

# The Greening of Faith: Why a Paradigm Shift Is Needed

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## Introduction

*"Your care for others is the measure of your greatness." (Luke 9:48)*

None of us is perfect. Caring for creation takes new habits, new ways of thinking, and yes--some personal sacrifice. I ride the 8-mile bike path between Pullman, Washington and Moscow, Idaho everyday to and from work. In the fall and spring the way is lined with shrubs and hawthorn trees literally dotted with empty nests of all sizes, from miniature sparrow nests to giant owl or hawk nests. One day a few weeks ago as I passed through, I decided to stop and take one of the little nests to keep for myself. Then I had a second thought: What if the birds need those old nests? And if not, what if everybody like me takes a nest home--- what would that do to the path experience for other bikers and walkers?

A friend of mine has five people in his family, so he's building a house with five bathrooms. Another tells me cheerfully over lunch that she knows environmental concerns are pointless since God will remake it all after Armageddon anyway. I used to attend a church--not unlike many churches in the U.S. today--that preached that an easy life and many worldly possessions are rewards from God. That non-believers and nature are expendable in the pursuit of the happiness of the chosen people. I still receive mailings from para-church organizations that interlace profit-oriented economic premises with Biblical theology. And yet even I, after a lifetime of supporting environmental causes and years of active environmental involvement, still automatically thought to snatch one of those tiny nests off the trail for myself.

Renowned preservationist and founder of the Sierra Club John Muir experienced the kind of spiritual awakening or reorientation that we as a society need to experience to truly change. Regaining his sight after blindness due to a machine accident transformed his view of nature and his gratitude for it. "I bade adieu to all my mechanical inventions," he said in a late nineteenth century letter, "determined to devote the rest of my life to the study of the inventions of God" (*The Life and Letters of John Muir*, 1924, as quoted by P. Brockelman in *The Greening of Faith*,

31, 1997). Like him, we must come to appreciate nature as a child or a poet does, to put others before ourselves, and always review the possible consequences of our actions--locally, globally, and spiritually (Matthew 18:3--"Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"). Anything that preaches otherwise is false doctrine. How does God view nature and our relationship with it? What does the Bible say? For the Judeo-Christian community, the final word must be found in *The Word*.

This paper is the result of an exhaustive manual and computer search of the King James Bible from Genesis to Revelation using over 69 nature-related and social-justice-related key words, for example *cattle, mountains, fowl/fowls, sea/seas, poor/needyy*, etc. The result is a list of several hundred pro-environment Hebrew scriptures. One surprise was the fact that most environment-friendly scriptures are to be found in the *Old Testament*, not the New. The New Testament focuses on people treating other people with love, but it echoes the Old Testament in this sentiment, as well as the charge to show love and respect toward all life, all creation.

It might be argued that Old Testament instructions are unimportant because they seem outdated, barbarian, or were somehow "canceled out" by the words of Jesus or other parts of the New Testament. Jesus' words *are* indeed in opposition to some attitudes and philosophies expressed in the Old Testament and He Himself does point out misinterpretations of the Old Testament, offering something better, more clear, and "new." Even so, Old Testament passages are important because at the very least---*taken in the context of Jesus's life and philosophy*--they offer a glimpse of God's original direction and some idea of His own attitudes. These scriptural proofs go a long way in their advisory nature.

For the sake of brevity, I have used as supporting examples scriptures that are *representative* of the hundreds of verses that address God and nature. In the Bible most of these sentiments are repeated multiple times, often in exactly the same words; those not quoted in full are listed in citation form. I have also created a "Mini-Concordance of Environmentally Friendly Scriptures," an abbreviated version of the longer, multi-volume collection of all my notes from the Bible search; this is available through the mail to anyone who asks me for a copy. The unabbreviated version--my three-volume (three-binder) "working copy" contains every scriptural reference to nature found through the 69 search words listed--literally thousands of scriptures. Those in the mini-concordance represent verses that best address nature and God directly.

It might appear that some obvious words are missing among the 69 search words, but it is likely I searched for them and came up with nothing relevant in the King James translation.

The guiding non-Bible text for this paper is *The Greening of Faith--God, the Environment, and the Good Life*, edited by John E. Carroll, Paul Brockelman, and Mary Westfall and published by the University Press of New England, University of New Hampshire in Hanover, New Hampshire (1997).

**A Note on Further Research:** To make this study truly complete the search should be done in all the major Bible translations besides the King James. Also there are issues of translation to be addressed: the English words--especially the words "earth" and "land"-- should be double-checked with the Hebrew.

## **16 Scriptural Observations**

**1) God Himself is expressed in nature. Nature in its beauty, hugeness, and complexity represents God's own attributes and greatness (e.g. power, balance, etc.).**

*"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" (emphasis added).*

*See also Psalms 19:1, Job 38:28, Job 41, Romans 1:20, Numbers 14:21, II Samuel 23:3-4, I Chronicles 16:14; Psalms 33:5, 102:25, 119:64; Isaiah 22:11*

For formulators of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), based in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, nature is a "testimony" or a "witness" to its creator. Paul says as much in Romans 1:20. Therefore any mistreatment of God's creations, be they people or natural objects, is an affront to God Himself: "He that oppreseth the poor reproacheth his Maker" says Proverbs 14:31, assuming our wounded earth is now part of the poor and voiceless. Such behavior reveals the sins of pride, greed, self-indulgence, gluttony, waste, and idolatry.

