



Christians and Creation Care

By John Silvius, Ph.D.

When the modern “environmental movement” began nearly a half-century ago, many Christians stayed on the sidelines to avoid entanglement in social and political issues they feared would distract from the basic message of the gospel. After all, why expend precious time on environmental issues, such as energy conservation, water and air pollution, and endangered species? Isn’t it God’s plan to bring about the “new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells?” As a result, Christianity was sometimes accused of offering a ticket to heaven while disregarding Earth.

However, in recent years a remarkable transformation has occurred in both the evangelical church and the scientific establishment. Evangelicals have

been re-energized to engage the broader culture with biblical truth and kindness. Meanwhile, secular science, mired in a host of bioethical issues from stem cell research to global warming, is beginning to look toward the church to provide moral and ethical leadership.

“There is an underlying spiritual dissonance in the universe that makes it impossible for us to live within our means and in harmony with the natural systems that support our lives. We are out of touch with the One who runs the place . . . We have a spiritual problem, and we need a spiritual solution.”

Ed Brown, author of *Our Father’s World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*

E.O. Wilson, the distinguished Harvard biologist and self-proclaimed scientific humanist, now acknowledges that “religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today.” His recent book, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, calls upon evangelical leaders to bring “the theological and moral arguments for saving

the creation” into partnership with science in an effort to avoid further environmental deterioration on our planet.

Wilson’s appeal is consistent with the fact that science can point to physical causes of the environmental crisis, but the root cause is spiritual, and the ultimate cure is spiritual. Both the devaluation of human life and the abuse of God’s creation are rooted in human sinfulness. But God’s plan is to work through the transformed lives of His children, believers who refuse to be conformed to this world system and whose lifestyle demonstrates the hope of heaven while caring properly for His creation.

But can Christians be heavenly minded and still be concerned with earthly good?

God values not just human life but all of His creation. Indeed, He has given His Son to reconcile creation as a whole (Romans 8:22). The book of Colossians teaches us that the natural realm is of great value to the Creator. Here we learn that Jesus Christ created the heavens and the Earth for His purposes (1:16); that Jesus rules and sustains His creation (v. 17); and that His death and resurrection set the stage for the redemption and reconciliation of all creation, “whether things on earth or things in heaven” (v. 20).

A theology of creation that teaches the full scope of God’s redemptive plan is essential both to effective evangelism and discipleship and to victorious living in our materialistic culture. “Biblical evangelism” and “biblical environmentalism” should go hand in hand. Environmentalism without a correct theology of reconciliation will lead to environmental programs and perhaps even the worship of creation while ignoring the cause of its alienation: unresolved sin in human hearts.



God’s Redemptive Plan

The full scope of redemption addresses alienation from God at all levels — our heart and will, our personal and interpersonal relationships, and our stewardship of His creation.

| Scope of Sin | Effects of Sin | Scriptural Basis | Reconciliation |
|---------------------|--|--|---|
| Heart | Root of Alienation Loss of Reverence and Thankfulness to God | “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks ... their foolish heart was darkened.” Rom. 1:21 | “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away ...” II Cor. 5:17 |
| Will | Alienation from God Defiance of God’s Word | “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, ... a delight to the eyes, and ... desirable to make one wise, she took ... and ate ...” Gen. 3:6 | “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.” I Cor. 15:22 |
| Individual | Self-Alienation Personal Anguish | “... I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” Gen. 3:10 | “These things I have spoken ... that in Me you may have peace.” John 16:33 |
| Social | Alienation from Others Interpersonal Strife | “... The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Gen. 3:12 | “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” I John 4:7 |
| Material | Alienation from Creation Defiance of God’s Word | “... served the creature rather than the Creator ...” Rom. 1:25 | “... through Him to reconcile all things ...” Col. 1:20 |

On the other hand, evangelism without a correct theology toward the creation may lead to Christians who receive “personal salvation” but are never fully mature in their social and material responsibilities.

“Each day I find myself surrounded by good people trying to do their part to conserve the creation, with the belief that it is all here by chance and that we must allow nature to have the maximum amount of working parts in order to continue . . . How much greater I find my calling, knowing that it is God’s creation that I am working to conserve and that He has called each of us to be stewards.”

Benjamin Rosner, 2002 CU Graduate
Environmental Scientist

Lack of spiritual maturity may explain the church’s lack of compassion toward the powerless, the unwanted, and the persecuted church worldwide, all of which are victims of selfishness and greed. Sadly, a theology of redemption that omits God’s full scope of reconciliation has created a Christian culture mired in materialism and its social consequences. The result: Christians whose testimonies are blunted and ineffective in a world hungry for meaning and purpose.

Where do we go from here?

Christians need a truly biblical bioethic that places proper value not only upon human life but also upon the whole creation. We must avoid an unbiblical dichotomy that acknowledges God’s revelation about creation but fails to act upon it. In truth, stewardship of God’s creation, or creation care, demonstrates a mature understanding of our Creator and the full scope of His redemptive plan.

The “environmental crisis” is in fact a spiritual crisis, intertwined with many of

the social challenges from which Christ came to free us. May God’s Spirit renew our reverence toward the One who demonstrates His power, wisdom, and provision through what He has made. Out of this renewal, may we dedicate ourselves to living Christian lives that are winsome and willing to humbly reach out. After all, we are armed with the gospel of God’s reconciliation to a culture filled with people alienated from God, from each other, and from the creation. **T**



Dr. John Silvius serves as senior professor of biology at Cedarville University, as well as associate for environmental ethics in the University’s Center for Bioethics. In addition, he is an adjunct professor and Cedarville representative at the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Before coming to Cedarville in 1979, Silvius was a plant physiologist for the USDA Agricultural Research Service. He earned degrees from Malone College and West Virginia University and is currently a member of several professional organizations, including the American Institute of Biological Sciences, Botanical Society of America, Creation Research Society, and Nature Conservancy.

