
Green theology and deep ecology: New Age or new creation?

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Christianity has often been a scapegoat for the environmental crisis. The most influential proponent of this view is the much quoted Lynn White, Jr.¹ In a lecture given on 26 December 1966 at the Washington meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), he put forward the thesis that the Judaeo-Christian view of the physical creation paved the way for the science and technology that created the environmental crisis. (This thesis has been adequately refuted elsewhere.²) Along the way he makes the following statements about the Christian view of the creation:³ (i) it established a dualism of humanity and nature; (ii) it is anthropocentric: no item in the physical creation has any purpose save to serve humanity's purpose; (iii) humanity is not simply part of nature; (iv) it insisted that it is God's will that humanity exploit nature for its own ends.

This article tries to provide a foundation for a distinctively Christian approach to environmental care, and to develop an understanding of the green movement from a Christian perspective. In doing so, four great movements in 'salvation history' are considered as a framework: creation, fall, redemption and new creation.⁴ In using this framework, we shall be able to critique White's four points in what follows.

¹ Lynn White, Jr 'The historical roots of our ecologic(al) crisis', *Science* 155 (10 March 1967); (reprinted in F. A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Hodder & Shoughton, 1974), pp. 70-81; and more recently in *Thinking Green: An Anthology of Essential Writing*, ed. Michael Allaby (Barrie & Jenkins, 1989)).

² See, for example, Robin Atfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern* (Basil Blackwell, 1983), ch. 2; James Barr, 'Man and nature - The ecological controversy in the Old Testament', *BJRL* 55 (1972), pp. 9-32; Stephen V. Monsma (ed.), *Responsible Technology* (Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 40-44; A. R. Peacocke, 'On "The historical roots of our ecological crisis"', in *Man and Nature* (Collins, 1975), pp. 155-158; F. B. Welbourn, 'Man's dominion', *Theology* Vol. 78 (1975), pp. 561-568.

³ Throughout this article I use creation and nature as synonyms. See Richard Bauckham, 'First steps to a theology of nature', *EQ* Vol. 58, pp. 229-244.

⁴ See Christopher J. H. Wright, 'The use of the Bible in social ethics: paradigms, types and eschatology', *Transformation* Vol. 1 No. 1 Jan/March. 1984), pp. 11-14, about the use of this framework. Cf. also Rowland Moss, *The Earth in Our Hands* (IVP, 1982), who uses a similar framework, as does Keith Innes. *Care for the Earth* (Grove Ethical Booklets, 1988). For a full discussion of the creation, fall and redemption framework see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (IVP, 1986); and Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (IVP USA, 1984).

A. A BIBLICAL ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGY

1. Creation

The whole bedrock of environmental care is that God is the creator of heaven and earth (Gn. 1:1). The whole creation is an *expression* of God, so as we begin to understand the creation we can begin to get an idea of the creator; that is why the apostle Paul declares that God's eternal qualities can be understood from what he has made (Rom. 1:20). However, God is not to be identified with his creation: God is distinct from, and yet involved in, his creation.

Two theological points need to be stated: the Christian concept of creation is (i) theistic and (ii) *ex nihilo*. It is these two important points that undermine pantheism (God exists in everything) and the closely related panentheism (everything exists in God) of process theology, both of which have been used to construct environmental ethics. Some theologians have adopted Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary pantheistic framework in an attempt to provide an environmental ethic: see, for example, the work of Conrad Bonifazi⁵ and Sean McDonagh.⁶

A Whiteheadian 'ecological understanding of nature' has been developed by L. Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr.⁷ This ecological model depicts entities as events rather than objects. Reality is best thought of as organisms rather than material or mental substances,⁸ hence the interest of environmentalists. There are several problems that lie at the heart of process theology;⁹ two in particular make it unsuitable as a foundation for a biblical environmental ethic:

⁵ Conrad Bonifazi, 'Teilhard and the natural environment' in *Cry of the Environment*, ed. P.N. Joranson and K. Butigan (Bear, 1984), ch. 15..

⁶ Sean McDonagh, *To Care for the Earth* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), relies heavily on Teilhard de Chardin: 'only in the past thirty years, due mainly to the impetus which Teilhard's writings have given to the Christian world, have theologians once again begun to search for and discover a new theology of creation' (p. 108). See also Mathew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Bear, 1983).

⁷ See, for example, Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life* (CUP, 1981).

⁸ John B. Cobb, Jr, 'Process Theology and an ecological model', in *Cry of the Environment*, ch. 17

⁹ For a critique of process theology see Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, 'Process theology: a survey and an appraisal', *Themelios* 12.1 (1986), pp. 15-22. See also Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence* (Amity House, 1987), ch. 4.

(i) God is not distinguished from his creation. Traditional Christian theism is displaced by panentheism: all matter/events are in God, he is not external to them.

(ii) It is a denial of *creatio ex nihilo*. Creation is, for the process theologian, *ex materia* and out of God. This then leaves us with the conclusion that matter/event is pre-existent, eternal; it has become as God. The picture has become the artist.

The goodness of creation

Five times in the first chapter of Genesis we have the refrain 'And God saw that it was good' (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and once at the end of God's work of creation, 'it was very good', (v. 31). This affirmation undermines any potential spiritual material dualism. By virtue of his creating it, the earth *and* everything in it (*i.e.* all its contents)¹⁰ belongs to God (cf. Jb. 41:11; Pss. 241; 50:12).

The role of humanity: dominion or domination?

On the sixth day of creation God created the living creatures. The culmination of this activity was the creation of humanity and their subsequent mandate to rule over the animals and to subdue the earth. This concept of dominion has opened up Christianity to accusations of being anthropocentric, and hence being able to dispense with and dispose of nature as it sees fit.