Evangelical teacher and scientist Calvin DeWitt does not mince words on this: "Honoring the Master Artist while trampling the Master Artist's work is an intolerable hypocrisy that must be corrected...seduction by immediate pleasures and goods of the world alienates people from God

and creation" ("A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective," *Greening of Faith/GOF*, 90). Aldo Leopold would concur: "Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend," he writes in *A Sand County Almanac*, "you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left."

The EEN's Declaration states that current environmental degradation proves "we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation...We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed rather than care." The Jesuit environmental ethicist Father Albert Fritsch suggests that since we are in a fallen and wounded state of affairs, the earth suffers as well as humanity (*The Greening of Faith/GOF*, "A Catholic Approach," 125-163). St. Paul, in Romans 8:22, states that all of creation (or all creatures) "groaneth and travaileth in pain together." A less forgiving interpretation might point out that it was man's sin that caused this pain for all other creatures as well as himself.

## **2) God loves nature and rejoices in His handiwork; He maintains and cares for it.**

*Genesis 1:21*

*"And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good."*

*See also Genesis 2:10; Nehemiah 9:6; Job 8:11, 37:10, 38:25, Job 38:39; Psalms 29:3, 36:6, 65:9, 77:19, 104:10-35; Isaiah 27:3, 43:20; Jeremiah 12:1-9, 48:28; Amos 5:8; I John 5:8*

"It is God's steadfast love that brought this world into being," states Rabbi David Shapiro (as quoted by E. Gendler, *GOF*, 68), "...the goodness of God...was objectified in the created world. This world is such that humans dare not degrade any of its parts. The One Who has created them praises them, who dares depreciate them?" Would this not be akin to degrading God Himself?

It might be argued that animals exist only for human use, but even the capture and death they endure in the predator/prey relationship is not described as positive. It is part of an imperfect world, and thus described in negative terms. Devices for trapping even the animals approved for eating are described as "evil": "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an *evil* net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of man snared in an *evil* time..." (Ecclesiastes 9:12, emphasis added). Proverbs 6:5 gives another

example of the goodness of freedom *versus* the evil of capture: "Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter, and as a bird from the hand of the fowler." Thus the food chain may be a temporary reality in our world, but it is by no means the ideal. Isaiah 65:25 offers a better understanding of God's ideal: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock...they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD." For more on the evil of captivity for either man or beast, see Psalms 124:7; Proverbs 1:17, 7:23; Isaiah 8:14; Lamentations 3:52; Ezekiel 34:20; and I Corinthians 7:21.

Note that throughout Psalm 104, animals and nature are referred to as God's "riches," not as expendable wastes. In the *Book of Job* God brags about his natural creations in terms like "treasure," "strength," "precious," "glory," "riches," "comely," "goodly," and through the concepts of freedom and independence. These animals also possess the breath of life (Genesis 1:29, Psalm 104:30), thought by some scholars to signify the soul (see Leviticus 17:11-15--"For the life/soul of the flesh is in the blood..." See Proverbs 6:30, Isaiah 29:8, and Isaiah 32:6 for more scriptures that equate the "soul" with "life" or being alive. Job 12:7-10 refers to "the Lord...In whose hand is the *soul* of every living thing...." emphasis added). Deuteronomy 11:12 describes God's feelings toward the land, "...A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year." See Deuteronomy 33:13 ("precious").

### **3) God expresses love for humanity by giving humankind the gift of nature, and love for animals through the gifts of habitation and food.**

*Genesis 1:29-30*

*"And God said, `See, I have given you every herb that yields seed...for food. Also to every beast of the earth., to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life'....I give every green plant for food...."*

*See also Genesis 2:10, 2:15; Deuteronomy 8:17, 11:15, 24:4; Job 5:10, 37:13, 40:20; Psalms 33:5, 50:11, 72:3, 104:11, 104:1 104:20, 119:64; Song of Solomon 2:12; Ezekiel 34:26; Isaiah 55:10; Zechariah 10:1; Revelation 11:18.*

American botanist and chemist George Washington Carver (1864-1943) is quoted as saying, "I love to think of nature as an unlimited

broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in." Jesuit environmental ethicist Albert Fritsch: "In a spirit of Eucharistic thanksgiving we accept this world as God's gift, which beckons gratitude found in service to all creatures as Jesus has served us" (*GOF*, 127). Genesis 2:15--"And the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to *serve it* and to keep it" (emphasis added).

When we deny nature and a healthy environment to others, we are actively denying them a rightful gift from God and denying God Himself the opportunity to express his love to others besides just ourselves. "[O]ne consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future," according to the EEN. Arguably, the poor and "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3--"Blessed are the poor in spirit...") include not only the economically deprived, but the downtrodden and the vulnerable---nature, animals, and all victims. "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker," reads Proverbs 14:31, "but whoever is kind to the needy honors God"; see also Proverbs 14:21, 17:5, 19:17, and 28:22.

Timothy Weiskel, Director of the Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values at Harvard Divinity School, predicts that in the face of current environmental degradation, "the mass of the world's humanity is about to endure a very different experience of human limit and divine presence.....we should be prepared to understand as well that for the mass of humanity other, more terrible concepts of God are likely to dominate for the foreseeable future" ("Notes from Balshaz'zar's Feast," *GOF*, 29). The Bible contains strong passages about those whose actions cause others to turn away from God (Deuteronomy 13:10; also Paul in New Testament).

