



Creation Care



The world and all that is in it belong to the Lord, the earth and all who live on it are his. --Psalm 24:1

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Knowing God in Creation and Living Godly Lives

#1, The Written Word

The written, canonized, scriptures are the source documents of our faith and the primary source of our guidance. Unfortunately biblical misinterpretation has often created stumbling blocks that complicate our ability to live in harmony with God's creation and to fulfill our responsibility to "cultivate it and guard it." (Genesis 2:15b). The sad result has been that, far from living humbly as stewards of the creation, we became selfish and arrogant exploiters!

The primary example of destructive biblical interpretation concerning the human role in the natural world is found in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them, and God said to them 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and SUBDUE it and have DOMINION over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'"

The Old Testament scholar, with whom I studied, Dr. Frank H. Seilhamer¹ (1933-2001), said that the two key words in this verse are "subdue" and "dominate." They are powerful words that need careful ancient biblical-era understanding. Today's definitions do not fit the biblical intent of the passage and provide the basis upon which we justify our greed and exploitation.

Subdue (kabash in the Hebrew). Seilhamer said that subdue has in it the idea of "gently massaging" (as with a boil) to work out the corruption. Its goal is to bring healing restoration through tender care. Christians are called to "heal the earth" by gently correcting the sinful human abuses that are destroying the earth.



Dominion (radah). Dominion comes from the same Hebrew root as Rabbi. A Rabbi is one who is qualified to expound and apply God's law so that people can live in proper relationship to God, each other, and to the natural world. Dominion does not mean domination! To "have dominion" means that we must learn God's ways so that we operate on the earth and in the world as God willed from the beginning. Far from "lording it over the earth," we are called to harmonize ourselves with God's plan for "life on the earth."

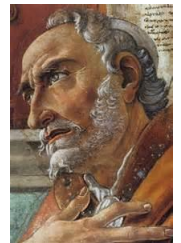
Even before the *Industrial Revolution* the human/earth relationship was below par. We like to think that the whole earth was created for human consumption alone and that all the other plant and animal inhabitants were put there to be subjected to our dissipation. We forget that the same blessing that God gave to us had already been given to the rest of creation; that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without God taking notice! (Luke 12:6). The species of the earth do not live in isolation from each other. God created them because each contributes to the welfare of all. God is interested in the details!

We are called to be partners with God in creation and to be ever conscious of his presence in both his physical handiwork and his spiritual nature. In one of their books of worship our Jewish friends remind us:

"When God created the world, He made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, He made wheat grow so that man might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, He made it of clay so that man might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that man could become His partner in the task of completing the work of creation."²

#2, Worship and the Natural World

Augustine of Hippo wrote: **"Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"³** (See Psalm 19:1-6)



*I see You in the starry field,
I see You in the harvest's yield,
In every breath, in every sound,
An echo of Your name is found,
The blade of grass, the simple flower,
Bear witness to Your matchless power,
In wonder-workings, or some bush aflame,
Men look for God and fancy Him concealed;
but in earth's common things He stands revealed
While grass and flowers and stars spell out His name.⁴*

Humans are multi-dimensional beings who use their five senses in practically everything they do. Yet only "speak/hear" dominates most church worship. It is a cerebral process that shuts-out the other senses. It breaks the ties between soul and body; spiritual and physical; reason and emotion. It is sustained with a jungle of theological lingo and concepts intended to raise the possibilities of a "mustard seed" faith. (Luke 17:6) whose nature is multi-dimensional. Most discouraging of all our cerebral worship services seldom produce spiritual change and missionary zeal. In reaction we often intensify our delivery in manipulative ways in an attempt to stir life-changing responses in the hearers. The truism, "*The louder the voice the deeper the frustration,*" often applies. A thousand words could never reveal the transcendent meaning of holding and tasting the bread and wine in the Eucharist or the washing of feet in the "*mandatum novarum*" (John 13:34)



