cares, about food.

Food is sacred. For Christians, food is, literally, a sacrament: the Eucharistic elements. And the Lord's Supper is the best illustration that when we're talking about food, the line between metaphor and the literal gets fuzzy. When we celebrate communion, real bread and drink are involved, but something much deeper is going on than the nourishment of our bodies, as essential as that is. Episcopal bishop Bill Swing puts it this way: “There's a hunger beyond food that's expressed in food, and that's why feeding is always a kind of miracle. It speaks to a bigger desire.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Food is a moral issue**

Just as some foods are physically more nourishing than others, some are spiritually more nourishing than others—or they can be. We won't find this on any label (4 g. fiber, 1 g. fat, 50 percent daily recommended food for the soul), and we don't always think about it. But the foods we eat are not morally neutral. All foods

come with stories, stories of real-world impact. Some of those stories are much more in tune with our values.

Consider an example from the early nineteenth century, as described by Jessica Prentice in *Full Moon Feast*. New England settlers of the day could choose between two sweeteners: locally produced maple sugar or refined cane sugar imported from the Caribbean, where it was produced by slaves. An 1805 farmer's almanac urged, "Make your own sugar, and send not to the Indies for it. Feast not on the toil, pain, and misery of the wretched." A historian of Vermont noted that maple sugar "is never tinctured

**Food is a gift from God, a good and wonderful gift. This reminder is especially important for those of us living in a culture of abundance. How easy it can be to take food for granted.**

with the sweat, and the groans, and the tears, and the blood of the poor slave."<sup>3</sup>

That's a 200-year-old story. The point is that stories of our food today also have dramatic ethical implications. Yet because so few of us produce our own food, we no longer know those stories.

Where did your last meal come from? If we were to read the full story, we might start with several chapters explaining where our food was grown, by whom, under what

conditions, with what consequences for wildlife, and for whose profit. Of concern would be the seeds' origin, the planting, watering, fertilizing, weeding, spraying, and harvesting. The next chapters would go into the transporting, storing, packaging, processing, and marketing of our food.

By the time we got to the end, we would see how our food choices are affecting creation and our neighbors, making them healthy or sick, making lives better or worse. We would find that although one carrot can look pretty much like another, one pound of hamburger like another, their stories can be as different as the tale of two sweeteners in 1805 New England. Some have happy endings. Others are horror stories.

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, journalist Michael Pollan offers an in-depth but very readable account of the conventional agriculture system in the United States and its impact on the environment. He describes the central role fossil fuels play in the industrial food chain: from chemical fertilizers to providing the energy needed to run farm machinery and to process, package,

and transport food. All told, it takes ten times more energy to produce the food than the food itself provides the eater.

Pollan makes a direct connection between food choices and international conflict. The context is a chapter about conventional meat production. Rather than eating grass and converting the energy of the sun into a food that people can digest, most modern cows in the U.S. eat grain. The statistic I have seen elsewhere is that it takes about a cup of gasoline to produce a quarter-pound burger. As a result, Pollan says, “petroleum is one of the most important ingredients in the production of modern meat, and the Persian Gulf is surely a link in the food chain....

[The industrial food chain is] powered by fossil fuel—and therefore defended by the U.S. military, another never-counted cost of cheap food.”<sup>4</sup>

**Our food production chain has become so complex that we don't see the effects of our choices. But to say that we don't know the stories of our food is not to say that we do not participate in those stories.**

I daresay when most of us buy a hamburger, we're thinking about whether we want fries with it, not about the war in Iraq. Our food production chain has become so long and complex that we don't see the effects of our choices. But to say that we don't know the stories of our food is not to say that we do not participate in those stories. As writer and farmer Wendell Berry famously put it, eating is an agricultural act. And a moral one. And

that is precisely why I get so energized by this topic. Our Anabaptist tradition emphasizes discipleship: a concern for how we live out our faith in ordinary life. The constant nature of our need to eat provides a tremendous opportunity to express our faith every day.

Given the ramifications of the choices we make about food, it's possible that what we put in our mouths can be as powerful a faith statement as the words coming out of our mouths. St. Francis is quoted as saying, “Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.” Now we can preach the good news with our mouths full!

