

**Creation Care – Our First Task, Our Greatest Challenge****Tenants in God's World: a Biblical Theology****Dr Allan S. McKinnon****Introduction:**

"Plant a tree in 73" was a UK government slogan to urge a response to an ecological crisis in the 1970s. (MPs went on to quip, plant some more in '74; keep them alive in '75) (Hansard, 20.12.73)

If you knew today that the world was going to end tomorrow what would you do? Martin Luther (reputedly responded), "I would plant a tree."

Luther's answer highlights a moral obligation to consistently behave in light of what we know to be the good and beneficial long-term consequences despite the imminent end, and no matter the immediate situation. There are no excuses for not doing what you know to be good and beneficial. The fact that the world winds up tomorrow is no argument for accelerating its destruction or for neglecting to do anything!

The coming together of today and tomorrow, the present and the future, is right at the heart of the environmental crisis that has most recently been privileged in our media. It is not a new problem or a recent crisis - we have been slow to deal with this matter for nigh on 50 years. Yet, the currency of the debate points us not only to predictions about the future but also to our present state of affairs. It hints at the place we have come from too, as being a better world, a diverse and fuller world that existed before - when our planet was not overtaken by corruption and decay.

Of course, as Christians this gives us a place for discussion: we have convictions about our future (our eschatology) and about our origins (the beginnings) as well as a moral code that we believe should shape our present. Tonight we can explore a few of these matters as we think about Creation Care.

In truth, some Christians, who have upheld the Bible as their governing story for life, have not been as careful with their responses in the present as we might have hoped for - this does not suggest our Bible is inadequate in some way. Rather it is to acknowledge that our interpretation of it may be flawed - perhaps we've held an inadequate view of the endings and maybe even of the beginnings. There may be need to revisit our Bible story as we think about a theology of creation care and formulate our responses and reactions to environmentalism.

As we turn to the Bible we will not get easy answers to some of the immense challenges facing us - solutions for the pollution of our oceans, or the extinction of some animal species, for example. But we will find key principles that should guide us for the present and the future, and we do well not only to find them but to keep them before us as we formulate our responses to the Greta Thunbergs & David Attenboroughs of our day.

**From the beginning...****A. The God of Creation**

"In the beginning God created heaven and earth." (Gen 1.1) The dependence of the whole cosmos upon God is the starting point of the Bible story. Creation in its entirety is his, he made it and he owns it. God is not to be confused with his creation: creation is not God, neither is God creation. God is completely distinct from and other than the creation. Yet God is not far from his creation. God cares for his

creation: we see this in the way he orders creation, he provides for its creatures, and he celebrates its goodness. Creation has intrinsic goodness - it's not only good because it is useful to humans.

But there is more... In light of these reflections, it is important to note that God, having created something apart from himself, continues to uphold it while still remaining apart from it, and in so doing offers it freedom. Freedom to turn to God in unity with his purposes and blessing, or to turn away from him in rebellion and destruction.

From these brief comments we can assert that:

**All of creation is the work of God and the whole earth belongs to him** (Ps 24.1-2, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.")

**God, although separate from creation, cares for it in sustaining and providing for all he has made** (Ps 95.3-7, "For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.")

**God made creation good for its own sake, not *just* for human use** (Ps 104 - a celebration of the goodness of creation in all its balanced beauty *apart from sinners!*)

"The message is clear: stars do not shine simply to provide light for humans; snowflakes do not fall only for human appreciation; there are [animals] we should not tame; deer whose freedom is preserved; hawks and eagles which fly high above us." <sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, humans do have a unique place in the midst of God's creation.

## **B. The place of humanity**

'Let us make man in our image, and in our likeness' (Gen 1.26). Human beings are part of creation - they are creatures - the work of God's hand. We are his, we belong to him. However, humans, although made on the same day as the other living creatures that inhabit the land, enjoy the place of being the 'final act' - perhaps the pinnacle of God's creative acts. Humans shared the same creaturely status of all living things inasmuch as they are made from the dust of the earth. Adam is made from the 'adamah', the earth. In other words we share in nature our earthiness, with the rest of the created order - we are an integral part of God's creation.