The radical eco-feminist Andrée Collard, echoing Lynn White, Jr, suggests that:

Genesis presents the view that God created everything and gave it to man [and not just in the generic sense!] to dominate ...¹¹

Ian McHarg, likewise, states that the Bible

in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature, encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in man.... Here can be found the sanction and injunction to conquer nature...¹²

To assess Collard and McHarg's claims we need to examine the biblical idea of dominion.

¹⁰ Following P. G. Craigie's translation in *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentaries 19 (Word, 1983).

¹¹ Andrée Collard, *Rape of the Wild* (The Women's Press, 1989), p. 17.

¹² Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Natural History Press, 1989), p. 26.

Dominion is based on Genesis 1:28, where two Hebrew words lie at the heart of the problem: *radah* and *kabas*. *Kabas* (subdue) is a very strong word, even translated in one place as 'rape' (Est. 7:8) *radah* (rule over) is also a strong word. Westermann translates it as 'to tread the wine press' and von Rad as 'trample'.

Yet, despite the strength of these words they do not provide humanity with a mandate to dominate or conquer nature. The meaning of these two words is best seen, not in their derivations, but in their context. This of course has several different aspects: the cultural mandate; the creation story; and the cultural milieu.

(i) *The cultural mandate*. The immediate context is that of the 'cultural mandate' (Gn. 1:26-28): the call for humanity to develop and unfold the creation as the image-bearers of God.¹³

If we compare the mandate given to humanity with that given to the rest of the animals (Gn. 1:22), it is clear that subduing and ruling are one facet of being the image of God, and thus an essential part of what it means to be human. Subduing and ruling the creation, then, are to be done as God's representatives: he is our role model.

Barr suggests that humanity's role is 'less exploitation and more leadership'¹⁴; this, however, is only satisfactory if we see (with Houston¹⁵) leadership as servanthood, as exemplified by Jesus the Shepherd-King (*cf.* Phil. 2).

(ii) *The creation story*. Opening up the context a little more places the subduing and ruling in the Hebrew record of creation. One thing is immediately obvious: creation is not merely for humanity. The world exists for the glory of God: creation is not anthropocentric, it is theocentric. All things exist for and have their meaning in God.

¹³ Man's rule over nature, the direct consequence of his creation in the image of God, is for the sake of the non-human creation': J. S. Hurst, 'Towards a theology of conservation', *Theology* 75 (1972), p. 201. For a discussion on the image of God see, for example, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (SPCK, 1974), pp. 142-157; David J. A. Clines, 'The image of God', *Tyn. Bull.* 19 (1968); Douglas J. Hall, *Imagining God* (Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 61-112; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (SCM, 1972), pp. 60f.; S.G. Wilson, 'New wine in old Wineskins: IX. Image of God', *Exp. T.* 85(1974), p. 356; and at a more popular level, Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning* (IVP, 1984), ch. 4.

¹⁴ Barr, 'Man and nature'.

¹⁵ Walter Houston, "'And let them have dominion..." Biblical views of man in relation to the environmental crisis', *Studia Biblica* 1 (1978), pp. 161-184 (JSOT, 1979).

The earth is not humanity's to do with as it sees fit. It is God's creation, and as God's delegates we are to take care of it on his behalf; humanity is accountable to God for its treatment of the earth (cf. P99. 115:6; 8:4-6).

It is not rulership without limits. God follows on from the cultural mandate to place immediate constraints on dominion: men are not to kill for food (vv. 29-30). F.W. Welbourn identifies the other limitations that God placed on Israel's use of nature:¹⁶

- No blood of any animal may be eaten (Lv. 17:10-14).
- Fields are not to be reaped to the border (Lv. 19:9).
- The grower may only harvest from trees five years old (Lv. 19:23).
- Fruit trees may not be used for siege works (Dt. 20:19).
- A kid is not to be boiled in its mother's milk (Dt. 14:21).
- An ox is not to be muzzled when treading corn (Dt. 25:4).
- A mother bird is not to be taken with her young (Dt. 22:6).
- The land is to lie fallow regularly (Lv. 25:1-12).
- All the tithe of the land is the Lord's (Lv. 27:30-33).

It is evident, then, that it is not, as White contends, 'God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends'.

(iii) *The cultural milieu.* Another important context is that of culture. Whatever the concept of dominion conjured up in the time of its writing, it could only have had a fairly restricted meaning (cf. Jb. 38:33; 41:9): there was no potential for world destruction. Most likely they would have understood dominion in terms of animal husbandry, cultivating the ground and developing culture. Genesis 2:15 contains an amplification of what it means to subdue and rule, and here the context is that of a garden. This twofold commission echoes the cultural mandate of 1:26-28: they are to work (*abad* implies work as a slave) and take care (*shamar*) of the garden. There is no sense of dominion being exploitative. McHarg and Collard's interpretation owes more to their own cultural perspectives than it does to the biblical account.

Stewards of the earth

The opening chapters of Genesis show that humanity's relationship with the rest of creation is ambiguous: we are part of it and we are above it. We are part of the earth and we are to rule over it. We are creatures of God and made in the image of God. It is these truths held in tension that keep Christianity free of the extremes of biocentrism and anthropocentrism (*i.e.* the reducing of humanity to grass and the deification of humanity). Christianity, contrary to Lynn White, Jr, is neither anthropocentric nor biocentric: it is theocentric. Our solidarity with the rest of the creation should serve to keep us from an oppressive rulership. Dominion is not a dictatorial rulership, we are not to

¹⁶ F.B. Welbourn, 'Man's dominion', *Theology* 78 (1975), pp. 561-567.

lord it over creation: it is a delegated rulership, a rulership that is accountable. As God's stewards of creation we will be called to account for how we have treated his earth.