### **Food is a gift for everyone**

Every faith tradition includes a call to share food and be hospitable. Working to ensure that all people have access to good food—food that is good in every way—is a relevant and even



prophetic way for Christians to extend our historical efforts to feed the hungry.

The exponential growth of the fair trade coffee industry over the last decade has shown that churches can make an enormous difference. Fair trade coffee has entered the mainstream with incredible speed, and at least some of the credit belongs to organizations such as Ten Thousand Villages that sell it, and to churches that buy it and promote it among their members.

**What I love most about this journey with food and faith is its ordinariness. We all eat. Not everyone can buy a hybrid car, but we all can make small, mindful choices about what we eat.**

In my own community of Corvallis, Oregon, it's been exciting to be a part of a local initiative called "That's My Farmer." For the 2007 growing season, ten churches teamed up with ten small farms to sell coupons

redeemable for fresh, local food at the farmers' market. A ten percent "tithe" from each booklet went into a fund to provide free coupons to low-income people in the community. That's a win-win-win: church members who bought the coupons got great food, local farmers got more business, and lower-income folks got better access to fresh, nutritious food.

### **Eating is a spiritual discipline**

Participating in That's My Farmer has convinced me that eating can be a meaningful spiritual discipline. I use this term for two main reasons. First, as with the discipline of charitable giving, there's an economic impact: good foods can cost more. I have needed to learn to question my "cheaper is always better" attitude. While I still value frugality, I no longer assume that price is the most important factor as I make a purchasing decision. Now I ask about any item, not just food: Why is this item cheap? What costs, in terms of impact on the environment and other people's lives, are not being covered? Who is bearing the real costs?

Keeping these questions in mind helps me remember that my purchase happens in the context of a community, human and nonhuman. My choices aren't just about me and my pocketbook. As I shop, I have learned to repeat a prayer from *Blessed Be Our Table*, a collection of graces from the Iona community: "Let me not seek a bargain that leaves others hungry."<sup>5</sup>

Just as significant as the economic impact is the impact on time. My observation from *That's My Farmer* is that for the majority of our congregation, time was a bigger barrier to participation than cost was. Amid busy schedules, it can be hard to find the time to buy and prepare fresh food. Framing this practice as a spiritual discipline honors that reality. If we are to spend time in worship or prayer, we must make these practices a priority. The same is true of cooking a meal.

What I love most about this journey with food and faith is its ordinariness. We all eat. We constantly make choices about food.

**Fixing the world is God's business. Yes, we can participate in that great mending, but our actions are on the scale of the child who brought his lunch to Jesus. We can offer them up, trusting that God can use them to work wonders.**

Not everyone can manage to buy a hybrid car or go off the electrical grid, but we all can make small, mindful choices about what we eat. We might make one choice today and a different choice tomorrow, but the next meal always brings another chance to move toward greater consistency in matching our values with our actions.

That, to me, is how grocery shopping can be a spiritual act. It's about putting my faith into practice. I mean *practice* in the sense of "enactment" but also in the sense of "to train by repeated exercises." It's like practicing the

piano. We do it over and over again and get better. It's not about perfection.

Practicing the spiritual discipline of mindful eating can be a way to practice—and perhaps get better at—hope. When I consider the scope of global environmental degradation and the looming specter of climate change, any action I might take can seem meaningless. What can one person do? I am tempted to sink into despair or apathy. Yet as I eat, I can take concrete actions each day and offer them up as acts of faithfulness, more focused on responding to our Creator than on results.

I have read that we Mennonites, for all our humility, are particularly susceptible to the sin of pride; our emphasis on discipleship twists into an unrelenting internal sense that it's up to us to fix the world. In truth, fixing the world is God's business. Yes, we can participate in that great mending, but our actions are on the scale of the child who brought his lunch to Jesus. We can

offer them up, trusting that God can use them to work wonders beyond our imagining.

As we eat good food, we are nourished, physically and spiritually, for the journey. Isaiah 55 rings out like a dinner bell: Come, and eat what is good.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989), xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> As cited by Sara Miles, *Take this Bread: A Radical Conversion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 175.