Paul Brockelman, author and Director of Religious Studies at the University of New Hampshire, warns that the current 20th century materialist view of happiness and our own insatiable pursuit of "the good life" makes us a "demoralized culture" "which not only thinks of nature as put here for our enjoyment but...places human life at the center of everything...Having accomplished that marvelous trick, it then makes morality radically relative to the wants and desires of a particular group or...individual" ("With New Eyes," *GOF*, 36).

Steven Rockefeller, author and former Dean of Religion at Middlebury College in Vermont, interprets Isaiah 2:6-9 and 65:25 (about the Israelites' paying back God for the plenty in their land by worshiping the

works of their own hands) to mean "the knowledge of God is equated with a wisdom that involves an appreciation of the intrinsic value of all life and a compassion that seeks to prevent suffering and to create shalom, a joyful community of all living beings" ("The Wisdom of Reverence for Life, *GOF*, 44).

**4) God is inclusive: he addresses all ecosystem types---sea, desert, wilderness, forest, streams, fields/pastures, etc., even islands. He addresses all creature types. He loves diversity or multiplicity.**

*Hosea 2:18*

*"...I will make a covenant...with the beasts of the field and with the fowls of the heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground...."*

*See also Genesis 1:26-28; 6:20, 7:2-3, 7:14, 8:17; Isaiah 34:14; Ezekiel 6:3, 38:20; Psalms 8:8, 97: 1, 104: 24-25, 148:9; Proverbs 30:19; Nehemiah 9:6; Hosea 4:3; Haggai 1:11; Acts 10:12; and Revelation 5:13, 10:6, 14:7*

Farmer and nature poet Wendell Berry puts it this way: "The first principle of the Kingdom of God is that it includes everything; in it, the fall of every sparrow is a significant event...Everything in the Kingdom of God is joined both to it and to everything that is in it" (as quoted in *Whole Earth*, 14). The EEN Declaration adds that "...the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship." We are all in this together, yet we are individuals.

We have only to look around us at the innumerable species and life forms to realize that He delights in variety. The creation story in Genesis 1:20-25 repeats the word "kinds" seven times in five verses, revealing the Creator's special attention to variety (EEN). He also insisted that the ark preserve all species and their ability to regenerate themselves, especially birds--today's environmental indicator species (Genesis 7:3--"Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and female...").

Further, God directly *addresses* nature throughout the Old Testament. He includes nature in His proclamations and even holds it in some part responsible for the actions of humans living on it: "...Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys...Behold I have spoken in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen..." but "...I have lifted up mine hand...And I will multiply men upon you...And I will multiply upon you

man and beast...Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you...and they shall possess thee, and thou shalt be their inheritance...Therefore thou shalt devour men no more...neither shalt thou bear the reproach of the people anymore..." (Ezekiel 36:4-15). For more of God's direct addresses to the earth, see also Psalms 29:9, 66:1, 68:15-16, 100:1, 147:15; Proverbs 8:29; Song of Solomon 4:16; Isaiah 1:2, 42:10, 48:13, 49:13, 56:9; Ezekiel 6:3, 20:47, 36:4-6; Hosea 2:21-22; Joel 2:22; Jonah 2:10; Micah 6:2; and Zechariah 11:2.

## **5) God instructs man to take pains to preserve not only plants and animals but breeding stock and regenerative potential.**

*Genesis 6:20, 7:2-3*

*"Of fowls after their own kind, and of cattle after their own kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive (emphasis added)...Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens and of beasts that are not clean by two ...Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and female; to keep their various kinds alive upon the face of all earth" (emphasis added).*

*See also Genesis 7:14, 8:17.*

In the Pacific Northwest of the United States there is often the comment regarding endangered species of salmon (and others) that perhaps it is not important to work toward preserving *all* species--that some should be viewed as expendable, especially in the context of the human habit of using up or corrupting the habitat that fish populations need to stay viable. Paul Gorman, director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, calls God's post-flood covenant "the first and last word on biodiversity and endangered species." "In Eastern Orthodox thought," he continues, "Christ redeems all creation. Not just well-mannered people. The entire cosmos" ("There is a River, Judeo-Christian Faiths Face the Earth in Crisis," *Whole Earth*, 16). Note in the emphases added above that the language communicates the importance of *diversity* and *survival*. God wills that eventually, in Christ, He will "reconcile *all things* to Himself" (Colossians 1:20; emphasis added).

Catholic teachings view environmental destruction as a violation of the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" (*Whole Earth*, *ibid*). Using up resources leaves little behind for future generations and mistreating resources shows disrespect for its creator. "...[F]or ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses," declares God in Isaiah 3:14-15. "What mean ye that...grind the faces of the poor?" The EEN

asks: "Are we called to be any less responsible than Adam or Noah?"

**6) God teaches humans through nature. He uses nature as expression, punishment, example/instruction, comfort, reward, and means to an end.**

*Job 12:7-10*

*"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee....the Lord...In whose hand is the soul of every living thing...."*

*See also Genesis 8:7-9 Exodus 8:6, 9:6; Numbers 11:31; I Kings 13:24-28, 19:11; II Kings 2:21; Job 37:13; Psalms 104:3; Jeremiah 5:6; Matthew 10:29, 17:27; and Revelation 21:10*

Father Fritsch elaborates on these "creature-teachers" by saying they fill us with "exuberance, energy, laughter, and song, and they invite us to extend our area of concern to those who do not necessarily share our belief systems or culture. It is the poetry of St. Francis come alive" (*GOF*, 128). Jesus uses natural and agricultural images extensively to teach his disciples: see his parables of the vineyard, the mustard seed, the sheep, the fig tree, etc.

