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Creation Care: Stewardship or What?

There are practical and urgent reasons for treating our environment sensibly, but there are also theological ones which underpin them. Our environment is God's creation. How Christians regard and treat their environment ultimately depends on their understanding of the creative and sustaining work of God. A valid ecotheology must involve the study of God's Book of Words (the Bible) and his Book of Works (Creation, which we learn about from ecological and environmental science). This essay reviews and puts into this context a number of recent books on the subject of creation care.

Key words: creation, environment, ecology, stewardship, ecotheology

David Horrell, Cherryl Hunt and Chris Southgate

Greening Paul. Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010

333pp. pb. \$34.95/£29.50

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David Horrell, Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate and Francesca Stavrakopoulou (eds.)

Ecological Hermeneutics. Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives

London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010

333pp. pb. £24.99

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Richard Bauckham

Bible and Ecology. Rediscovering the Community of Creation

London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010

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Richard Bauckham

Living with Other Creatures. Green Exegesis and Theology

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Roger Scruton

Green Philosophy. How to Think Seriously About the Planet

London: Atlantic Books, 2012

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Forrest Clingerman and Mark Dixon (eds.)

Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy and Ethics.

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Three books by Cambridge academics appeared within a decade of each other at the end of the seventeenth century. They shaped understanding of the natural world for more than the next hundred years. The most eccentric was Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (originally published in 1681 in Latin as *Telluris Theoria Sacra* but more widely known in its English translation of 1684). Burnet believed God had created the Earth as a perfect sphere and all its irregularities (mountains, seas, islands ...) were the result of the Flood.¹ It was reprinted many times and was the most popular geology of the eighteenth century. A positive side effect it had was to open the Bible to scientific explanation. Isaac Newton wrote to Burnet, 'I do not think [Moses's] description of the creation either philosophical or feigned, but that he described realities in a language artificially adapted to the sense of the vulgar... Of our present sea, rocks, mountains, &c., I think you have given the most plausible account.' The second book (in 1687) was Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, produced in response to questions put to him by Edmund Halley but extending hugely beyond such a modest root. More than anything else, the *Principia* set the agenda for Enlightenment science. The third book was John Ray's *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, which appeared in 1691.² Ray, like Darwin two centuries after him, was essentially a naturalist. His biological writings were firmly based on observation, and he extended the same discipline into his theology. Ray captured the growing acceptance of his time that God had other concerns than humankind. In a well-known sentence, Ray stated, 'It is a generally received opinion that all this visible world was created for Man [and] that Man is the end of creation, as if there were no end of any creature but some way or other to be serviceable to man... But though this be vulgarly received, yet wise men nowadays think otherwise.'

Charles Raven condemned the century after Ray as occupied by 'dull people in a dull period when decline is more obvious than advance'.³ This is unfair. The eighteenth century was the Enlightenment century and we are still using many of the ways of thought developed during it, but one can sympathise with Raven as he looked back at the fate of the ideas and vision set out by his hero, John Ray. Roy Porter identifies the key eight-

1 Keith Thomson calls the book, 'a combination of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Ussher's biblical literalism, with shades of Blakean mysticism' (Thomson, K. *The Watch on the Heath*, London: HarperCollins (2005), p.142).

2 It consisted of (as recorded by Ray in his preface), 'the Substance of some Common Places (so in Cambridge they call their Morning Divinity Exercises) delivered in Trinity-College Chappel, when I was a Fellow of that Society'.

3 Raven, C.E. *Organic Design*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1954), p. 5.

eenth century concept as 'Nature', and more specifically as the deification of nature:

It was an affirmation of an objective and external reality, created by God, repudiating the fallen, decaying cosmos imagined by Calvinism. The natural world could also serve as the antithesis of all that was confused and contorted, the deceitful and the meretricious. For early environment thinkers like [the 3rd Earl of] Shaftesbury, Nature linked the divine (eternal and transcendental) and the human; it pointed to the purification and perfection of mankind, and extended human sympathies beyond the normal bounds of artifice.⁴

At the end of the century, the Archdeacon of Carlisle, William Paley, published three books, the most well known being *Natural Theology or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity collected from the Appearances of Nature* (1802). Paley was deeply impressed by Newton's demonstration of the regularity of nature. The image of the world as a mechanism suggested to him the metaphor of a clock. For Paley this implied a purpose-built 'contrivance' and hence something about the 'contriver' who had designed and made it. He transposed the then fashionable arguments for the existence of God from physical to biological design. Raven condemns *Natural Theology* as 'imitated and extensively plagiarised' from the *Wisdom*, and guilty of a simplistic form of teleology 'pagan in origin and mechanistic in character' absent from Ray.⁵

Paley's crude natural theology faltered in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the growth of geological knowledge and wilted still further under the impact of the *Origin of Species*. A wedge appeared between science and religion, encouraging an increase in secularism. An attempt to recoup some theological ground was made in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth by a number of influential churchmen (among whom Charles Raven was a leader), who tried to reconcile Christianity with post-Darwinian biology on the grounds that evolutionary change involved a progression driven by some sort of internal *élan vital*. Their endeavours were boosted by claims of phylogenetic non-randomness made by a few scientists. These ideas gained some credence as the first generation of geneticists savaged the importance and effectiveness of natural selection, totally eclipsing Darwin's ideas about the mechanism of evolution.⁶ This cross-over of evolutionary idealism from science to theology lasted for several decades, but died through its perceived ineffectiveness. 'The Modernists saw themselves marginalised not by the new science, of which many remained unaware, but by changing

