

## Rwanda: Doing the Right Thing

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**Clean water creates sustainable communities.** We are all aware of the genocide that resulted in millions of deaths in Rwanda. Thirteen years later, they are restoring friendships, through conversations and grace. Steven Garber in his book *Fabric of Faithfulness* says, “Community is the context for the growth of convictions and character.” If this is true, then we need to help create simple, community-driven environments, where convictions and character can be reclaimed. When I visited one of the new wells in Rwanda, I noticed hundreds of people walking for up to 3 miles with these unforgettable yellow jugs. Every day, a person from every family will walk or ride a bike to the well to get water for the day. Through clean water locations, healing to individuals is happening daily. Conviction and character is being restored. Bill McKibben, in his brilliant book *Deep Economy*, thinks growth in developing countries, “should concentrate on creating and sustaining strong communities, not

creating a culture of economic individualism.” Clean water not only benefits individual Rwandans but also offers a deep place for developing the Rwandan community.

**Influence is gained by doing something.** The most difficult element of moving an idea into motion is starting. Yet, when a great idea is launched, influence quickly follows. The dream that woke me up that night was about one little boy, yet thousands of people have joined in the initiative and thousands of Rwandans have benefited from one boy. Rwanda Clean Water has gained attention from media, churches, and cultural leaders because we did something. Everyone has an idea, but few people move that idea into reality. When creators move from idea to action, people will follow. Don’t search for influence. Don’t care who gets the credit. Search yourself. Find what moves you. Discover a place of need. Authentically pursue a vision that helps humanity. Use the gifts you have been given. Influence will follow at the moment you can handle it.

**Join Rwanda Clean Water Project.** As encouraging as this project has been to me, most people in

rural Rwanda still do not have access to clean water. Women and young children walk for miles to fetch water from swamps and dirty rivers with buckets and canisters. It is amazing that with a simple gift of money we can literally save lives, decrease illnesses, and create sustainable communities.

We are looking for 300 churches to join a growing community in raising funds to bring clean water to Rwanda. Give \$3,000 to Rwanda Clean Water and 750 people will receive the simple gift of drinking clean water for the rest of their life. Your community, your family, your neighborhood, and your friends can work together to raise the funds that will forever change lives. Please join us in providing clean water to Rwanda.

[www.fermiproject.com/rwanda](http://www.fermiproject.com/rwanda)

*Jeff Shinabarger, co-founder of the Fermi Project and Rwanda Clean Water, is the creative director & experience designer for all Fermi Project initiatives, the editor of Fermi Words, a digital media magazine educating leaders on shaping culture, and the creative mind behind the Catalyst Conference. Jeff lives in Decatur, Georgia with his wife, Andre, and dog Max. (contact: jeffs@fermiproject.com)*

## Clean water also depends upon climate protection

Out of an estimated 800 million Africans, 300 million lack safe drinking water and 313 million lack basic sanitation.

But there’s a tension that suffuses all relief and development work to provide water to very needy people. On the one hand, the task is straightforward. Drilling wells, protecting springheads, conserving watershed and catchment areas, and treating sewage do not involve rocket science. For trivial proportion of Western government budgets, clean water could be provided to every person on the planet who lacks it today.

Yet if we allow climate change to occur unabated—if we proceed with business as usual and continue emitting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases as we do today—some of the worst impacts will be to water systems. Paradoxically, the area of the earth’s surface afflicted with drought at any given time will increase while at the same time flood risk will increase in other areas. Water supply from snowpack and mountain glaciers, which supports one

out of six people on the planet, will decline over the course of the 21st century. Coastal areas will find aquifers contaminated with salt water as sea levels encroach on low-lying areas.

In Africa, by 2020, between 75 and 200 million additional people are projected to be subjected to high water stress due to climate change. In countries which are dependent on rain-fed agriculture, yields could be reduced by up to 50%. Successful agriculture depends on carefully matching the timing of planting and the onset of the rainy season, and climate change threatens to alter the seasons. A study in *Science* found that climate change is expected to shrink water supply across a quarter of Africa.

A generous world can find the resources to stave off future dangerous climate change and help provide clean water in the short run.

