

Theological Basis for Creation Care

Christian awareness of environmental responsibility was aroused when historian Lynn White (1967) published a paper entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." In this paper, White laid blame for much of the ongoing environmental crisis on the anthropocentric worldview of Judeo-Christianity that conceives man as superior to all the rest of creation, which exists merely for his use. His argument regarding the exploitative attitude of Christians toward nature is mainly based on his interpretation of the Genesis mandate for humans to "have dominion" over the rest of living things.

Ontological Implication of Creation Care

In order to respond to White's indictment, the human position in the created world needs to be defined. What does it mean to be human, or what is the position of humanity in the created world? Are men and women a part of nature or the "crown of creation," or both?

Humans share a common identity with the rest of the creatures (Gen. 2:7, 19; 3:19) and their fate is bound to the fate of creation (Gen. 3:17-18; 4:11-12). Nevertheless, the Bible says that humans are exceptional in creation. The high point of the creation narrative is the creation of human beings. They alone are made in the image of God and are given dominion over the natural world, and thus are distinct from all other creatures (Gen. 1:26-27). Jesus affirms that humans are much more valuable than the rest of the creatures (Matt. 6:26). In her narrative on the Creation story, E. G. White (2005) observes that "among all the creatures that God had made on the earth, there was not one equal to man" (p. 46). With regard to their unique position, a Psalmist amplifies the Genesis narrative as follows:

What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, and the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. (Ps. 8:4-8, NIV, 1984)

Based on the above two parallel passages, we can infer two concepts that make humans different from the rest of the creation: "image/likeness of God" (relation with God) and "subdue/dominion" (relation with creation). So, our main argument will be focused on the terminology of these two words.

What is meant by the image and the likeness? Contrary to the early

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theologians who have taken the image and likeness as separate components of created human nature, scholars since about the time of the Reformation have recognized that “in the image” and “after the likeness” refer to the same thing based on the facts that there is no “and” joining these two phrases and these phrases are used interchangeably between Genesis 1:27, 5:1, and 9:6 (Collins, 2006). Traditional theologians have thought that the image of God is a property of human nature that is like God in some way. Collins calls this traditional view the “resemblance view.” According to Collins, this traditional view was rejected by the theologians in the 20th century who thought that the Bible focused on function rather than ontology. This function-based perspective was divided into two views: (1) the representative view, in which man was made to represent God in his activity of ruling the world

9:28). Given that God is the Lord of creation, dominion belongs only to God, who rules the world with ultimate and absolute authority over His creation (cf. Job 25:2; Ps. 22:28). Therefore, humanity doesn't have any intrinsic authority over creation. There is no absolute authority in relation to humanity but a "delegated authority" with limitations and boundaries (Gnanakan, 1999, pp. 51-52).

Eschatological Implication of Creation Care

Another environmental argument in the context of Christian ministry is how to overcome the discontinuity between present earth and eschatological earth. Christian responsibility for environmental conservation is frequently challenged with a question from those who are waiting for the Kingdom of God from the premillennialist perspective: "Why preserve the present earth when it is headed for collapse and a new heaven and new earth will replace it?" (DeWitt, 1991, p. 74). The dichotomy of present and future, temporal and eternal, and physical and spiritual world has weakened the necessity of any endeavor to restore the environment. Some bridging concepts for this dichotomy need to be discussed in the eschatological context.

Bridger (1990) describes our present position:

We and the world lie between the two decisive acts of God in the affairs of the world, namely, "His past act in Jesus Christ and His future act when the final theophany will usher in the resurrection of the dead"

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melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:11-13, NIV, 1984)

Here Peter uses very strong apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic language in our present context sometimes denotes urgency, a sense of crisis, a need to do something in order to avert the End. However, as

practical issue in the evangelical context. The ultimate purpose of the church is evangelism which is based on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Acts 1:8). As Cress (2008), the late Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, noted, "Our concern for the planet must never surpass our concern for people and bringing the good news of Jesus to them" (p. 30). Then can neglect of ecological responsibility be excused if we are busy enough in the work of saving souls? Is there any continuity between caring for creation and saving souls?