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Prentice, *Full Moon Feast: Food and the Hunger for Connection* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Pub., 2006), 26–27.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Neil Paynter, *Blessed Be Our Table: Graces for Mealtimes and Reflections on Food* (Glasgow: Wild Goose, 2003), 26.

## About the author

Cathleen Hockman-Wert, Corvallis, Oregon, is the co-author, with Mary Beth Lind, of *Simply in Season*, a cookbook in the spirit of *More-with-Less*, commissioned by Mennonite Central Committee.

## A spirituality of creation care

Susan Classen

**J**ob reminds us that animals, birds of the air, plants of the earth, and fish of the sea all innately know something that we humans need to learn: that “in [God’s] hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being”:

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the LORD has done this? (Job 12:7–9)*

Jesus used examples from nature to teach his followers life lessons. He pointed to birds and flowers, weeds and wheat, as he taught

**Spirituality touches on the core values that lie beneath the choices we make and the lives we lead. A spirituality of creation care is more than reducing our consumption out of concern about climate change.**

those around him to recognize God and respond in trust. Centuries later, Pilgram Marpeck, an Anabaptist leader, sensed God in creation when he wrote, “All visible creatures are placed in the world as apostles and teachers.”<sup>1</sup> Creation teaches us that God is the source and the sustainer of life.

Spirituality touches on the core values and beliefs that lie beneath the choices we make and the lives we lead. A spirituality of creation care, therefore, is more than reducing our consumption out of concern about

climate change. It is more than recycling because we don’t want to be wasteful, more than eating local food in order to reduce the use of fossil fuels. A spirituality of creation care recognizes creation as a reflection of our Creator. God’s Spirit is present in all that exists, caring for us and teaching us how to live in harmony.

We respond humbly and gratefully by taking care of what cares for us. A spirituality of creation care invites us to respond to God's presence in the world around us.

### **Come and see**

Creation beckons us to come and see God. Learning to see and respond to God in the world around us, then, is a crucial spiritual practice.

This past summer, at the end of July, I noticed a vine sprouting in the flower bed in front of the cabin where I live. It was growing in the same spot where an acorn squash had sprouted last year from the compost. The vine spread and formed fruit. One afternoon, a departing visitor called out that my melons were about ready to pick. "They aren't melons," I replied from the door. "They're acorn squash." After his car pulled out, I started wondering how he could confuse melons and squash, so I went to the plant and really looked at it for the first time. Sure enough, big round melons were beginning to turn from green to tan. I stood there shaking my head, amazed that I could have been so blind. A

**Assumptions keep me from seeing, but curiosity opens my eyes. We often overlook the spiritual value of curiosity. But it was curiosity that got Moses to step off the path to see God in the burning bush.**

passing visitor had spotted what I had missed: for weeks, melons had been growing right outside my front door, and I had never looked closely enough to identify them—because I just assumed they were squash!

Assumptions keep me from seeing, but curiosity opens my eyes. The one saving grace about the incident was that, after the visitor pointed out the melons, I was curious enough to go and look for myself. We often overlook the spiritual value of curiosity. But it was curiosity that got Moses to step off the path to see God in the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–6). And Jesus' first disciples began to follow him because they were curious about who he was and where he was going (John 1:35–42). Jesus invited his disciples to come and see (John 1:39), and they did.

Children are role models for curiosity. Everything is interesting to a young child discovering the world. We would do well to spend time with children, as we seek to respond to God's invitation to come and see.

## **An invitation in every moment**

Thomas Merton once wrote that “every moment and every event of [our] life on earth plants something in [our] soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in [our] minds and wills.... Most of these unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because [we] are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity and love.”<sup>2</sup> God’s presence in and around us constantly invites us to respond.