4 Porter, R. *Enlightenment*, London: Allen Lane (2000), p. 295.

5 Raven, C.E. *John Ray*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1942), p. 14.

6 Bowler, P. *Monkey Trials and Gorilla Sermons*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (2007)

values within the churches, which brought back a sense of human sinfulness and alienation from God incompatible with the idea of progress.⁷ By the middle of the twentieth century, worries about environmental damage led to a rapid growth in both public and institutional concern about human actions.⁸ At first this concern was largely directed at identifying and ameliorating the damage, but increasingly questions of responsibility and ethics began to be raised. There was need for a theology of nature distinct from traditional natural theology, which had become little more than a search of the natural world for evidences of the existence of God.

The beginning of modern theological interest in environmental morality is commonly attributed to a 1954 essay by an American Lutheran, Joseph Sittler on 'the theology of the Earth'.⁹ Unfortunately Sittler's prose is very opaque, and his work went largely unnoticed. Then in 1967 a massive review by Clarence Glacken of human attitudes to nature through time appeared, followed in 1969 by a Church of England Report *Man in His Living Environment* (prepared for the 1970 European Year of the Environment) and by an enquiry by Hugh Montefiore about the sustainability of our way of life. The last two books did not spring from theological enquiry, but from a secular unease stimulated by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the saga of the oil tanker *Torrey Canyon* wrecked off Land's End in 1967 which leaked oil onto many of the holiday beaches of Devon and Cornwall. Francis Schaeffer published his *Pollution and the Death of Man* in 1970, drawing the attention of his readers to Lynn White's (1967) indictment of Christian attitudes to the natural world and alerting Christians to their myopia on the subject, but it did little to advance our general understanding. Then John Cobb's *Is It Too Late?* appeared in 1972, beginning a stream of theological writing on the environment which concentrated on process thought and panentheism; this theme has been particularly influential among North American liberal theologians (for example, Birch, Eakin & McDaniel, 1990; Clayton, 1997).¹⁰ These pioneering studies have stimu-

7 Bowler, P. *Reconciling Science and Religion*, Chicago: Chicago University Press (2001), p. 417.

8 Theologians tend to use 'ecology' and 'environment' as equivalent terms, although 'ecology' should properly be restricted to a science concerned with the interactions which determine the distribution and abundance of organisms, while 'environment' extends to include all the factors outside an organism which influence it.

9 Bouma-Prediger, S. & Bakken, P. (eds.) *Evocations of Grace*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (2000).

10 Carson, R. *Silent Spring*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin (1962); Glacken, C. *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press (1967); White, L. 'The historical roots of our ecologic crisis', *Science* (1967) 155, 1203-1207; *Man in His Living Environment*, London: Church House (1969); Montefiore, H. *Question Mark: The end of Homo sapiens?*, London: Collins (1969); Schaeffer, F. *Pollution and the Death of Man*, London: Hodder & Stoughton (1970); Cobb, J. *Is It Too Late?*, Beverley Hills, CA: Bruce (1972); Birch, C., Eakin, W. & McDaniel, J. (eds.) *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, New York: Orbis (1990); Clayton, P. *God and Contemporary Science*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (1997).

lated a flood of other publications of varying quality, but certainly have advanced a robust theology of the environment – including those books reviewed here.

A convenient starting point to recent publications is *Greening Paul*. The title does it a disservice. The implication is that the authors are attempting to push Paul into some sort of contrived green jacket. This is not so: the book is a healthy analysis of what Paul actually wrote. Its conclusion is that Paul is unequivocally green, and that his message is about the care of creation as a whole, not merely human salvation. As many a preacher has said, God wants us to be saved – but to be saved so that we can do his work, and this involves much more than evangelism.

Greening Paul is a book that should be read for its methodology by all Christians seeking to discover biblical teaching on scientific issues, whether or not they find they agree with the authors. It is concerned with ecological issues, but its approach and methodology have much broader relevance. The authors are based in the Theology Department at Exeter University: a Professor of New Testament Studies (David Horrell), a cell biologist turned theologian (Cherryl Hunt), and a polymath – a poet and theologian who began as a biochemist (Chris Southgate). For convenience, I refer to them as HHS. Intriguingly (particularly for those in the science world burdened with making repeated grant applications), it is the main output from an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant to explore the ‘Uses of the Bible in Environmental Ethics’.

HHS is well worth reading in its own right, but the authors have contributed mightily to the exercise by editing a complementary volume, *Ecological Hermeneutics*, adding a Hebrew Bible scholar, Francesca Stavrakopoulou, to their team. We can call this second volume HHSS. Reminiscent of the way that many examination papers require candidates to show their working in full, HHSS contains twenty lectures which contributed to the final AHRC funded work, originally given as seminars in the Exeter Department. The book consists of eight contributions discussing the ecological implications of various parts of the Bible, eight on the interpretation of such passages through the ages (from Irenaeus to Moltmann), and four on contemporary understandings – including an illuminating survey of North American understandings of dispensationalism and the millennium by Harry Maier, noting its influence on British thought through J N Darby, Cyrus Scofield and his Reference Bible, and Billy Graham (HHSS: 246-265).

