

Youth Theology Institute Journal



AUGSBURG
COLLEGE

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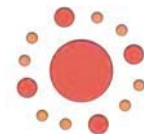
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February 2011

When I first arrived on campus, I ran into a bunch of high school youth in scrubs boarding a school bus. They looked too young to be ER orderlies, but they carried themselves like they should be. The Urbane Urban Scrubs program gathered neighborhood teens for on-site training in local hospitals, where they learned basic skills and the bearing of professionals.

The ACYTI journal is only another symbol of Augsburg College's commitment to young people, inviting them to see themselves as professionals: writers and theologians, teachers and authors. That commitment grows out of the belief that that "Christian faith liberates hearts and minds," a conviction put into words by former President of the College, Bernhard M. Christensen, but one that has undergirded the College since its founding.

Think of "freedom" as the cornerstone of an institution embedded in the Norwegian Free Church tradition, a movement that came to this country from an Old World stratified by class and governed by a lifeless orthodoxy. The Free Church offered another voice that represented a spirit of democracy and an emphasis on the reasons of the heart, not just of the head.

So conceived, the "freedom" of the Free Church movement had a double-edge. Protestant Reformer Martin Luther captured it succinctly in his signature Reformation treatise, "On the Freedom of A Christian:"

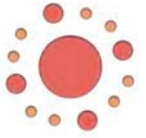
A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none;
A Christian is a perfect free servant of all, subject to all.

According, freedom meant freedom *from* an education system that meted out learning according to class. Those who could pay more, got more. Those who couldn't, got nothing. Freedom also meant freedom *from* orthodoxies that did not reflect the movement of the Spirit, in either the churches or the human heart. On the other hand, however, freedom was also emphatically a freedom *for* love and service to the neighbor. Originally, those neighbors were the Norwegian immigrants who came to this country, looking for land, opportunity, and a fresh start. Over the history of the College, those immigrant groups shift to Vietnamese, Hmong, and now Somali. Always the College remembers its roots, welcoming the stranger and providing access and excellence for those in its immediate community.

That neighborliness is not just ethnically defined. The College has also welcomed people older and younger than the four-year span of a liberal education. Augsburg is a learning hub for people way beyond the "college years," as well as those not yet old enough. This program and this journal argue the wisdom of that commitment.

Fourth century North African theologian, Augustine of Hippo, reports that the words "take and read" (*tolle et lege*) prompted his conversion. Take and read: expect nothing less.

Martha E. Stortz
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Christian Faith and Creation: Heavenly Minded and No Earthly Good?

For five days in June of 2011, twenty-one high school youth gathered at Augsburg College to explore our relationship to and responsibility for Creation as Christians. We canoed down the Mississippi River in voyageur canoes. We visited with merchants and farmers at a local Farmers' Market. We assisted in two neighborhood and organic gardens. In the classroom, we wrestled with the literary influence on our relationship with "the land". We explored what the Bible does and does not say about our responsibility for creation. And we wondered if theology could offer us any way forward. This journal reflects the thinking of 16 of these students. In here you will find a variety of essays, which are essentially exercises in the art of theological meaning making; the students' process of constructing knowledge and meaning from within tradition and their own experiences.

Three of our essays explore the relationship between science and religion. Robinson Ewald asks the question, "How much progress is too much, and who gets to decide?" He argues that we can't even begin to answer these questions without first understanding our relationship to God. Jenna Seward claims that science and religion do not have to be enemies; that Darwin's theory of evolution and the Bible's stories of creation can coexist and enhance one another. Matt Peterson explores science and scripture in search of guidance on whether or not we can support biotechnology as Christians.

Three essays examine an unfamiliar culture, comparing and contrasting it with Christianity and finding the insights they offer us. Abigail Bennett engages in an exploration of the similarities and differences between Christianity and Judaism after being intrigued by the term "Judeo-Christian tradition". Desi Niewinski compares and contrasts two stories of creation – Christianity's and the Mayan Popol Vuh. Kristopher Torres explores the concept of Dreamtime from the Australian Aborigines as an idea that might aid Christians in developing a deeper understanding of their relationship to the earth.

Two essays express a deep appreciation for creation and argue that we will never solve our current environmental problems without first developing a deeper appreciation for creation. Britta Brolin wants us to view the earth as a miracle and believes that if we take that view then we will begin treating it better. Lauren Windhorst's experience growing up on a farm has convinced her that experiences in nature and in rural America is the best, if not the only way to help people learn to care for creation.

Six essays examine the biblical notion of stewardship and our call to care for creation. Stewardship. Katelyn Danelski argues that we need to cease viewing humans as superior to the rest of creation and to begin to understand ourselves as stewards of creation, located within creation – responsible for it and dependent upon it. Laura Grobner is also concerned that we try too hard to live above creation and this has caused our connection with creation to be broken. The biblical image of stewardship can help us become reground in creation. Will Howitz claims that even if Christians think the world will eventually be destroyed, they should see and hear God's clear call to care for creation within scripture; especially in Genesis, Romans and Revelation. Abby Kalina offers the biblical image of steward as our best way to understand our role within creation. Amber Kalina explains how the Bible offers us freedom from our



anthropocentric ways, which are killing creation and freedom to see creation as our neighbor. Alicia Papke-Larson draws a helpful parallel between the parable of the Good Samaritan and our current ecological reality; encouraging us to begin to see creation as our neighbor who is beaten on the side of the road. She calls us to embrace our role as co-creator with God.

Lastly, two essays offer impassioned calls to action. Sam Hoffman claims that we as Christians have been getting off too easily over the years. We have cheapened grace and we need to start talking about good works we need to say that the way we live matters. Zach Malecha calls us to stop procrastinating and do something to project the earth. He recommends some smart food choice we could begin making today.

We had a formative week together. It was a week full of laughter and learning. We grew anxious about the state of creation but we also gained hope as we were reminded of God's promises and presence with us. We hope that these essays offer you, the reader; a healthy dose of anxiety and hope as we all work to find meaningful and helpful ways to care for God's creation.

Enjoy!

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The Progress of Man

Robinson Ewald, Burnsville, MN

From Columbus and other early explorers, to travelers along the Oregon Trail the modern world has forever been expanding westward. As these pioneers moved forward in their journeys, they also made steps forward in innumerable other ways. Always attempting to improve their lives and better the future, western expansionists gradually molded our society to what it is today. Along with the phrase “Western Progress”, and simply progress in general, however, there always seems to be a negative undertone. In the process of bettering their own lives, they subjected the natives to suffering. Not only the people (Native Americans) but also the land. Loggers wreaked havoc on North America’s abundant forests while farmers followed behind, draining the soil of its fertility through over farming, and unnatural and unsustainable farming techniques. Eventually these “improvements” to their own lives became more and more sophisticated. Soon railroads crossed from the Pacific to the Atlantic and on these railways were trains, leaving billows of steam streaming behind them. These trains are perfect metaphors of progress in America. Though always moving forward, they leave a trail of destruction and pain in their wake. As more and more “progress” has been made, more and more harm has come to the environment. In bettering our own lives, we have had to desecrate our surroundings.

Through modern science we can now see how much harm we have already brought to the world. Even at that, people to this day still sacrifice the well being of the Earth for progress and more often profit. It must be said, however that the quality of life that we now enjoy would not be possible without this progress. On the other hand, from pollution and deforestation to over-hunting and the extinction of species, man has certainly left his mark on the environment in the process of improving his life. Or as Daniel Quinn puts it (through the words of Ishmael), humans are the Takers, taking what we need from the environment and giving very little back. Herein lies a troubling dilemma, a question of both morals and interpretations. In giving man the Earth did God do so that we may exploit it for our own purposes and even if so, is it the morally right thing to do? Is the world around us as fragile as it is often made out to be? And how much “progress” is too much progress, where is the line drawn and by whom? To gain a better perspective on these questions and many more, they need to be considered from both religious and ecological mindsets.

In order to understand this dilemma, we must first consider who God is and how humans fit into His plan. This is certainly an incredibly broad topic, yet a necessary one to be discussed. People that practice all types of religions have very differing views on these topics. Even among Christians there is much debate on which God truly exists. Every Christian has his or her own image of God, both physically and spiritually. In the same way, everyone has differing ideas on what God’s plan is and what role we play in it. Some base their views on the Bible, others on history, some on beliefs and others on pure intuition. Common ground must be found though, if we wish to work together to better understand our world. To begin with, as Christians we can all hopefully agree that God is inherently good and that in making humans and the world God had good intentions.

Another seemingly indisputable point would be that for whatever reason we are here, we are not here to cause harm to God’s other creations. As long as we can at least agree



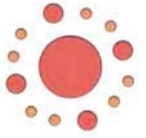
on these two statements, we must then admit that what we are doing to the world around us is not what God wished for us to. This does not necessarily mean that the progress that we have and are making is a bad thing, but rather that in progressing, we have overstepped our boundaries and are impending on the safety and sanctity of nature. Just as we are creations of God, so is all of nature and thus it should be treated as such, with respect and reverence. If we wish to continue progressing as we have, we need to change the ways that we go about it, in order that we no longer must sacrifice nature's well being for our own.

Another part of this issue to be viewed through the lens of religion is that of the power that man holds and what dominion means to us as Christians. As is told in Genesis: in the beginning, God made the Earth and God made man. Upon creating man he gave to him "dominion" over the world and its other inhabitants. Dominion however can be a very tricky word. Its denotative meaning is "control or the exercise of control." Along with dictionary definition, though, it also carries with it certain connotations. For example many associate dominion with tyranny and oppression. And in their defense, the word shares the same Latin stem as the word domination. Yet in the same sense, the Latin word for Lord (*dominus*) has the same stem. In this both a connection and a heavy responsibility can be found. This relates man to God and simultaneously puts a hefty burden on man's shoulders.

It can be argued that as man was created in the image of God, he was also given a task. Simply put, man's task was and is to strive not to be like God but rather to do with our lives what He would want for us to. In which case many agree that it is our duty to protect and shepherd over nature. Everything there was, is and ever will be is a precious gift from God and should be treated as such. In this it can be derived that the use of the word dominion in Genesis is not to give man the right to exploit the Earth but instead to give him the responsibility of caring for it.

When we as humans look at "our" world (and that's exactly what we see it as) we often fail to remember for how short of a time we have even inhabited it. To gain a different perspective on this dilemma, we must take a step back from our humanity and look at the world around us from the perspective of someone other than man. The famous dialogue *Ishmael* does just that and through it Daniel Quinn opens doors to new ways of thinking and living. In the conversation (that occurs between man and ape) we can see how the man, like many of us, thinks with an incredibly narrow mind. Rather than seeing the big picture, we often restrict our thoughts to those centered on humanity. Ishmael, (the ape) asks a very interesting question, "Why did the world and universe need man?" When the man cannot answer he tells him to "Imagine the world without man" (Quinn, 70). This greatly unnerves the man, as he has never thought about the world like this. In this thinking though, he finds why many believe man is here: to rule over the chaos and anarchy of nature. If this truly is man's destiny, we really are not fulfilling it. Though we have, as Ishmael continues to say, conquered the world, we haven't successfully ridden it of chaos and discord.