However, a balance is to be found in the Scriptural story - mankind are 'the same but different' from the animal kingdom. The Genesis accounts clearly state that only humans are 'made in God's image and in his likeness'. This set us apart from the rest of creation. Much speculation has been undertaken by theologians to establish what it means to be made in the image of God. One crucial aspect of this discussion often forgotten is that it defines a relational orientation towards God himself - an ability to commune with and cooperate with God. Furthermore, it endows human beings with both responsibility for and a unique relationship with the rest of creation (including relating well to one another).

Because they are made to bear the image of God, human beings are expected to model the life and nature of their Creator: the 'gracious and self-giving nature of their Creator.' Human beings are made to

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, p.283

be part of creation while at one and the same time to have a unique role in relationship with creation. We see this especially in what they are to do.

Genesis 1.28 has been a verse misused and abused by Christians to justify the exploitation of the earth for their own selfish ends. 'God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' (NIV) Two important commands are added to the 'be fruitful and multiply' commands given to all of creation. They are 'subdue' and 'rule'. The Hebrew words behind these English translations are even more forceful and strong in their meaning than we might expect - there is no place to 'make the translation a little gentler'! The Bible is making a clear statement here that particular responsibilities are given to the human race *over* the rest of creation. For this reason, many have accused the Judeo-Christian worldview as the reason why our earth has been so badly treated and manipulated - we have trampled, crushed and exploited the resources of the earth for our own ends, ravaged the land, the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea and then turned to this verse as a proof-text to justify our own wickedness.

Now, we need to look again at this verse in Genesis and other scriptural indicators to see if we might understand it aright and then better define what our God-given responsibilities are on his earth.

As we have said, this is a picture of strong dominion, but it is a balanced picture that is explained by other texts. We cannot read Gen 1.28 without reading 2.15. 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' (NIV) The significant aspect of this description is that the 'doing' is not for the benefit of the doer, but for the benefit of the object to which the 'doing' is applied! 'Working it' is with a view to providing a *service* to the earth. 'Taking care of it' is not just for human comfort or provision, but for the preservation of the garden itself. Human activity in the garden is designed to both *preserve* and *serve* the fields, the beasts, the trees, and even the land itself. It is in this kind of relationship with creation that they are to model the preservation and service of the Creator himself who gives of himself in the service of his creation and provides for all he has made.

But there is more... Adam (representing humanity both male and female) is given the task of naming the animals (Gen 2.19). 'He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.' (NIV) It is a curious thing that God the Creator wanted 'to see what [Adam] would name them'. The point is that just as God saw that his creation was good, so too he wants Adam to 'see' the intrinsic worth and goodness of the Creator's work. Naming the animals is not merely giving them a label - a Latin name, like *gorillagorilla* - no, 'True naming... involves a deep knowledge of the creature and a sympathetic relationship with it.' It is as though God allows the human being to bring his creatorial work to it completion by giving him the responsibility to know, understand and act with God in giving the creatures their names. Mankind are to know and understand and manage the creation intimately.

Genesis 1 *and* 2 are needed to understand fully what God intended the place of human beings to be in the midst of his creation - how they are to act in regard to the rest of creation and what responsibilities they share as the cooperate with God in the work are explained there in a beautifully balanced picture. The surprise from our brief and fleeting review of the teaching of scripture is that 'having dominion' as those who 'bear the image' of our Maker, most certainly means being a servant, a steward, a tenant - the masters for sure, but a good master serving and taking care of all of our environment in the midst of God's good creation. Sadly, human history bears out the truth that this has not been a pattern often followed, but there is always the chance to repent and to change our wicked mis-behaviour.