One day the simple task of building a fire inspired these reflections:

*It’s a cold, wet November morning in Kentucky. I’m sitting in Grandma’s old rocker, wrapped in a royal purple afghan crocheted by my niece. The afghan somehow holds my niece’s love and creativity, and I draw it close. A fire glows in the woodstove.*

*Last night, I carefully prepared the kindling so that the fire would light easily this morning. Pulling wood scraps from the kindling box, I was reminded that each piece has a story. The long, matchstick-like pieces were shaved off boards used for my cabin floor. I gratefully remembered the woman who donated the boards, which were left over from the house she built. The larger pieces of rough, weathered wood were scraps left from remodeling one of the retreat center cabins here. Those boards came from eighty-seven-year-old Mr. Kemp, who is glad that someone is interested in the old boards piling up in his lumberyard, which (like its owner) is fading. I set aside some thick slabs of oak from a tree that fell in a storm by Mary’s Lake, so they would be ready to use once the fire was hot.*

*I feel settled by the memories inspired by the rocker, the afghan, the wood scraps. They are tangible reminders that everything holds a story, that everything is more than what it seems on the surface, that I’m a small but important part of that “something more.”*

*On the surface, I'm describing something as inconsequential as starting a fire with scraps of wood. But underneath the mundane task, I sense the Spirit inviting me to live with the awareness of God's presence in every moment, in everything, in everyone.*

The psalmist describes the pervasive presence of God's Spirit. "If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there" (Ps. 139:8). The writer of this psalm identified the highest and lowest places he could imagine. Today we could describe the span of God's presence far more broadly. Think of God's grandeur expressed not just in one galaxy but in the approximately one hundred and forty billion galaxies we know exist! And imagine God's presence in something as minute as human genes. I was awed when I read that the instructions contained in our genes in a single DNA strand would fill a thousand books of six hundred pages each. And those strands are present in each one of our billions of cells!<sup>3</sup> God's transcendence and God's immanence are beyond our comprehension.

It's a challenge to live the truth that God is both transcendent and immanent. Sometimes we emphasize only God's transcen-

**Underneath the mundane task of starting a fire, I sense the Spirit inviting me to live with the awareness of God's presence in every moment, in everything, in everyone.**

dence. God is "up there" somewhere, a being who set the world in motion and then withdrew except for occasional interventions. I recently heard a friend say with urgency, "We've got to get God out of the sky!" Our understanding of God as distant from the natural world, as apart from, as over and above, contributes to our tendency to see ourselves as apart from rather than a part of creation. If God is in the sky, ruling over the earth, then we too can exercise power over

the rest of creation. But Paul told the people of Athens that God is not far from us: in God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The world around us becomes the place where we search for—and find—God.

Several weeks ago, I heard an Episcopal priest describe his efforts to promote a faith-based response to the environment. He has found that most people have had a significant experience of

God's presence in nature, but not even one in twenty has talked about that experience in church. I was astounded. What might happen in our congregations if we asked each other how we have experienced God in nature? What might open up within us as individuals and as communities of faith if we told stories of life lessons learned from pets and gardens, from sunrises and storms?

### Seasons and rhythms

God is present in the details of every moment, and God is present in the broader seasons and rhythms of life. I need to live close enough to nature to absorb a healthy understanding of time as season.

I recently read an article that pointed out the influence of nineteenth-century philosophers on the priority Western culture places on extracting profit. Stanley Jevons (d. 1882) wrote, "Value depends entirely on utility."<sup>4</sup> I initially felt smug as I thought about those who extract profit from natural resources, and about the destruction that results. "I appreciate beauty and don't have a utilitarian view of creation." But then it hit me. I try to extract profit from time. Time is only useful if I use it productively and make every minute count. Of course, I'm the one who determines what is efficient and whether the minutes count. I judge according to my criteria.

**I get impatient with the time it takes to nourish my roots, and I resist dying back. Gardening helps me remember to honor the seasons of my own life, fallow and fruitful, and to trust that the time for fruit will come.**

When I write about God's Spirit within creation, I have to write about it with great humility and with the heartfelt question, what does creation teach me about time and efficiency? Nature reminds me that I'm small, that my life will fade like a leaf (Isa. 64:6), that my understanding is limited, and that God's ways are as far beyond my grasp as the heavens are far above the earth (Isa. 55:9). Who can look at the grandeur of the mountains and feel big? Who of us can think we are in control in the middle of a snowstorm? Even something as minor as hoping it doesn't rain on a picnic is a reminder that I'm not in control!