teaching us to love and serve each other as we follow the "*new commandment.*" Our current *National Thanksgiving* day church observances don't hold a candle to the "*early harvest*" festivals of the ancient church where the first grain of the har-

vest was baked into bread blessed, and distributed to the worshippers to smell, hold, share, and taste. All of us have experienced the pleasant orders circulating throughout the church building when dinner is being readied following worship - how it stimulates thoughts of good food and warm fellowship. This is why we have live greens at Christmas and flowers at Easter. These are things that appeal to all the senses. If we expect worship to be **holy**, we should be **wholly** stimulated by and involved in worship - we should attempt to call upon all of the senses in order to stand fully before the divine presence. The ancient Hebrews burnt animal offerings on the altar and incense is used in the church cathedrals even today. The call of Isaiah was a prophet was filled with sight, odor, sound, and touch (Isaiah 6:1-8). He was overwhelmed by the all engaging presence of God.

The ancient liturgical calendars, both Jewish and Christian incorporated the elements of nature's wonders into their diet of worship experiences with wonderful feast days that drew attention to the daily details of living in God's world. I believe that the lack of connectedness between God's creation and modern worship helps to explain our abuse of and attitude toward the natural world, giving rise to the emotional controversies, ridicule and distrust that words like "ecology," and "climate change" create in the church today. We fail to see that the welfare of God's good earth is also tied to the welfare of our souls!

The disconnect between the spiritual soul and the natural body is responsible for physical abuses of every kind, be it an unhealthy diet, sexual violence and promiscuity or the unfulfilled inner hunger that drives us to the unrestrained consumption of goods and services. It helps explain our lack of reverence and understanding of our environment and why ecological issues are greeted with such controversy, disbelief, and anger within so many congregations.

In Colonial times Native American religion was closely tied to the marvelous details of God's creation. Their religion was very "earthy" and many colonists were drawn to its appreciation for nature and its connection to the spiritual sense that the colonists felt in the glory of their natural surroundings, often referred to as "nature's great cathedral." This alarmed the religious orthodoxy of the time and the formal church responded to it with charges of Pantheism, a doctrine that equates God with the forces and laws of the universe. They played the "race card" claiming that these "savage pagans" worshiped nature and its creatures. While pantheism goes too far, atheism lies dead in the water, and polytheism confounds reality, monotheism tends to be too modest in its recognition that Creation is the handy work of God. Creation is an amazing miracle which is plainly exhibited in our natural surroundings. Not to connect such a miracle to worship is unthinkable! The natural world is an irresistible witness to the joy of living, and to the presence and power of God in our midst -- "How clearly the sky reveals God's glory! How plainly it shows what he has done!" (Psalm 19:1, TEV)

#3 The Meaning of Worldliness

At the heart of the confusion about the natural world is the principle of "being in the world but not of it." (1 John 2:15-17). The

term "worldliness" points to the dangers of a misplaced devotion to the temporal pursuits of the human order: the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects necessary for living in any historical era. The truth is that "worldliness" is a neutral term and is not a condemnation of the natural world, but a warning about misplaced commitment. God created the world, blessed it and loved it (*Genesis/John*); David sang about it in his Psalms, Jesus constantly referred to it in his teachings, touch and miracles; the Ancient Church spoke of it in its liturgies, hymns, and experienced it in their feast-day celebrations. Worship and nature were closely tied to each other and followers of "The Way" honored it as grateful and committed servants. Check out your hymnal for songs that celebrate God's creation.

Philippians 3 warns us about the deadly effects that misplaced commitment has on people; how it secularizes them to the point that they reject spirituality and become deadly adversaries. The Moffatt translation renders the 20th verse thusly: "But we are a colony of heaven, and we wait for the Saviour who comes from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, followers of Jesus know the difference between the temporary and the eternal. That doesn't mean that the temporary is bad, it only means that it is temporary and deserves the kind of devotion that temporary things require. The make and model of the automobile that I drive is temporary in its ability to endure, but I must enjoy it while I have it and give it the care and attention that it needs while it lasts. The earth is temporary, but I must enjoy it while I have it and give it the care and attention that it needs while it lasts. The manner and desire of our living is well expressed in the Lord's Prayer: "May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Matthew 6:10b)

You must know God to know what is temporary - that knowledge frees us to enjoy what the world has to offer without tying ourselves to it.