### C. The nature of stewardship...

Stewardship of God's creation is the most obvious model then that can be gleaned from the pages of scripture for explaining the relationship and responsibility that we as human beings. Made in God's image and likeness, we are to have 'dominion over' creation in such a way that allows us to serve and care for that which the Lord God has committed into our keeping.

Stewardship is not optional. It is part of human existence. It is the way God has ordained matters in His Creation. Now the question that remains and that we will briefly address is how is this tenancy to be conducted - how are the responsibilities of the stewards of God's creation to conduct themselves? Let's look quickly at six features (De Vos, *Earthkeeping*)...

- a. *Humans are held accountable to God for their service.* This is implied in the work and responsibilities given to Adam from the beginning. Psalm 8 links this place of accountability to the privileged position that humans have within creation - 'made a little lower than angels and crowned with glory and honour', seems to be ascribed to humanity because 'You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.' (Ps 8.4-5)
- b. *Humans are to exercise a delegated responsibility.* It is clear that God is the 'land owner' (Lev 25.23) and the 'whole earth' (Ex 19.5) belongs to him (Ps 24.1). In fact, even we are his (Ps 95). His command to subdue and rule over all he has made is a delegated task. We do it on his behalf. Our work of creation care should never lose sight of the fact that God is the ultimate owner.
- c. *Humans are fully equipped by God for the task.* God has made human beings in the way he has, so that they might undertake the work he has given them of creation care. They are body, soul and spirit - they can relate to God, to his creation and to one another. They are given a head, and heart and hands. A head to think, plan, manage, decide, evaluate, and strategise. They have a heart to love, to have compassion, to seek justice, to love mercy, etc. They have hands to act, to work, to create, to touch, to heal and to mend. Human beings are fully equipped for the task.
- d. *Humans are to manage God's creation.* The term for steward in Greek is *oikonomos* meaning the manager of a household. The household manager is to maximise the benefit of the home for all who live therein - in this case, all that has life and breath - is to be cared for by managing their environment for the health and well-being of all concerned. Management of any situation means balancing the needs of the household, it means having sufficient knowledge of our environment and the nature of the challenges we might face. No good manager will hide from or deny the challenges that he or she faces but will rather learn and equip themselves in order to make the best decisions for the good of all.
- e. *Human beings are to exercise initiative in their stewardship.* Jesus story of the talents comes immediately to mind. Each given a responsibility but only some taking initiative to put the things committed to them to good use. That one who did not take any initiative was condemned as slothful and wicked, his goods were taken away, his status revoked and he himself 'cast out' to the place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.' (Mt 25.30)
- f. *Humans are to exercise their stewardship together - both individually and communally.* It would be a misrepresentation of the facts of Genesis to suggest that one human being is given responsibility for all of creation. It appears that Adam is the representative human and that God gives the responsibility for creation care to all of humanity together. The division of labour is clear from the parable Jesus told - 'each according to their ability' were given responsibility. Private and personal stewardship however sits very well in the Bible's teaching alongside communal and community responsibility. Good stewardship of great enterprises happens under the guidance of a body of people who have a shared responsibility. In this

way, humanity have most decidedly received shared responsibility in creation care as well as individual responsibility in our own personal spheres of influence.

#### **D. A world of peace at peace**

This picture of a world that is well-managed under stewards who love God and his plans and purposes, who truly love his creation in all its diversity and beauty, and who live and work in harmony by serving one another through selfless lives that honour and glorify the Lord God, is not confined to Genesis 1 and 2. The prophets of the Old Testament spoke often of this ideal world in terms of “shalom”. A time when the ‘prince of peace’ would take the government upon his shoulders and would rule and reign on David’s throne, and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness.’ (Isa 9.6-7) It is God’s intent to see ‘shalom’ established on the earth he created by the word of his power. And the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. This is God’s kingdom vision... his kingdom of peace, that he has promised will come to pass on the earth.