Creation makes visible the wisdom of Paul's counsel to the Romans "not to think of yourself more highly than you ought,"



because you are only one member of the body, and all the members have their functions (Rom. 12:3–4). Creation teaches me that size doesn't matter, that standing out is no better than being essentially invisible. What would happen to the earth without bacteria to break down waste? Yet I don't see bacteria. I don't think about what they do. I'm only somewhat aware of them when I check to see how well the compost pile is breaking down. So why do I think I need to do with my life something that I see as big and important?

I make myself too big when I think that my perspective is broad enough to determine the efficient and productive use of my time. When Peter tells his readers that for God a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day, he is reminding them that our increments of time are scarcely relevant to God (2 Pet. 3:8). Time in creation is marked by cycles and seasons, not by hands on a watch.

Late last summer, in the midst of the tomato harvest, I found myself wondering, why do I think I should live my entire life as if I were in the midst of harvest time in August? I know that tomatoes have their season of harvest, which comes after a long season of growth and will be followed by a season of dying back. But I get impatient with the time it takes to nourish my roots, and I resist dying back. I somehow think something is wrong if I'm not constantly producing bushels of visible fruit in my life. Gardening helps me remember to honor the seasons of my own life, fallow and fruitful, and to trust that the time for fruit will come naturally if I nourish my roots.

**Gratitude is the foundation of a spirituality of creation care, because it reminds me that life is a gift I receive from God with every breath I take.**

### **Grateful living**

Gratitude is the foundation of a spirituality of creation care, because it reminds me that life is a gift I receive from God with every breath I take. It helps me remember that I'm small and important at the same time. I'm not the only person who receives life from God with

each breath. Humans are not the only beings that receive life from God with each breath. We are part of an intricate web which is sustained by God, the giver of life. Psalm 148 is a rousing call for all creation—the sun and the moon, the shining stars, moun-

tains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, young people and old—to praise God. Everything that has life and breath has the capacity to praise the one who created us.

When I'm aware of God's presence in creation, I respond with gratitude, and gratitude inspires action. When I was living without running water for twenty years in Central America, I hoped that on my return to the U.S., I would remember to be grateful whenever I turned on the faucet. Unfortunately, I often take water for granted, but at least sometimes I allow the act of opening the tap to remind me to be grateful, to help me remember that many women in the world spend hours every day hauling water by hand, and that children die because they lack clean water to drink.

If I follow the water in my house back to its source, I'm aware that Kentucky is rich in flowing streams. And as I think about those streams, I'm appalled that they are being destroyed, as coal companies dynamite the tops of mountains to extract the coal, and then dump the debris into valleys and waterways. Gratitude for clean water inspires me to reflect on how to take care of what I'm grateful for, and gratitude inspires me to respond to those who don't have access to something so basic to life.

My former neighbors in Central America are my role models for living gratefully and generously. Daily life reminds them of two basic truths: we aren't in control, and we need one another. They know that they are dependent on God and one another, so they take nothing for granted. They celebrate as a gift things I tend to overlook or expect as a right.

As I prepared to return to the U.S., I worried about not having neighbors to remind me that I'm not autonomous and in control. Then I realized that creation teaches the same truth. I'm grateful that at this point in my life I can live and work close to the earth, because it helps me keep me in touch with God's wisdom embedded in nature. But I know that God's Spirit is present everywhere, not just in the rural landscape where I now live. Wherever we are, whatever we do, we can ask for an increased awareness of the ways creation reflects our Creator's wisdom.

### **God's desire to be found**

The Spirit of God invites us to come and see that creation is more than a source of natural resources for human consumption. God is

present and calling out to us in creation. I'm deeply moved by Isaiah's expression of God's desire to be found: "I was ready to be sought out.... I said, 'Here I am, here I am'" (Isa. 65:1). But the people are not looking for or listening to God:

*I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,  
to be found by those who did not seek me.  
I said, "Here I am, here I am,"  
to a nation that did not call on my name.*

God is calling out to us, "Here I am, here I am!" in the beauty of the sky, in the intricacy of a flower, in the grandeur of a mountain. God is calling, "Here I am, here I am!" as earth's resources are being depleted, as species become extinct, as the vulnerable suffer from drought and floods. When will God's call, "Here I am, here I am!" be heard by a people who are looking and listening—and who respond with gratitude?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, trans. and ed., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1978), 56.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 125.