The biblical concept of stewardship is not without its objectors. Two of these are the philosopher John Passmore¹⁷ and the Eastern Orthodox Paulos Mar Gregorios.¹⁸ Passmore raises two objections, and claims that there is 'very little' evidence in support of stewardship.

For Passmore biblical stewardship 'relates to the Church, not to nature'.¹⁹ In making this accusation Passmore is guilty of spiritualizing the Scriptures. Passmore is correct in one sense, in that there is little explicit evidence in the Scriptures (there is though much implicit evidence). Black comments that this concept of humanity as God's steward of the earth is 'too central in the way of life, too obvious to require any precise statement or reiteration'.²⁰

Passmore's second objection is that if humanity is to image God, then humanity is to nature as God is to humanity. This suggests that nature is humanity's servant as humanity is God's servant, thus leaving Christianity open to White's accusation that nature is at humanity's disposal. The argument is however wrongheaded. Even if (as Black contends)

God: Humanity: Nature

it does not imply

Nature: Humanity: God.

There is no evidence to suggest that the relationship is commutative. In fact the non-commutativity of the relationship renders impotent Passmore's argument.

A more serious accusation comes from Bishop Gregorios, who suggests that the idea of stewardship reduces nature to 'nothing but an object given into our hands for safe keeping and good management'.²¹ This demands refutation.

¹⁷ John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (Duckworth, 1974).

¹⁸ Mar Gregorios, *The Human Presence* (Amity House, 1987).

¹⁹ Passmore, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

²⁰ John Black, *The Dominion of Man* (Edinburgh University Press, 1970), p. 52. See also the rest of his chapter 14.

²¹ Gregorios, *op. cit.*, p. 88. For further discussion on stewardship see Robin Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*; Doug Hall, *Imaging God*, pp. 193-205; William Dyness, 'Stewardship of the earth in the Old Testament, in *Tending the Garden*, ed.

First, stewardship, rather than reducing nature, opens it up to new possibilities. Stewardship brings liberation for nature and humanity because in it they are both fulfilling their God-given roles. Secondly, there is no evidence whatsoever that nature should be treated as an object in a pejorative sense; the whole remission of stewardship is that the earth has been given to humanity because of God's love and concern for nature: it is his and he made it. There is therefore nothing reductionistic about stewardship.

2. Fall

The task of imaging God as stewards, however, becomes deformed. Humankind disobeyed God in an attempt to become autonomous (Gn. 3:17); this sin, to use Calvin's phrase, 'perverted the whole order of nature in heaven and earth'.²² The whole of creation was disrupted. The shalom that existed in the Garden between God, humanity and nature was ruptured. It is in the fall that the roots of our ecological crisis lie.²³

Paul interprets this as a cosmic fall: the whole of creation was subjected to frustration (Rom. 8:20). However, others have suggested that there is little evidence to 'suggest that the realm of nature has been altered in a fundamental way'.²⁴ The approach we take seems to depend on whether or not we take scientific issues into account when we interpret the Scriptures.²⁵

Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson (Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 50-65; Loren Wilkinson (ed.), *Earthkeeping* (Eerdmans, 1980), ch. 14.

²² *Institutes* II. i. 5 (cited in *Man and Nature*, p. 35.)

²³ One of the defects of the Anglican Symposium *Man and Nature* is that it fails to take the fall seriously - it is dismissed almost out of hand: 'The more extreme forms of a doctrine of a cosmic fall, though they might claim some support from the Bible, are too speculative to command assent and involve ideas that are not readily harmonized with modern conceptions of the world' (p. 35). Cf. also *Man in his Living Environment* (CIO, 1970): 'Man loses proper control over nature by losing control of his own morality' (# 132 p. 63). This is to some extent remedied in the later Anglican report *Our Responsibility for the Living Environment* (Church House Publishing, 1986): '... the Fall was regarded as cosmic and not only affecting the human race, the whole of unredeemed nature as well as unredeemed humanity was regarded *in some circles* as totally depraved' (p. 22, my italics).

In passing Jonathon Porritt's (until recently Director of Friends of the Earth) comments on this report are worth noting: 'Despite several pointers in the right direction, this again is a bland insular document that only scratches at the surface of the problem', *Two Lectures* (The David Thompson Trust, 1988), p. 29.

²⁴ A. Lewis, 'The localisation of the Garden of Eden', *BETS* 11 (1968), p. 174 (cited in Lucas and Blocher, see n. 25 below).

²⁵ See E. C. Lucas, 'Some scientific issues related to the understanding of Genesis 1-3', *Themelios* 12.2 (1987), pp. 46-51, who thinks we do, and Henri Blocher, *In the*

One thing is clear: the task of fulfilling the cultural mandate becomes all the more arduous. Being fruitful, increasing in number and filling the earth becomes a painful task (Gn. 3:16); subduing the earth becomes a painful toil (3:17-18); rulership becomes misdirected (3:16);²⁶ and there is a clear reminder of the creatureliness of humanity: *adam* is *adamah* - we are dust.