Notice that right at the centre of this world of peace is justice and righteousness. We have no time really to dwell on this important subject, but it is right at the heart of creation care too. Creation care is not just about our environment. The biblical story is not one that allows for unfaithful stewards who exploit and ravage the earth for their own selfish gain. God’s faithful stewards are not only interested in earth-keeping but also in people-keeping. If we love God, we will truly love our neighbour also. Whether our neighbour is across the street or across the world. We live nowadays in the global village. What I do, how I act, and how I live in Glasgow, Scotland affects my neighbour in Garenganze, Congo.

One example from the prophets will need to suffice, but take note of the fact that the prophets speak that which is already enshrined in the Torah, the law of God (see e.g. Lev. 19.10-18). Amos and Hosea were contemporaries who railed against the social injustice of their day: the neglect of the poor, the violence of the rich, the accumulation of wealth, the communal human dysfunction of society was because God was forgotten and unknown. As a result the impact of such behaviour upon the land is bound up in this condemnation.

*‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away.’ (Hos 4.1-3)*

Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, the mighty God. He himself proclaimed that the year of the Lord’s favour had come in him (Lk. 4). The kingdom of God is at hand. By his life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension he has begun the work of ‘new creation’ in all those who have faith in him by the power of his Spirit. One day he will come again to establish that kingdom here in a new heaven and a new earth which the Bible describes as the home of righteousness. It is to this future hope that we now turn in our final section of my talk.

#### **Towards the end...**

How we understand the future profoundly affects how we live in the present. The technical term for theological reflection on the future is eschatology. The kingdom of God which we have referred to is both present and yet future. We live now in an eschatological tension between the “now” of the present kingdom and the “not yet” of a future kingdom. How the kingdom of God is to find expression in the here and now is related to how we understand it will find expression in the future.

It is important to say that the kingdom of God is not about the reign of God as such - for God is ultimately reigning as the eternal sovereign king. Rather the kingdom of God is the action of the sovereign God of heaven by which his reign is restored in power in those areas of his creation which he has permitted in rebellion to move outside the actual acknowledgment of his rule (Ladd, *Questions*, p. 83). God's will is done on earth when people like you and me submit to his purposes and align ourselves with his commands so that we can say 'He is Lord' and 'his will be done' - this then is where the kingdom of God is seen in the present age. 'The "history" of the kingdom of God is therefore the history of redemption, viewed from the aspect of God's sovereign and kingly power.'

The New Testament suggests that there are three realms that precede the coming of the ultimate glory of the God's fully perfect rule and reign. These previous realms seem to be preparatory to the full incoming of God's perfect shalom. The kingdom was first manifested in a particularly new revelation in the person of Jesus the Messiah. Because of the in-breaking of God's kingdom through Jesus, a new way of salvation was opened up for men and women to enjoy something of the powers and blessing of the kingdom. At his second coming, Christ will bring a further manifestation of the kingdom during which he will subdue every enemy and rule as the second Adam and as a glorious King in line with God's purposes. "Then, and only then, when every enemy is brought under his feet will the fulness of God's kingdom be realised, and the eternal kingdom have come." (Ladd, *Questions*, p.85)

Striking in George Ladd's eschatology issues in the continuity of the kingdom of God on the earth from the present time until the end. Not every eschatological viewpoint sees the earth in this way - some see this earth as destined for destruction. In such a view, the earth is beyond redemption, is utterly corrupt and will finally be destroyed. But this perspective of the future is in danger of undermining our work of the kingdom in the present. If the future is to be in a "new Heaven and New earth" which are discontinuous, indeed complete different from this earth, then, we might take a very nonchalant or even neglectful view of the present world – its not worth saving!