**Sources:** IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, Working Group 2 Summary for Policymakers; M. de Wit and J. Stankiewicz, 2006, *Science* 311: 1917-1921.

# Creation Care and Christian Character

## Beyond fear of consequences to responsibility, moral virtues

by John Silvius

The hurricanes of 2005 and notable weather events across the globe in 2006 have bolstered the attempts of climate scientists to keep global warming in the headlines. In January, out of increasing concern about global warming, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists advanced the hands of the “Doomsday Clock” two minutes closer to midnight, bringing the time to five minutes before the “figurative end of civilization.”

Then, in early February, Dr. Ken Denman, one of the lead authors of a new report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) summarized the panel’s conclusions: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal.” He added, “Most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations.” Global consequences of this warming trend, which the IPCC report attributes in part to human activities, include altered precipitation patterns, a global rise in sea levels, altered agricultural production, and increased episodes of violent weather.

The climate change debate calls each of us as Christians make an informed judgment and then act accordingly. Some who believe that human practices are contributing to global warming are adopting a lifestyle that promotes energy conservation, reduces greenhouse gas production, and encourages elected officials to enact policies that favor these strategies. One motivation for such actions is fear of the consequences of global warming.

Fear is a legitimate basis for concern for all who love family, church, and country. Christians who fear God acquire a sense of reverence that motivates obedience and exemplary living. However, the “more abundant life (John 10:10)” that “abides in the vine” and bears fruit (John 15; Galatians 5:22-23) is nurtured more by God’s grace than by our fear. For example, we may avoid financial or moral failure out of fear of legal or physical consequences but



miss out on the joy and fulfillment of a Spirit-filled life aimed at pleasing God. Likewise, if it is our moral responsibility to care for God’s creation, then our fear of environmental consequences is also an inadequate motivation.

Thankfully, there is a clear Scriptural basis for environmental stewardship, or creation care, which has deeper roots than fear of consequences. In Genesis 1, after God pronounces the creation as good and He blesses it, He creates humankind and grants them dominion over the Earth as image-bearers of His righteous rule (v.26-28). This

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Virtues: Stewardship requires godly character, moral excellence

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dominion is further prescribed in Genesis 2:15 as “keeping” or “serving” the creation. In return, God has equipped His creation to “serve” humankind with the fruits of their labor. Here, the Scripture supports an ethic based upon duty or moral responsibility as the proper motivation for serving God and caring for creation.

This duty ethic is evident in the challenge of Joel Hunter, pastor of Northland Church in Orlando, Florida, who, when asked for his position on global warming, is quoted as saying, “...we need to do this regardless of what the science of it is. We need to take care of the earth and do what we can to stop the pollution and accumulation of gasses, because it’s just the right thing to do.”

If obedience to the biblical command to care for creation brings growth in Christian character and godliness, how are these virtues nurtured?

The biblical environmental stewardship ethic recognizes the importance of scientific data in making personal lifestyle and institutional decisions. But, it also calls Christians to do more than simply fashion lifestyle according to the current estimates of planetary “health.” Instead, as Edward Brown writes in *Our Father’s World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation* (Doorlight, 2006), “Creation must be cared for because God made it, because he made it as a sacred worship space in which we could meet him, and because he himself walked along its paths, sat under its trees and used it for worship himself.”

Environmental stewardship rests heavily upon duty ethics, but arguably it can be supported more strongly

from the perspective of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics focuses upon how we develop virtues—

those habits that produce godly character and moral excellence. It is concerned not only with what we do, but the kind of person we are becoming by our doing. Thus, a virtuous person who understands biblical dominion and stewardship will perform acts of creation care (e.g. bicycling to reduce carbon emissions; leading a Bible study on stewardship; aiding an urban gardening project) not only from a sense of duty, but also as an outward expression of moral virtues such as love, discretion, moderation, and justice. Result: Both God’s creation and His kingdom benefit while obedient Christians experience joy and fulfillment as these virtues are expressed and nurtured.