The core of HHS is an examination of two Pauline texts (Rom. 8:19-23 and Col. 1:15-20) commonly used as key passages to claim support for environmental care. The authors begin with a description of how not – in general – to understand biblical teaching. We can *resist* the meaning of the text, either because we have a preconception of what it ought to mean or because of an allegiance to particular interpretations. Examples of the first

are the Earth Bible's¹¹ predeterminative commitment to ecojustice; of the second that ecological readings are a New Age (or in the North American context, a liberal) plot.¹² Either bias may be influenced by one or another variety of ecofeminism (HHS: 22, 26). An alternative to resistance is *recovery*, on the basis that the original meaning of Scripture has been obscured by mis-interpretation. The authors of *Greening Paul* note the responses of a number of scholars (they quote particularly Richard Bauckham) (HHS: 16) to 'recover' the true meaning of the creation narratives from the influential misinterpretation of Lynn White in his much reproduced essay 'The historical roots of our ecologic crisis'.¹³ They cite also the writings of Sean McDonagh claiming Jesus as a 'proto-environmentalist' (HHS: 19).¹⁴

HHS acknowledge the difficulty of balancing and prioritising interpretations. Indeed a major part of their endeavour is to steer between the inflexible dogmatism of evangelicals who see 'stewardship' throughout the Bible¹⁵ and the quicksands represented by the preconceptions of the Earth Bible and ecofeminism (HHSS: 8). HHS speak repeatedly of viewing Scripture through 'hermeneutical lenses', leaning heavily on the work of the South African theologian, Ernst Conradie (HHS: 126 and HHSS: 295-313).¹⁶ Conradie writes about the need for 'continuously re-appropriating [Scripture] and responding to the significance of signs in everyday life' (HHSS: 298); he warns about 'cherry-picking' Bible passages (HHSS: 298). This is salutary, but care needs to be taken to avoid such readjusting as developing into a sort of situational ethics of the environment. We cannot avoid interpreting the Bible from our own understanding and experience; the challenge is to incorporate this with as rigorous as possible an understanding of God's revelation in his word. Many (particularly North American) commentators focus on the danger of biasing 'world-views'. This danger extends well beyond religious concerns: it is an ever-present

11 An Australian initiative led by Adelaide theologian Norman Habel and published by Sheffield Academic Press during 2001-2 in five volumes. The project continues through a series of seminars on ecological hermeneutics hosted by the Society for Biblical Literature (see Habel, N. & Trudinger, P. (eds.) *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, Atlanta, GA: Society for Biblical Literature (2008)).

12 e.g., Lucas, E. *Science and the New Age Challenge*, Leicester: Apollos (1996); Beisner, C. *Where Garden Meets Wilderness*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1997); Northcott, M. *The Ethics of Global Warming*, London: Darton, Longman, Todd (2007); White, R. (ed.) *Creation in Crisis*, London: SPCK (2009).

13 White, L. *op. cit.*, (10). White's exposition was enthusiastically embraced by Francis Schaeffer *op. cit.*, (10), but has been widely criticised, e.g. Barr, J. 'Man and nature – the ecological controversy and the Old Testament', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library* (1972) 55, 9-32; Harrison, P. 'Having dominion: Genesis and the mastery of nature', in Berry, R.J. (ed.). *Environmental Stewardship*, London & New York: T&T Clark (2006), pp. 17-31. More criticisms are listed by Bauckham (2011), (reviewed here), p. 17.

14 e.g., McDonagh, S. *The Greening of the Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman (1990).

15 They see this in the *Green Bible* (London: Collins (2008), an edition of the NRSV with texts relating to the Earth highlighted in green.

16 See also Conradie, E. *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on the Earth*, Aldershot: Ashgate (2005).

hazard in the interpretation of virtually any scientific experiment, especially on environmental issues.¹⁷ HHS are clear that what might be called ‘naked exegesis’ has to be complemented with ‘narrative’ and (somewhat less certainly) by the discipline of Ian Barbour’s threefold yardstick of success in science and theology topics – agreement with data, coherence and scope (HHS: 44, 156).

Added to all this must be the fact that biblical narrative cannot properly be dissociated from the recognition of the Bible as revelation – God’s story from beginning to end. This is an area where interpreters range widely – from those who regard the Bible as an almost random collection of ancient writings to those who see every punctuation mark as divinely inserted. As Conradie points out, ‘The selection of some favourite text may unintentionally reinforce the perception that ecology is indeed a marginal concern in the Bible. The focus may be far too narrow... By contrast, a retrieval of the ecological wisdom in the biblical traditions has to be doctrinally comprehensive. This implies that texts dealing with creation, providence, humanity, sin, redemption, the church, the sacraments and eschatological consummation have to be retrieved from an ecological perspective’ (HHS: 296). Put another way, the Bible is an account of God’s dealing with his people. John Barton (HHS: 48) recalls Robert Murray’s book *The Cosmic Covenant*¹⁸ which traces God’s covenant from creation – behind and therefore conditioning the later Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.¹⁹ HHS do not state their own beliefs about revelation, although they seem to regard the biblical record as an integral account. They write (HHS: 59), ‘our overall argument will be that a narratively focused engagement with the Pauline texts – and *mutatis mutandis*, with other biblical texts too – enables a theologically and ethically fruitful ecological reading to be developed’. However, I am unconvinced that they apply their own argument rigorously. I hope I am not unfair to them – or improperly convinced about the strength and coherence of the biblical story.²⁰

The Bible’s ‘big’ story is about the vicissitudes of the relationship between a divine creator and his creation; and about the divine initiative(s)

17 See Suzuki, D. ‘Blinded by our minds’, in Wakeford, T. & Walters, M. (eds.) *Science for the Earth: Can Science Make the World a Better Place?*, Chichester: Wiley (1995), pp. 3-17. An especially dangerous and malign example of world-view distortion is the extreme libertarianism which leads to the denial of anthropogenic climate change (Powell, J. *The Inquisition of Climate Science*, New York: Columbia University Press (2011).