The redemptive story of the Bible suggests that the ministry of God is

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In the parallel passages in Colossians, Paul depicts Jesus' concern for cosmic reconciliation within God's ultimate redemptive plan based on the centrality of Christ in relation to God's creation: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (1:16, NIV, 1984). This inclusiveness of all creation in the creative work of Jesus lays the foundation for His redemption to be so far-reaching that it encompasses all of heaven and all of earth: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:19-20, NIV, 1984).

Gnanakan (1999) shows how early Christians gradually changed from exclusiveness to a more inclusive attitude that recognized God's plan for the whole world. Their redemption scope was expanded from the Jews to the Gentiles and eventually to the point where they were ready to "recognize not only God's sovereignty over all people, but also over the universe, the entirety of God's creation" (p. 101). Gnanakan asserts that individualistic approaches to Christianity prevent us from accepting the cosmic dimension of redemption. God is revealed in the form of a triune relationship. The same is true with humans whose image was not individual but expressed communally in the relationship of a man and woman. So redemption is understood from the perspective of an overall relationship encompassing the entire universe. The implication is clear that if saving souls is the prime ministry of the church, then creation care also should be part of its ministry.

In a diachronic sense, covenant theology clearly shows how the first ministry of humanity in Genesis has continuity not only with the ministry of Jesus but also with the eschatological event itself. The evangelis-

the contents of the Noachian covenant are closely linked to the Adamic covenant (Gen. 9:1-17; cf. 1:28-29). In this covenant, God put everything back in the right and proper order originally intended (Gen. 9:1-3; cf. 1:28-30). God's covenant with Adam is also reflected in His following covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15; cf. 13:14-17, 1:28). The Sinai Covenant with the Israelites also succeeds the basic principles of the first covenants. As Jewish theologian Martin Buber (cited in LaRondelle, 2005) states, "the Sinaitic covenant was not an innovation, but rather a reaffirmation of an already existing relationship which had previously

spective with respect to human attitudes toward the natural world. Thirdly, environmental care involves an issue of intra- and inter-generational equity.

Anthropocentric or Ecocentric

In 1973, Naess (1973) wrote his view that the mainstream ecological movement of those days was a shallow ecology in the sense that its central objective is just the health and affluence of people in the developed world, and fought against pollution and resource depletion. In reaction to such an anthropocentric and technocentric attitudes of shallow ecology, where nature is simply seen as something to be mastered and controlled, deep ecologists hold ecocentric ideas as a deeper and more fundamental solution to environmental problems. Thus, at the heart of deep ecology, as Partridge (2005, p. 58) discoursed, is the belief that all forms of life have intrinsic value, moral worth, and the right to self-realization and that humans are just a part of the "web of life" equal with many other aspects of creation. Based on this biospherical egalitarianism, Naess thought that the human perspective is that of a part of nature, which he called an "ecosophy," a personal philosophy or a code of values and a view of the world that guides personal decisions about relations with the natural world (Adams, 2001; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993).

The ecocentric worldview has undoubtedly been important in encouraging a wider appreciation of the value of nature and of modern humanity's often destructive relations with it. However, it cannot avoid a criticism that it has disregarded the distinctive human role and humanity's dignity. To make things worse, monism and pantheism even erase the border line between God and His creatures. On the other hand, the attempt to define nonhuman through the human perspective (anthropocentrism) also has encouraged exploitation of nature by devaluing the nonhuman world. In this regard, anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews may not be the appropriate criterion to define the human relationship

nonhuman contributes to the survival and happiness of humans, its ultimate and final purpose is for God. To put it another way, humans are expected to make their relationship with the natural world a seeking to glorify God.