If obedience to the biblical command to care for creation brings

growth in Christian character and godliness, how are these virtues nurtured? Development of Christian virtues requires both the physical disciplines of proper diet, exercise, and rest; and, the spiritual disciplines of meditation upon God Word, prayer, worship, and obedient service. A balanced attention to both the physical and spiritual disciplines is important to avoid the extremes of asceticism and materialism. It is here that many humans fail, being distracted to view the natural world as either an inappropriate object of our enjoyment and care; or, something to be grasped out of pride and a desire for power and pleasure (Romans 1).

Immaturity in the development of the virtues of love, discretion, and moderation may lead Christians to



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make poor decisions in stewardship of material wealth, time, and relationships. Over-commitment and anxiety compete for the time necessary to practice the spiritual disciplines needed to develop Christian character. The resultant impoverishment of soul leads to further material and social excesses that destroy relationships, families, and even local churches. Instead of being free to worship God and to find joy in His power and in the material bounty of His creation, their actions further degrade the creation as they attempt to meet spiritual and emotional needs in wrong ways.

Now, consider three cases in which Christian character is enriched through proper stewardship of creation motivated by the Christian virtues. When a person pursues the spiritual disciplines noted above, she is nourished by the Word of God while the Spirit nurtures the virtues of love, joy, kindness, and self control (Galatians 5: 22-23). Her disposition that finds fulfillment in her Creator and His creation enables her to avoid material excesses that result in discon-

tentment and broken relationships. Instead of degrading the creation, she utilizes God’s provision of the material world with moderation. Her decision to conserve energy and reduce carbon emissions by car pooling or public transportation is neither a joyless duty nor a distraction from “spiritual priorities.” Instead, she is able to conserve God’s creation while, at the same time, building human relationships in which she practices the virtues of faith, love, and kindness.

A second example emphasizes the

spiritual discipline of regular worship within the body of Christ. It is God’s design that the local church be a place of worship, mutual encouragement, and accountability to nurture the convictions and virtues that grow out of our personal walk with Him. Here, we worship corporately, encourage one another in Christ, and become equipped as a winsome counterculture in a society overcome by materialism, discontent, and broken relationships. Both Ed Brown’s book cited earlier and Matthew Sleeth’s *Serve God, Save the Planet* (Chelsea Green, 2006) contain many ideas and examples of how churches and individuals can implement creation care as an integral part

chised of Earth who cannot compete economically for the energy and resources we consume. He also develops a willingness to learn about climate change and other environmental issues from the scientific experts and to respect differences of opinion among those dedicated to understanding how the creation works.

When an environmental ethic based upon fear of consequences is enhanced by one based upon duty and moral virtue, both the people of God and the creation can flourish. Obedience to Scripture sets us free to adopt a lifestyle based upon love and devotion to our Creator, and free to manage material resources, time, and

Virtue ethics focuses upon how we develop virtues – those habits that produce godly character and moral excellence.

of their mission.

Finally, when a person practices the spiritual disciplines and regularly worships and fellowships in a local church, he can be spiritually prepared for the vocation to which God has called him as an “ambassador for Christ (II Cor. 5:20).” He gains a small glimpse of God’s great desire to see wholeness, relationship, and beauty restored both in lost sinners and within God’s creation. He willingly considers positive changes in his lifestyle and in support of world missions because he begins to see God’s vision of justice and mercy for the poor and disenfran-

chised of Earth who cannot compete economically for the energy and resources we consume. He also develops a willingness to learn about climate change and other environmental issues from the scientific experts and to respect differences of opinion among those dedicated to understanding how the creation works.

*John Silvius is Senior Professor of Biology and the Center for Bioethics Associate for Environmental Ethics at Cedarville University, Cedarville, OH.*



Further Reading

Steven Bouma-Prediger, 2001. *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

This accessible, informative, and wide-ranging introduction to creation care includes a discussion of the importance of stewardship as part of the Christian character. Highly recommended.

Kyle S. Van Houtan, 2006. “Conservation as a Virtue.” *Conservation Biology*, vol. 20, issue 5, pp. 1367-1372.

**Other resources:** Michael S. Northcott, 1996. *The Environment and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge U. Press. Cambridge, UK.

Fred Van Dyke, 2006. “Cultural transformation and Conservation.” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* vol. 58, iss. 1, pp. 48-63.

Christopher J.H Wright, 2004. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. - John Silvius