18 Murray, R. *The Cosmic Covenant*, London: Sheed & Ward (1992).

19 A point also made by Francis Schaeffer *op. cit.*, (10).

20 Richard Bauckham (*Bible and Ecology*, p. 143) argues strongly in favour of a biblical grand or meta-narrative: ‘The Bible’s meta-narrative is a very ambitious one, since it runs from eternity to eternity, more especially from creation to new creation... The beginning and end of the Bible’s meta-narrative are recounted in theologically meaningful images, while the historical story that takes place between them is given us in the Bible in a variety of different sorts of historical writing and related material.’

to repair the relationship – in other words, to show where and how sin meets salvation. HHS write somewhat hesitantly about the original breakdown of the relationship ('the Fall') and with more confidence about its restoration, which is a central element to one of their key discussions (about Col. 1: 15-20) (106). They certainly do not join those 'calling for an ecological reinterpretation of the doctrine of sin... as a radicalised version of [the anthropocentrism, alienation and domination contained in] secular reflections on systematically distorted forms of communication' (HHSS: 297). The hesitancy of HHS about 'the Fall' is not a denial of the disorder conventionally attributed to the event described in Genesis 3, but because they cannot reconcile such a catastrophe with the millions of years of death and disaster before the appearance of humans. Indeed one of them (Chris Southgate) has written at length decrying the idea of a historical Fall. For him, 'the Fall account in Genesis reflects a general condition rather than a historical chronology', although in involving creatures others than human, 'the Genesis 3 account of the Fall has a profound wisdom to it'.²¹

I have argued on a number of occasions in this journal (and elsewhere) that a major factor in the common rejection of a historical Fall is falsely equating evolutionary struggle and death with a particular understanding of the consequences of the Genesis 3 story.²² This rejection has two components, both of them theological rather than biological. Firstly, there must have been a step-change in the history of humankind when it (we) moved from mere animal (*Homo sapiens*) to true human (*Homo divinus*, using terminology suggested by John Stott). The timing, mechanism and extent of this change is variously interpreted, but its occurrence is non-contentious, except to those who believe that we appeared fully formed on the sixth day of creation.²³

The second root is less often recognised. It arises because it is generally assumed that biological (or evolutionary) 'death' is the same as the results of the rejection of God by the Adam and Eve characters in Genesis 3 ('The day you eat [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil], you are

21 Southgate, C. *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution and the Problem of Evil*, Louisville, KY & London: John Knox Press (2008), pp. 102, 101, (Reviewed in *Science & Christian Belief* (2011) 23, 74-77.)

22 *Science & Christian Belief* (1999) 11, 29-49; (2011) 23, 23-48. Southgate *op. cit.*, (21), p. 34 describes my position as a 'most curious one [because] he [Berry] simply refuses to venture into evolutionary theodicy'. This is a misunderstanding, not simple obtuseness on my part: Gen. 3 is concerned with the relationships of humankind in the image of God (who, following John Stott) we can conveniently label *Homo divinus* in contrast to the biologically evolved entity *Homo sapiens*. Questions about theodicy cannot apply to *Homo sapiens*; they can only arise in relation to *H. divinus*. I reject any suggestion that a Fall in time implies the existence of a previous 'Golden Age' as assumed in different ways by Francis Schaeffer, Lynn White, Rosemary Ruether and Calvin Beisner (HHS: 181-183).

23 Morwenna Ludlow gives a useful account of the interpretation of 'humanness' by some of the early Church fathers in HHSS: 143-152.

surely doomed to die'). The latter consequence is described (particularly by Paul) as 'death', using the same word as for biological death. Spiritual and physical death must be distinguished. Adam and Eve lived on biologically outside Eden after their death-producing disobedience.²⁴ Time after time, the Bible describes people who are obviously physically alive as having been dead: 'You *were* dead because of your sins and wickedness... But God brought us to life' (Eph. 2: 1-5); 'You were dead... he has brought you to life with Christ. For he has forgiven us all our sins' (Col. 2: 13); 'We know we have passed from death to life' (1 Jn. 3:14). Paul explicitly links sin as the cause of death (Rom 5: 12, 6: 23, 7: 11). Jesus's insistence of the need to be born 'again' (Jn. 3: 3-8) is a very similar identification of spiritual life as distinct from physical existence. 'Death' in this biblical use must refer in some way to something from which we recover or revive from when we enter into a relationship with the God revealed in the pages of Scripture.²⁵

This is not the place to argue these points in detail, but it is important to recognize that failing to recognise them leads to a massive (and very common) misunderstanding, not least because it leaves the Bible story bereft of its real beginning. Put positively, acknowledging that a break in relationship with the creator occurred in time makes the Bible story of salvation wrought by a loving God much more coherent and powerful. It focuses on the importance of relationship in the story – relationship of creator to creature and of creatures to one another, as well as relationships within the Godhead.²⁶

