

Climate Change, Stewardship, and Renewing Creation
FSCF Spring Term 2013 Series, Meeting #2

As Rob Lamb noted last week regarding the various ecological issues before us:

- What resources does the Bible (and Christian doctrine/world view) provide for dealing with these issues?
- Are Christians going to be part of the problem or solution?

We looked last week at our place in creation—God made it all; creation was an act of God’s love. “Everything under heaven belongs to me,” is what God tells Job in **Job 41:11**.

Romans 1:18-21: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.”

I Corinthians 3:11-15 make it clear that there can be a saved soul but a “lost life,” because of unfaithfulness in stewardship of life. This person goes to heaven, but his reward is less.

So this week we focus on the question, “**What does it mean to be a steward of God’s earth?**”

- Wikipedia definition of stewardship: the acceptance or assignment of responsibility to shepherd and safeguard the valuables of others.
- We are curators in God’s showroom. Preservation...conservation...these would be natural outcomes of that mindset.
- As J.I. Packer notes in *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs (1993)*, “Realizing our moment-by-moment dependence on God the Creator for our very existence makes it appropriate to live lives of devotion, commitment, gratitude, and loyalty toward him, and scandalous not to. Godliness starts here, with God the sovereign Creator as the first focus of our thoughts.”

Servants think like stewards, now owners. Have we forgotten that God owns it all?

Corinthians 4:2 says, “Those who are trusted with something valuable must show they are worthy of that trust.”

CARING FOR CREATION

By Calvin B. DeWitt (1998; excerpts below in summarized form)

The quality of evangelical Christianity is weakened by the fact that it operates within the context of another religion which is shortchanging us and leading to ecological and spiritual bankruptcy. The principal doctrine here is “Look out for number one; we have to look out for ourselves! *We* are number one!” This expression has become widely used and incorporated into what we believe about life and the world, and it is a belief we sometimes find ourselves and other defending religiously.

While the expression may be new, the idea is not. It is present, for example, in *The Wealth of Nations* where Adam Smith wrote about “the natural effort of every individual to better his own condition” as its cornerstone; others came out and called it human greed and avarice. People did not feel fully comfortable with this basic idea behind this belief. The economist John Maynard Keynes, for example, envisioned it operating for a while, after which we could return to an economy driven not by greed but by Christ’s teachings and traditional virtue.

The proof text for this religion is 33:6 .ttaM: “Seek first yourself, and the kingdom will be added unto you.” This is backwards from Matt 6:33, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Setting this backward verse as a cornerstone in the human economy performs a remarkable flip on how we think about greed. It takes greed, long recognized as a vice, and declares it to be a virtue. This backward thinking no longer makes it necessary to refer to Number One—the Maker of the heavens and the earth. This “number one” economy is an important piece of the puzzle for understanding responsible stewardship of God’s creation.

Along with this, DeWitt goes on to explain historically how “number one” thinking led to the belief that life could be separated into the “number one” economy of the world, and the Number One economy of the church (in which Number One refers to God). The first belongs to the public sphere; the second belongs to the private sphere.

Our “number one” economy has become our way of doing business, our way of doing our jobs. When we take the mask off our “number one” religion, we see that it almost always means that it will have us make impious use of creation, simply because we are number one.

At the heart of our “number one” religion is an economy of use only. It is use that must be fueled and sustained by dissatisfaction with what we already have. It fosters an economy of discontent that festers at the heart of our restless society, putting forth survival of the economically fittest as an expected outcome.

Besides that, our “number one” economy reduces the creation to resources and people to consumers. It has no need for God in making decisions and has no authority except the free self. It determines value by price, and price by willingness to pay. It is largely unable to conserve ecosystems and landscapes. It denies intrinsic good, and it presumes to operate independently from the larger economy of creation. Our “number one” religion has led us to worship this creature (the market) rather than the Creator. Thus, human beings are divested of their role of stewards of creation and are seen as mere consumers of creation.

Two Kinds of Dominion

- *Domination* is service in behalf of self at the expense of creation;
- *Stewardship* is service to creation in behalf of the Creator.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stewardship_%28theology%29

Many moderate and progressive Catholics, Protestants and evangelicals see environmentalism as a consequence of stewardship. In Jewish and Christian traditions stewardship also refers to the way time, talents, material possessions, or wealth are used or given for the service of God.

