

A BRIEF THEOLOGY OF CREATION CARE

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SIX MAIN PRINCIPLES

1. God loves all of creation

A description of God's actions and craftsmanship

i. PS 104:1-6

God's evaluation of 'the work of his hands'

i. GEN 1:31; PS 24:1

God's admiration for his creation

i. JOB 38:4-13; MATT 6:26-29

"The world...is a whole barrelful of the apples of his eye, ..."
from *The Third Peacock*, by Robert Farrar Capon

2. Creation reveals God

A multi-voiced choir

i. ROM 1:20

ii. PS 96:11-13

iii. PS 19:1-4

"The heavens declare the glory of God"

3. People are an inseparable part of creation

The blessing of creatureliness

i. GEN 2:7; ECC 3:18-21

- We share 'creatureliness' with everything that exists
- we are embedded in, bound up with, the many cycles of the biosphere (air, water, organic matter, etc.)
- This is NOT a necessary evil to be tolerated, but a glorious part of who we are that should be celebrated
- Christ, in both his transfigured and resurrected states, had a body
- we too, will have *bodies*. (see I Cor 15:40-44, Rom 8:23)

4. People have a special role within and unique responsibilities for creation

The stewardship mandate that goes along with our prominent position

i. GEN 1:26-28

ii. PS 8:3-8

- *we are meant to* rule over creation, to practice dominion

iii. GEN 2:15, 19-20A

- But what is the *nature* of this rule? 3 clues:

1) imago dei: as His image bearers we represent God

on earth and so our rule should be modelled on his rule

2) Pentateuchal laws: articulate a husbanding of

creation that does not compromise its abundant fruitfulness

3) our first task is 'to work and keep'

(abad) **work, serve**; translated as ... to work, to do work in it,

to till, to cultivate, to dress, to tend, to serve

CP JOS 24:15

"But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD"

(shamar) **keep, guard**; translated as ... to keep it, to care for

it, to take care of it, to guard it

CP NUM 6:24-26

"The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make his face
to shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up his
countenance on you, And give you peace."

5. In our fallen condition, we are alienated from creation

Our rebellion is the root of all forms of alienation

i. GEN 3:17-19

ii. HOS 4:1-3

- Our rejection of God compromises the proper relationships we were meant to enjoy with God, each other, and creation so that we no longer live up to our high calling as God's stewards

6. God's plan of salvation includes the restoration and redemption of creation

Christ's redeeming work is all-inclusive

i. COL 1:15-20 (also JOHN 1:1-14, ACTS 17:24-28, HEBREWS 1:1-3, ROM 8:19-23)

ii. JOHN 3:16

note: the word 'world' in greek is *kosmos* (can mean universe, created order)

The scope of God's redemption story included the redemption, restoration and transposition of the entire *kosmos*

see also REV 11:18, 21:1-3

Conclusion

"In a nutshell, the Bible has this to say about creation: **God loves it** and uses it to point to himself. He made us an **inseparable part** of creation: but gave us a **special role** within it. We have **abused our rule**, and damaged God's creation. But in his plan of salvation, **he will redeem creation** along with us, and restore us to our proper place within it."

A BRIEF THEOLOGY OF CREATION:

Scripture and Quotations

Each group has been given different biblical passages (NIV) and questions to consider. Please read the passages assigned to your group and briefly discuss the corresponding question(s). The quotations may be used to supplement your reflections if you wish.

Please note that this is not intended to be “tricky” or complicated. The idea is simply to get a sense of the way various biblical passages speak about the Creator, creation, our place in it, and so forth.

You will have 5 minutes to read the passages and briefly discuss them.

Principle #1 – God loves all of creation

Group 1

The Psalmist is describing God's actions by painting a verbal picture. Describe what do you see.

Psalm 104:1-6

- 1 Praise the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendour and majesty.
- 2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent
- 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.
- 4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.
- 5 He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved.
- 6 You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains.

Based on these passages, how does God view “the work of his hands”?

Genesis 1:31

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning – the sixth day.

Psalm 24:1

1 The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.”

G. K. Chesterton

See also Robert Farrar Capon's “Let My Tell You Why” in *The Third Peacock*

Group 2

In these two passages God (or Jesus) addresses a person (Job) and a group (the disciples), respectively. Imagine the Almighty is speaking to you. What do you learn about his attitude towards creation?

Job 38:4-13

4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand.
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?
6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—
7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?
8 “Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb,
9 when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness,
10 when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place,
11 when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt’?
12 “Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place,
13 that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?”

Matthew 6:26-29

26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?
27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?
28 “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin.
29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.