Moral Status of Nonhuman Entities

The second challenge will be how to identify the moral status of nature and the nonhuman entities in it. One of the most controversial issues related to the moral status of the nonhuman is the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities, and nature in general. Many traditional Western ethical perspectives are anthropocentric in that they either assign intrinsic value to human beings alone or they assign a significantly greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings than to any nonhuman things such that protection or promotion of human interests or well-being at the expense of nonhuman appear to be justified. However, when environmental ethics emerged as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s, it began to investigate the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents.

In reality, the issue of intrinsic value has conceptual, ontological, epistemological, and ethical questions in terms of its application to nature and its entities (Vilkka, 1997). To put it another way, when we are confronted with some proposed list of intrinsic goods, it would be natural to ask such questions as What does the intrinsic value of nature mean? What are the intrinsic values in nature? How do we perceive them in nature? What is their significance to human life?

Basically, the concept of intrinsic value is described as opposed to extrinsic or subjective value, and most generally instrumental value. First, as opposed to extrinsic value, intrinsic value is an inner value of an object in terms of value in itself. Secondly, as the opposite of subjective value, objective intrinsic value is defined as the qualitative property of an object. Finally, intrinsic value is an end-value, referring to what is valuable for its own sake as the opposite of instrumental value (Vilkka, 1997).

Four kinds of intrinsic values will be defined at the most general level when the intrinsic value is to be defined in relation to nonhuman entities: (1) anthropocentric intrinsic value, (2) non-anthropocentric intrinsic value, (3) anthropogenic intrinsic value, and (4) non-anthropogenic intrinsic value (Hargrove, 2003, p. 177; Vilkka, 1997, pp. 32-33). The distinction between the first two values is made based on the question of

whether value in nature is human centered or centered outside the sphere of human welfare (Reed, 2003). The other two values are based on the ontological question of who can generate values. That is, is it human-generated and ascribed intrinsic value, or nonhuman-generated intrinsic value (Vilkka, 1997, pp. 32-33)?

Ethics may strive to identify universal principles. In the context of an environmental situation, however, ethical standards may vary from person to person and society to society. This is because, as Lein (2003, p. 186) noted, there is no objective moral truth or reality comparable to that which we seem to find in the natural world. However, in the context of Christian belief, these diverse philosophical theories and opinions would find a common ground. The Bible provides some conceptual frameworks in defining the moral status of nature and its nonhuman entities. Based on the above-discussed ethical issues, some biblical standpoints can be addressed, as follows:

First, the Bible introduces God as not only the generator of value but also the giver of consciousness through which humans may conceive God's ascribed values.

Second, the Bible supports the concept of intrinsic values in nature distinctive from its instrumental values. This concept will be inferred in the proclamation that God made during creation week: "It was good" (Gen. 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This goodness will be more than aesthetic value when we refer to the number of texts that rephrase it as the "glory" or goodness of God (Ps. 19:1).

Third, the Bible infers the degree of moral significance between entities in nature. In terms of value, as Jesus affirms, humans are much more valuable than the rest of the creatures because they were created in the image of God (Matt. 6:26; Gen. 9:6). At the level of nonhuman entities, God put more value on animals than vegetation on account of the life they have (Gen. 9:3-6). This is similar to what Vilkka (1997, p. 32) did when he classified nonhuman entities and their value into three sets: animals as sentient beings (zoocentricism), living beings because of the value of life (biocentricism), and the whole planet Earth because of its unique life-support system (ecocentricism). Thus it is important to note that something can have intrinsic but not absolute value.

Fourth, according to the Bible, humans have three-dimensional ethical accountabilities—first to God, then to their neighbors, and finally to the entities in nature. These responsibilities are interconnected with each other to such an extent that it cannot be said, for instance, that humans are supposed to ascribe intrinsic value to nature solely for the sake of nature. In

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Johannesburg to mark the 10th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, was called to reaffirm a commitment to the agreement made at the Rio Summit (United Nations, 2005b, p. 2). The emphasis was placed on the development of action steps.