<sup>4</sup> Walter J. Burghardt, "Contemplation: A Long Loving Look at the Real," *Church*, Winter 1989, 15.

## About the author

Susan Classen worked with Mennonite Central Committee in Latin America for twenty years. She is currently the director of Cedars of Peace, a retreat center in central Kentucky, located on the grounds of a Catholic religious community, the Sisters of Loretto.

## Mennonite Creation Care Network

**M**ennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) is a new organisation of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA for Mennonite people and agencies actively engaged in the care and restoration of God's creation. It is rooted in the conviction that all the earth is an expression of God's love and that Christ calls us to be stewards of the earth, bringing renewal to the land. In response to this call, MCCN's vision is to equip lay people and leaders with tools, resources, and models that will educate, encourage, and inspire the church in this work.

MCCN's goals are to encourage the church to (1) claim our biblical and theological foundations regarding care of God's creation, (2) discover the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God, (3) confess the harm humans have caused the natural world, and (4) act faithfully to restore the earth.

The centre of the network is the MCCN Web site (<http://www.mennocreationcare.org/>). It contains resource links; examples of creation care among individuals, congregations, schools, church agencies, and the work/business community; a directory to facilitate networking with other creation care workers; and a photo gallery. A sampling of resource links from the Web site is provided below.

### **Greening churches and homes**

**A Rocha** in Portuguese means "the rock." A Rocha Canada is a national conservation organisation working to show God's love for all creation. Their commitment to environmental action is manifest through community-based conservation projects, with a focus on science and research, practical conservation, and environmental education. For resources on making your church a creation stewardship centre, see <http://en.arocha.org/caresources/index.html>.

**Earth Ministry's** mission is to inspire and mobilise Christians to lead in building a just and sustainable future. Their resources include *Greening Congregations Handbook: Stories, Ideas, and Resources for Cultivating Creation Awareness and Care in Your Congregation*, a 225-page “tool box” for all who want to foster creation awareness and care in their congregations ([http://www.earthministry.org/your\\_congregation.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/your_congregation.htm)); and *Caring for All Creation: On the Road, at the Table, in the Home* (<http://www.earthministry.org/cfac.htm>). The latter is a four-part program to encourage individuals and communities of faith to live in loving community with all of God's creation, in specific aspects of our lives.

**Greening Sacred Spaces** is a practical programme of Faith and the Common Good, to assist faith communities to “renew the sacred balance.” This group has developed a resource kit, which includes workshops, posters, music, and more, to help faith groups reduce greenhouse gases and live sustainably. See <http://www.faith-commongood.net/gss/index.asp>. Faith and the Common Good is an interfaith network of religious communities who understand the earth as a sacred gift: “As peoples of differing faiths and cultures, we affirm common values of justice, peace, participation, human rights, ecological inter-relationship, and compassion as cornerstones of a healthy society.”

**Web of Creation** was established to foster personal and social transformation to a just and sustainable world from religious perspectives. Maintained by the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, with funding, sponsorship, and endorsement from a variety of faith-based sources, this Web site provides ecology resources to transform faith and society. See <http://www.webofcreation.org/Manuals/index.htm>.

### **Worship and education resources**

**Environment Resource Packs** from A Rocha UK provide worship materials focusing on biblical teaching on God's world and our place in it, Christian perspectives on the environment, and making a practical difference in your local community. See <http://en.arocha.org/ukconsunday/index2.html>.

**The Catholic Conservation Center's** mission is to promote ecology, environmental justice, and the stewardship of creation in

light of scripture and Catholic tradition. Their Web site features writings about ecology and the environment from a variety of Catholic sources (<http://conservation.catholic.org/index.htm>).

**Christian Ecology Link** is a multi-denominational UK Christian organisation for people concerned about the environment (<http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/resource.htm>).