Quinn continues in saying, "Man was born to turn the world into a paradise, but tragically he was born flawed. And so paradise has always been spoiled by stupidity, greed, destructiveness, and shortsightedness." In this we find our need for progress, always attempting to make the world a paradise for humans, a utopian world. We also find an opportunity though, an opportunity to better our world. Since evidently man



does have the power to rule over the world, and debatably that is what he is supposed to do, we have the chance to use our mastery of the world to better the world. Throughout human history man has always taken from the Earth. Now with our power, should we not at least attempt to give back?

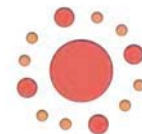
Whether or not the world around us is expendable, there is no way anyone can ever be truly certain. In this case, to protect the world around us seems like it should be an easy enough choice. If we woke up tomorrow to find that everything we as a species have done to the Earth is irreversible, wouldn't we have rather treated it better today? Although we can, will and should continue to make progress in bettering our own lives, we must strive to do so with as little damage to nature as is possible. We must take steps towards the conservation (or as the Sand County Almanac puts it, "a state of harmony between man and nature") of our natural resources. As much as we are a creation of God, so is the Earth. If God gave us power over it, he also gave us a responsibility to maintain it. Although one small act of caring for nature may go unnoticed, it could be the grain of sand that turned the tide. So as a race, to ensure a better and brighter future it is our solemn duty to protect the Earth. Though no one should govern this duty, we must all take it upon ourselves to be good shepherds of all of God's creation.

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...And God Created Science

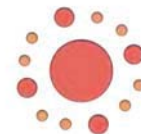
Jenna Seward, Alexandria, MN

“But then, religion in your country is so focused on fighting science and all these compelling atheist voices that your preachers have lost track of what religion is really about. ... For you and for a lot of rational people like you, it’s become a choice. Fact or faith. Science or religion. ...You shouldn’t have to choose” (Khoury 385).

The book *The Sign* by Raymond Khoury offers some interesting insight into the world today. Although the book is fictional, this quote does have relevance. It says that science and religion can go hand in hand. Many Americans today would feel that a proper analogy of the relationship would be like one between oil and water—they don’t mix. I decided to dig deeper into this conflict, and focus on evolution versus the creation story. My goal was to figure out why Americans feel that there has to be a choice between science and religion, discover what the Bible actually says about the creation story, and most importantly, to see if Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and the Bible’s Creation Story can peacefully coexist.

Part of the reason that evolution and religious views conflict, has to do with our culture, and what we’ve been exposed to. Depending on where you live, you hear different things regarding evolution. As David N. Livingstone says in a chapter entitled, “Evolution and Religion”, “In all these instances the particulars of geographic location and social space had a huge role to play in what could be said about evolution and, just as important, what could be heard about it” (Livingstone 366). If you grew up around scientists or reading scientific journals you might have been heavily exposed to information regarding evolution. However, if you lived in a highly religious community, you might be told that evolution is a theory of the devil. This belief could cause you to disbelieve any and all information ever presented to you regarding evolution. According to the Lutheran Study Bible margin, “Worldwide, there is diversity among Lutherans regarding the interpretation of the days of creation in Genesis 1. ... Many Lutherans understand that science helps us understand how God created the heavens and the earth” (NRSV 50). The variations of exposure, as well as the beliefs, are a main issue when it comes to the conflict between evolution and religion.

Another factor is that we live in an anthropocentric society, one that views humans as the most important thing, and it’s been that way for hundreds of years. At one point, people believed that the Earth was not only the center of our solar system, but of the entire universe. One of the reasons why: because humans are present. What does this have to do with evolution? An idea that goes with an anthropocentric mindset is that humans, as a species, are special. Evolution destroys this concept because it says that humans occurred due to chance, just like everything else. Aside from that concept making it difficult for humans in general to accept evolution, it makes it even harder for Christians. This is because Christians typically believe that God created humans in His image to have dominion over all other things. In the *Revolve Devotional Bible*, an anthropocentric view is very plain to see in a “Check Out the Context” section. The section says about creation that, “It’s all good. But something’s missing—enter humankind” (NCV 3). That flat out says that God’s creation would not have been complete until God made us; that we are better than everything else. Not only do some humans think that the universe revolves around them, but that God, to an extent, does too.



Some Christians look at Genesis 1 and say that this is exactly how creation occurred. God spoke and everything was made - all in seven days. There is nothing essentially wrong with the Creation Story as long as you view it as just that, a story. "Genesis 1 is a story, not history. It's like storytelling, it's used to make sense of our world" (Jacobson). This was one of the many points Professor Karl Jacobson made in class. It stuck with me, and had me paying attention through the entire class. I wanted to see if, in reality, this statement holds its own. After doing some investigation, the concept of the Creation Story being a story, started making sense.

To start with, the beginning of Genesis 1 could be completely wrong. The Bible, as many know, was originally written in Hebrew. It is entirely possible that the words, "In the beginning" in the English Bible are incorrect. Another version from the *New Revised Standard Version Lutheran Study Bible* says, "When God began creating" (NRSV 29). However according to Professor Jacobson the most literal translation from Hebrew to English is, "In a beginning" (Jacobson). That statement alone implies that there may have been more than one beginning. What Genesis is the beginning of exactly, no one knows for sure. It could be the beginning of an ordered creation. In the margin of the Lutheran Study Bible New Revised Standard Version it says, "The beginning of the ordered creation, not the beginning of all things" (NRSV 49).

People often ask questions about creation, such as how and when it occurred. Sometimes 'When' can be interpreted as 'how long?' Scientists argue that the world was created approximately four billion years ago, and that creation is constantly evolving. Some Christians argue that the world was created in seven days and everything was created in those seven days; there is no evolution. A better question would be 'why?' Why did God create? The answer to this question is far from concrete because no one knows the answer. The Earth was present when God started creating and there was water on it, covered in complete darkness. God could have been just ordering and organizing His creation. Like someone cleaning their office, He starts by separating things, the waters into the air and waters still on Earth. "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters" (Genesis 1:6, NRSV). Then God goes on to label everything else, naming the animals. "So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name" (Genesis 1:19, NRSV).

Something else to take into consideration is the 'What?' The science community typically accepts the fact that life started in the water. Over time, creatures evolved to be able to fly, and to eventually live on land. One of the most recent species that scientists believed have come from evolution are humans. The Bible lays out a rather similar framework, "So God created the great sea monsters...and every winged bird of every kind" (Genesis 1:21, NRSV). Later, God creates "cattle and creeping things...of the earth" (Genesis 1:24, NRSV). Finally, God created man. Coincidence or not, these two outlines match up. The story of Genesis is rumored to have been finished between "587-538 B.E.C." (NRSV 27). Somehow, thousands of years ago, humans were able to come up with the same basic framework for how things were created without what we have today. The people back then didn't have archeological information, such as fossil time records, yet they came up with the same sequence. The fact that these outlines match up



may be saying something. It is possible that instead of disproving the Creation Story, science has reinforced it.

One main issue between the religious and the scientific views are the timelines. In Genesis the world was created in seven days. The theory of evolution states, more or less, that 'creation' is still occurring everyday. It was interesting, then, to read the footnotes of the *Jewish Study Bible*. It pointed out that "most biblical descriptions of creation know nothing of a seven-day sequence..." (*Jewish Study Bible*. p12). When the Bible talks about creation, the number of days it took is never mentioned. This means that the creation story could have been written "relatively late in the history of Israelite religion" (*Jewish Study Bible*. p13). In the *Lutheran Study Bible* margin it says to "Notice how God evaluates the work of creation. This implies it is an ongoing process" (NRSV 49). If creation is ongoing, that means it could continue for billions of years. Maybe it took that long for God to decide that He wanted to create humans. This fits with the theory of evolution. God created all things so who is to say how He did that. God could be the driving force behind evolution. Science says natural selection is working towards perfection. It "selects" certain traits that will give the species the best chance for survival. God loves His creation, so why wouldn't He want what is best for it; a near perfection for his loved ones. Genesis 1 may be a story, but it is there to help us as humans. It gives us a sense of understanding of why things are the way they are. The creation occurring in six days may be nothing more than a way for humans to relate back to their week, their world. Seven days are in a week, six for work and one for rest, just like God. Perhaps this is the only way God could put creation into terms that humans could understand.

The quote I used to open my paper is from a fictional book. However, I feel that it really forces you to look at and question your world, especially the fact that science and religion can coexist. Science and religion each have a special role to play in our day-to-day lives, one that the other can't fill, nor should it try to. Science can tell us why things are the way they are and explain our surroundings to us, but religion is there to help put meaning into our lives. Science and religion can coexist peacefully, and so can Darwin's Theory of Evolution and the Bible's Creation Story.

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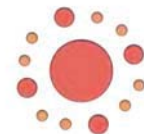
Genetic Modification, a Necessary Evil?

Matt Peterson, St. Paul, MN

One of the most controversial issues of the twenty-first century is the debate over genetic engineering. Some believe that it is not our place to modify creation because we are not worthy of criticizing God's handiwork. For instance, many opponents of genetic modification cite Genesis, saying that because God views his own creation as "very good" we should be content with what the Lord provides. However, others believe that the genetic engineering of food crops could be an effective response to global problems such as poverty and hunger. Data from past uses of genetically modified crops can show us responsible uses of biotechnology. Likewise, guidelines are given in the Bible about how we are supposed to farm responsibly and sustainably, even when growing bioengineered crops. By combining insight from both science and scripture, we can decide what types of biotechnology we can advocate as responsible Christians.

Genetically modified (GM) crops were introduced to the global market during the so called "Green Revolution" of the 1960s. The Green Revolution was sparked by promising research into high yield crops by Norman Borlaug's work with DuPont. In 1943 they were planting high yield wheat in Mexico. By the 1960s, work began to bring GM crops to India and Africa. Eager to do something great for the global community, the leaders of the Green Revolution distributed the genetically modified crops to poor countries before taking time to fully explore the implications of their use. Because this technique of farming was relatively new, nobody anticipated that genetically uniform crops could not grow the same way in every climate. The result: "Because the new monocrops were poorly adapted to local conditions, the plants didn't do so well unless sustained by massive amounts of water, fertilizers, and pesticides" (Georgia Straight, 2008). When such resources are required, only large industrial farming operations can take advantage of increased yields. The poor families who had farmed the land for generations were suddenly faced with competition that could sell grain for a fraction of the price. Were they to price competitively, they would not have been able to feed their families. The individual farms were sold off and their owners moved elsewhere for work.