The Old Testament prophecies concerning the future kingdom describe another view, in my opinion, an earthly realm which enjoys both continuity and discontinuity with the present age. There is no sense of that future kingdom being 'other worldly' (Isa 65, 66). In addition, NT teaching of the King of the kingdom insists that the meek shall inherit the earth (Mt 5.5). God's kingdom prayed for in the Lord's prayer is yet 'to come' and invokes God's will being done 'on earth' as it is in heaven (Mt 6.10; cf. 8.11-12; Lk 19.1ff, etc). Jesus' teachings about the kingdom are without doubt difficult to discern in terms of any future chronology, neither does he himself set out stages of the manifestation of the kingdom - it is not his immediate purpose to write us a handbook for future prophetic fulfilment. But what Jesus does do is establish for us the essential character of the kingdom of God and the demands that it makes upon us as its members, its citizens. Jesus makes it clear that his followers will, like him, the Immanuel God with us, reflect his own character and image and likeness by knowing, understanding and practising the righteousness, justice and peace of the kingdom he has introduced us to.

Romans 8:18-28 deals with present suffering and future glory. In this majestic passage, Paul reminds us of the lot of the whole creation which in his understanding is animated in its waiting, its groaning and its longing. The world of which we are a part seems to be caught up in the salvation purposes of the children of God. Paul under the power of the Spirit sees a future world where this present creation is released from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. Hallelujah! Here is the vision for the future - a renewed and transformed world, saved by the Prince of Peace, which dwells in perfect harmony as the creation is properly stewarded under the watchful eye and action of the glorious children of God... this is what we hope for, and we wait for it patiently. We are a new creation and in that glorious kingdom we will know both continuity and discontinuity with this present existence. Until then we continue to live with the presence of the future...

## Conclusion

So, how can the future kingdom be present? What impact will our understanding of the future have on our present day world and the call to creation care? *Firstly*, let me say I think it would be a mistake to suggest that the kingdom of God does not concern *this* world and is *confined to a future* spiritual realm. Excluding a temporal earthly aspect to the future kingdom is not a solution, just as excluding a present kingdom of God from our temporal experience now, is not a solution. We must live with the tension. *Secondly*, let's remember always that God's creation matters to him. We must allow the future to influence the way we live in the present.

The secret for living as God's faithful stewards of this world while realising the hope of the next, is bound up with the life in the Spirit. This is the key theme of Paul in Romans 8. The Spirit offers us the dynamic power to live for God in this present world. Our adoptions as children of God through the Spirit offers us opportunity to be channels of God's divine activity on the earth. Paul will insist elsewhere that "our work in the Lord is not in vain" and so as we keep in step with the Spirit, we are expected to embrace the Spirit's work not only in our lives but through our lives to others. We are to partner with Him in the work of renewal and healing for all of God's creation - the world, the atmosphere, the environment, the climate; the animals, the birds, the fish of the sea, the oceans; our fellow man, our neighbour, our poor, our neglected, our downtrodden and oppressed. We are to be earth-keepers and people-keepers (Provan). In this sense, Creation Care ought to be understood as a discipline of Christian formation as the Spirit of God has his way in our lives and as we serve the living and true God, creator of heaven and earth, and wait for his Son from heaven, Jesus Christ the Righteous One.

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## Recommended reading:

- Moo, Douglas J, and Jonathan A Moo. *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*, Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2018.

In our first session we thought about our Christian responsibility to care for creation. Now we want to think about the environmental movement as a whole because if we take our responsibilities seriously, we will be working alongside people in that movement to preserve the planet. This raises the question, 'do we believe in the same values?' The answer with at least some of them is, yes and no. Yes, because we do value creation, no because we do not value creation in the same way as many of them do. While we might be doing similar things, we will be coming at it from a different perspective. Of course, the environmental movement is extremely broad and diverse. It is not possible to state what a typical environmentalist or environmental campaigner looks like. Given that we have the responsibility of creation care, many environmentalists will share our Christian convictions. Many will not and we need to be aware of some of the strands within the movement because there are dangers.