A threefold perceived basis of sound exegesis (examining and eschewing as far as possible preconceptions; engaging with the text itself; and a need to constrain interpretation by the reality of a real world) provides the context for HHS to understand the key Pauline 'green' texts. Both Romans 8: 19-23 and Colossians 1: 15-20 are seen as eschatological (in the sense of 'already' but 'not yet') and Christocentric. It is a pity that HHS did not allow themselves a stronger sense of the developing divine drama. Steve Moyise is only one recent scholar to show how this might work out. He has

24 Hans Walter Wolff distinguishes these two meanings of 'death': 'In the Old Testament life means to have relationship. Above all to have relationship with God. Death means lack of relationship. This definition of death in the Old Testament is of fundamental importance for understanding the death of Jesus in the New', Wolff, H.W. *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, London: SCM (1974), p, 107. The topic of death and the meaning of Adam's historicity are examined in depth in an important new book by Peter Enns (Enns, P. *The Evolution of Adam*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos (2012).

25 HHS note that Rom 8: 19 may be an allusion to 'a broader phenomenon than simply a reference to mortality' (75), but do not follow up this implication.

26 Both David Horrell (HHSS: 126) and Richard Bauckham (2010: 146) point to a model with Creator, humankind and the rest of creation as the three points of a triangle, each interacting with the two other forces. Chris Wright has used this model as a general framework for understanding the ethical world-view of Old Testament Israel (Wright, C. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Leicester: IVP (2004); Dave Bookless has extended it in the environmental context (Bookless, D. *Planetwise*, Leicester: IVP (2008), p. 37).

identified quotations by Paul from nearly half of the Old Testament books (17 out of 39).²⁷ HHS cite the Durham theologian Francis Watson on several occasions. Watson argues that Paul used the Pentateuch as a whole to develop his understanding of the curse of the law.²⁸ Tom Wright follows a similar thread, particularly in Romans where he sees Paul recapitulating the key events in the history of the chosen people, culminating in the affirmation of Romans 8: 31-39. Wright points out that Romans 1: 18-32 expounds the Fall and, after describing the consequent enslavement to sin, emphasises that Israel is God's agent for rescuing the world (chapter 4: note that the promise to Abraham is that he and his seed would inherit the cosmos, not merely the land), although Israel herself needs rescuing. The answer to this was the Christ (chapter 5), and to develop the theme, Paul rehearses the Exodus story: in chapter 6, God's people come through the waters (baptism, paralleling the Red Sea) and enter a new freedom, whereupon they are given, not the Torah but the Spirit (chapter 7). Chapter 8 describes the Christian life in terms of God's leading his people home to their inheritance – which turns out to be the whole redeemed creation.²⁹ For Wright, Romans 8: 19-23 is an integral part of this account, 'the deliberate and carefully-planned climax of thought in Romans 5 – 8, and indeed Romans 1 – 8 as a whole', not 'an odd, apocalyptic appendix [as] the tradition has often regarded it, both in the "radical" scholarship of Lutherans like Bultmann and Käsemann and in the "conservative" readings of much evangelical scholarship of the Bible's "story"'.³⁰ HHS seem to agree with Wright here. They comment 'Romans 8 and Colossians 1 offer resources for refocusing the reading of the Pauline tradition, away from the long-established preoccupation with human salvation and relationship with God' (129) (although they draw back from Wright's conclusion that human and non-human creation alike 'will enjoy the freedom which comes when God's children are glorified' (140)).³¹

HHS have no doubts that the theology implicit in the key passages (Rom. 8: 19-23 and Col. 1: 15-20) 'encompasses the whole creation... and implie[s] a crucial role for human beings, specifically the members of the Christian communities, whose new life in Christ entails ethical responsi-

27 Moyise, S. *Paul and Scripture*, London: SPCK (2010).

28 Watson, F. *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, London: T&T Clark (2004). Watson also writes in HHSS (127-139), albeit mainly commenting on the views of Irenaeus.

29 Wright, T. 'New exodus, new inheritance: the narrative substructure of Romans 3-8', in Sonderlund, S. & Wright, T. (eds.) *Romans and the People of God*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1999), pp. 26-35; Wright, T. *New Heavens, New Earth*, Cambridge: Grove Biblical Series B11 (1999).

30 Wright, T. *New Heavens*, p. 12.

31 Wright comments, 'There is enormous resistance within some branches of the New Testament studies guild [involving] a proper caution about grand overarching patterns and a preference for small-scale exegesis – a caution, which, often laudable and necessary ... always runs the risk of not seeing the forest but only the trees, and hence of not understanding the trees either' (Wright, T. 'New exodus', p. 28).

bilities and imperatives' (217), but they shrink from the notion of stewardship. They record that for 'very many readers, particularly those writing from an evangelical stance, the language of rule and dominion can be reliably read as a mandate for a stewardship model of humans' care of the Earth. Yet not only are there questions to be raised about the ethical value of the model itself, it may also be questioned whether it is such a 'biblical' image as its proponents claim, particularly in terms of the relationship of humans to creation' (HHS: 17). This is an important issue. The word 'steward' does not help. Jim Lovelock relates it to an etymology of 'swineherd' or 'pig-keeper'.³² It certainly should not be restricted to the largely negative role of 'preservation' as HHS tentatively suggest (183).³³ Richard Bauckham argues that at least part of the problem is that 'stewardship remains, like most interpretations of the Genesis 'dominion', an image that depicts the human relationship to creation in an entirely 'vertical' way. It sets humans above the rest of creation, sharply differentiated from it, in God-given charge of it.'³⁴