For more on the use of nature as punishment, see Deuteronomy 11:17, 28:26, 29:22; Leviticus 26:20-22, 43; Job 37:13; Isaiah 42:15, 56:9; Jeremiah 5:6, 15:3, 21:14; Ezekiel 6:3; and Micah 7:13.

**7) God covenanted with nature and all creatures--in addition to humanity. He covenanted with future generations as well.**

*Genesis 9:9, 12-16*

*"...I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.....And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations...between me and you and every living creature of all flesh...the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (emphases added).*

*See also Deuteronomy 7:13, 29:25; Hosea 2:18; Leviticus 19:18,25:35, 26:42; Jeremiah 33:25; Psalms 119:90; Zechariah 7:9-10; Proverbs*

*2:22, Malachi 2:10.*

Jesus' command to "Love thy neighbor" includes the earth and the animals, and future generations of humans. Showing love for one's children and the grandchildren of one's neighbor or enemy means leaving behind a viable and continuously miraculous earth on which to live. "Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth," reads the EEN Declaration. The book of Proverbs says that three things God hates, things that are abominations to Him, are "a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood" (Proverbs 6:16-19). Taken in the context of false teaching and the raising of children who are wasteful, greedy, and disrespectful toward creation, and looked at from the fact that polluted air, water, and soil can kill, this scripture offers a new and potentially powerful perspective on why lying and harming the innocent (e.g. children) might be in the same verse. Is it not our responsibility to provide a clean and healthy home for our children and theirs, and for the children of other people--for the Bible's "strangers"? This is a matter of basic good parenting, and it is stewardship. Poisoned air and water kill children around the world and every day; greed in one part of the world often starves families in another. Even the U.S. is seeing a disturbing rise in premature births, newborn mortality, and asthma due to pollution, especially in large cities.

God's willingness to contract with yet-to-born generations occurs not only in the Genesis excerpts but throughout the Old Testament when He makes promises to loved ones such as Abraham or David--promises he can keep only after they are dead and which must be fulfilled through their descendants.

It might be argued that "God's children" and our "neighbors" include only those who consider themselves "saved," therefore the earth's blessings belong only to them: the various forms of suffering by nature, animals, and non-believers are unimportant. The Bible sees it quite differently. Proverbs 22:2, Matthew 12:50, Mark 3:35, Luke 6:42, Romans 14:10, and I Timothy 4:4 only hint at an ethic understood throughout the Bible: that God created all people and things. The Old Testament is filled with admonitions to the chosen people to be good to others, especially "strangers" and including their former captors--the Egyptians (see Numbers 15 and 16 of this paper for supporting Biblical citations).

Finally, if God covenanted with every living creature including trees and insects, asks the EEN, then what should we do when we disrupt the

covenant? *Webster's New World Dictionary* reminds us that part of "redemption" is making right the wrongs: "to make amends or atonement."

**8) A healthy and flourishing earth is a blessing and a reward. An unhealthy and overly exploited environment is expressed as negative, often symbolizing punishment or indicating sin.**

*Leviticus 18:25-27*

*"And the land is defiled: therefore do I visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants...For all these abominations have the men of the land done...and the land is defiled...."*

*See also Exodus 8-12; Deuteronomy 8:7; II Kings 3:25; Isaiah 19:15, 42:15; Jeremiah 9: 10 and 15, 12: 4, 51:36; Hosea 4:30; Leviticus 26:14-32; Ezekiel 4:16, 12:19, 31:14, 32:2 and 13, 33:28, 47:10; and Revelation 7:3, 8:11, 22:1*

An honest reading of scripture shows that God wants nature to be kept in good condition. Destruction of nature by man or God is expressed as a negative, not an inevitability. "Are we given a scriptural mandate to destroy?" asks the Evangelical Environmental Network (in: *Biblical and Theological Perspectives*, World Wide Web). "That is the prerogative of the Creator, not the steward. Our responsibility is to tend the garden." Why should "rule" or "dominion" over nature mean cruelty and exploitation? II Samuel 23:3 says that he who rules must rule justly according to God--to suggest that rule or domain is cruel and exploitive is to suggest that God's model is cruel and exploitive. As for how we are expected to treat nature and animals, Evangelical teacher and scientist Calvin DeWitt has this to say: "As God provides for the creatures, so should we people who are created to reflect God Whose image we bear...[and] with Noah preserve...earth's creatures, especially those threatened with extinction" (*GOF*, 92).

Destruction of nature is a negative in these scriptures: Genesis 2:5, 19; Exodus 10:15; Deuteronomy 8:7, 11:1; Psalms 106:38; Isaiah 10:18, 34:9, 42:15; Jeremiah 3:9, 9:12; Ezekiel 9:25, 39:10; Joel 3:18; and Revelation 8:7, 9:4, 14:7.