### **Lessons from Bible History**

Jeremiah 29:7 instructs us to, 'Seek the welfare of the city'. We need to care for our community and our world. Caring properly for the environment is part of that, but not the only part. One of problems with pressure groups like many within the environmental lobby is that they are single-minded, sometimes dogmatic, (Extinction Rebellion is an example of this). Such groups focus on one issue (however massive) without seeing the big picture and without caring for the whole of society. Mature Christian reflection cannot do that. To genuinely care about the world, we need to do more than care about just one aspect.

Before we do that, we will take a look at two important Bible characters. They are an example of how godly people can make a difference in society as a whole. Environmentalism is about policy making and influencing public policy. God's people have played an important part in that. Think of Joseph, who was the saviour of his family, but also a policy maker who ensured that a potentially catastrophic famine did not ruin Egypt. Think also of Daniel, who worked in the civil service of not just one but two pagan empires - empires which were undemocratic and caused bloodshed, but also empires that brought a measure of global stability. Daniel was a policy maker who worked hard and wisely to improve the lot of everyone within those regimes. These are good role models whose example we can follow.

### **Learning to Live Wisely**

How are we to approach the whole environmental issue? Let me make some introductory comments.

1. As we have already noted from the first session, it is our Christian duty to care for creation. That must be seen both in our personal lifestyle and our attitudes.
2. We need to remember God is in control. Beware of the language of Climate Emergency – I am not convinced it is an emergency (though it is a serious situation), but we need to be careful about the language of panic – it is a denial God's sovereignty.
3. Avoid naiveite – we need to lift our eyes above the clamour of all the political debate and realise the complexity of the situation. We should do this because the complexities affect people and we should care about that. We could think of two examples of this.
  - Firstly, think of fossil fuel emissions in the UK. I would like to see them lowered because it is good for the planet. However, we cause only 1% all emissions. The biggest offenders are the USA, China and India (52%). We want to lead by example as a nation. However, if all we are concerned about is campaigning to reduce emissions here – we are in danger of



virtue signalling to ourselves without actually dealing with the bigger issue. This doesn't let us or the UK off the hook. However, we need to be honest about what is really happening and treat the debate seriously.

Of course, in the long run people will only change their lifestyles if it is practical and possible for them to do so and that means better infrastructure. Lifestyle is also important. Note the huge growth in SUV sales. In the long run, the consumer is indeed king.

- We need also to be aware of geo-political challenges. If we look at some of the fossil producing countries, we would discover they are also some of most politically unstable as well as potential breeding grounds for terrorism (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Nigeria, Algeria, Libya). Fossil fuels form a huge part of their economies with the income and security that generates. Consequently, fossil fuels are currently essential if those countries are to function. If they were forced by international pressure to wean off fossil fuels too quickly, this could cause huge instability. Security threats would increase markedly. Also migration which is a big issue now, with people trafficking etc. could become much bigger if some of these countries became failed states! Does God care about these things? As Christians we should be prayerful about them too. Providing sound bites and simplistic solutions does not deal with the significance of the issue.

### **Dealing with Philosophy**

Another issue that we do need to be concerned about is the philosophy that lies behind some in the environmental movement. A person's motives for what they do are important, that should be true of us as Christians. As we engage in this debate, we need to make sure that we don't swallow whole worldview. We need to remain as biblical Christians.

Jesus said that the way in which humans act is a manifestation of the way they think— a tree is judged by the quality of its fruit; “out of men's hearts come actions” (*Mark 7: 20 – 23*). That is certainly true in the environmental field, where there is much concern to develop visions of a better future. What belief systems lie behind it? We will outline two concerns.

### **Environmentalism as a secular Mystical Religion**

The way some environmentalists approach the issue and also talk about nature is deeply religious. That is true, even if those people would not claim to be religious. For example, there are people within the scientific community, some of whom might even be atheists or agnostics, for whom the planet and the life on it has acquired an almost mystical and transcendental significance. An example of this is what has popularly become known as the Gaia hypothesis. This term was the invention of British scientist called James Lovelock. He began to argue that the biosphere acts like a living organism, one that self-regulates to keep conditions just right for life. In other words, the biosphere is a living thing that might even have some kind of purpose or self-regulating will. Although rooted in science, Gaia appeals to the mystical side of human nature.