Earth Ministry **Sermons and Worship Aids** and other Earth Day Sunday-related materials are available at [http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/clergy\\_and\\_lay.htm](http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/clergy_and_lay.htm).

**The Evangelical Environmental Network** seeks to educate, inspire, and mobilise Christians in their effort to care for God's creation, to be faithful stewards of God's provision, and to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment. Creation Sunday resources can be found at <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/>.

Named for a sixteenth-century scientist and theologian, **The John Ray Initiative** celebrates the wonders of nature; seeks ecological understanding, environmental stewardship, and industrial sustainability; and provides biblical interpretation on these subjects. See the resource index at <http://jri.org.uk/resource/index.htm>.

**The Eco-Justice Program office of the National Council of Churches** (U.S.) works in cooperation with the NCC Eco-Justice Working Group to provide an opportunity for the national bodies of member Protestant and Orthodox denominations to work together to protect and restore God's creation. For resources, see <http://www.nccecojustice.org/resources.html>.

**Season of Creation** proposes a way to focus in worship for four Sundays in September our concern for creation's suffering. By concentrating this season's worship on God's creation and our relationship with creation, we can seek ways to heal rather than exploit the earth. See <http://www.seasonofcreation.com/index.asp>.

Web of Creation's **Green Congregation Program: Worship** includes materials for reflection and action, as well as worship resources (liturgies, litanies, prayers, sermons, and more), at <http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/index.htm>. **Green Congregation Program: Education** also includes materials for reflection and action, as well as educational resources. See <http://www.webofcreation.org/ReligiousEducation/index.htm>.

## Book review

Matthew D. Hickman

*Earth Trek: Celebrating and Sustaining God's Creation*, by Joanne Moyer. Waterloo, ON, and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004.

**H**istorically Anabaptists have had a hard time articulating a theology of creation. Having shifted rather early on to a spiritualist theology of redemption, the majority of our Anabaptist forebears came to believe that the earth and its human power structures would be annihilated at the end of days. This shift was in part a response to persecution and a reaction against the exploits of violent, politically revolutionary Anabaptists. And yet because of their belief that God's kingdom had already been inaugurated by Jesus, most Anabaptists continued in practice to follow the impulse toward stewardship of the material world, clinging to the affirmation that the earth is the Lord's. This tendency was most visible in Anabaptist economic and agricultural practices.

Many Mennonites today are asking anew how their faith should inform the way they live in a material world. To those seekers, I commend *Earth Trek*—a Mennonite Central Committee publication from Herald Press, written by Joanne Moyer—as an invaluable primer on creation care. *Earth Trek* is a multiweek curriculum for individuals or small groups, organized thematically by the days of the Genesis creation story. Within each thematic day are four to six sessions, which address ecology, faith, spirituality, and taking action.

The theological foundation of *Earth Trek* is an affirmation of the primitive Anabaptist eschatological conviction that God's kingdom has already come in part and will come fully on this earth, which will be redeemed. Here, briefly, is the perspective offered: creation belongs to its sovereign God, who called it good. Humanity is charged with a special vocation of stewardship within the created order. Humanity is inseparable from creation, which flourishes or decays as a result of human obedience or sinfulness. Humans serve creation under the

ultimate rule of God. Salvation includes the redemption of the earth. And finally, Jesus Christ is both the agent of creation and the agent of redemption.

The ecology sections are an excellent introduction to ecological processes and concerns. The biblical material is representative of core biblical texts that speak specifically to creation's relationship to both God and humanity. The spirituality sections include scriptures, poetry, and prayers. Especially useful in shaping personal and corporate responses to the readings are the many practical suggestions at the end of each session. Many of the suggested actions can be done the same day, but some—such as replumbing your house to dispose of wash water and bath water (grey water) apart from sewage (black water)—require longer term commitment and expense.