**9) Nature and all natural characteristics belong to God, not man.**

*Psalms 24:1*

*The earth is the Lord's and all it contains, the seas and all that dwell therein."*

*See also Genesis 2:9; Exodus 15:8, 19:5; Leviticus 25:23; Joshua 3:13; I Samuel 2:7-8; II Samuel 22:16; II Kings 19:15; I Chronicles 29:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Deuteronomy 10:4; Job 9:8, 28:25; Psalms 18:15, 33:7, 47:2,7, 50:10-11 73:9, 78:13, 89:9 and 11, 95:4-5, 104:3, 115:15, 119:90, 121:2, 124:8, 134:3, 135:6-7, 136:6, 139:15, 146:6, 147:18; Job 38:4, 6, 8, 18, 25-26, 33; Proverbs 8:29, 30:4; Isaiah 40:12, 42:5, 43:13, 45:12, 45:18, 48:13, 51:16, 54:5; Jeremiah 2:7, 5:22, 10:12, 23:24, 27:5, 31:35, 32:17, 33:2, 51:15; Amos 4:13, 5:8, 9:6; Jonah 1:8-9; Habakkuk 3:6; I Corinthians 10:26; Hebrews 1:10; II Peter 3:5; and Revelation 10:6, 14:7.*

According to Carol Robb, the Margaret Dollar Professor of Christian Social Ethics at San Francisco Theological Seminary, several often-overlooked scriptures weave together the earth, justice, and a land ethic in the Old Testament's "debt-remission legislation" ("Sabbath and Jubilee in Leviticus," *Whole Earth*, 57). She shows how this legislation aimed at keeping Hebrew peasant farmers from being controlled by absentee urban elites and from growing crops for export rather than "for family and village nurture." The entire 25th chapter of Leviticus addresses this as well as Exodus 22. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity," proclaims the Lord, "for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). Writes Professor Robb: "Landowners had responsibilities to God's land and to God's wild creatures. They could never fully own it to the exclusion of God's justice. Private 'ownership' rights to use the land existed within guidelines of obligations to others and to the land itself" (*Whole Earth*, p. 57).

## **10) Nature has intrinsic worth separate from humanity.**

*Psalms 104:30*

*"When you send your spirit, they [animals] are created, you renew the face of the earth."*

*See also Genesis 1:10, 49:15; Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 25:2-4, 26:34; Deuteronomy 8:17, 11:12, 33:13; Psalms 50:10-11; and Job 15:7 28:10 ,37:13, Chapter 41. In Job 39-41 God says in His own words that He delights in creatures which have no apparent usefulness to humans, for example hippopotamus, unicorns, leviathan, wild horses, eagles, and other beasts that defy human control, animals that live independently in the wilderness, animals not made to be food for people. Calvin DeWitt*

notes that even non-commercial and "noneconomic" animal species are saved from the flood of Genesis 6-9 (*GOF*, 97). "Creatures have value simply because they are the works of the Creator," he explains (*ibid*). The same is true of God-made landscapes. God also routinely addresses nature directly, as in Ezekiel 6:3--"Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys...." or in Job 37:6--"He says to the snow, 'Fall on earth,' and to the rain shower, 'Be a mighty downpour'...." He calls on nature to witness His actions in Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28, and 32:1 (e.g. "I call heaven and earth to record this day...Give ear, O ye heavens....").

Everett Gendler, Jewish Chaplain and Instructor in Philosophy and Religious Studies at Philips Exeter Academy in Massachusetts, says that we "assume that a God who transcends nature thereby depreciates it" ("Join the Chorus, Recapture the Rhythms," *GOF*, 67). He further points out that a covenant is a term of reciprocity, involving an exchange of responsibilities and duties. What might this mean in terms of what is expected of nature by God? At the very least, it is judged to have "that minimal measure of sentience that permits joining in this universal hymn to the creator" (Gendler, *GOF*, 70). Psalm 148: "Praise ye the Lord...Praise ye Him, sun and moon: praise Him all ye stars of light. ...Praise the Lord from the earth...Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind *fulfilling his word*: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl...."...and so on (emphasis added). In Ezekiel 36:4-6, God expects even more from nature: "Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God...unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys...I have spoken in my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen...." Nature's own responsibilities are hinted at again in Habakkuk 3:8-11. In Deuteronomy 24:4, the land is even apparently capable of sinning--again, man's evil affects the land.

In all the above verses in Psalms, Proverbs, and Job, it is obvious that creation has intrinsic value apart from human beings as nature is in itself described to be "good" simply because it provides for animals and brings God delight. It "fulfills his word" in Psalms 104, an important duty in the Bible. Jesus assumes the inherent worth of animals in Matthew 10:29 -- "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father [knowing of it]." Matthew 6:29-- "Consider the lilies of the field...I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

Note that in Genesis 2:9 there is worth in a tree's beauty: "And out of

the ground made the LORD GOD to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight...." In Job 41:12 God says he will not conceal the "comely proportion" of his leviathan. And apparently small acts of respect and kindness do matter even towards animals; in Exodus 23:19 the people were instructed not to "seethe a kid in his mother's milk."