The dominance of commercial farming following the Green Revolution has led to a very new land ethic, one that seeks maximum profit regardless of damage done to the land or the consumer. Commercial farming largely ignored all previously embraced sustainable practices such as crop rotation and composting, hoping that their functions could be replaced by chemical fertilizers. One of the problems with huge monocropping operations is that there is very little genetic diversity, leaving the crops weak and vulnerable to diseases. In order to prevent crop failure, GM crops must be treated with huge amounts of chemical pesticides. Another problem is that the lack of genetic diversity actually causes the grain to contain less nutritional value. Commercial agriculture's obsession with high yields and high profits has led to a massive surplus of calorie rich, nutrient poor food, which is one of the biggest culprits of America's obesity problem. The manner in which farming companies treat the land is far removed from the care that an individual farmer would have practiced. Their current application seeks higher yields and greater profit at the cost of the land and the community. This approach puts control of the rural economies in the hands of the elite few, destroying the rural communities that were once there.



The most common justification for GM crops is that they will be able to feed the growing population of our planet. The governments of some poor countries have insisted on the use of GM crops in their country for a variety of reasons. Many of them were hoping the improved yields would improve their economy. While in theory it is a great idea, the decades since the Green Revolution have proven that in the hands of commercial interests genetically modified crops have done very little to feed starving populations worldwide. Wheat produced in India rots in the storehouses waiting to be exported, despite there being starving families nearby. Even with parts of the harvest being wasted, the commercial farmers can sell their crops for more outside of India. However, the technology is still evolving, and there is increasing promise that more climate-adapted crop varieties will allow for small scale farmers in developing nations to improve their yields and lower the risk of crop failure. Protecting these farms from crop failure may even become of greater importance as the effects of global warming intensify, "Climate scientists predict that global warming will make arable land in many developing countries less productive or unusable. Advocates of GM crops often defend the technology by arguing that drought and salt-tolerant varieties can play an important role in adapting to global warming" (Guardian UK, 2008). Genetic modification may prove to be a valuable asset in fighting world hunger if we are able to create these drought-tolerant crops.

It is well known by farmers that plants can help restore fertility to depleted land. Old, proven practices such as composting and field-burning took advantage of this, but now genetic modification may be able to create plants specialized for this purpose. Human activity has left deep scars in our planet from which nature will take millions of years to recover. But now hybrid plants may be able to effectively clean up some of the messes we've made; messes like nuclear waste, toxic chemicals and explosive residue can be absorbed by special GM plants. Following the Chernobyl disaster, it was discovered that sunflowers could absorb uranium in a small area, storing it safely in their roots. As far as application goes this is still in its infancy, but some promising experiments have been conducted. For example, scientists have been able to absorb highly toxic TNT residue using hybrid plants, "Considering the availability of many microbial genes mediating detoxification systems and degradative pathways, this approach of engineering plants to remove toxic pollutants has the potential of providing an efficacious means of cleaning up land areas that have been polluted through military and industrial activities." (Nature Biotechnology, 2001). We are going to have to wait and see if this is ever realized, and hopefully from the Green Revolution we have learned not to apply technology without having basic understanding of the implications of its use.

For a Christian perspective, it is important to reference the Bible for guidance on how to proceed with agricultural innovations, or any innovation for that matter. God does not completely discourage the development of new practices, we can clearly see that even in the old testament God intended for his people to farm the land for their sustenance. In Exodus 23, God gives the Israelites his rules for farming the land, instructing them to allow time for the land to regenerate: "10For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 11 but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove." This shows God's desire for sustainability in agriculture. Earlier in the book of Genesis, God gave



humans dominion over creation. Dominion means that we are the keepers of creation, and we are allowed to take of it only what we need to live as God instructs us.

Interestingly, an early approach to selective breeding (an common type of genetic engineering for livestock) appears in Genesis chapter 30. The story is that Jacob's payment from the oppressive Laban is to be able to take the sheep and goats born at specific times, so, as instructed by God, Jacob controls when certain animals breed. Taking his share only when the strongest are breeding, Jacob's flock eventually becomes much stronger than Laban's flock. Perhaps the moral here is that God believes that the manipulation of his creation is necessary in certain circumstances. To determine if God would allow it, we need to speculate whether the end results of the application of genetic engineering will obey or disobey the Ten Commandments.

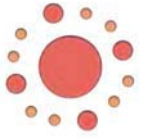
Greed is one of the major corrupting factors when applying GM crops, since commercial farming has caused the United States to overproduce crops. Many of the companies that produce GM seeds have claimed that pesticides or fertilizers are not necessary for their crop to be productive. However the business-centric attitude of modern farms continues to encourage irresponsible and unsustainable practices (like pesticide and chemical fertilizer use) in order to improve the company's bottom line. Miguel Altieri explains: "As agricultural modernization progresses, the ecology-farming linkage was often broken as ecological principals were ignored or overridden. Profit, rather than people's needs or environmental concerns has shaped agricultural production. Agribusiness interests and prevailing policies favored large farm size, specialized production, crop monocultures, and mechanization" (Altieri, 2004).

The concept of putting profit first and its consequences are everywhere in the bible, like in 1st Timothy 6 verses 6-10:

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

So here we see that putting wealth ahead of all else leads to evil, much like how the GM crop industry focusing on profit, rather than sustainability has lead to a myriad of problems worldwide.

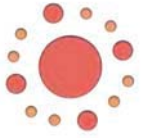
Looking back on the Green Revolution, it is crushingly discouraging to see how such a well-intentioned movement can lead to (in some cases) worse problems than we had before. It is also unnerving to witness modern technology's often reckless drive towards "Playing God" by manipulating nature. When faced with these issues it is important to re-evaluate what our faith calls us to do. We can see that pesticides are polluting our environment. We can see that excessive production of poor quality food is fueling obesity in our country, yet there are still starving children worldwide. It is easy to blame the modification of crops for weakening the global agriculture system, but it is important to note that this technology was intended to help people, and still can when it is used properly. As Christians, we can consult the Bible to give us guidance on how to



responsibly use the innovations we have made in genetic engineering. We must familiarize ourselves with God's will, as well as move cautiously when exercising our dominion by modifying creation. We must keep in mind what our place in creation is, in order to ensure that what we do with it is sustainable and appropriate to our needs.

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Comparing and Contrasting the Views of Christianity and Judaism

Abigail Bennett, Sunfish Lake, MN

This year when I attended the Augsburg Youth Theology Institute I heard many references to our “Judeo-Christian heritage.” I wondered what the overall meaning of this would be. I decided to dive deeper into those two religions so I could learn more about the Christianity in which I have been brought up in, and Judaism, which Christianity has branched off from. It is widely known that Christianity and Judaism are two completely different religions, but what most people do not know is that there are as many similarities as there are differences.

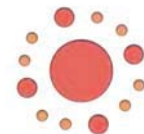
First I would like to start with similarities which are widely known between the two religions. Christianity and Judaism are mono-theistic, which means a religion that believes in one God (Britannica 251, 402; elca.org,1). Both religions share the Hebrew traditions of the Old Testament. Both Christianity and Judaism originate from the ancient region of Palestine, now commonly known as Israel. They both believe in one God known as Jehovah, the God of Abraham. In addition, both religions believe in super-natural beings like angels and demons.

Commonly known differences between the two religions are that Christianity was founded by Jesus Christ of Nazareth who was brought up in the Jewish faith. Judaism was founded by either Moses or Abraham, depending on the source (Comparison, 1). Christianity believes that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, but Judaism believes that Jesus was conceived by man, and not by supernatural beings. While people of Jewish faith celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday, Christians typically view the Sabbath as Sunday, being the seventh day of the week. Christianity identifies Jesus as the Son of God, or incarnation of God, and the Savior of the world. In the Jewish faith Jesus is mostly identified as a rabbi, a teacher, or even a prophet – but not the son of God (Comparison, 2).

Here are some lesser known similarities between Christianity and Judaism. Both Christianity and Judaism list the death of Jesus by crucifixion. In terms of divine revelation, both religions acknowledge that God communicates to humans via prophets.

Here are some lesser known differences. In Christianity it is believed that Jesus rose from the dead three days after His crucifixion. However, in Judaism, Jesus’ death was final and there was no resurrection. In the Christian faith it is believed that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. In the Jewish faith it is believed that the Son of God has yet to come.

Some widely held popular beliefs about differences in the religions are actually similarities. For example, a widely-believed distinction between Judaism and Christianity is that Judaism focuses on the rules for living a good life with God. The Ten Commandments are an example of this. They provide laws for a good life. Rules and regulations appear many times in the Old Testament and in ancient Jewish writing. For example, community rules found in the Dead Sea Scrolls include,



1. He should be excluded from pure food and from the council and the judgment for two [full] years and he may return to the interpretation and to the council if he does not go.
2. Sinning through oversight. Until two years have passed because for one year of oversight he will be punished two years but for impertinence he shall not go back again.
3. Two [full] years shall he be tested in respect of the perfection of his behavior and in the respect of his counsel according to the authority of them many and then he will be enrolled according to his rank in the community of holiness. (The Dead Sea Scrolls, 29)

By contrast, Christianity focuses on our love of God, and growth in relationship to Him. As Lutherans, we believe we are saved by the grace of God's love. (ELCA: Confessions of Faith). Of course, Christianity has many rules too, an example found in Colossians 3:5-9 (KJV):

⁵Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: ⁶For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: ⁷In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. ⁸But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. ⁹Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

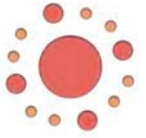
In the same way, Judaism focuses on loving God. For example, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (KJV) is about loving God first and foremost:

⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD: ⁵And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

So, some things that are perceived as differences are really similarities. The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is complex because they intertwine.

Some of the relationships between the religions have changed over history. A thought from a Jewish standpoint would be that Christianity was heresy. In more recent times, the relationship between Christianity and Judaism has changed because of world events. For example, in World War II many Christians fought side by side for people of Jewish faith to keep them (the Jewish people) from the concentration camps. This built a stronger relationship between the religions, empathy, and better understanding (Britannica, 475) which still continues today. The St. John's Bible, a new and illustrated hand-written Bible being created by the monks at St. John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN includes a drawing with a pile of eyeglasses that belonged to Jewish people that died at a concentration camp during the Holocaust, and illustrates the following verses from Ezekiel 37 (KJV):

¹The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, ²And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there



were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. ³And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. ⁴Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live.