¹Dr. Seilhamer was former president of Hama Seminary (1969-78), provost & professor of Old Testament at Trinity Seminary (1978-81), Pastor in Dkobois, Marysville/Duncannon, Greensburg & York, Pa., President Dropsie University (1966-69), Seilhamer lectured extensively in the U.S.A., Canada, and the Near East on biblical theology and conducted seminars in Greece and Israel.

²From the Midrash (adapted), Pg 127, Likrat Shabbat, Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine, 1975

³Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was an early Christian theologian and philosopher whose writings influenced the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy. He was the bishop of Hippo Regius, located in Numidia. He is viewed as one of the most important theologians in Western Christianity. *The City of God and The Confessions* are among his most important works.

⁴From the Midrash (adapted), Abraham Ibn Ezra, Pg 127, Likrat Shabbat, Rabbi Johathan D. Levine, 1975



We have just experienced five consecutive years of the warmest temperatures in recorded history. The warm weather is causing polar melting,

rising sea levels, increased water evaporation, erratic weather patterns, heavy rainfalls, catastrophic flooding in many developed areas and erratic cold in the northern tier. The pace of the warm-up is significantly greater than the climatologist's predictions. If the percentage of change continues unabated sea levels will rise six feet by the end of this century (two feet was originally predicted). For example, in flat, low-lying Florida, for each foot of sea level rise, the shoreline will move inland about 300 feet. We "inlanders" don't notice what the "oceanfronters" live with each time the high tide comes in!

Zillow Research, using data from the *National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)*, estimates that if the oceans rose six feet around the coasts of the USA today, 1.87 million homes valued at \$882 billion would be flooded by sea water. Roughly half of them, 934,411 million are in Florida.

What effect would a 6' rise have on our homes if it were true today? Here are some estimates of the number of homes that the water would destroy:

New York: 96,708, Massachusetts: 62,069, Maryland: 64,299, New Jersey: 190,429, Virginia: 46,287, North Carolina 57,259, South Carolina: 83,833, Florida: 934,411, Louisiana: 80,080, Texas: 46,804.

Property loss by flooding sea water is obvious, but one of the dangers of sea water overflowing inland is salt contamination of the drinking water supply. That is not as visible, but can reach further inland than property damage. It's implications for health and agriculture are huge.

So what can/should we do? Well, much of it depends upon what you believe to be the facts. There are **politicians** who resist reality by attempting to reclaim some mythical "good old days;" **real-estate developers** who think that most people don't care about what may happen in 60+ years and will purchase ocean-front or low-lying properties anyway; **historians** who believe that "climate change" is simply a part of an inevitable earth-cycle; **religionists**, some who believe that God will not allow an earth-sized natural catastrophe, and others who believe that the end of the world is at hand anyway; **naturalists** who believe that the earth will re-species and heal itself; **technologists** who believe that we will invent something to prevent climate change; **ecologists** who believe that ending the use of carbon based fuels in favor of renewable energy and power sources will prevent disaster; the **uninformed** who don't have an opinion or who flip back and forth depending upon the latest rhetoric -- and on and on it goes.

What do **you** believe and how did you come to that conclusion? Does it have any connection to your faith? Is there something that you are willing to do to protect and preserve God's creation?