**11) Nature, such as trees, the sea, etc., is described as having thoughts and feelings; it experiences joy, terror, mourning, hunger, satisfaction, pain, punishment, knowledge, grief, anticipation, and consolation. Also gladness, shouting, praising, singing, seeing, trembling, worshiping, and rejoicing (different translations account for varying adjectives).**

*Psalms 96:11-13, 98:8-9, 114:7*

*"Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult, let the sea roar and all the creatures in it, let the fields exult and all that is in them; then let all the trees of the forest shout for joy...Let the rivers clap their hands, let the hills sing aloud together before the Lord...Dance, O earth, at the presence of the Lord..." (New English Bible).*

*See also Leviticus 20:22, 25:2-4, 26:34; Deuteronomy 21:23, 24:4; II Samuel 22:8; I Chronicles 16:23 and 31-33; Job 55:12; Psalms 65:12-13, 66:1 and 4, 68:15-16, 69:34, 72:19, 77:16, 96:1, 97:1 and 4, 98:4-8, 100:1, 114:3-5;148:7; Isaiah 26:19-20, 41:5, 42:11 and 40, 44:23, 49:13, 55:12; Jeremiah 4:28, 51:48; Ezekiel 26:3 and 18, 31:14-16; Hosea 2:21-22; Joel 1:18; Amos 8:8; Nahum 1:3-5; Habakkuk 2:11, 3:10; Zechariah 11:2; and Revelation 5:13, 16:20*

EEN: "If every creature praises God...then should we not do all we can to make sure that the chorus of praise remains vibrant and inspiring? If an endangered species slips into extinction, what happens to the quality of the choir? How might the Concert Master, the Lord of Creation, respond to such an event?" (EEN letter to *Citizen Magazine*, Focus on the Family; Feb. 25, 1997). "Dare we diminish the joy God finds in His handiwork?" (EEN).

**12) The earth and its creatures have their own "statutes" or natural laws set in place by God. There is an emphasis on God's having set all natural characteristics where they are---right where they belong.**

*Psalms 104:5, 8-9*

*[God] laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever...They [the waters] go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over...."*

*See also Exodus 15:8; Leviticus 11:46; Numbers 24:6; Deuteronomy 11:15; Song of Solomon 5:12; Job 26:7 and 10, 37:8, 28:10, 39:5-6, 41: 15-17, 23; Psalms 29:9, 65:6, 74:17, 78:16, 102:25, 104:17, 119:64; Proverbs 8:26, 29; Isaiah 24: 4-7, 40:22; Jeremiah 5:22; Ezekiel 17:5; Matthew 8:20; Mark 4:32; and Luke 9:58*

"Can you set up God's dominion over the earth?" God asks in the Book of Job (Job 38:33). This puts a different spin on such practices as changing the course of creeks and rivers (usually to their detriment). There are also scriptures against the mixing of seeds and breeds of cattle (Deuteronomy 22:9, Leviticus 19:19).

The entire Chapter 41 of the Book of Job is about leviathan, a gigantic sea animal who is fitly built by God, a source of pride to Him, independent of man, and who functions as a symbol for God Himself; this is an exalted role for a wild animal: "Canst thou draw out leviathan with an hook?...Will he make any supplications unto thee?...Will he make a *covenant* with thee? wilt thou take him for a servant for ever? Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maids?...shall not one be cast down even at the sight of him?...I will not conceal his parts, nor his power, nor his *comely proportion*...Who can open the doors of his face?...His scales are his pride, shut up together as with a close seal. One is so near to another, that no air can come between them. They are joined one to another, they stick together, that they cannot be sundered...his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning...out of his nostrils goeth smoke...his breath kindleth coals...The flakes of his flesh are joined together: they are firm in themselves; they cannot be moved...His heart is as firm as a stone...He esteemeth iron as straw...The arrow cannot make him flee...Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear...He maketh the deep to boil like a pot...He maketh a path to shine after him...Upon earth there is not his like, who is made without fear. He beholdeth all high things: he is a king over all the *children* of pride" (emphases added). Note that in this passage the animal is considered a "king" even over some human beings--the "children." He also represents God.

**13) Humanity and other members of creation are repeatedly addressed by God together as one unit, and described together**

**as a unit. Our destinies are intertwined.**

*Hosea 4:1, 3*

*"...for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, nor knowledge of God...Therefore shall the land mourn, and everyone that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field and with fowls of the heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea shall also be taken away...."*

*See also Genesis 1:21 and 29, 7:22, 9:9 and 12-17, 47:19; Exodus 8:24, 9:25, 11: 5, 12:29, 20:10; Leviticus 11:46, 18:25-28, 20:22, 26:32; Numbers 35:34; Deuteronomy 5:14, 11:15; 13:15, 20:19, 21:23; I Kings 4:33; Ezra 9:11; Job 31:38; Isaiah 42:15; Jeremiah 4:25, 7:20, 14:5, 16:18; Ezekiel 6:3, 29:5, 38:20; Daniel 4:12; Hosea 2:18; Joel 1:10, 12, and 18; Amos 7:17; Nahum 1:3-5; Habakkuk 3:17; Zephaniah 1:3; Zecharia 14:15; Luke 13:19; Acts 10:12, 14:15; Romans 8:20; and Revelation 5: 13, 12:12.*

Calvin DeWitt points out that there is no word in the Hebrew Bible for the "environment" (*GOF*, 95). In fact he considers the term "Christian environmentalist" to be an oxymoron. "Simply put," he explains, "there is God and Creation, and people are part and parcel of Creation...care for Creation does not distinguish or prioritize between caring for people and caring for the environment [there is no real separation]. Caring for creation always means caring for the whole system..." (*GOF*, 97). Thus creation truly consists of *all things*, as described by Paul in Colossians 1:20. Animals and the land also share in humankind's punishments, as the scriptures show, and human wickedness can defile the land (Jeremiah 16:18, Ezekiel 36:17).

**14) The term "wilderness" is used more often as a positive than it is used as a negative.**

*Joel 2:22*

*"Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine..."*  
(emphasis added--note element of provision).