Some themes that Judaism has brought to other world religions, including Christianity are “exclusivist and universalist [sic] emphases” (Britannica, 475) and an “inner dialectic.” A common biblical custom that came from Judaism is “exclusivism,” meaning no other Gods exist. “Universalist” means that God has the overall rule of the universe. An example of this is in the verse from Amos, 9:7: “‘Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?’ says the lord. ‘Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?’” (Britannica, 475). The “inner dialectic” is a tension between conflicting ideas, or an investigation of truth through discussion, this is often an attempt to resolve conflicts through academic debate. Judaism has a long history of this. To fail to understand Judaism’s place in other religions would be to fail to do justice to Judaism’s inner dialectic (Britannica, 485).

In conclusion, having attended the Augsburg Youth Theology Institute I heard many references to our “Judeo-Christian heritage.” In this paper I explored some of the similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity. I have learned that many of the traditions are very similar, and some are different.

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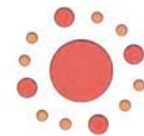
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Creation Collides: Mayan and Christian

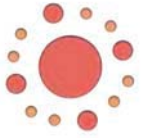
Desi Niewinski, St. Louis Park, MN

Many people debate how this world came to be, how it was created. Some people believe in what biologists say on evolution, while other people believe in what their religion says about it. Stories about creation can be very different and they can be very similar. Many religions also have different versions of the same creation story. I have chosen to focus on the stories of two different religions, the Popol Vuh, from the Mayan traditions, and the Christian creation story. These two stories, though mostly different, are also similar in some ways.

The Christian creation story is one that says God made the world in seven days. Each day God created something new and different and God said it was good. God created the world by himself, because in the Christian religion there is only one God. Each time he created part of this world, he created it by word, meaning that “God said, “let there be light”; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3) Once God created an object it was never destroyed, nor re-created. This version on creation is told in three parts. The first is how the world was made, until the making of humans. The second states how humans were made, and the third is of the journey through evil with Adam and Eve. The two humans discussed in the Christian creation, are Adam and Eve, who were both created differently. Adam was created from the dust on the earth and God breathed life into him. Eve was created from one of Adam’s ribs that the Lord had taken. God created these humans in his image, and God said it was good.

The Popol Vuh is the Mayan creation story. The god that has the most power in this story is heart of sky, the god of the sky. Others who were there in the beginning were the gods of thunder and lighting. This account of creation starts with the gods creating the animals to praise the gods. Then the gods created the plants and the environment around the animals so that they would have a place to live, to sleep, and so they would have food to eat. They created the animals of the forest first. Once the animals were created, they were asked to speak to praise the gods, but all that came out was squawking and moaning. The gods decided that since the animals couldn’t praise the gods their flesh could be eaten. Then the gods decided to make humans to praise the gods. Their first attempt at making humans was out of mud and earth. These humans talked very quickly, and could walk for only a short period of time before they started disintegrating. Since the humans of mud disintegrated, the gods decided to make humans out of wood. These wood humans could walk, talk, and praise the gods. The problem was that they never had any passion for anything because they were empty inside. They couldn’t remember the gods, so the gods decided to send a flood and all of the wood humans were destroyed. On the third attempt the humans were made out of corn. These humans were perfect, so the gods created four men who are the founders of the Mayan people.

One of the differences in these stories is directly the creator of the world. In the Christian creation story there is one God. This God rules over all things, and created everything by himself all in his image. In the Popol Vuh, there are many gods. There are gods for every new thing that is created, a god for corn, a god for thunder, a god for trees, etc. In creating the world the gods discuss what should be created and how it should be created. The Christian God creates everything in his image for the sole purpose to have living creatures on earth. The gods in the Popol Vuh create the earth so



that all the living creatures can praise them, and that is why they decided to create Earth.

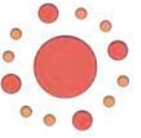
For the creation of animals, the Popol Vuh is more specific as to what the animals do, and what their purpose is. In the Popol Vuh, the gods created animals for each terrain; animals for the forest, for the desert, and for the tundra. The gods also made sure that these animals would have a place to sleep and food to eat. In the Christian creation story it only specifies there were land animals and animals that lived in the water. It only states that they were created but not given all the necessities of life, but this is stated in other parts of the Bible, such as Matthew 6:26 and Psalm 147:9. When the animals couldn't praise the gods in the Popol Vuh, the gods said they could be eaten and they ate some of them themselves. In the Biblical creation story, God never ate the animals, but he did let humans kill them for food.

The major difference that is debated around the world is how humans were created. These versions, Mayan and Christian, have different stories of how humans were created. The Christian creation story states that the first human was made out of dust and earth, and that God breathed the breath of life into him and he came alive. Also that the first woman was made out of the rib of the man and God created both of them in his image. In this Christian account humans were only created once and they were never destroyed nor re-created. In the Popol Vuh, the Mayan version, humans were created multiple times. First from mud, then destroyed, second from wood, then destroyed and pounded on, and third by corn and these are the humans that stayed on Earth. The humans in the Popol Vuh were four males and it is never stated that they were created in the Gods image.

In the Popol Vuh it is said that humans were made for the purpose of praising the gods. They were not made for keeping the earth the way it is or made just to be on Earth. In the Christian creation story humans were made to care for the earth. They were put into the Garden of Eden to care for it, and they went out onto Earth to care for everything that was created before the humans. God asked them to praise him and to obey his wishes, but that was not their reason for existence.

For these two stories there are not many similarities. One is that the earth and everything on it was created by the word of God. Meaning that the gods said let there be this and it appeared there, the gods did not manually create these things but mainly said that it should be there and it was so. This happens in both the Mayan creation story and the Christian story. Another similarity was that the earth did not start completely empty in either story. In the Popol Vuh there was water and wind to begin with as well as the gods. In the Christian creation story, in Genesis 1:2, it says that the earth was formless and empty, but later says that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. This would lead to saying that there was water on Earth and that the Spirit was a wind.

The Popol Vuh and the Christian creation story are two versions on how the world was made. The Christian creation story has one God that created everything in seven days all in his image. He created animals on land and in water and he never ate them or destroyed them because they couldn't praise him. He also created humans in his image, a man from dust and breath and a woman from the rib of the man. He created these humans once and never destroyed them entirely. In the story of Noah it explains that



God sent a flood but saved Noah and his family, as well as two animals of every kind. The Popol Vuh has many gods, one for each thing. They created animals to praise them, and since they couldn't praise the gods, they could be eaten. It took them multiple times to create humans. First mud and earth, then wood, and the final humans made out of corn. They are similar because they were created by word and by word alone, and because both started with wind and water.

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Aboriginal (and Theological) Insight on the Environment

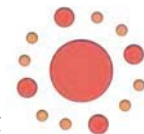
Kristopher Torres, Eagan, MN

Throughout the course of humanity it is certain that nearly everyone on Earth has put their faith - by means of insightful and passionate integrity through their regional and spiritual beliefs, as well as diverse and complex perspectives of logic and scientific reasoning - into their indigenous stories and myths of creation. Not all of these stories are the same. However, in nearly each story there is a puzzlingly incredible event in which the earth we inhabit unveils itself, bringing forth water in streams and sprouting fertile land in each hidden valley. Why is it that we believe these stories, the ones that most of us kept close as growing children? Is it because we grew up hearing these tales, passed down from generations before us? Or maybe we just seem to favor them, because they appeal to us in our creative minds? These are simplistic questions; they may have a straightforward sentence structure, but they are simple for every sort of indigenous people because they are easy to answer, not because they are easy to ask.

If I were to ask you, through a story, that a snake formed streams of gushing water by sliding on its belly across the land, what would someone living in the United States be likely to think? Perhaps something along the lines of: 'Has the serpent from the Garden of Eden, has Lucifer, suddenly decided to change and provide for the people? Has God given him a second chance?' Maybe you would think something completely different. It sounds incredibly ridiculous (and blasphemous) for many of us to share this identical warrant, for nearly every Christian who reads a copy of the Bible in the Book of Genesis will point out that, clearly, it was God who provided the waters of Earth. But again: not all creation stories are the same. It may be baffling and wayward for a majority of people in this country, and other places on Earth, to believe a snake created the first sign of a world of life just by sliding on its stomach. This myth, though, was indeed one of many profoundly simplistic stories for the people indigenous to the continent of Australia, who are better and more commonly known as the Aborigines.

The Aboriginal people are a group that embodies a most interesting culture. In this culture, it is more than likely these Australian-indigenous people do not govern naturally by human law. Strictly speaking, the Aboriginal people live according to the respect of The Dreamtime, the spiritual guidance of their universe. Through this, they establish their fundamentals of everyday society, preserving their environment, and assisting each other to keep these real and spiritual aspects of The Dreamtime alive.

The Aboriginal people see themselves as part of the land they live in. Through such a consequence, they willingly obligate themselves to contain the duty of protecting and preserving each of their diverse, particular 'countries'. There have been many arguments regarding observations of whether the Aborigines have a connection with their land at all. Although, there is a supplement of evidence that supports that the Aborigines are, true to their beliefs, using preservative environmental methods. An example of such a debate would be of Tim Flannery from the Australian Museum and a professor by the name of Rhys Jones. Flannery argues that the Aborigines have hunted many large animals into extinction and that their use of fire as a tool for their burning practices have increased the productiveness of the landscape in order to facilitate the killing of large herbivores. Jones, who lays claim to the term 'firestick farming', believes that the Aborigines have used this as a means to dramatically change and benefit the environment, by means of a new landscape but without the removal of herbivores. By



extension, the said herbivores actually return to new vegetation and do not permanently leave the previously burned areas.

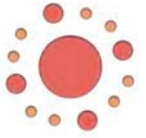
What these arguments nearly miss entirely though, is that the Aboriginal technology (including their fire and burning practices) has not remained the same way for 50,000 years. It has changed over time, specifically in the last 5,000 years (there was an increase in the Aboriginal population during this time 5,000 years ago). There have been changes in the ways that they have hunted and made tools for just such an occasion; new netting material for fishermen, arrow-tipped spears and edge-ground axes are a few examples. In 1839, Sir Thomas Mitchell documented the relationship of the Aborigines and their environment, stating that “fire, grass and kangaroos, and human inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia...fire is necessary to burn the grass...[to] form those open forests, in which we find the large forest kangaroo...the native applies the fire to the grass at certain seasons...that a young green crop may subsequently spring up, and so attract and enable him to kill or take the kangaroo with nets.” (pg. viii, *Aboriginal Environmental Impacts*, James L. Kohen, 1995, rep. 2003). So, quite surprisingly, researchers have found little connection between the Aboriginal burning practices, technological advancements, and the animal population; the evidence stated implies that such methods and changes hold true against the researchers that do not see the Aboriginal connection with the land.