A better word might be 'trustee' or 'agent', or even 'creation-carer'.³⁵ It is worth quoting Charles Moule who firmly links human responsibility for creation care to our redemption in Christ:

Man is responsible before God for nature. As long as man refuses to play the part assigned him by God, so long the entire world is frustrated and dislocated. It is only when man is truly fitting into his proper position as a son in relation to God his Father that the dislocations in the whole of nature will be reduced.³⁶

HHS agree: their 'reading [of the biblical texts] suggests a special role for humanity within this narrative' (137). It is pertinent to note also that the Anglican Church has led the way in recognising that the mission of the Church (i.e. the people of God) is fivefold, and includes an affirmation 'to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'

The stewardship debate is analysed in detail by Richard Bauckham in *Bible and Ecology*, an expanded version of his Sarum Lectures of 2006,

32 Lovelock, J. 'The greening of science' in Wakeford & Walters *op. cit.*, (17), p. 61.

33 See also Southgate, C. 'Stewardship and its competitors', in Berry, R.J. (ed.) *Environmental Stewardship*, London & New York: T&T Clark. (2006), pp. 185-195.

34 Bauckham, R. *Living with Other Creatures*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press (2011), p. 62.

35 e.g., Granberg-Michaelson, W. (ed.) *Tending the Garden*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1987); DeWitt, C. *Caring for Creation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker (1988); Wilkinson, L. (ed.) *Earth-keeping in the '90s*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans (1991); Weaver, J. *Earthshaping Earthkeeping*, London: SPCK (1999); Bouma-Prediger, S. *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic (2001).

36 Moule, C.F.D. *Man and Nature in the New Testament*, London: Athlone Press (1964), p.12.

interestingly entitled 'Beyond Stewardship: the Bible and the Community of Creation'. He avers that the stewardship model 'has had an enormous influence for good in giving Christians a framework within which to approach ecological issues with concern and responsibility', although it 'also has distinct limitations that consist more in what it does not say than what it does' (2). His main criticisms of the concept are:

- Hubris: it can be very dangerous to overestimate one's power to achieve or control things, a case made strongly by Jim Lovelock and Steve Gould.³⁷
- A lack of focus: Bauckham firmly rejects the notion that we are 'co-creators or co-redeemers' with God on the grounds that such ideas 'pander to the hubristic modern aspiration to the role of gods over the world' (10). Likewise, he is lukewarm about the concept common in the Orthodox tradition and popularised by George Herbert³⁸ that we are 'priests of creation'. He argues that the view that other creatures are related to God only through human mediation is a relic of some of the more grossly anthropocentric views of the creation in Christian history and has no support from the Bible, where other creatures have their own direct relationships with God (Gen, 9: 10, 16; Job 38-39; Ps. 50:4; Ps. 104: 21, 27-28; Is. 45:8; Joel 1: 20; Mat. 6:26; Rev. 5:13)' (84).³⁹
- The implication that humans are set over creation, not within it. A major theme for Bauckham is that our creatureliness is more fundamental than our distinctiveness. 'We need the humility to know ourselves as creatures within creation, not Gods over creation, the humility of knowing that Only God is God' (46), a point made unequivocally in Job 38 – 41.

Bauckham is keen on the notion of a 'community of creation' within which we have 'special and distinctive roles' (64), clearly expressed in Psalm 104 where 'its picture of an ecological creation belongs within its theocentric praise of God for his creation' (70), a passage responded to in Psalm 148 and drawn upon by Jesus in Matthew 6: 25-33. He quotes with approval the American Wendell Berry, who has developed this concept of a

37 Lovelock, J. *The Revenge of Gaia*, London: Allen Lane (2006); Gould, S.J. 'The Golden Rule – a proper scale for our environmental values', in *Eight Little Piggies*, London: Jonathan Cape (1993), pp. 41-51.

38 In his poem 'Providence', Herbert pictures the creatures as unable to put their praise into words and so requiring humans to 'present the sacrifice for all'. Bauckham expands his criticism of Herbert's theology in Chapter 7 of *Living with Other Creatures* (147-162). He calls the Orthodox assumption that 'only through human mediation can the rest of creation be itself in relation to God' 'an arrogant assumption [of which] there is not a trace in the Scriptures. This Orthodox sacerdotal universe is not the world of the Old Testament where the creatures have their own relationships with God quite apart from humanity and fulfil their God-given existence without human interference (e.g. Ps. 104; Job 38-39)' (152).

39 Bauckham in this is supporting Chris Wright's 'triangle' model (see note 26).

‘theocentrically-encased culture’ over many years.⁴⁰ He interprets Romans 8: 19-23 very similarly to HHS, albeit linking it more to the Bible’s metanarrative.⁴¹ For Bauckham ‘Paul assumes the same kind of close relationship between human wrongdoing and the well-being of the non-human creation that the prophets do’ (100). He warns, importantly ‘so often, in the Christian tradition, we have thought of the non-human creation merely as a stage on which the drama of the history of God is being played out – and a temporary stage at that, due to be dismantled and removed when the story reaches its final climax’ (145).