Written in a devotional style, the content of *Earth Trek* is broadly accessible. Admittedly, it took a while to orient myself to the book. Innovative page and text layouts compromise readability. Use of multiple fonts in different sizes and styles seems to be a

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hallmark of postmodern publishing, but it causes visual disorientation. In my opinion, noncapitalization of titles and headings is best left to ee cummings. Sequential numbering of the weeks that continued through (rather than restarted with) each thematic day would have aided orientation to the book's structure. I was surprised at the lack of color and imagery; they would have added to the appeal of this book on creation care, and

could also have aided comprehension in the ecology sections. The latter are well researched but lean toward being heavy on data.

Buy this exceptional book and read each session thoughtfully. But then, lest you miss the point, put it down and go outside. Take time to meet your creature and plant neighbors. As Sallie McFague, quoted in the book's introduction, says, "We cannot love what we do not know."

### **About the reviewer**

Matthew Hickman is completing an MDiv at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and volunteers in land management and habitat restoration at Mennonite camps.



## Book review

Karla Stoltzfus

*Simply in Season: A World Community Cookbook*, compiled and edited by Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert. Waterloo, ON, and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005.

**D**uring a 2006 conference on *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, theologian Malinda Berry heralded *Simply in Season* and its predecessors in the Mennonite World Community Cookbook trilogy as a true, organic—if unofficial—confession of faith. Berry was pointing to a profound truth: that our attitudes and practices related to food express our faith. The ways we cook and eat speak volumes about our core beliefs about God, creation, and our relationship to both. Correspondingly, our cookbooks express in poetic, accessible form the theology and ethics of those who create and use them.

Testimonies abound of faith transformed by reading and cooking from the first two cookbooks in this series, *More-with-Less* and

**The ways we cook and eat speak volumes about our core beliefs about God and creation. And our cookbooks express in poetic, accessible form the theology and ethics of those who create and use them.**

*Extending the Table*. And surely stories will abound of transformation through reading and cooking from this newest confession of faith, *Simply in Season*. Sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee, *Simply in Season* represents a glorious revival of the series.

Like its predecessors, *Simply in Season* gathers recipes and stories from Mennonite cooks across North America and beyond, but the emphasis in this collection is on seasonal, local foods. In our petroleum-powered technological age, grocery stores offer pro-

duce from many parts of the world throughout the year. The concept of cooking and eating seasonally seems foreign and burdensome to many North Americans. Limiting our diets largely

to locally produced foods may seem to entail undue deprivation and an excess of effort. Cooking and eating seasonally does require discipline and skill. But as the wise cooks and storytellers represented in *Simply in Season* testify, the discipline yields pleasure and peace—shalom—for people and the environment. A more just, peace-loving economy grows when eaters choose to buy food from local growers. And our tastebuds and the earth rejoice with the farmers and gardeners we support.

Organized according to the seasons of North America's temperate climate, *Simply in Season* unpacks this truth about pleasure and peace through recipes featuring seasonal produce, vignettes about growing and eating local foods, and invitations to action. In the section on "Spring," we are invited to consider the environmental impact of conventional agriculture as we savor tender new lettuce and the first ripe strawberries. "Summer" calls us to gratefully tend the gift of health as we celebrate the bounty of summer gardens. "Autumn" invites contemplation on the pace of life as we shift our eating from the fast-growing fruits of summer to the slow foods of fall. "Winter" bids us entrust our stomachs and our money to God, who provides enough: enough local root vegetables, apples, and grains to feed us when fresh produce can be purchased only at the cost of gallons of petroleum, carbon emissions, and exploitive corporate economic structures; enough money and generosity to pay the higher price for a local farmer's potato rather than the cheaper one in the store. The final section, "All Seasons," explores stories that lie behind our food: of celebration and devastation, of hope and despair, for people and creation.

Some users of *Simply in Season* express frustration with the index at the back and the lists of recipes at the beginning of each section, which lack page references—shortcomings that reinforce the call to slow down our approach to eating and cooking!

While it cannot take the place of *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, *Simply in Season* is a resource that testifies powerfully to—and enables us to embody—our faith in the Creator who provides abundantly for all people and all of creation.

### **About the reviewer**

Karla Stoltzfus is a bivocational pastor, serving part time as minister of church community life at First Mennonite Church of Iowa City, Iowa, and part time as a market gardener. She is a 2007 graduate of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.