It is quite clear though that the Aboriginal people have been putting much effort into their complex socioeconomic system of tribal cooperation to bring forth the full potential of a productive and healthy environment. Their method of ‘sustainable development’ has been essential for population growth, as it is the ability to regenerate resources that would be suitable for future generations to follow. It was through the aspects of The Dreamtime that the Aborigines supported the view of what they had accomplished over the years.

In ancient Aboriginal mythology The Dreaming, or Altjeringa (the “Dreamtime”), is a sacred ‘once upon a time’, time out of time where the ancestors of the Aborigines, the Totemic Spirits, formed the creation of the Earth. The expression ‘Dreamtime’ is more commonly used to refer to the ‘time before time’, or ‘the time of the creation of all things’. ‘Dreaming’ is used more to refer to an individual or group’s beliefs or their spirituality. The Dreamtime is the main story of things that have happened, how the universe came into being, how the human beings were made and how the Creator intended for humans to function and live within the universe.

It is certain, according to Aboriginal mythology, that the ‘Ancestor Spirits’ came to Earth in various forms, human and otherwise, and the land, plants and the animals were given their earthly forms as we know them today. These Spirits set forth, founding relationships between groups, individuals, and people and animals alike. Wherever they traveled or stopped across the land they created rivers, hills, and the likewise came into being. There are some stories that connect to the creation of these places.

As soon as they saw that they had completed their job, the Ancestor Spirits changed their forms once more into animals, stars, hills or other things. For the Aboriginal people, the past is still alive and vital today and will remain so into the future. The Ancestor Spirits and their powers have not yet gone, but are present in the forms into which they changed at the end of The Dreamtime, as described before. The legends of



The Dreamtime are handed down through generations, by storytellers and by totems of the different tribes. It involves secret rituals and rites. (Sometimes, they are classified as Men's or Women's Business.) Dancing is the commonly used special ritual to pass along the stories of creation to the next generation.

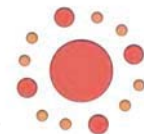
The Dreaming had set up the structures of societies rules for collective behavior and the ceremonies performed to facilitate and guarantee stability of life and land. The Dreaming governs the laws of the Aboriginal public, cultural teachings and how people are required to behave in their communities. The condition that is The Dreaming is met when inhabitants live according to law, and live traditionally. This means they carry on the traditions by singing songs, dancing, telling the stories of the past, and painting The Dreamings.

There is something potent that the Aborigines talk about called jiva, or guruwari; this is a special 'seed power' deposited and stored in the soil of the earth. In this world view of the Aborigines, every sacred or meaningful event, life process, or activity that happens at a particular place leaves behind a special mark, as plants leave their images with seeds. The shape of the land and its unseen marks resound the events and time of creation. All things in the natural world are meaningful, symbolic footprints of the Spirits whose actions created the world. Going with the same concept of a plant and a seed, the important meaning of an earthly location is tied into the memory of its derivation; this potency is what the Aboriginal people call the "dreaming of the derivation". In this dreaming resides the sacredness of the earth and its environment. This sacredness is so profound, yet it is very simple to understand. I can relate this concept not just through the eyes and faith of the Aborigines, but my own faith as well.

I would like to quote a phrase from my literature class teacher in one of the very first lessons I experienced as a junior year student. He told us "Profound Simplicity." A very simple statement, though not one person in the room understood what he meant by this. The teacher continued to explain that not only in literature but life itself, when something is so descriptive and so hard to grasp through the difficult sentences and events that you have to dig deeper to find out what it means, you do just that. Until you find your answer- eventually, the event or sentence would become subjects of second nature, so understandable that you felt like you knew it right from the very beginning and would also sometimes feel like a very big simpleton. What I learned from my literature teacher that day (and for many lessons, thereafter) made me think about my faith subconsciously as I filed out the door to my next class.

I began to realize that I had been delving too deeply in 'profound' thought of my spiritual faith, and the 'simplistic' part was something I wasn't finding. I was thinking so hard that the answer was shouting out to me, in front of my face. I realized it had to be God telling me, "Stop thinking for just a moment...start trusting your heart and spirit, reach out of yourself...no matter where you are or what you believe in, I'll be standing next to you, because you are a loved child of mine and no one will ever take that away from you." I suddenly said to myself, "You know, there's good, solid truth in that..." I found 'profound simplicity' to be a strong part of my faith. I want to extend that theme using my faith to compare to the Aborigine's.

The Aborigines are a people who one and alone follow a faith like no other person has ever experienced in this world; it is seen by most others on this earth as an incredibly



complex view of not only a spiritual aspect of life but environmentally sound. It is so simple for them to understand as it has been that way for over 50,000 years and passed down since then. With the indigenous population deteriorating, they carry old customs and faith with them. It would be a very disappointing loss to the world if the Aboriginal faith and the concept of The Dreaming were to be forgotten or cast wayward, their methods of protecting the environment and their sacred traditions only written in bits in history books. I have only been alive for 17 years, and with my experiences being a young adult, I feel that I have found my faith journey an understandable and enriching one. It is probably the same feeling as an Aboriginal boy's a century ago, who was my age, may have felt about his faith. I could probably never contain the true feelings or beliefs of The Dreaming self and if I were an Aborigine, I'd most likely think the same way about being a Christian.

When I plucked a copy of a religions and nature encyclopedia off of a shelf in the library and found my topic, I had this feeling that it was waiting for me. That's an interesting way to put it because the moment my eyes saw the title on the page in bold letter font, "**Aboriginal Dreamtime**", I read the contents and wrote the two words down in my notepad; I couldn't change my mind about it after that. It was much different than anything I had ever read or heard of before and I thought I would benefit from being more knowledgeable about a faith and culture that is not commonly studied, or discussed. I was right. I had never guessed that I could find a culture or faith that sees the world through a profoundly simplistic way. By seeing the world's environment in a hidden and simple yet reflective way in their faith of The Dreamtime, the Aborigines have committed themselves to a life dedicated to preserving and upholding nature in a respectful and equal manner through rituals and methods. This culture aids the environment to benefit and grow in a healthier manner. I agree with many methods they use for survival and giving back to the earth. I also stand with the fact that the Aborigines have taken care of their land by use of natural elements and phenomenon to transform and ripen it over time, entrusting that the land, as if it were a humble brother, would give them the resources needed to survive.

The earth and its vast environment are almost undoubtedly the ultimate and most beautiful creations. That, through the eyes of almost any creature on this planet, would be very true. Yet we still wonder, still have questions. How is it that both humans and animals are able to sustain life because a planet has just the right climate? How is our Earth tilted on its axis to effect seasons and other weather phenomenon? How do we persist to find renewable or reusable resources other than natural gas, so we may benefit without excess carbon dioxide filling our ozone layer and polluting the air? These and other questions have boggled minds for many years.

As for the Aborigines, they do not have the need to look at the world scientifically. By observing the earth and the sky, they develop the faith that is needed to simply understand the changes of their surroundings and adapt to them.

The Aborigine's Dreamtime faith is fascinating and one of deep connection to both land and soul. Their belief of The Dreaming, that embodies their being, bestows them with respect and honor of the Earth, and has a positive impact in the effort to preserve and protect it for future generations. This is a faith that should be shared, even on a minute scale, with other faiths across our planet. It is evident that, particularly in the United States, all Christian faiths could adopt and apply The Dreamtime philosophy to their



doctrine, as to acknowledge the need to care for and honor the Earth that God so generously effectuated for all of us. The unfortunate circumstance that is evident in attempting to research the Aboriginal Dreamtime, is that there is little knowledge of the Altjeringa, which regrettably dismisses its importance to the rest of the natural world. The recognition of this faith through research and cultivation seems relevant for our human race. It is a desire of mine personally, to see in my lifetime, some theological awareness and application of the Aboriginal Dreamtime to our society as whole. It would be superlative to realize this 'Profound Simplicity' is helping to facilitate a better understanding of creation, and a call to all Christians to elevate their demand to care for and honor the environment that has been bestowed upon them.

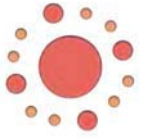
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Getting Closer

Britta Brolin, Centerville, MN

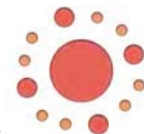
How do you view the Earth? Is it just a big ball of rock and water, or possibly a hot mass of sand and gas? I believe that Earth is a big circle of hope, full of water, mountains, plains, animals, and people; the Earth is a miracle. It is a shame that millions of people living in 2010 take this wonderful creation for granted. It seems as though we are fighting the natural flow of everything God has given us here on Earth. We have messed up the way animals are raised which is seen in *Fresh, The Movie*. Also, as humans, we need to recognize that God is our king and creator. He created us to take care of his precious Earth. And last, taking care of the Earth will give us all faith. God shows through all things beautiful and if we all focused on the important things in life, the simple gifts from God, maybe the depression and suicide rates would decline.

The first night at the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute we watched *Fresh, The Movie*. Our eyes were opened wildly at the sights and sounds of animals suffering in feed lots all over the world. These feed lots house animals, *ecoli* disease, poor sanitation, toxic wastes, pesticides, and hormones. Many companies have had to re-call their products due to *ecoli* outbreaks, which are very harmful to humans.

Moreover, farmers have almost been forced to spray their crops with chemicals for the reason that there is an exceedingly high demand of food. Corporations have taken away the traditional farms and replaced them with unhealthy, stressful factories. One of the farmers in the movie, Joel Salatin, stated that “you need to respect the design of nature;” which is exactly what he did. He began herding his animals naturally and let them roam; the animals became much happier and healthier. Respecting the animals and plants is respecting the Earth, and furthermore respecting God, and living to meet his expectations. Everyone should have been taught respect at a young age. As we grow up we would expect that our respect for the Earth will remain the same, but it has not. There is no reason for this occurrence and we need to find the true way of life, naturally.

I like to run up north at my cabin in Park Rapids, Minnesota. The lakes are beautiful and the folks are nice, but while running I notice trash scattered up and down the road in ditches. McDonald’s cups, plastic bags, beer cans and red Dairy Queen spoons are just a few of the gross morsels of trash I’ve picked up. This trash is killing many animals and plants, causing extinction. Why do people litter? God created the Earth for us; we should not be treating it with disrespect.