Lovelock stood back from his initial position, not least because of the criticism he received. But his idea became popular and many of his followers have continued to support the idea to the point where we talk about the 'strong Gaia or weak Gaia depending on where you are on the spectrum.

Of course, it is one thing to argue that that the global biospheric system is able to compensate and change so that it survives. This is in the realm of provable science. It is a very different thing to claim that the biosphere has some mystical and transcendental characteristics like a living being. But that is what some have suggested. Some of Lovelock's disciples have claimed that earth is a single life form with senses,

intelligence and the power to act. This is seen in expressions like 'nature always finds a way'. This 'strong Gaia' end of the spectrum is not far removed from some of the animistic beliefs of ancient times.

It is not hard to see how this idea has become popular even among people who believe in science. In a society that has lost any concept of the divine, all we have is this life and this planet. Our goal must therefore be to ensure its survival and that of all the species that live here. But that kind of transcendent goal fits more comfortably into the realm of religion. It uses language like values, faith, ethics and salvation. We could almost call it a mystical secular religion.

Adding to this debate are some liberal Christians who jumped on the bandwagon. This would include Hans Kung, Matthew Fox and Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard de Chardin once wrote, "our consciousness...shall finally discover that the only truly natural and real human unity is the spirit of the earth." In this way he also utilised language reminiscent of mystical religion. He pictured salvation as being born from the earth, nurtured by the earth and then returning to the earth.

### **Environmentalism as a Pantheist Belief System**

A second area where we need to be careful is in the pantheist strains of the environmental movement. Pantheism is the belief that nature and the universe are expressions of god and indeed that there are many gods. This may have some link back to the hippy era of the 1960's. An example of this is the neopagan, ecofeminist and activist Starhawk (described by some as a feminist witch). She seamlessly combines environmental activity with pagan beliefs. Her training courses attempt to 'cross-pollinate the political, environmental, and spiritual movements that seek peace, justice, and resilience'. She is reputed to have said, 'When I say goddess I am not talking about a being somewhere outside of this world nor am I proposing a new belief system. I am talking about choosing an attitude: choosing to take this living world, the people and creatures in it, as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, to see the world, the earth and our lives as sacred.'

The problem with both of these positions is that they, in effect, focus on the created thing not the creator. Romans 1 instructs us to worship God not created things. Both these strands of thought within the environmental movement do the opposite. In deifying creation they turn their backs on the creator. GK Chesterton once said, 'When people stop believing in God they don't believe nothing – they believe anything'. This is certainly true in some of the belief systems that lie behind some environmental thinking.

### **Making Humanity Less Special**

With the decline in belief in God there is also a decline in belief in man made in the image of God. For many in this movement, we are just one of many species. Any attempt to see humans as special and of particular value, made in the image of God, an act of speciesism.

Some radical environmentalists have a negative view of humanity. Dave Foreman, founder of the radical environmental group Earth First describes humans as, 'a disease, a cancer on nature'. Greenpeace activist and founder of environmental activist group Sea Shepherd, Paul Watson states, 'we, the human species, have become a viral epidemic on the earth'. Many of these radical environmentalists do not accept the biblical position that the earth was made as a home for humanity. Rather they see human activity as 'abusing', 'pillaging' and even 'raping' the earth. Many environmentalists want to radically curb human population so as to let the earth flourish, not recognising that the earth was made for us. An ironic outcome of this negating of human value is that we cannot cut down forests because that is seen as immoral, but we can take the life of an unborn child which is not seen as immoral. This is a distortion of truth.

## **BIBLICAL RESPONSE**

- There is one God who is creator
- The material world is created and will one day be renewed
- God is distinct from his creation, he is not nature
- Nature is fallen and needs renewed
- The future blessing of all creation is bound up in the redemption by the cross