*“God is perceived on one hand as infinite, immense, the creator and sustainer of a universe, the universe whose unimaginable size we are only now beginning to discover, and on the other hand he is believed to be present in every single detail of creation, to know and hold dear every atom, every speck of dust on every star and planet, to care about every blade of grass, every insect, every human being ... God’s spanning of one and many, huge and miniscule, this instant and always, here and everywhere, omnipotent and vulnerable is even further beyond human imagining ... The profoundly Judeo-Christian idea that God is not a theorem or a pattern or a necessity but a person – an I – takes us even further from common sense. But that is not all: Christians believe that this person (“I am who I am”) is the root of love and eternally loves us. It takes only two words to say the most mind-boggling article of Christian belief there is: **God cares.**”*

Margaret Visser from The Geometry of Love (emphasis mine)

Principle #2 – Creation reveals God

These passages describe creation’s response to its Creator. What images or metaphors would you use to describe this response?

Rom 1:20

20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Ps 96:11-13

11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;
12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy;
13 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Ps 19:1-4

1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

- 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.
3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

“God wanted man to know him somehow through his creatures, and since no creature could fittingly reflect the infinite perfection of the Creator, he multiplied his creatures and gave a certain goodness and perfection to each of them so that from them we could judge the goodness and perfection of the Creator, who embraces infinite perfection in the perfection of this one and utterly simple essence.”

Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621)

See also Murray Pura’s “The Divine Game of Pinzatski” in *Mister Good Morning: Stories of Flesh, Blood, and Holy Spirit*

Principle #3 – People are an inseparable part of creation

The numerous ways in which humanity is “set apart” from the rest of creation are quite familiar and often taken for granted. How do these passages describe the solidarity or connection we share with the rest of the created order?

Gen 2:7

7 ...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Ecc 3:18-21

- 18 I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals.
19 Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.
20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.
21 Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”

“A human being is a part of the whole... the universe. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature....”

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

See also Aldo Leopold’s “Odyssey” in *A Sand County Almanac*

Principle #4 – People have a special role within and unique responsibilities for creation

Group 3

How is humanity’s “place” in creation described in these passages? What responsibilities go along with this position?

Gen 1:26-28

- 26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Gen 2:15

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

A prayer for the Earth

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.

O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, even our brother, the animals, to whom Thou gavest the earth as their home in common with us.

We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of pain.

May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for Thee and that they love the sweetness of life."

St. Basil the Great (329-379)

Group 4

How is humanity's "place" in creation described in these passages? What responsibilities go along with this position?

Ps 8:3-8

3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:

7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,

8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Gen 2:19-20

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

Responsibility for the Future of the Land

"Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by his negligence; but let him endeavor to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred by neglect. Moreover, ... let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses. Then he will neither conduct himself dissolutely, nor corrupt by abuse those things which god requires to be preserved."

John Calvin (1509-1564)

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, sprints –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.

By Gerard Manley Hopkins

Principle #5 – In our fallen condition, we are alienated from creation

How did our Rebellion against God affect our relationship with creation?

Gen 3:17-19

17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Hosea 4:1-3

1 Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land.

2 There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

3 Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.

“The man to whom little is not enough, he will not benefit from more. He who tramples upon the world, tramples upon himself.”

St. Columbanus

“I am urging that we recognize that our form of modernization is premised on a set of value assumptions that are inherently in tension with biblical values. And this type of modernization aspires to little more than ever-expanding consumerism.”

Vincent Rossi

“The richest 25% of the world's population uses 86% of all forest products, 75% of energy, and 72% of all steel production. The poorest 25% uses barely 2% of the resources.”

Vincent Rossi

Principle #6 – God’s plan of salvation includes the restoration and redemption of creation

What do we learn about the scope of God’s plan of salvation and redemption from these passages?

Col 1: 15-20

15 [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

20 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.

John 3:16-17

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

The Incarnation Increases Appreciation of Creation

"Now if I believe in God's Son and remember that He became man, all creatures will appear a hundred times more beautiful to me than before. Then I will properly appreciate the sun, the moon, the stars, trees, apples, as I reflect that he is Lord over all things."

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

"I do not worship matter. I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter, who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honouring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honour it, but not as God... Because of this I salute all remaining matter with a reverence, because God has filled it with his grace and power. Through it my salvation has come to me."

St. John of Damascus

"Any error about creation also leads to an error about God."

Thomas Aquinas

What do these passages from the Book of Revelation have to say about God's intentions for the earth?

Rev 11:18

18 The time has come ... for destroying those who destroy the earth.

Rev 21:1-3

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

"If God is really at the center of things and God's good future is the most certain reality, then the truly realistic course of action is to buck the dominant consequentialist ethic of our age – which says that one should act only if one's action will most likely bring about good consequences – and simply, because we are people who embody the virtue of hope, do the right thing... Our vocation is not contingent on results or the state of the planet. It is simply dependent on our character as God's response-able human image-bearers."

Steven Bouma-Prediger, For the Beauty of the Earth, p. 186.

Additional Resources for further study

Bookless, Dave. Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World, (2008)

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Van Dyke, Fred, et al. Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship, (1996)

Wirzba, Norman, The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age, (2003)