We look to God for strength and guidance; we also look at The Bible for these things. In the book of Genesis, in The New Testament, God said “let us make human kind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have domination over the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild animals of the Earth ... [let them] have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth” (Genesis 1: 26-27). God, our king, created the Earth for us to have and to use and to take care of. Humans are Gods royal subject; we were created to have dominion over everything else He created. Meaning God put us in charge of taking care of the Earth. Understanding our higher power can be extremely hard, many wrestle with “the problem of evil; if God is good, why does He allow suffering and death? But nature is death”(Professor Mary Lowe). There is no harm being done to us; the Earth will be



what we make of it. For some of us, believing in a king that can't physically be seen is a deep and often frustrating idea. Learning that He is our king and that He created everything on Earth for us is mind boggling. God wants good things for us and He will never give us more than we can handle in life. We need to use the amazing resources He has given us to our advantage by not throwing it away or taking it for granted. We will destroy the planet if we don't make changes. God has set rules for us in the Bible and they should be followed because He is our king.

To speak to us, God shows through all things created; all things that He sees to be good. It is fun to seek out God because we can find him everywhere! Psalm 18 stresses how we call out to God. This psalm proves that He is king. "David, the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of [his] song to the Lord." David said that "[he] [calls] upon the lord, who is worthy to be praised, so [he] shall be saved from [his] enemies." Psalm (18, verse 3) We are Gods people and should rejoice in this divine romance. God saves us and we must save the Earth. Learning more about God and the environment at Augsburg College opened my eyes and gave me a new sense of hope; it gave me hope for the future. Not enough people are recognizing the damages being done to the Earth. In time, this vicious cycle of killing and building starts to affect the people doing it.

People often times become depressed because they aren't connected with God in places they should be. Such as in nature, being out in nature and seeing animals or sitting in a garden is fulfilling. Recognizing that God is tucked inside all places reminds us that we always have someone there watching and guiding us, and giving us hope and strength when we need it the most or even when we don't. Angela Thomas, author of *A Beautiful Offering*, explained how people need God, The Holy Spirit. She observed a child at her son's middle school who was given the name "Sunshine" due to his not so pleasant attitude. She realized "That the kid just needs Jesus. That empty kids needed to fall in love with the only person who will fill his soul" (Thomas, 37).

If we could recognize that when everything becomes too hard, empty, numb, or if we feel lost, abandoned, or afraid then obviously we are lacking the power of the presence of God. Becoming closer with God through his Creations on Earth is a satisfying way to connect with Him.

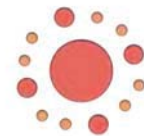
Through all of my studies and prayers, I have learned that working with the Earth is one of the best ways to become closer with God. Respecting the Earth is respecting God and I want to show my respect for Him in every way possible. But all of us working together is the only way to solve economic problems, such as feed lots and pollution; there must be a way to end the turmoil being done to the Earth. At the Augsburg College Youth Theology Institute I learned to better myself through environmental stewardship and that respecting the Earth can not only help prevent pollution, but can also help surrounding others and me.

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Professor Mary Lowe, Section Three: The Environment and Christian Theology, June 16, 2010



Appreciate God's Creation

Lauren Windhorst, Cannon Falls, MN

You're walking down a country road, a nature trail, or a heavily wooded forest. You hear a silence away from the everyday world that fills the space, a stillness that is full of peace. Perhaps you are thinking about the beauty surrounding you and the fact that God designed it. The natural beauty that we are blessed with, but that we don't always see, we aren't always exposed to the natural beauty created by God. You walk along and continue on your way. Other sounds begin to penetrate into your thoughts: crickets, birds and the wind rustling through trees.

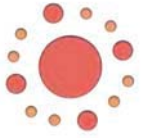
God created Earth and all that is good in it. God also created man, and in turn he created woman directly from man. Creating the human race, Eve from Adam. God gave humans the Ten Commandments to follow, and the power of free-will, granting them the will to do what they like, with themselves and with the world they live in. Then, man began creating things for himself though they were not always good for Earth, the things they did with their creations were not always helpful to God's original creation of paradise. It says in the Bible that God placed humans on Earth to tend for his creation, and that he loves both the earth and those inhabiting it. So if we are wise, we should respect God's creation and all that is in it.

The towns and large cities that we travel through or live in these modern ages are useful, I believe that just about all of us can agree to that. With buildings built tall to conserve money and space, and apartments crowded in next to each other. With Wal-marts and Super Targets surrounding strip malls and mega outlets to satisfy our needs to survive in this materialistic world. On our way to our jobs or school we hardly notice how much time and thought our material world takes up in our lives. We are in such a hurry, such a rush to go about our everyday routine that we don't take much time to appreciate God and his creation, or what's left of it.

Many environmentalists have noted the decline of nature's value, noticing the harmful things that have been done to the Earth. Global Warming has been a huge matter of debate, creating conflict and dispute throughout the world. We've discovered now that our car exhaust fumes have played a part in the problem, yet we knew before that they did have some sort of harmful effects on the environment, though we were not all exposed to this information. For example, we continue to use an excessive amount of cars because that is what we depend on to get around the world we live in today.

When you're standing in the check-out line at a store and you see an item or a sign that says "Go Green", what do you think about? Would you consider buying it, and if your answer is 'yes' then why would you consider buying it? Is it trendy, good-looking, just appealing? Or is it to show the world that you care and that you have played a part in "going green"? Is it just because you want to flaunt the fact that you are doing something, no matter how small it is? Do you feel guilty and therefore wish to push that guilt aside and buy something that is not harmful to the environment?

Take a look at the world around us and consider what we have already done, what we have made for ourselves out of God's creation. Shouldn't we have done something sooner? "Going Green" now seems to be coming a bit too late, with the fact that we continue to make and use products that are harmful to the environment. We choose a



simple method after we realize how much harm we have caused to lessen our personal guilt. So we buy something that says it will send the money to help our failing environment while our material world and economy continues to rise.

Unfortunately, some people do not truly understand the extent of the harm we as humans have done to God's creation. We, as human beings, are generally greedy in our endeavors. Some do not recognize the extreme gift we have been given. If they are one of the billions of people who live in smog filled cities they don't usually see what parts of God's creation are left. They don't see the green in the trees, or see the millions of stars at night, or hear the quiet stillness in a nature walk. Exposure to nature creates a better appreciation for God's wonderful creation. For someone who has not been exposed to this, they are not aware of the beauty that we have been given by God.

This is not a declaration saying that city dwellers are ignorant, or uncaring about the environment, not at all. Instead it is stating the fact that they are less apt to understand and truly embrace the beauty surrounding them. I stand firm in my belief that those who have been exposed have a fuller appreciation for God and his design. Those who have lived in a small town where corn fields are abundant, or who have lived in the country or on a farm know how fragile and wonderful God's creation truly is. Even if those people just grew up there as a child and then moved to a large city they still have that underlying foundation of understanding and appreciation of God's gift to us.

Usually people who live in cities and have lived there all their lives are unaware, unknowing of God's wonderful creation. They are oblivious to the perfection around them, of nature and all the wonders it holds for them. They do not know the extreme gift of grace that they have been given. In the NIV translation of the creation story in the Bible, Genesis 1:28 says "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.'" These words were spoken to Adam and Eve, giving them power over all the Earth and the animals on it. God even goes as far to say "subdue it", to control those animals and all things on Earth. He says that we have control over it, but that we must also have respect for it.

We should also consider the amount of exposure that younger generations have to nature. These generations have not had quite the same experiences as the older population. In fact, they do not have the same amount of access as older generations have had. Instead of people going into agriculture, environmental studies or farming we have more people going into engineering, business and the sciences. Though these are obviously very important jobs we have made them more prominent in our world today. As a human race we are racing to be the best, the fastest, at whatever it is we are doing. There is much competition between companies, corporations and countries in general to get to the top of the technology food chain. College students, high school students and especially middle school children are exposed to the materialistic environment that we have created.

The reason we have more and more technology based jobs and careers is because of our dependence on technology. True, it has much to offer us, it has strongly benefited our way of life. The agricultural needs are still the same, though we generally need more food as we have a larger population, but the amount of people in agriculture is less than even just several years ago. Farming has switched into large co-operations that are built



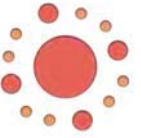
for mass production and mass efficiency. Family farms, big and small are going under because they just can't compete with the technology that's been created to grow our foods quicker and better.

As the daughter of a farmer I have witnessed the hardship and strain this puts on a family farm. Most farmers are barely scraping by, with debts from their crops and farm machinery needed to produce any profit at all. These small town farmers know the true worth of a penny, of a kernel of corn. Most of the farmers I know practice sustainable farming, including my family. According to the UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, sustainable farming integrates three main goals- "environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity." In short, sustainable farming turns away from large profitable co-operations for quick and easy food, instead leaning back on the traditional farming that was done in the past. This includes less or no medications for animals, and less or no chemicals to spread over crops to kill pests.

I grew up in the country on 160 acres of land that my father and grandfather before him owned and farmed. We own beef cattle and plant and harvest soybeans, corn, and alfalfa hay, most of which goes back into our cycle by feeding to the cattle during the cold winter months. During the spring, summer, and autumn months the cattle are left to graze on 80 acres of natural prairie grass, which is a huge part of sustainable farming. As a young girl I remember helping my father by watching the gate, or moving cattle from one pasture to the other. I recollect many instances during calving season where I was a part of the young calves' new lives. I got to watch them grow up, some of them to eventually be sold, and some to become mothers themselves. I can also recall how happy it made me feel to be a part of the food cycle, to know that these animals I helped raise would bless someone's dinner plate, even just their fast-food stop. I was exposed to the blessing God gave us my entire childhood, and it has left me with a very strong foundation in my faith and appreciation for God's creation.

Unfortunately, many people do not have this luxury. Many people also don't know that the chicken nuggets or cheeseburger they're eating probably came from a huge farm instead of a small sustainable one. With the animals in large numbers cramped in small spaces, chickens in small cages with no sunlight or room to walk around or grass to eat. That the beef being consumed was once fed cheap corn feed that may have even contained beef. The food we now eat the majority of the time is not raised naturally, mostly on unsustainable farming. The people eating these foods are either unaware of this fact, or perhaps they just don't care. Either way, they are probably uninformed about much of the food they consume everyday.

Not only should we inform everyday people with this, we should also put down a strong foundation in our youth. To further enhance the minds of our young people we need to introduce nature in the classroom, and continue the teaching throughout the entire school year. Immersing students of all ages in the natural environment that is responsible for all that we have today. For church-goers and Sunday school, classes should focus on God and his creation of the world. That even though we have been given reign over all he made for us, that we also need to respect and take care of what we have left in this world. These young minds are very important to the survival of our world because the younger generation is, after all, this world's future.



We need to bring to light the seriousness of what we are losing as a people, as human beings. We need to inform people, help them become aware of God and his creation. The environment should be more well-known, explored by the minds of more than just a select few individuals in the world. The importance of our environment should be recognized. The fate of the Earth lies in our hands, in the hands of every human being no matter their career or occupation. Just understanding and being exposed to the environment is enough to create a better appreciation for the beauty it holds.