Wellbeing: Health Care, Governance and Creation

#1 National Health Care

Like many Presidents, Ronald Reagan undertook an overhaul of the national health care system. I was invited to Columbus to attend a federal conference on national health care. A plan was announced that would, among other things, close small hospitals in favor of regional hospitals that were better equipped and staffed. The plan was meant to reduce costs and increase the services that were offered. It



was a beginning of what we now know as Corporate Health Care. Interestingly it appeared that the Pharmaceutical Industry was not included in the Reagan plan and was not mentioned in the discussion; something that I thought was really odd when you consider the central place pharmaceuticals play in health care. After the dust settled around all the structural details of the new system, the subject turned to cost and who

would be able to afford comprehensive medical care. It was at this point that my religious ears really perked up! What about the clients? After all, health care is about people isn't it? - you know, "*We the People*" of constitutional fame and "*God's People*" of religious fame, who are the "*crowning glory*" of all creation?

For me, affordable health care and who could afford it became the most interesting topic of the conference and led to a heated discussion. I expanded my meeting notes: "Corporations, non-profit or not, must have a *reasonable* return of investment in order to exist." - "None of us chose to come into this world. Basic health care is a human right." - "Capitalism is not a democracy, it is a market driven entity and everyone must play by those rules." - "Free health care is a socialistic folly and will lead to a society of loafers." - "All men are created equal; we are our brothers keeper." On and on it went, but the majority came down on the side: "You are entitled to the health care that you can afford; the golden rule of capitalism is that, in all things, you get what you can afford." It was also pointed out that competition between care-giving corporations will eventually produce better care and lower costs.

Today regional hospitals have become satellites of major medical centers; doctors and other practitioners "*sell*" their practices to the corporation and become its employees and/or stockholders. It makes a lot of sense when you consider the high cost of medical equipment, supplies, staffing, insurance and maintenance. However, the effectiveness of corporate medicine depends upon the ethics and morality upon which the corporation operates. What is its bottom line - the common good or whatever it takes to make a profit? How can these two goals be harmonized?

#2 Drug Cost Gouging

Recently the news has been full of reports of outrageous mark-ups on the cost of certain drugs by pharmaceutical companies. It is common knowledge that the many of the same drugs are cheaper in places like Canada and Europe than they are here. Rising prices are so bad that 20 States are suing six pharmaceutical firms in federal court for price gouging and even price fixing. (The states are Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington.)

#3 Government and Business

To further complicate things, there is a widening divide in this nation about what role federalism and corporatism should play in our political, cultural and economic lives. The USA is a Republic; which means that the will and welfare of all the people is heard and protected by a democracy that operates by the rule of law as prescribed by its constitution. Its focus is on the "*common good*." Capitalism is a system in which investments are determined by private decisions about prices, production, and the distribution of goods determined mainly by competition in a "*free market*." Capitalism focuses upon the interests of the group of persons who have united together to produce goods and services that will return a handsome profit.

There is a hitch in all this. "*...all men have sinned and are far away from God's saving presence*" (Romans 3:23). "*For the love of money is the root of all evil*" (1 Timothy 6:10). When you put sinners and money together there is bound to be trouble.

Money corrupts both federalism and corporatism. Both seek accommodations from each other and both try to provide the public with justifications for what each wants. The rallying cry from federalism is "It's in the National Interest". The rallying cry from corporatism is "Whatever is Good for Business is Good for America". Federalism attempts to control business abuse with regulations and corporatism attempts to control regulation abuse with lobbyists and campaign contributions. Federalism has allowed, and corporatism has relished, a rigged tax system in the name of reinvestment (which, according to the record, hasn't happened in fifty years) and has created the greatest income disparity in our nation since the 1920's. For more than thirty years federalism's two political parties have been more interested in propagating theoretical ideologies and taking political advantage than in governing. Corporatism has sought to control the market with huge mergers, trade deals, and wrenching control of the public domain through privatization (water systems, schools, prisons, highways, etc.).

#4 **Secular versus Sacred**

Is this discussion relevant to Creation Care? Of course it is because money and governance touch every living thing on the face of the earth for good or ill. Domestic and foreign policy either keep the peace or cause violence; and human violence is the most wasteful and destructive force that there is. Its effect on all resources and all forms of life is devastating.