This struggle with nature is taken up in the following chapters of Genesis. Cain's murder of his brother means that the ground will no longer yield its crop, and he will be homeless, driven from the land (Gn. 4:10-14). The prophet Hosea takes up the same theme (cf. Ho. 4:1-3): sin results in the land mourning and even in a reversal of creation.²⁷

Throughout the OT we can see examples of God's concern for the whole of the non-human creation. The story of Noah is a case in point: Noah was perhaps the first conservationist.²⁸ The flood was a direct consequence of human rebellion which caused the earth to be corrupt in God's sight (Gn. 6.11). The ark, and the subsequent covenant that God made with Noah, his descendants and with *every living creature on earth* (Gn 9:10), is testimony to God's concern for non-human life;²⁹ his promise that 'never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth' illustrates his concern for the earth.³⁰

Beginning (IVP, 1984), who thinks not. See also D. Keith Innes, *Resources for a Green Theology*, Science and Technology Papers No. 2 (Framlington Institute, 1987).

²⁶ See my 'Towards a biblical view of environmental care', *Evangel* 7(2) (1989), p. 8.

²⁷ Michael Deroche, 'The reversal of creation in Hosea', *VT* 31 (1981), comparing Gn. 1 with Ho. 4:3: 'Thus, Hosea is not merely employing the image of a drought to illustrate Israel's punishment; he is announcing the reversal of creation' (p. 403). Cf. also his, 'Zephaniah 1:2-3: the "sweeping" of creation', *VT* 30 (1980), pp. 104-109.

²⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Politics* (SPCK, 1989) 'I am surprised that Noah has not become, as he deserves to be, a model for Christian conservationists' (p. 16).

²⁹ Bernard W. Anderson, 'Creation and the Noahic covenant', in *Cry of the Environment*, pp. 45-61; see also his 'Creation and Ecology' in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B.W. Anderson (SPCK, 1984): 'This Noahic covenant opens up the horizon of the future by predicating the hope of the human and nonhuman creation on the unconditional commitment of the creator to humankind, to nonhuman creatures and , and to the order land regularity of "nature"' (p. 169).

³⁰ Bauckham, *The Bible and Politics*, p. 132: 'the message of the story [of the flood] is not so much that God once brought a universal deluge on the earth, but rather that he will never do so again'.

The sabbath year and jubilee are two further examples of God's care and concern for creation.

The sabbath year

The whole purpose behind the concept of sabbath was rest. The seventh day of creation, the sabbath, was a day when God 'rested from all the work of creating that he had done' (Gn. 23). In the same way the sabbath year was to be a sabbath of rest for the land (LV. 25:1, 4-5): 'The land is to have a year of rest.'³¹

The year of jubilee

The jubilee year was the sabbath year of Sabbath years and it meant an extra year of rest for the Jews.³² Several environmental and ecological considerations underlie jubilee:

(i) It constantly reminded the Jews that 'the earth is the Lord's'. The land was not theirs to do with as they pleased (cf. Lv. 25:23): they were stewards and tenants but not owners.

(ii) It confirms God's care for the land and for animals.

(iii) God demands that we treat his earth and his animals with respect; failure to do so by neglecting jubilee and the sabbath year brought God's judgment (2 Chr. 36:21).

Despite the all-embracing and all-encompassing effects of the fall, God still cares for the earth. He has not washed his hands of it, in fact the care that he has for the earth is ultimately shown in sending Jesus.

3. Redemption

Jesus' incarnation displays the love and concern of God for his creation (cf. Jn. 3:16). Jesus came to save not only humanity, but the whole earth. Humanity and the earth are inextricably bound together: we are to care for the earth; our

³¹ Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (SPCK, 1987), commenting on the sabbath, states: '...it is quite impossible to articulate the meaning of Sabbath except in inclusivist terms, that is, in terms which include the whole created order' (p. 31).

³² For a full discussion of the socio-economic implications of the jubilee see R. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, Analecta Biblica IV (Pontifical Biblical Inst., 1954), and R.B. Sloan, Jr, *The Favourable Year of the Lord* (Scholar Press, 1977); see also the more popular discussion in John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1972), ch. 3. Also C. J. H. Wright, *Living as the People of God* (IVP, 1983), pp. 101-102; Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Academic, 1983), pp. 217-221, where he summarizes the work of Martin H. Woudstra. The year of the jubilee and related Old Testament laws - can they be "translated" for today?, *Theological Forum* 5 (1977), pp. 1-21.

fall resulted in the earth's; and now our redemption results in the redemption of the earth, hence we have the onerous task of fulfilling the cultural mandate by proclaiming the gospel to all of creation.

Jesus on the cross redeemed the whole of creation: the cross has global effects. The cross lies at the heart of Christianity; it follows, then, that it must be central to a Christian environmental ethic.

The imagery of the cross represents all that Jesus has done: the cross is Paul's unique shorthand means of referring to Jesus' death, resurrection and all that it has accomplished. There, are, particularly in the Pauline passages, several ecological implications of the cross: it affirms that the earth is the Lord's.

(i) *The cross is cosmic in scope.* This is particularly apparent in Colossians 1:20:³³ the work of Jesus reconciles all things (*ta panta*). *Ta panta* cannot be restricted to the human creation alone; this is unjustifiable for two reasons: (a) *ta panta* is defined in this section as 'things on earth and things in heaven' - there are more things in heaven and earth than humanity! (b) the use of *ta panta* elsewhere indicates that it means all things without restriction. Hence, nothing is exempt from the reconciling power of the cross: there is the potential of reconciliation for all the orders of creation.

God is, in his Son, reconciling the cosmos; and we are to continue this ministry (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Jesus commanded his disciples to take the gospel to all of creation (*ktsis*) (Mk. 16:15). The word *ktsis* here includes both the act and product of creation. Again, we are confronted with the fact that we cannot limit it to the human. The whole earth, because it has been affected by the fall, needs the gospel of reconciliation.