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Loving Creation as Neighbor

Katelyn Danelski, Sturgeon Lake, MN

“O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the world is full of your creatures.” (Psalm 104:24, NRSV) God’s creation abounds, and God formed *all* of creation “in wisdom.” Too often Christians view humanity as a superior, separate creation rather than a beautiful part of *the* creation, one that continues to evolve today. To understand the role humans play from a Christian and biblical perspective, it is necessary to step away from this anthropocentric lens and step into an understanding where all of God’s creation, not just humans, is recognized and loved as neighbor. This may be accomplished by recognizing the mistreatment of creation and the motivations for the abuse, and by examining biblical passages regarding the relationship humanity is meant to have with creation.

Before seeking to live in relationship with creation, motivations for abusing it must be examined and understood. Modern day culture, predominantly that of the Western world, has fostered a very anthropocentric and individualistic culture. Lusting after money and possessions, seeking personal happiness at the expense of others, and embracing blissful ignorance are unfortunate norms for much of the population. This way of living is harmful to people when it is lived out individually, but it is arguably even more damaging when lived out by humanity as a whole; the damage here involves not only people but also everything else in God’s creation.

In viewing themselves as conquerors and masters of creation, people have exploited nature, resources, and animals. Aldo Leopold, a distinguished environmentalist in the early 20th century, wrote,

In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows...just what and who is valuable...in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves. (Leopold, 171)

Leopold goes on to describe a situation in the 1930s in which farmers used methods that maximized their profit and abused the land. The amount of soil and woods in the land decreased and became less healthy. The farmers thought they knew who was valuable (themselves) and what was not (the land). In the end, the land they needed was no longer usable, and they had indeed “defeated themselves.”

In today’s world, it is clear that assuming the role of conqueror has caused considerable damage to the earth and its inhabitants. Much of modern interaction with creation resembles that of the farmers described by Leopold, only on a much larger scale. People are changing the climate through greenhouse gas emissions, and the climate affects nearly everything on earth. Species are going extinct, and the most marginalized people are being harmed (i.e. sinking islands due to rise in water levels). It is predicted that by mid-century 150 million people will be on the move at any given moment due to environmental problems; this is more than all of the refugees created by all of the wars of the 20th century. The ice sheets of Greenland normally experience one major earthquake per year; in 2005, there were thirty-six major earthquakes. All of this destruction and chaos is related to climate change (McKibben). People are also invading



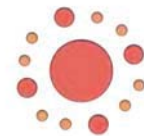
and destroying the habitats of wildlife, altering ecosystems, and polluting the waters around them. Volumes could be written concerning humanity's disregard for the earth.

There is no denying people have had a phenomenally negative impact on the environment, and many Christians, both knowingly and unknowingly, have contributed to the damage. McKibben reports, "Seventy-five percent of American Christians believe this statement can be found in the bible, 'God helps those who help themselves.'" (This statement is actually from Ben Franklin) The corrupt values of modern society have infiltrated the thinking of many Christians. By adhering to these selfish values, people have corrupted their own world. And what is the core motivation for this? Nothing more, and nothing less, than believing they are, as individuals and as a whole, the most important thing on earth.

Another motivation for mistreating creation originates with Christians carrying out their own will disguised as God's will. Especially in its Western form, Christianity revolves overwhelmingly around humans, declaring them the most important part of the world. (White, 4) "Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except Zoroastrianism), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends." (White, 4) Some Christians have misinterpreted and misapplied their Scriptures. This "dualistic" way of thinking creates a black and white interpretation of humans and the rest of creation, implying that humans are completely separate from the rest of the world. "We continue to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in a context of Christian axioms." (White, 3) With Christian axioms having such a tremendous influence on all people, it is especially significant that they have treated creation unjustly. Some Christians have taken the notion of humans being "created in God's image" too far, and while they are by no means solely responsible for the environmental problems and harmful ideals of today, they have contributed to the issues.

Perhaps the most dangerous ideal concerning the environment that is enforced by some Christians is that creation needn't be cared for because earth isn't their permanent home. "It is often said that many Christians – particularly evangelical Christians – don't care for the environment because they are so focused on end times. If God is going to come and destroy all of this anyway, why should we invest our energies in preserving it?" (Neff, 35) A relatively small but influential percentage Christians believe there will be a rapture in end times in which God will take the righteous to heaven and the rest will be destroyed (it is believed, of course, that the unrighteous will spend eternity in hell). If one believes he or she is living righteously under these precepts, then why be concerned about the earth? This is an unfortunate, misinformed sense of Scripture, and it often leads to severe mistreatment of creation. (Of course, not all Christians who believe in the rapture abuse creation) Under such a view, it is evidently not of value to create a cleaner world for future generations let alone for the sake of God or for the sake of creation itself.

There are countless motivations for abusing creation ranging from the role as conqueror to simple ignorance, and creation has been mistreated and damaged in numerous ways. People have a responsibility to the world around them, and those who claim the Christian faith should seek to understand the relationship people are meant to have with creation by studying the Bible and applying the biblical messages to their lives.



What, then, does the Bible have to say about humanity's relationship and connection to the rest of creation? The natural place to begin is with the first of two creation *stories* found in Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

Allowing two different versions of the creation story to stand side by side suggests that the ancient writers were not interested in defining precisely how the world began in a scientific sense. Rather, they were interested in exploring larger questions of meaning and purpose through multiple perspectives on the same event of creation. (O'Day and Petersen, 4)

Genesis does not provide a historical account of creation, and it should not be interpreted as describing literal events. In a commentary, Walter Brueggemann, who once held the position of Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, wrote of the creation stories, "The claim made is not a historical claim but a theological one about the character of God who is bound to the world and about the world which is bound to God." (Brueggemann, 26) Thus, it is not especially important how or when creation came into existence; what matters is the message these texts share, theologically, regarding creation, and they should be examined and studied with this understanding in mind.

Each story explores different "questions of meaning and purpose," and the first account has a great deal to offer regarding humanity's relationship with creation, whereas the second deals primarily with "Original Sin." Thus, only the first account will be examined here.

The first account is found in Genesis 1:1-2:4 in which God creates all things from pre-existing material. "The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2, NRSV) There are "six days" of creating; God speaks, "Let there be...," things come into existence, and God sees "it is good." "The word good does not mean perfect...it carries a sense of purposefulness and beauty." (Lutheran Study Bible, 49) On the "sixth day," God creates humans in God's image. "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27, NRSV) God then blesses humankind and gives them, "...dominion...over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28b, NRSV) God speaks all of creation, including humans, into existence.

God does not tell humans to wreck havoc and live as they please; God gives them *dominion*, and this implies not the role of conqueror but the role of steward. "The steward, as the Bible develops this metaphor, is a member of the community whom he or she serves." (Hall, 20) Being a steward involves acting with care and compassion and is not concerned with power or hierarchy. Humans are meant to be *members* of creation, not a superior, separate entity. As previously mentioned, God and the world are bound to one another; a trusting, mutual relationship is involved. God created people in God's image but does not force them into submission. "The grace of God is that the creature whom he has *caused* to be, he now *lets* be." (Brueggemann, 28)

Even though God has the *power* to *force* people into acting according to God's will, that is not what is done. In a similar manner, even though people have the *power* to *force*



much of creation into feeding the selfishness of society, this is not what should be done. If God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things, lets humans, who are a mere *part* of creation and cannot even begin to understand God, live freely, then certainly humans should deeply respect the rest of creation. "Participation, not domination; trusteeship, not possession; accountability, not mastery; this is the way of stewardship." (Hall, 22) God participates, trusts, and accounts for people, and God's relationship with humans should be the model for their relationship with the rest of creation.

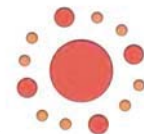
After God creates everything, God rests on the "seventh day." "So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work he had done in creation." (Genesis 2:3, NRSV) This day becomes "hallowed," or sacred, and is known as the Sabbath. "God does not spend the seventh day in exhaustion but in serenity and peace." (Brueggemann, 35) God sees creation is good and rests in peace about creation; God does not work until the point of exasperation. A parallel may be drawn here regarding humanity's relationship with the rest of creation; people should not work the land and animals into exhaustion, and time is meant to be taken to revere creation, for it has "purposefulness and beauty." Revering creation might include taking a walk, capturing photographs, watching a sunset, gardening, or any other form of pleasured activity outdoors.

While revering creation might not involve active plans of sustainability or conservation, it does foster a deep love for the surrounding world. Examples of this are found in the "Creation Psalms." The author of Psalm 8 wrote, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3-4, NRSV) The author is in awe of the wonders of God and feels appropriately small in comparison. Just as God rested and "hallowed" the day, people should take time to admire God's creation.

In short, the first account in Genesis calls for a loving relationship between humanity and the rest of creation, one in which humans are stewards, not conquerors, and take time to appreciate the wonders of God. Although the stories of creation occur in Genesis, it is not the only book in the Bible that has something to say about humanity's relationship with the world around them; there are numerous passages that could be examined, and among the most significant is Psalm 104.

Psalm 104 is one of the "Creation Psalms," and it continually makes note of all God has created. "You set the earth on its foundations... You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills." (Psalm 104:5a, 10, NRSV) The Psalmist rightly gives glory to God for all he sees and experiences. The Psalmist appears to be in complete awe of all God has done, and he writes of how deeply he wishes to praise God. "I will sing to the lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being." (Psalm 104:33, NRSV) People should follow in the footsteps of this Psalmist and acknowledge, by name, what different parts of creation surround them. One way to praise God for creation is by taking care of it; God created with intentional purpose, and we are meant to respect that.

With further examination, it can be seen that Psalm 104 involves more than just a call to praise God and revere creation. While it makes no mention of dominion, it does convey humanity in an important way. "People go out to their work and to their labor until the



evening.” (Psalm 104:24) People are not given a distinct role here; they are portrayed the same as the young lions, birds, trees, and the sun and the moon are portrayed in the preceding verses. The lions “roar for their prey,” and humans “go out to their work and labor.” This is in some contrast to Psalm 8. “Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:5) Perhaps Psalm 104 stands to remind people that although they are entrusted with dominion, they mustn’t forget they are a part of the same creation they are to have dominion over, thus reinstating their role as steward.

Lastly, Psalm 104 has something to say about not being too serious. “There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.” (Psalm 104:26, NRSV) “This can also be translated as ‘whom you made in order to laugh at it!’ God delights in creation. Laughter and joy are part of God’s creative order.” (Lutheran Study Bible, 962) Although people should be in awe of God and God’s wonders and should live in responsible, caring stewardship, Psalm 104 shows they should also experience joy in their hearts for creation. Watching a puppy chase its tail, discovering formations in the clouds, and other simple, joyful acts are part of the relationship. Finding enjoyment in creation helps one to better revere and care for it. In summary, Psalm 104 teaches humans to praise God for creation, reminds them they are a part of, not separate from, the world around them, and lets them know it is right to delight in creation.