Living with Other Creatures is also by Bauckham, consciously complementing *Bible and Ecology*. It is a collection of ten essays, eight of them previously published but revised and usefully organised as a coherent whole.⁴² Bauckham states his purpose as going beyond exposition. He writes of the need to ‘re-enter creation’(144),⁴³ that his ‘essays will be of no value unless they make some contribution to Christian worship, Christian spirituality and Christian practice. The praise of God the Creator and Renewer of his whole creation and an end to the war of aggressive conquest that modern humanity has waged against God’s other creatures are their goal’ (xiv). His final essay is a ‘biblical-theological’ perspective on biodiversity, steering a course between the ever-present whirlpool of biocentrism and the implacable rock of anthropocentrism, twin hazards which have beguiled many who have explored our proper relationship with the natural world. We are apart from nature, but we are also a part of it.

Roger Scruton is a philosopher who writes about the environment much more accessibly than most of his ilk. *Green Philosophy. How to Think Seriously About the Planet* is not about religious attitudes, but it does explore many ideas which overlap or may arise from theological teaching. Scruton’s passion is for the importance of the ‘home’; he calls this ‘oikophilia’, perhaps more familiarly written as ‘ecophilia’.⁴⁴ Influences, organisations

40 Wendell Berry is a prolific writer. A useful introduction is: Bonzo, J. M. & Stevens, M.R. (eds.) *Wendell Berry and the Cultivation of Life: A Reader’s Guide*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos (2008).

41 See note 20

42 Chapter 3 is a lightly revised version of Bauckham’s contribution to HHSS.

43 Bauckham acknowledges this expression was suggested by Edward Echlin ‘Let’s re-enter God’s creation now’, *The Month* (1991) 252, 359-364.

44 ‘Ecophilia’ would seem to be first cousin to ‘biophilia’, a term proposed by the social psychologist Erich Fromm and popularised by Wilson, E.O. *Biophilia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1984) to describe ‘the connections that human subconsciously seek with the rest of life’. The concept has never achieved prominence, although it is recalled from time to time, particularly to emphasise the benefits of contact with the natural world (see Heerwagen, J. ‘Biophilia’, in Callicott, B. & Frodeman, R. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy*, Detroit: Macmillan Reference, USA (2009), vol.1, pp. 109-113). There is a clear link here with the reality that we are a part of the community of all creation, highlighted by Richard Bauckham (and see also Wilson, E.O. *The Creation*, New York: W.W. Norton (2006)).

or authorities that damage our *ecos* are anathema to him. Markets are welcome, so long as their costs are properly internalised; he acknowledges that this is rare. The precautionary principle is fine in the abstract, but dangerous in restricting initiative. He abhors the attitude that has led to local abattoirs being abolished and excessive food packaging being introduced so as to increase our protection from possible disease. He sees good stewardship as that ‘which distinguishes rightful taking and rightful use from theft and usurpation’, whilst warning that ‘any policy that abolishes rightful claims or refuses to identify and punish theft... threatens stewardship, and is likely to lead to the kind of desertification that we witness in the failed states of North-east Africa or to the irreversible degradation of the environment that we witness in Russia’ (148). He cautions against elevating our interests into ‘rights’, recognising the need to involve ‘the idea of intrinsic value’ (200), which aligns him with Bauckham. He decries the failure of conventional environmental ethics to motivate action, listing ‘biocentric’ (E.O.Wilson), ‘geocentric’ (Jim Lovelock), ‘ecocentric’ (Aldo Leopold, Holmes Rolston, Arne Naess), ‘physio-centric’ (Klaus Meyer-Abich) (195), concluding that environmental problems are problems of morality (185) and that moral judgement must be distinguished from economic or empirical desire (201,202). Christians – indeed religious people of all faiths – can join with him here.

Scruton is no doctrinaire libertarian. He advocates a flat-rate carbon tax, ‘the more you use the more you pay’ (387). He defends British planning legislation, not least because the beauty of the countryside is for him a common to be shared by all, not a resource to be traded by opposing factions. He writes about ‘aesthetic pollution’, a subjective concept but not to be ignored because of that. He distrusts any cult of wilderness preserved by regulation, because regulation divorces the natural world from personal responsibility for it. Christians would agree with all this in principle, albeit on the grounds that the natural world is God’s world, entrusted to us for care. Scruton has no doubt that climate change is taking place (although he seems to judge ‘change-deniers’ on the cogency of their arguments rather than the scientific evaluation of data (45ff.) and he is over-confident about the possibilities of geophysical engineering), while regarding international treaties for dealing with it as valueless.

Scruton’s book is important for political reasons: his insistence is that the world belongs to all of us, and should not be hijacked by the tidiness of bureaucratic administrators or the ambitions of the greedy. His solution for ‘saving the planet’ depends on ‘civil associations’ – organisations like the National Trusts and the Campaign for the Preservation of Rural England (and its equivalents). I suspect he is far too ambitious, but he makes an important point by reintroducing the notion of local responsibility into discussions too often prematurely ended by assuming that the only solution to environmental problems depends on ‘them’ – distant and unapproachable powers. He describes climate change as

a transcendental issue, concerning the state of mankind as such. Like original sin, it weighs on us all, and like original sin it might seem to require a Salvationist solution. ... Uniting behind a purpose facilitates sacrifice, gives clear goals and strategies, and produces the kind of comradeship that is witnessed in armies and religious missions. ... Agenda-driven movements are not like this. They involve a flow of collective sentiment... resulting in the erosion of accountability – both to the followers and to those whose interests they damage (87-89).