(ii) *The cross vindicates creation.* Jesus' work on the cross undermines any matter/spirit or, nature/grace dualism: it declares that creation is worth dying for. Humanity is to be redeemed with creation not apart from it. This theme is taken up in Romans 8. The creation that has been subjected to futility, presumably through humanity's sin, is to be liberated by the children of God becoming the sons of God. It is the sons of God who will be given the privilege of releasing the fallen creation into the liberty that they experience because of Jesus' work on the cross.³⁴

³³ For a full discussion of Col. 1:15-20 see Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentaries 44 (Word, 1982), pp. 31-57 and references therein; Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation*, Marshalls Theological Library (Marshalls, 1981), pp. 114-126; and Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon* (Fortress, 1971), p. 59.

³⁴ Commenting on Rom. 8:18-25, Paulos Mar Gregorios states: 'Human redemption can be understood only as an integral part of the redemption of the whole creation', in 'New Testament foundations for understanding the creation', *Tending the Garden*, pp. 83-92.

(iii) *The cross dethrones the powers.* The powers that lie behind the orders, structures and institutions of society, which were originally created by and for Jesus (Col. 1.16), were in some way corrupted through sin and became demonized.³⁵ Now, however, through the cross he stripped them, exposed them to ridicule and led them out as a conquered enemy in a victory parade (Col. 2:15).³⁶ They now have the potential to be transformed to the order they were intended to have. These powers which contribute to the pollution and rape of the earth no longer have to do so the cross has dethroned them.³⁷

The work that Jesus began in redemption on the cross, he will finish at his *parousia*. The earth is involved in redemption, and it too will be involved in the consummation. The earth is never seen as a machine or as raw material, but as the scene of God's redemptive action, and as such it will be renewed at the *parousia*: redemption includes a transformation of the earth.

4. New or renewed earth?

If the earth is to be destroyed at the *parousia*, as many popular commentators have suggested - notably those of a dispensational persuasion³⁸ - then environmental action is at best 'patching up a dying man's coat' and a waste of time. The question of the fate of the earth, then, needs to be addressed.³⁹

There appear to be two conflicting views in Scripture: a renewal of the earth and a destruction of the earth. The *crux interpretum* is 2 Peter 3:10-13.⁴⁰ There

³⁵ For literature on the powers see Hendrik Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Herald Press, 1962); G. B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Clarendon, 1956); Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (SCM, 1951), pp. 191-210; *The State in the New Testament* (Scribners, 1956); John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 1972); Walter Wink, *Interpreting the Powers* (Marshalls, 1987).

³⁶ P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians*, pp. 127, 133.

³⁷ Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, p. 34, suggests that the best translation of *katarchein* is 'dethrone'.

³⁸ Cf., e.g., R. C. Gromacki, *Are These the Last Days?* (Walter, 1970), ch. 10; and Erich Sauer, *From Eternity to Eternity* (Paternoster, 1954), p. 54.

³⁹ For a discussion see Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal*, Marshalls Theological Library (Marshalls, 1983), pp. 168-170, who thinks that an attempt at reconciling the apparent ambiguity 'is perhaps not necessary' (p. 170).

⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentaries 50 (Word, 1985), p. 316. For a full discussion see Al Wolters, 'World view and textual criticism in 2 Peter 3:10' *WTJ* 49 (1987), pp. 405-413. Wolters argues that the author of 2 Peter sees the day of judgment as 'a smelting process from which the world will emerge

is ample textual and contextual evidence to translate verse 10 as 'the earth and all its works will be found', not 'burned up'. Critical editions of the NT, including Tischendorf and Westcott and Hort, all have *heurethesetai* (will be found) rather than the Textus Receptus version *katakaesetai* (shall be burned up).

There are several other passages (notably Mt. 24:35 and parallels, and Heb. 1:12) which seem to suggest destruction rather than a transformation. However, Matthew 24:35 could be translated 'heaven and earth will be transformed but my word never changes'; *parerchomai* also occurs in 2 Corinthians 5:17 where the emphasis is on transformation rather than destruction.

In Hebrews 1:12 earth and heavens are 'like a garment [which] will be changed'. *Allagisontai* here is also used in the context of the resurrection of believers 'we will all be changed', so yet again this can be understood in the context of transformation. Cf. 1 Enoch 45:5 where he describes the new heaven and the new earth: '. . . I will transform the earth and make it a blessing: And I will cause Mine elect ones to dwell upon it.'

The OT prophets also held out hope for a transformed heaven and earth. Passages in Isaiah expound environmental harmony: the environmental destruction caused by war will be no more (Is. 2:4); order and harmony (*shalom*) will once more exist between the animals (Is. 11:6a), and between animals and humanity (Is. 11:8); the desert will bloom and water will gush forth in the wilderness (Is. 35:6).

Environmental theology: a summary

- (i) God is the source of all things.
- (ii) God as creator is separate and distinct from his creation.
- (iii) All of creation belongs to God.
- (iv) All of creation is good.
- (v) Humanity is inextricably linked to the earth:
 - (a) humanity is created from the earth
 - (b) humanity is to steward the earth
 - (c) humanity's fall results in the earth's fall
 - (d) humanity is to take the gospel to all of creation
 - (e) humanity's manifestation as the sons of God results in the earth's redemption.
- (vi) Jesus' work of redemption accomplished by the cross includes the non-human creation.
- (vii) Humanity is redeemed with, not out of, nature.

purified', and he suggests that "heurethesetai" is a metallurgical term appropriate to smelting and refining' (p. 408).

(viii) At the *parousia* the earth will be liberated and transformed, not destroyed.

(ix) The new (*i.e.* transformed) earth will, experience environmental harmony.

Having examined the basis of a Christian environmental ethic we will now turn to look at, the green movement, to compare and contrast the two distinctive world-views.