*Matthew 14:23*

*"And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain*

*apart to pray...he was there alone."*

*See also Deuteronomy 3:25, 32:4 and 18; Joshua 12:8; I Kings 10:27; Psalms 30:7, 42:1, 62:7, 87:1, 125:2, 102:14, 104:18; Isaiah 2:2-3, 25:10, 42:11, 48:18, 56:7, 57:7; Joel 9:10; Jeremiah 9:10, 31:23 ("mountain of holiness"); Ezekiel 28:16, 43:12; Daniel 9:16; Joel 1:20, 3:17; Amos 5:24 (mighty stream); Micah 4:1; Zephaniah 3:11; Zechariah 4:7, 8:3; Matthew 5:1, 13:1, 17:1, 28:16; Mark 3:7 and 13, 6:46, 9:2 and 42; Luke 6:12, 9:28, 17:2; John 4:20, 6:3 and 15; Acts 17:29 (polluted rock altar); and Revelation 22:1 (clear water)*

Many contemporary Christian bookstores feature volumes written on the Biblical meaning of the word "wilderness," books that attempt to justify human manipulation of all ecosystems and which argue that no official wildernesses need exist anywhere. The Bible treats wilderness very differently. For example, in Ezekiel 34:25 God says "...I will make with them a covenant of peace...and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." "...[B]ecause of swearing the land mourneth" in Jeremiah 23:10, "the *pleasant* places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right" (emphasis added). Joel 1:20--"...for the rivers of waters are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the *pastures* of the wilderness" (emphasis added).

Wilderness is expressed as a positive place and a home for God's creatures---only symbolically as a desolate place of evil, and then only sometimes as a symbol of evil. It is the home of the beasts He loves. It is described as "pleasant," as a "pasture," as a "habitation," as a "refuge," and as a "sanctuary" (Exodus 15:17), among other terms.

Mountains are sacred as they are worthy to be symbols of God and serve as refuge for His son (and for us). God Himself is often symbolized as a mountain, or as dwelling on a mountain. Terms used include "my holy mountain" (Isaiah 57:13, 65:11), "the sanctuary which thy hands have established," "the mountain of His holiness," and "a goodly mountain" (Deuteronomy 3:25). Isaiah 2:3--"Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob..." is typical. In Psalms 11:1, David likens himself to a bird and God to a mountain: "In the LORD put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" For more examples, please also see Genesis 2:9, 13:6, 34:21, 36:7; Exodus 15:17; I Kings 6:29-32; Job 40:20; Psalms 48:1, 68:15-16, 50:11, 121:1, 125:2; Isaiah 2:2,11:9, 25:10, 56:7, 65:11; Ezekiel 17:24, 34:26; Jeremiah 12:9; Daniel 4:11, 9:16; Joel 1:19-20; Nahum 1:15; and Zechariah 4:7, 8:3.

A rock assigned to represent God and function as His alter is not to be marred by any carving or decoration of man's, but rather God orders it to be left natural in Exodus 20:24-25--"An alter of earth thou shalt make unto me...And if thou wilt make me an alter of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it...." Throughout both Testaments of the Bible, God, Jesus and Jerusalem are symbolized a rock, stone, or mountain (see Isaiah 66:20/Jerusalem, I Samuel 2:2/God the Father, and Matthew 21:42-44/Jesus).

Jesus seeks solitude and peace in the wilderness or in the mountains: Matthew 14:23--"...he went up into a mountain apart to pray...he was alone there" (see also Matthew 5:1, 28:16; Mark 3:13, 6:46, 9:2; Luke 6:12, 9:28; John 6:3, 6:15). Mountains are frequently the site of great spiritual/supernatural insights, such as in Mark 9:2 when Jesus leads some of the apostles up to a high mountain and is transfigured there before them (see also Revelation 21:10).

We also must bear in mind the strong symbolism of the *tree* throughout the Bible (and in subsequent cultural and literary works). There was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, the "tree" on which Christ was crucified, and the tree as a favorite symbol for greatness, as in Ezekiel 17:24 and Daniel 4:11.

The Song of Solomon uses nature and animal metaphors extensively, revealing a great love and gratitude for nature by its author. All the natural images are positive and human sexual love is "elevated" to the level of idealized nature. I do not believe, as some do, that the Song of Solomon is a metaphorical treatment of Christ's feelings for the Church, however when looked at in this light, the song becomes even more important: both the lovers (the Church and Christ) are symbolized through exalted images of nature and wildlife (e.g. see Song of Solomon 2:17).

**15) The land is to be treated well. The beasts are to be cared for as well as the poor, with neither being made captive in any way to "pay" for what they glean--indeed, it is owed to them.**

*Exodus 20:10, 23:11*

*But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle....But the seventh year thou shalt let [the land] rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and*

*what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard..." (emphasis added).*

*See also Genesis 2:15, 33:13-14 (gentleness toward children and young animals), Deuteronomy 26:13; Job 5:23 (at peace with the land); Psalms 73:9, 82:2-4; Proverbs 22:16; Isaiah 32:6, 46:1 (kindness to beasts); Ezekiel 22: 29, 35:12 (greed and gloating over disaster); 1 Corinthians 9:9.*

So who is my neighbor? And who is "the poor?" What is not given by the rich to the poor makes the rich no less than thieves in God's eyes: "The LORD will enter into judgement...for ye have eaten up the vineyard; *the spoil of the poor is in your houses...*" (Isaiah 3:14; emphasis added). Consider the following in the context of modern inventions for keeping birds, deer, or racoons from cherry orchards; conversely, some state wildlife departments feed elk and deer in the harsh winter months. Which is more in line with these scriptures? For "thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather *every* grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:10).