Christian Stewardship refers to the responsibility that Christians have in maintaining and using wisely the gifts that God has bestowed. God wishes human beings to be his collaborators in the work of creation, redemption and sanctification. Increasingly this has referred to environmental protectionism.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_and_environmentalism

Christianity has a long historical tradition of reflection on nature and human responsibility... As a result of the doctrine of stewardship, Christian environmentalists oppose policies and practices that threaten the health or survival of the planet. Of particular concern to such Christians are the current widespread reliance on non-renewable resources, habitat destruction, pollution, and all other factors that contribute to climate change or otherwise threaten the health of the ecosystem.

Hebrews 1:10-12 “In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like clothing; like a cloak you will roll them up, and like clothing they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will never end.”

Wendell Berry’s essay, “Conservation and the Local Economy” in his book *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* speaks to stewardship on a small local level being where we can make a difference. Doing something does not need to feel overwhelming. The root of the problem is always to be found in private life and how we live.

Spin-off thoughts or questions:

- The works of God and the works of man are interconnected.
- We are homesteaders...pilgrims and travelers passing through, yet while here we have responsibilities.
- If everyone ate 10% less food, we’d make a huge impact on saving resources.
- Working locally, eating locally, focusing on your own community.
- If you live in a highly urbanized area where exposure to God’s creation is overshadowed by man’s creation, is it more difficult to see and appreciate God’s creation? If so, does this lead to apathy in stewarding creation?

<http://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2011/10/green-christianity/>

Green Christianity, an article from the blog dated 10/31/11

... Perhaps environmentalism is not an issue of God vs. Green. Perhaps it’s not an issue of Left vs. Right. Perhaps it is simply one of many facets of biblical adherence to which Christians should give careful and prayerful consideration. The fact that environmentalism is mixed up with pantheism and tree-hugging, does not mean that a Christian who plants a tree on Earth Day is also worshipping that tree.

Good Work and Bad Work

Back to Wendell Berry's book, and another essay entitled, "Conservation is Good Work." Berry writes, "And the real name of our connection to this earth is 'work.' We are connected by work even to the places where we don't work, for all places are connected; it is clear by now that we cannot exempt one place from our ruin of another. The name of our *proper* connection to the earth is 'good work,' for good work involves much giving of honor. It honors the source of its materials; it honors the place where it is done; it honors the art by which it is done; it honors the thing that it makes and the user of the made thing. Good work is always modestly scaled, for it cannot ignore either the nature of individual places or the differences between places, and it always involves a sort of religious humility, for not everything is known.

The name of our present society's connection to the earth is 'bad work'—work that is only generally and crudely defined, that enacts a dependence that is ill understood, that enacts no affection and gives no honor. Every one of us is to some extent guilty of this bad work. This guilt does not mean that we must indulge in a lot of breast-beating and confession; it means only that there is much good work to be done by every one of us and that we must begin to do it. All of us are responsible for bad work, not so much because we do it ourselves (though we all do it) as because we have it done for us by other people.

Most of us get almost all the things we need by buying them; most of us know only vaguely, if at all, where those things come from; and most of us know not at all what damage is involved in their production."

Spin-off thoughts and questions:

- Our lives lived out as a prayer to God---as a curator, what is my work here, and is it meaningful?
- Good stewardship is good work.
- Berry notes, "Bad stewardship is not just stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy. It is flinging God's gifts into His face."
- Creation care as a justice issue.

LOVING THE EARTH IS LOVING THE POOR

By Gordon Aeschliman (from *The Green Bible; NRSV*)

This is an excellent article, which opens, "Serving God's creation and doing justice for the poor are inseparable missions in today's world. Said another way, to hurt the earth is to hurt the poor; to serve the earth is to serve the poor.....Just as keeping God's creation sits within the original mission given to humans, compassion and justice for the poor sit at the core of our faith tradition."

- Our modern lifestyle of consumption puts a heavy burden on the earth....And here's the harsh reality for the poor: it's usually their resources we are capturing to support our lifestyle, and their land, rivers and lakes where we are dumping our waste.
- The biblical notion of compassion is a demanding concept. It does not allow for an arrogant disposition toward those who are "have-nots." Scripture pushes into the arena of justice. To do justice is to correct the systems that unfairly harm the poor.

- The church can be a positive agent of change.
 - Through *advocacy* churches are speaking up for the rights of indigenous peoples and the poor whose land, rivers, and forests are being taken away by corporations, governments, and the wealthy.
 - Through *protection*, churches are helping to fund the purchase of rain-forest and other sensitive lands. This is one way to protect endangered species, indigenous peoples, rivers, and lakes all in one action.
 - Through *restoration*, the church is replanting ruined crops, establishing nurseries, and relocating communities to safer lands.
- Evaluate our *personal consumption* and become free of the idea that our worth and fulfillment are wrapped up in the pursuit of “stuff” and status symbols. (It’s hard to imagine Jesus preaching a life of getting all the goods we want or of seeking the approval of the cultural establishment.) The less we consume, the less we are taking from the earth of the poor, from the rivers of the poor, from the future of the poor. Developing an ethic of consumption that meets our needs while also defending God’s creation and delivering justice for the poor is the frontline biblical work for Christians today.