B. THE GREEN MOVEMENT

What does it mean to be green? What is a green world-view? These are two important questions that need to be addressed.

Green is one of those 'slippery' words that have an elastic definition; it can be stretched to mean what we want. For the majority it is erroneously seen as a synonym for environmental however, it means, much more than that. Jonathon Porritt, until recently director of Friends of the Earth, states that 'Whereas concern for the environment is an essential part of being green, it is ... by no means the same as being green'.⁴¹

Central to green thinking and politics are what Capra and Spretnak call the 'four pillars':⁴² ecology, social responsibility, grassroots democracy and non-violence.

Ecology

The term ecology is understood in a wider sense than its strict scientific definition; it means 'understanding ourselves and our environment as part of nature'.⁴³ Underlying the concept of ecology is the need to find our place in the ecosystem. Porritt sums it up as the need to 'remind people of the inseparable links between ourselves and the planet on which we depend'.⁴⁴

Social responsibility

This is understood to mean 'social justice and an assurance that the poor and working class will not get hurt by programmes to restructure the economy and our consumer society ecologically'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Porritt, *Seeing Green* (Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 5. Porritt also lists 14 points which he sees as the minimum criteria for being green.

⁴² Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, *Green Politics* (Hutchinson, 1984), p. 30. Cf. *Programme of the German Green Party* (Heretic, 1983), p. 17.

⁴³ *Programme*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ *Seeing Green*, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Capra and Spretnak, *Green Politics*, p. 35.

Grassroots democracy

This is the concept that democracy should be decentralized and direct, i.e. it takes into account the 'wishes and opinions of everybody affected by political and social economic policies, especially those who currently have very little say . . .'.⁴⁶

Non-violence

According to Petra Kelly of Die Grünen, the German Green party, non-violence is 'the essential ingredient in an ecological society'.⁴⁷ Non-violence is the abolition of both personal and structural oppression: 'humane goals cannot be achieved by inhumane means'.⁴⁸

One prominent green thinker, John Button, describes 'green' as:

A set of beliefs and concomitant lifestyle that stresses the importance of respect for the earth and all its inhabitants, using only what resources are necessary and appropriate, acknowledging the rights of all forms of life, and recognising that all that exists is part of one interconnected whole.⁴⁹

The two keywords are *beliefs* and *lifestyle*. As with all world-views, the green world-view rests on a set of beliefs, which are inherently religious, about the universe and humanity.⁵⁰ These beliefs are the set of hinges on which all our thinking and doing turns.⁵¹ They are like the roots of a tree, hidden, but without them the tree would not be a tree.

To understand the green world-view we need to examine the underlying faith-questions that shape all world-views:⁵²

⁴⁶ John Button, *A Dictionary of Green Ideas* (Routledge, 1988), p. 190.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *Green Politics*, p. 43.

⁴⁸ *Programme*, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Dictionary of Green Ideas*, p. 190.

⁵⁰ For a full discussion of the nature of world-views see James H. Olthuis, 'On Worldviews', *Christian Scholars' Review* Vol. XIV (2) (1985), pp. 153-164. Cf. also *Transforming Vision*, chs. 1 and 2.

⁵¹ Olthuis, p. 155.

⁵² Cf. the questions listed in *Transforming Vision*, p. 35; see also Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (CUP, 1974), who uses similar questions to analyse seven theories of human nature.

1. What is the nature of the universe?
2. What does it mean to be human?
3. What is wrong with life as it stands?
4. What is the remedy? How can we put it right?

Each of the answers outlined below provides a marked contrast to the Christian world-view.

It should be stressed from the outset that the discussion that follows is, and can only be, a generalization. The green movement is extremely diverse: it contains atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Marxists (and even some Christians) ... and not all of them would respond in the same way to these four questions, though the majority of greens would concur with the answers outlined below.

1. What is the nature of the universe?

Chief Seattle, a Dwarmish Red Indian chief, in a letter to the US government in the 1850s, succinctly defined the green view: 'All things are connected, whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the children of the Earth.'⁵³

The greens would see the 'earth as a single' self-regulating organism; the term Gaia, first coined by Jim Lovelock is often used to describe this concept. Gaia has, over 3 ¼, billion years, 'created the conditions which are now vitally necessary for life'.

2 What is humanity?

It is easier to answer this question negatively: humans are not the centre of the universe - indeed, as we shall see below, anthropocentricity (the view that the universe exists for man) is named as one of the causes of the problems that the earth faces.

Humanity, for the greens, is part of, not distinct from, nature; but because human beings have greater power to 'control' nature, they have a greater responsibility for it. Chief Seattle, writing a century before the green movement, also summed up the green view of humanity: 'Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it.'

3. What is wrong?

For the greens the source of contemporary alienation is that we have become estranged from nature. Man (and not just in the generic sense) has become too central, dominating nature and disturbing the natural order: he is upsetting Gaia's balance. This anthropocentricity results in too much growth, both in

⁵³ Author's note (April 2005): it is now recognised that Chief Seattle's 'speech' actually originated in 1887 by a frontier physician rather than in 1855 by an Indian chief. Nevertheless, it does illustrate a green world-view particularly well.

population and in economic terms, hence the earth's resources are rapidly depleting.

4. *What is the remedy?*

Most greens would agree that what is needed is a total change in the structure of society. Growth needs to be drastically cut. Sustainable development, i.e. one that can be sustained without using up the earth's resources, and the need to get back into harmony with nature by having a reverence and respect for the earth and its ecosystem, are for the greens their means of salvation.

Having presented a general summary of the green world-view, I want to examine one specific green group--the 'deep ecologists'.