Overall, Scruton is on the side of the angels, whether or not he acknowledges that they exist.⁴⁵

Placing Nature on the Borders of Religion, Philosophy and Ethics is the product of a conference ‘Recreate, Replace, Explore’ held at Ohio Northern University in 2009. It ticks all the right boxes. It brings together subjects which are diminished if considered in isolation. Furthermore, the Editors share with Scruton and ecologists generally the importance of place. They write ‘as beings with physical bodies, our embodiment implies our emplacement. At each moment in our lives we are somewhere, at some place, at some time in the physical universe’ (ix). One reason for welcoming the book is that most of the contributors are young scholars – four of the fifteen chapters are written by graduate students and many of the others seem to be by early career academics. All but the abstract philosophical chapters are descriptions of various forms of damage: the bombing of Dresden, urban waste, the mismanagement of bighorn sheep populations and Florida wetlands. Two of the contributors are concerned with Scripture, both taking Lynn White’s *Science* paper⁴⁶ as their starting point: Sampson Nwaomah of Babcock University in Nigeria applies Romans 8:18-22 to the chaos of the Niger Delta and David McDuffie of the University of North Carolina explores the relation between creation and conservation. McDuffie opts for stewardship: ‘Whilst remaining distinct, theological “creation” incorporates ecology into a religious understanding of the proper relationship between humanity and the ecosystems of which we are a part’ (161). He recognises the demoralising problem (particularly in North America) of politically inspired misinformation, summarised by the leading US evangelical Richard Cizik, ‘Environmentalism carries with it baggage... that it’s about big government, kooky religions... all the left-wing ideas that are known to mankind’ (155). In words which sum up a proper (but too often a rare) evangelical response to environmental matters and at the same time encapsulate why many conservative Christians are wary of ‘entering creation’, the same Richard Cizik said on another occasion, ‘When I die,

45 Scruton’s Gifford Lectures are published as *The Face of God*, London and New York: Continuum (2012). In them he points to a turning away from God as the fundamental plight of our time.

46 White *op. cit.*, (10).

God isn't going to ask me "Did I create the Earth in six days or five days?" but "What did you do with what I gave you?"⁴⁷

It would be good to welcome this book. It complements the other books considered here. However, priced at £50, I suspect it will have a rather limited circulation. I hope this will not discourage the authors. They are dealing with important topics.

Where does all this leave us? We have come a long way since John Ray's *Wisdom of God* and even further from Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth*. Creation is more damaged and weighed down by a much greater mass of humanity than they would ever have envisaged. We now know much more about the Earth's fragility and capacity than even a few decades ago when the astronauts of the early 1970s saw a Blue Planet floating in space – a sight forcing the recognition that there must be limits to the Earth's resources, that we are on Spaceship Earth.

Sadly, Christians have been too easily distracted by debates about evolution to take much interest in the environment and build a robust theology of nature. Hopefully this is changing. William Brown ends a recent book:

To claim the world as creation is not to denounce evolution and debunk science. To the contrary, it is to join in covenant with science in acknowledging creation's integrity, as well as its giftedness and worth. To see the world as creation is to recommit ourselves to its care, not as the fittest, most powerful creatures on the animal planet but as a species held uniquely responsible for the planet's flourishing. It is to celebrate the inalienable beauty and dignity of all living kind and bear witness to God's manifold creation. It is also to bear witness to creation's groaning as the ground suffers from deforestation, mountaintop removal, toxic dumping, and rising temperatures. To see the world as God's intricate, intelligible, surprising, sustainable creation is to return to wonder and to go forth in wisdom, such that 'mountains and the hills ... shall burst into song and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands' (Is. 55: 12).⁴⁸

The tragedy is that Calvin said this four and half centuries ago in his Commentary on *Genesis*. He wrote of Genesis 2: 15,

The Earth was given to man *with this condition*, that he should occupy himself in its cultivation... and the custody of the garden was given to Adam to show that we possess the things that God has committed to our *hands on the condition* that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain.... Let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he

47 Quoted by Juliet Eilperin *Washington Post*, 8 August 2007, p. A01.

possesses (my emphases).

Or as Mahatma Gandhi put it, 'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed.' In truth the conclusion of the matter must be not the making of ever more books but rather to 'fear God and keep his commandments' (Eccles. 12:12-14), or as Tom Wright puts it,

In the new creation the ancient human mandate to look after the garden is dramatically reaffirmed. The resurrection of Jesus is the reaffirmation of the goodness of creation, and the gift of the Spirit is there to make us the fully human beings we were supposed to be, precisely so that we can fulfil that mandate at last. What are we waiting for? Jesus is coming. Let's go and plant those trees.⁴⁹

R J Berry is a former President of the British Ecological Society. He is the author of *Ecology and Ethics* (IVP, 1972) and *Ecology and the Environment: The Making, Marring and Maintenance of Nature* (Templeton Press, 2011).

48 Brown, W. *The Seven Pillars of Creation*, New York: Oxford University Press (2010), p.240.

49 Wright, T. *op. cit.*, (15), p. I-85.



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