Sustainable development also puts emphasis on intra-generational equity, which can be applied across communities and nations within one generation. The belief that intra-generational equity is also a key principle of environmental sustainability is based on the assumption that inequities are a cause of environmental degradation (Sunder, 2006, p. 20). For instance, poverty deprives people of the choice of whether to be environmentally sound in their activities.

Such a concern is well embedded in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015 (United Nations, 2000). They include eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, and fighting disease epidemics, such as AIDS. This denotes a firmly established concept of sustainable development, that is, "efforts to

God's ownership of the land, in practice, ensured the equal distribution of the land. When the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, God distributed the land to them according to their tribal divisions, clan by clan (Josh. 13:1-19:51). Equitable allocation was emphasized in the process of distribution. More portions were allotted to the tribes with more people (Num. 26:51-56; Josh. 17:14-18). This equity was supposed to be maintained or at least restored on a fifty-year basis (Deut. 19:14; Lev. 25:8-10, 23-28). The assumption is that not only synchronic equity but also diachronic equity was considered in the land allocation process. That is, God was concerned for the welfare of future generations. As Wright (2006) expounds, "the Jubilee was an attempt to limit its otherwise relentless and endless social consequences by limiting its possible duration" so that "the economic collapse of a family in one generation was not to condemn all future generations to the bondage of perpetual indebtedness" (p. 298).

One of the main points of the Jubilee was that there should be a limit to the use of land. If the sabbatical year limits the extent of land use, the Jubilee limits the duration of land monopolization. Humanity is endowed with the land from God to use it only during the time they live; then it should be handed over to the next generation without decreasing its sustainability. It was imperative to maintain the integrity of the land for generations to come because it was God who owned the land.

Reorientation of Relationship With the Material World

With regard to human impact on the environment, many scholars believe that the overpopulation of humans is the leading cause of environmental degradation (Penn, 2003, p. 276; Swearer, 2009, p. 1). Such a belief is simply based on the assumption that the more people there are, the more resources are consumed and the more waste is created.

However, the relationship between population alone and planetary stress is hardly straightforward. We need to note that "the world's richest 500 million people (roughly 7 percent of the world population) are currently responsible for 50 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emission, while the poorest 3 billion are responsible for just 6 percent" (Assadourian, 2010, p. 6). This highly skewed consumption inequity creates the disproportionate responsibility for the current environmental ills upon the rich, who consume resources excessively and as a result generate a major part of the hazardous waste on the planet. Therefore, managing the level of consumption would be more crucial and urgent than controlling the population growth.

Materialism, Lifestyle Dysfunction, and the Good Life

Overconsumption, as Assadourian (2010, p. 3) notes, is a cultural trend that leads people to find meaning, contentment, and acceptance through what they consume. By its nature, consumerism is based on materialistic value. Theoretical suggestions have been made that people who share materialistic values feel happiness when they possess things, so they buy more and more to maintain and increase feelings of happiness. Thus, they are constantly motivated to over-consume due to the law of diminishing returns.

Since the beginning of modernity, materialism has stood both as a vision of the good life and as a cosmological basis underlying epistemology and modern science (Norgaard, 1995, p. 475). However, as materialism drives humanity's environmental crisis, it would be timely for Christians to reorient their relationship with the material world and to

through their possessions. Therefore, what is often interpreted as materialism is in reality a demonstration of the pathologies of social deprivation.

Post-Material Value

In reaction to such limits of materialism, post-materialism emerged. If materialism is seen as the system of beliefs and attitudes aimed at satisfying one's material needs, post-materialism can be understood as the system of convictions and values that are beyond the materialistic ones. As van der Ven (1996) describes it, post-materialism leads people to strive for fulfilling the needs of belonging together, trust, esteem, dignity, and intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction (p. 106).

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