Deep ecology

Arne Naess, the founder of the philosophical journal *Inquiry*, was one of the first to articulate the green philosophy that is known as 'deep ecology'.⁵⁴ Naess has even been called the pontiff of deep ecology.

Deep ecology is often contrasted with 'shallow' or 'cosmetic' ecology; deep ecology, as the name suggests, attempts to ask more profound questions about the underlying assumptions of society that lie at the heart of the environmental crisis. 'Shallow' ecology on the other hand (they maintain) tends to place a veneer over the problems. In his 1987 Schumacher lecture Naess explains the deep ecology approach by saying: 'When we in the Deep Ecology movement, talk about pollution, we ask "pollution for whom? There are so many living beings. Are you talking about pollution for humans? What about pollution for others?..." We always go on from discussing the sphere of human life, which is important for us, to life in general.... For us it's the ecosphere, the whole planet, Gaia, that's the basic unit and every living being has an intrinsic value!'⁵⁵

Deep ecology presents a marked contrast to the 'Dominant world-view of technocratic-industrial societies'.⁵⁶ We can summarize this contrast in the table below.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ 'The shallow and deep, long-range ecology movement. A summary', *Inquiry* Vol. 16 (1973), pp. 95-100; this is a summary of a lecture given at the Third World Future Research Conference, Bucharest, 3-10 September 1972.'

⁵⁵ 'The basics of deep ecology', *Resurgence* No. 126 (Jan-Feb 1988), p. 7

⁵⁶ Bill Deval and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Peregrine Smith, 1985)

⁵⁷ Based on fig. 5-1 in *Deep Ecology*, p. 69.

Dominant Western world-view	Deep ecology
1. Dominance over nature 2. Nature as a resource 3. Economic growth necessary for an increasing population 4. Belief in unlimited resources 5. High technological progress 6. Consumerism	Harmony with nature Nature has intrinsic value Simple material needs Earth's resources limited Appropriate technology Reducing consumption and recycling

Points 3-6 are important correctives to contemporary idolatry of scientism, technicism and economic growth.⁵⁸ The theological concept of stewardship arrives at the same, or at least similar, conclusions. It is in the first two points that we see not only a marked contrast to the dominant world-view but also to Christianity.

At one level points 1 and 2 of deep ecology are true; however, they are not the whole truth.

Harmony with nature

In one sense humanity is in harmony with nature⁵⁹--we are all part of nature (i.e. the created). We are creatures, made from the dust of the earth. Genesis 2:5 affirms our solidarity with the non-human creation; and yet we are also distinct from the rest of creation: humanity alone is created in the image of God.

All nature has intrinsic value

Christians too can affirm that nature has intrinsic value, by nature of its having been created by God. The non-human creation does not exist merely for humanity; its value is not dependent on how useful it is for humanity (see e.g. Jb. 40-41; Ps.104). Attfield⁶⁰ claims, with justification, that the notion that creation has no value except in its instrumental value for humanity is a Greek rather than a Hebrew concept, and as such is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. All of creation has rights: the right to be what God intended it to be.⁶¹

⁵⁸ For a Christian critique of these idols see the work of Bob Goudzwaard, e.g. *Idols of our Time* (IVP, 1984).

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *Man and Nature*, p. 67; Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (SCM, 1987), p. 17.

⁶⁰ Attfield, *The Ethics of Environmental Concern*, p. 26.

⁶¹ For a full discussion on how this relates to animals see Linzey, ch. 5.

Though all of nature has value, not all of nature has *equal* value. It is this point that is inherent in Jesus' claim that humanity (in the form of his disciples) is different/superior to the birds (Mt. 6:26). This is further exemplified by Jesus *permitting* the demons to go into the Gadarene swine after he had cast them out of the demoniac(s) (Mt. 8:28-34 and par.).

A green creed

Fifteen years' thinking on the principles of deep ecology has been summarized by Naess and George Sessions in eight basic principles, elucidated in the book *Deep Ecology*.⁶²

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy *vital* needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly of appreciating *life quality* (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

It is these principles that are the foundation of deep ecology, its creed. They have been left deliberately vague and 'somewhat neutral' so that they can 'be understood and accepted by persons coming from different philosophical and religious positions'.⁶³

⁶² P. 70; see also Naess' Schumacher lecture, *Resurgence, op. cit.*, and a similar list of principles in Peter Bunyard and Fern Morgan-Grenville (eds.), *The Green Alternative* (Methuen, 1987), pp. 281-283.

⁶³ *Deep Ecology*, p. 70.

It is worth commenting on these points to draw out some of their inconsistencies.

Deep ecology is not without its critics. The most trenchant of these is Murray Bookchin, who claims that:

‘Deep ecology’ is so much of a ‘blackhole’ of half-digested ill-formed and half-baked ideas... the very words, ‘deep ecology’, in fact, clue us to the fact that we are not dealing with a body of clear ideas but with a bottomless pit in which vague notions and moods of all kinds can be sucked into the depths of an ideological toxic dump.⁶⁴

The main problem for deep ecologists is how to define ‘life forms’ (principle 2). Do these include the HIV virus? To be consistent with their biocentric premise that all of nature has an *equal* inherent value they would have to welcome the HIV virus: not only does it represent another diverse life form, it is also instrumental in furthering the aims of principle 4, *i.e.* it decreases the human population. In fact David Foreman, one of the more extreme (consistent?) deep ecologists, suggested that smallpox should be reintroduced.