And again--the concept of the hidden curses of luxury and abundance can be heard here, powerful negations of present-day theologies that claim prosperity as a reward from God, valuable lessons for our extravagant western cultures: For "...this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness...neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and the needy" (Ezekiel 16:49), and even from Jesus: "Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger" (Luke 6:25).

We also find that God obviously does not view "property rights" in the same way that many in western cultures do. The concept of "Sabbath" is more than a resting time for people: it is for land and animals too. The practice of leaving the land untilled and empty for the entirety of every seventh year refreshes the land while providing for biodiversity and even pest control (Psalms 11:25: "He who refreshes others will himself be refreshed"). Carol Robb of the San Francisco Theological Seminary explains that this prescription allowed for the "increase of wildlife, since the birds, rodents, and deer would undoubtedly make off with the food. It allows the predators involved in bio-control to replenish their forces as they have a year of undisturbed feasting on `pests` to the farmer (jackals on field mice)" (*Whole Earth*, p. 57). God says he will bless the sixth year before the land sabbath so that there will be enough food for

the seventh year (Leviticus 25:5). Even if today's believers no longer take the Leviticus regulations literally, whether because of denominational doctrine or the alterations of Jesus Christ and the New Testament, these regulations provide a good indication of God's intentions and at the very least--an excellent agricultural model to start with. According to Evangelical Calvin DeWitt, "Preserving Creation's fruitfulness preserves biotic species whose interactions with each other, and with land and water, form the fabric of the biosphere. Our fruitfulness should not be at the expense of the fruitfulness of other creatures" (*GOF*, 92). Indeed, their decline means our eventual extinction.

There is also a Biblical expression of the land's carrying capacity in the story of Abraham and his nephew Lot: "For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land...could not bear them because of their cattle...." (Genesis 36:7); this image is shown from the view of the land rather than from man's view, a consistent device throughout the Bible.

**16) The land and its products or benefits are for everybody, not a chosen few. Justice and the poor, greed and nature are often intertwined as images and themes.**

*Ezekiel 34:18*

*"Seemeth it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, but ye must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? and to have drunk of the deep waters, but ye must foul the residue with your feet?"*

*See also Psalms 82:5; Isaiah 47:8; Matthew 21:31; Mark 4:19; and Revelation 3:17.*

Again the EEN Declaration: "We recognize that human poverty is both a cause and consequence of environmental degradation." The EEN insists we make "personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self-restraint, and frugality" and notes that "poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive" (see also Proverbs 6:30--"Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry...."). "...Therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty" (EEN Declaration).

And here is a concept we rarely hear in western societies anymore: "The

love of money is the root of all evil things," according to Paul in 1 Timothy. Perhaps it is time to revive the old-time Faustian stories that remind us that selling one's soul for money and worldly comforts is really selling oneself to the Devil. A major hurdle for faith-oriented environmentalism is the loss of society's association of greed and money with evil; when a church preaches money and material belongings as rewards from God, it is preaching the exact opposite of what used to be common knowledge (Isaiah 5:20--"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!").

Especially relevant to today's idolization of growth is the Biblical statement against excessive and selfish development: "Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!" (Isaiah 5:8); God also rails against those who dare to name land and house after themselves! See Proverbs 21:13, 26; Psalms 94:6, Deuteronomy 24:19,21, 26:12.

The Bible's lists of sayings about the rich and the poor, especially the poor, is daunting. Almost no other topic is addressed more. The handful of verses about fornication, thievery, even lying, do not begin to come close to the Biblical emphasis on how God feels about the poor and how He wants people to treat the poor. Since poverty is related to the selfishness, greed, and wastefulness of usually a smaller portion of the population, it is relevant here. It is also relevant because it is in these lists of God's grievances that we find spiritual/moral degradation wrapped up with images about the land's degradation. God's own word for the plight of the unpropertied poor and others is "injustice." It is important to note as well that "the poor" do not include simply the hungry and the landless--it is the disenfranchised, the outcast. Jesus referred to "the poor in spirit" in the same breath as the financially poor (Matthew 5:3). Over 100 scriptures speak for themselves on this topic in 41 books of both testaments of the King James Bible.

### **Final Thought**

Most environmentally oriented theologians agree that hope for the earth in these later stages of degradation will have to come from the faith communities. Father Fritsch, the Jesuit environmental ethicist, observes that "a community's growth in understanding and awareness of environment is analogous to its growth in faith" (*GOF*, 127). This is quite a challenge. He sees hope in the re-examination of redemption theology. "A Catholic perspective has always accepted the reality of pilgrimage,"

he explains (*GOF*, 130). Even while the untouched, pristine earth bears witness to God, its current suffering parallels our own. Since we are a people always in the *process* of being saved (*GOF*, 131), we can respond to the wounded condition of our environment by "realizing what we have individually and collectively done wrong...With a confession of wrongdoing comes the demand for restitution for the earth that has been damaged. Faith takes on a dual aspect of realizing we are forgiven and realizing that we need reestablish justice" (*GOF*, 129). After that, anything is possible!

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