Throughout history many have sought to divide our world into two spheres: the sacred and the secular. The historic failures of theocracies (Theocracy: Government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided; the favoring of religious power in the political sphere) have rightfully made us cautious about tying religion to government. The problem is not with faith, but with sectarian religion when it attempts to enforce a particular point of view by using political advantage. Christendom sought to impose itself upon society, something that Jesus was very careful not to do - even when he faced the cross. Kevin White (Religious Freedom and Business Foundation) writes that followers of Jesus "are called to be salt, light and witnesses to all professions and spheres of influence." Religion cannot be established by law and its followers should not seek political or legal control; but they must apply their faith and speak their minds to every aspect of life regardless of its spiritual or secular label. Ours is the power of witness through the sharing of our opinions and the faith anchors out of which they come. Ours is the responsibility to participate fully in the political, legal, economic, and cultural structures of our society.

"The fate of humans and the fate of the animals are the same: as one dies so does the other; both have the same breath."
Ecclesiastes 3:19

I've written ten articles in these newsletters about the world's shrinking **fresh WATER** supply, two of which were about the potential for violence that shortages can create (*Water Wars: issues 9 and 14*). A recent article in the Japan Times, Tokyo, Brahma Chellaney writes: "Asia, the world's largest and fastest-



developing continent, has less fresh water per capita than any other continent.....it's sharpening competition over transnationally shared freshwater resources.....holds strategic ramifications just as ominous as those relating to maritime territorial disputes.....in the coming years, water scarcity is likely to become Asia's defining crisis...."

In issue three I pointed out that 75% of the earth's surface is covered with water. 97% of that water is saltwater in oceans and seas. 2% is frozen in glaciers and icecaps (which appear to be melting faster than at any time in recorded history) and less than **1% is fresh water** made up of the groundwater, streams, rivers, lakes, and the water in the atmosphere. The natural distribution of this water is a matter of topography and weather patterns. Less than 1% can be used for drinking, cleaning, growing and manufacturing all over the world! Water is more precious than gold or oil!

Unless the nations of the world can learn how to negotiate instead of fight and how to welcome displaced persons (in this case water refugees and immigrants) into their societies, we will see a whole new series of disastrous wars and killings over the availability of fresh water. Water is the key to all life!

The Southeast Florida Regional Climate Compact, made up of a 4 county region, is working together on climate change issues. Miami Beach is rebuilding roads as much as 2.5ft higher to counteract the flooding caused by the rising sea. Alfresco restaurant diners now eat at eye level with feet using the adjacent sidewalk. (7-18-16, issue, Time, page 68)

Dialogue and Transparency in Decision-Making

Encyclical Letter - Pope Francis, 2015

It is essential to analyze and evaluate business proposals from an environmental and social point of view so as not to harm the most disadvantaged populations. It is necessary to foster the development of honest and transparent decision making processes, in order to "discern" which policies & business initiatives can lead to genuine integral development. In particular, the environmental impact study of a new project demands transparent political processes involving a free exchange of views. On the other hand, the forms of corruption which conceal the actual environmental impact of a given project in exchange for favors usually produce specious agreements which fail to inform adequately and to allow for full debate. (182-188)

Politics and Economy in Dialogue for Human Fulfillment

Encyclical Letter - Pope Francis, 2015

Starting from the global crisis, a new economy, more attentive to ethical principles, and new ways of regulating speculative financial practices and virtual wealth, should be developed. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces. Looking at things differently allows us to realize that a decrease in the pace of production and consumption can at times give rise to another form of progress and development. Efforts to promote a sustainable use of natural resources are not a waste of money, but rather an investment capable of providing other economic benefits in the medium term. More radically, redefining our notion of progress is necessary, linking it to improvements in the real quality of people's lives. At the same time, economics without politics cannot be justified. Together they are called to take on a new integral approach. (189-198)