Principle 4 declares that a decrease in population is necessary for the flourishing of life and culture (but flourishing for whom? Definitely not for those who have to ‘decrease’); however, this cannot be achieved without violating Principle 5. How can the population be decreased if we do not interfere by euthanasia abortion, restricting the size of the family, *etc.*? Perhaps AIDS, the reintroduction of smallpox or famine are expected to do the task.⁶⁵

Principle 5 describes the human interference as excessive. This would then mean that we do not interfere with the famine in Ethiopia, rather we let ‘nature’ take its course and thus fulfil Principle 4. In fact Principle 5 is incompatible with Christianity. The cultural mandate (Gn. 1:27) is a mandate to subdue and rule *i.e.* to interfere. The problem is not interference but *how* we interfere. Interference is necessary for the responsible stewardship of creation; but it has two opposing directions: it can be done obediently *or* disobediently. It is disobedient interference that has resulted in the crisis we face today (Is. 24:1ff.).

Deep ecology is not only a biocentric philosophy, it is anti-human and even misanthropic. According to Bookchin, for deep ecology, ‘Humanity is essentially seen as an ugly “anthropocentric” thing – presumably a malignant

⁶⁴ M. Bookchin, ‘Social ecology versus “Deep ecology”’ *The Raven Anarchist Quarterly* Vol. 1 No. 3 (1987), p. 222.

⁶⁵ *Guardian*, 13 July 1988.

product of natural evolution – that is “overpopulating” the planet, “devouring” its resources destroying its wildlife and the biosphere’.⁶⁶

Green spirituality

‘My own working definition of spirituality is that it is the focusing of human awareness on the subtle aspects of existence, a practice that reveals to us profound interconnectedness’, writes Charlene Spretnak.⁶⁷

It is this interconnectedness with nature that provides the basis of green spirituality. John Seed, a deep ecologist and rain forest activist, says that ‘I find the idea that I am a part of nature, I’m not separate from it, I’m not different from it, I’m not alienated or isolated from it, to be an incredibly mystical thought’.⁶⁸

According to Porritt, the spiritual dimension of the green movement consists of two essential components: (i) ‘The endeavour to promote ecological wisdom in *all* existing religious and spiritual traditions’, and (ii) ‘the need to find ways of letting people reconnect with the Earth’.⁶⁹

The first concept is unashamedly pluralistic and syncretistic: most green thinkers draw upon Eastern mysticism, Celtic Christianity or pre-Christian Celtic paganism, the new physics and process theology. The second component again emphasizes the interconnectedness with nature, and in this sense is no different from the pantheism and monism of the so-called New Age movement: all is one, one is God, the earth/nature is God.

Wanted: Daniels in a New Age Babylon

It is evident that the green movement is immersed in New Age ideas. Consequently, Christians need to be on their guard if they are to play a part in the environmental movement; what is needed is an understanding of the New Age and a well thought-out Christian response to it. There is no need to become paranoid as some commentators have.

One such commentator is Constance Cumbey, a Detroit lawyer. She claims that the New Age movement is a ‘worldwide coalition of networking organisations’, of which there are over 10,000, ranging (alphabetically) from Amnesty International to Zero Population Growth. They include ‘many

⁶⁶ C. Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (Bear and Co. 1986), p. 41.

⁶⁷ *Raven*, p. 221

⁶⁸ J. Seed, *Green Line* No. 73 (June 1989), p. 12.

⁶⁹ J. Porritt, *Two Lectures* (The David Thompson Trust, 1988), p. 26.

“appropriate technology”, environmental and ecological organizations. . . such as Camshell Alliance, Sierra Club. . . [and] Friends of the Earth’.⁷⁰

Cumbey stands in a long tradition of conspiracy hunters.⁷¹ It is Cumbey’s contention that ‘for the first time in history there is a viable movement - the New Age movement - that truly meets all the scriptural requirements for the antichrist and the political movement that will bring him on the world scene.’⁷²

She presents a good critique of theosophy, but lets her conspiracy thesis run away with her, and in doing so trivializes biblical prophecy and history. Loren Wilkinson, whose book *Earthkeeping*, according to Cumbey, lays out a New Age political programme (!), describes Cumbey’s book as ‘an odd mixture of innuendoes, half-truths, and guilt by association’⁷³-- and in my view, Wilkinson is right.

Although environmental action is not synonymous with New Age ideas, it still leaves an important question unanswered: if the green movement does embrace some New Age ideas and concepts, should Christians be involved in it? The situation is in many ways analogous to that during the Second World War when the Kuyparian Calvinists and Marxists joined forces in the Dutch underground.⁷⁴ Two distinct groups, two distinct world-views, and yet because of a common aim - to resist the Nazis and help the Jews escape - they were able to work together; as in fact do Christians and Marxists today in South Africa fighting against the injustices of apartheid. Most Christians work ‘nine ‘til five’, rubbing shoulders with secular humanists and materialists - so why should working with the greens, even if they are New Agers, provide us with problems? We are called to transform all of culture with the gospel of the kingdom.

If Christians are to be involved they need to be able to articulate a coherent Christian world-view and to critique the greens, but, perhaps most of all, to know the call of God. Then with greens we will be able; to confront the idols

⁷⁰ C. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Huntingdon House 1983), pp. 247f.

⁷¹ For a useful critique of Cumbey and other American conspiracy hunters see James Alan Patterson, ‘Changing images of the beast apocalyptic conspiracy theories in American history’, *JETS* Vol. 31 (1988) pp. 443-452.

⁷² Cumbey, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁷³ Loren Wilkinson, ‘New age, new consciousness, and the new creation’, *Tending the Garden*, p. 26.

⁷⁴ I am indebted to Dr Brian J. Walsh for this illustration.

of technicism, scientism and economicism, and fight against the rape of the earth. The earth, after all, is not Gaia's, but the Lord's.

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