Back again to Wendell Berry’s book, and the essay, “Christianity and the Survival of Creation.” Berry writes, “Obviously, ‘the sense of the holiness of life’ is not compatible with an exploitive economy. You cannot know that life is holy if you are content to live from economic practices that daily destroy life and diminish its possibility.

Berry encourages us to think about ways in which the human household is situated and maintained within the household of nature.

- What sort of economy would be responsible to the holiness of life?
- What, for Christians, would be the economy, the practices and the restraints, of “right livelihood?”

The holiness of life is obscured to modern Christians also by the idea that the only holy place is the built church. Christians are encouraged to think of the church building as “God’s house,” and most of them could think of their houses or farms or shops or factories as holy places only with great effort and embarrassment. It is understandably difficult for modern Americans to think of their dwellings and workplaces as holy, because most of these are, in fact, places of desecration, deeply involved in the ruin of Creation.

It is clearly impossible to assign holiness exclusively to the built church without denying holiness to the rest of Creation, which is then said to be “secular.”

Spin-off thoughts and questions:

- This is blasphemy: to make shoddy work of the work of God.
- Good human work honors God’s work. It uses no thing without respect.
- What do we make of the statement occasionally heard that, “Faith is faith, and business is business”?

Examples of Christian organizations involved in creation care:

<http://creationcare.org/index.php> is the website for the Evangelical Environmental Network, which exists to:

Declare the Lordship of Christ over all creation. He is the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created. All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15b; 16a, c; 17)

Deepen our walk with the Lord and the life of their churches through joy-filled worship, Bible study on the topics of creation's care, and prayer that God's will "be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Show the compassion of Christ for people who suffer from creation's destruction (Proverbs 14:31).

Demolish strongholds of sin that tarnish the glory and integrity of God's good creation (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Build our Lord's kingdom by active service to restore and renew the works of his hands (Matthew 6:33; Ephesians 2:10).

Share the Gospel with those who do not know that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Hope for creation groaning under our sin and the only Hope for our own souls (Romans 8:19-21; Colossians 1:20, 27).

<http://arocha-usa.org/> is the website for A Rocha. A Rocha contributes to environmental conservation in ways that are distinct from other organizations:

Scientific research and conservation. We conduct research that furthers the understanding and protection of natural habitats and populations, especially those in urgent need, and use that research to guide our conservation projects.

The role of the church in caring for creation. We work to lead and equip the church toward a fuller understanding and a more active expression of its biblical mandate to steward the Earth.

The needs of human beings. We work to integrate and balance the needs of humans with those of the nonhuman world for the benefit and protection of both.

Open participation. We welcome and encourage people of all backgrounds and faiths to be a part of the work.

The example of Christ. We endeavor to be a living expression to all with whom we work of Christ's love and concern for all of His creation.

Hope. In the face of ever-increasing environmental degradation, we bring a message of hope based on the help of God the Creator who cares for His creation.

<http://www.thegreenchristian.org/> is the website for **TheGreenChristian.org**, a volunteer-run website hoping to educate Christians on the issues of climate change and the environment. “We believe that the Bible has a clear message on the issue of how we should be stewards of the Earth and our fellow men, and that if we open our hearts to that message we can open hearts for Christ. This is something that God has really been speaking into our hearts, and we feel He's got some awesome things in store.

We believe that Christian Love will awaken the hearts of evangelicals towards the suffering of people in the third world as well as in America due to environmental degradation. We believe that their love of God's word will make Christians realize how wonderful creation is, how it is a testament to His Name, how it evangelizes, and how we are commanded to tend it.

We are working with churches and pastors, giving them the tools they need to talk about stewardship of the earth, and what the bible says about caring for the planet and our animals. We are working to inform Christians about the fact that there are almost a billion people in this world without access to clean drinking water, and that sadly in many cases this is the result of pollution and pesticide runoff from fields. We will supply logic and plenty of information to those who want it, while focusing on spirituality, ethos, and pathos; personal stories about how the environment actually affects people and its role in the Christian faith.”

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored. Scripture. Genesis 1:1-31 God made the heavens and the earth and it was good. Genesis 2:15 Humans are commanded to care for God's creation.