God’s creation is a marvelous gift and community, one of which humans are blessed to be members. Humanity’s motivations for abusing the world are selfish and unbiblical. Those who claim the Christian faith have a calling to be stewards of creation and to revere the wonders of God. The Bible demands a response to creation, and Christians ought to love creation as neighbor as intended by God. Baba Dioum once said, “In the end we will conserve only what we love. We will love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.” (Dioum) By engaging with the messages of the Bible and applying the messages to their lives, Christians may come to understand, love, and conserve the beauty that is all around them and may recognize they are, and have always been, a part of this beauty too.

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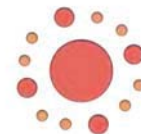
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The Call to Care for Creation

Laura Grobner, Ellendale MN

Every twenty minutes, one of God's creatures is extinguished from this earth, as a direct result of humankind's destruction of the habitats of fellow earthlings. The black bear, the wild fern, even the all-too-common mosquito, all of these creatures are of equal importance in maintaining the delicate balance of our planet, a balance which humankind often completely disregards. In this heavily industrialized, modernized culture, anthropocentric views permeate everyday life; animals and plants are assigned value based on their worth to our society. This view of our relation to the rest of the world is distorted and destructive; unfortunately it is a view that is common among Christians.

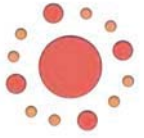
If one is to look to the Bible as a guide, it is found that God wishes for us, as his stewards, to care for the rest of creation. If the Bible gives us the guidance to be stewards of the earth, to play a role in God's plan for the world, why have we lost our way? Why have we placed ourselves, as humans, above the rest of creation?

The role of steward is something Christians want to fulfill. We talk about it, and we sing about it in contemporary hymns, but we do not have the framework to guide us in this role. We speak the words from Genesis: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it' ..." (Genesis 1:27-28 NIV). And we interpret this as proof that God created humans in his image to rule over the rest of creation; He gave us dominion over the earth. But does this dominion justify our pillaging of natural resources, our poisoning of water supplies, our disregard for the rights of all other creatures? There is no way we can reconcile these actions with the ideals of stewardship.

Further into the book of Genesis, God places man in the Garden of Eden "... to work it and to take care of it" (Genesis 2:15 NIV). This is a very important verse, the importance of which is often sadly overlooked. When looking to justify the exploitive practices of our society, some Christians cite the dominion over creation given in chapter one. But with this dominion comes the command to *care* for creation.

This earth does not belong to us; we do not own it. As said in Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1 NIV). God created all of creation and gave it to us as a gift, but with this amazing gift comes an amazing amount of responsibility. We owe a responsibility to our creator to use this gift with care, to appreciate it. We also have a certain obligation to the creation itself, for God created us in his image to care for the rest of the earth.

"God saw all that he made, and it was very good ..." (Genesis 1:31 NIV). In His infinite wisdom God created all of creation; if all of creation is God's work then He is most certainly saddened by humanity's continued destruction of it. As said before, we are causing the extinction of other species at the astounding rate of three species per hour. Deforestation, soil erosion, pollution—the list of environmental problems plaguing the planet is extensive.



Along with being “good” in the eyes of God, all creation is holy, for the spirit of God is what gives everything life. “When you send forth your spirit, they are created ...” (Psalm 104:30 NIV). Therefore how can we, as Christians, justify disregarding the rights of the rest of God’s creation? Wendell Berry points out that, because of this holiness, our destruction of nature is “the most horrid blasphemy. It is flinging God’s gifts into His face, as if they were of no worth beyond that assigned to them by our destruction of them” (Berry 308).

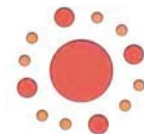
All life on this earth is interconnected. As humans, we have attempted to separate our species from nature, to live above the rest of creation. As a result our connection with life is broken. To heal this brokenness we need to broaden our perception of our connectedness to all life through deeper scrutiny of Biblical passages and the resulting weaknesses of the Christian framework. We need to go further and apply that scrutiny to the overemphasis of the role of science in the ecology movement; we need to face the “really subversive element of ecology,” which is interrelatedness. We cannot continue to interpret Biblical passages and scientific reassurances in a way that justifies our failures. We need to consider the messages of peoples and cultures whose frameworks for stewardship will guide us to assume our rightful role.

The American Indians had a working framework for stewardship; their view of caring for Mother Earth was not anthropocentric, rather it was life centric. The American Indians did not have the concept of ownership of land and all its plants and animals. They did not see themselves owning the land any more than the buffalo or the eagle or the elk owned it. The Indians made use of their particular gifts, such as human intelligence and physical abilities, to kill animals and harvest plants for food. And the most important step—which they strove never to forget—was to thank the animals and the plants, the rain and the sun, for providing for them, for giving them life.

Black Elk, a warrior and medicine man of the Oglala Sioux offers this vision of the meaning of life. He says, “It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one spirit” (Neihardt 1). Let this passage help us to remember that God gives *everything* life. If we can remember this we may avoid just feeling impressed with our personal successes, all that we own and all that we accomplish. The Indians saw private ownership—almost without exception—as a way to poverty, not to riches.

Walking Buffalo, a Stoney Indian, has words which may help guide us back to understanding God’s plan for us: “Hills are more beautiful than stone buildings, you know, living in a city is an artificial existence. Lots of people hardly ever feel real soil under their feet, see plants grow except in flower pots, or get far enough beyond the street light to catch the enchantment of a night sky studded with stars. When people live far from scenes of the Great Spirit’s making, it’s easy for them to forget his laws” (McLuhan 23). In today’s industrialized world, that is precisely what happens; people forget that the laws of nature, that govern the animals and plants, apply to humankind as well. Humans depend on the soil, the trees, and the sun just as much as a bear or a coyote.

When missionaries worked to convert the Indian to Christianity it resulted in the loss of the very things we now know we *need* to care for the earth. The Great Spirit was understood and held in the deepest reverence by the Indians through their relationships



with each other and their homeland. They spoke courteously and respectfully of the land, of the animals, of all of creation. They saw nothing good about imposing their will upon the environment. If—after hundreds of years of ignoring their wisdom—we can still learn how to listen to the trees, the wind, and all of nature, we too can experience these relationships. Therein lies the hope that we can turn around the destruction of nature and, ultimately, ourselves.

As Christians we hold the highest responsibility: we are called to nurture and preserve all of God's creation, which has been entrusted in our care. We are called to be stewards of this earth, in partnership with God. The way the Indian accepted this great challenge was by *loving* the earth and all things of the earth. He knew that if his heart strayed away from nature his heart became hard; if there was lack of respect for growing, living things this would lead to the same lack of respect for humans.

How will we carry out our responsibilities to our Mother Earth? By walking in our neighborhoods, canoeing down a great river, sending emails with sobering statistics, messing up our cars' exteriors with inspirational bumper stickers, studying, pausing, listening, listening, and more listening. Who we are and who we will become cannot be separated from where and how we live.

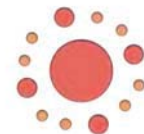
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The Final Judgment: Continuing God's Environmental Work in the Face of Adversity

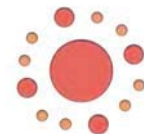
Will Howitz, Shoreview, MN

"If I knew the world were going to end tomorrow I would plant a tree," said Martin Luther, the German theologian who inspired the Protestant Reformation. His words go against what many Christians believe regarding the book of Revelations, the final book in the Bible. According to a poll taken by Time magazine, approximately 59% of Americans believe that Revelations spells out God's final judgment when the world will undergo seven years of destruction and apocalyptic events (Rossing 72). Unfortunately, many of these people, therefore, see no reason to maintain or care for the environment due to the inescapable cataclysm. Though it is possible that this interpretation of Revelations may be true, it doesn't pardon the Christian populous for ignoring God's calling for them to be environmental stewards. It is through the books of Genesis, Romans, and Revelation that God calls us to care for His creation no matter what the future may hold.

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, discusses God's Creation and His peoples' role in it. Starting with the first Creation story, God places a heavy burden on man. "Then God said, 'And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small'" (Genesis 1: 26, Good News Translation). Through His statement God charges us with "power" over His creatures. When someone is given power, many times it leads to violence and destruction, but God's intention is quite the opposite. He places his faith in us to act as He would if He were to reside on planet earth. It is this bond of trust He extends to us that we should not break. God's Creation is His gift to us and we do not have the right to violate it. Even if the world is doomed, God would not want us to be the harbingers of environmental catastrophe. Later in Genesis, God asserts His position when He speaks to us directly. "'Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals'" (Genesis 1: 28, Good News Translation). This remark holds extraordinary weight because it is spoken with the intent that we, His people, make doubly sure to take care of Creation and utilize it to benefit our survival as a species. He expects us to expand with the aid of His Creation. Destroying it would only counteract His divine plan.

During the second Creation story, God is even more explicit about His plans for our role in Creation. "Then the Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it" (Genesis 2: 15). In this example, the Garden of Eden is a metaphor for all of God's Creation and once introduced that way, it is clear that we are not meant to exploit Creation based solely upon a prediction of cataclysm. Instead, God's Garden has been given to us in the form of diverse plant and animal life. Caring for it is our purpose, destroying it would be equivalent to breaking an oath. Ultimately, the book of Genesis dictates God's will that we take the task granted to us and honor it in its entirety by being environmental stewards rather than polluters.

Romans, the sixth book of the New Testament, replaces God as the informant with Paul who sends messages to God's people that call for a stronger relationship between them and God's Creation. A beautiful illustration of this comes from an early passage of the Romans text. "Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal

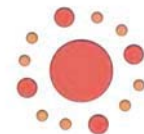


power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things God has made” (Romans 1: 20). This statement from Paul expresses the need for humans to realize and truly understand that God’s Creations are not just multiple clay molds set down upon earth to live out their times. There is a piece of God that goes into every one of His works. That is the idea that Paul is attempting to get across to us. Even though an apocalypse may soon be upon us, it certainly is not appropriate for us to decide that the rest of God’s Creation is less worthy of life than we are, or His presence and guidance. Perhaps the strongest call Paul makes to God’s people to reform their beliefs regarding the environment is during his discussion of God’s future Creation:

“I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. All of creation waits with longing for God to reveal his children. For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth” (Romans 8: 18-22).

Paul’s words instill a sense of domain amongst God’s people. The written words tell us that Creation is intended to be directed by God, not by those that make it up, which when looked at under a magnifying glass, indicates that we need to preserve it the way it is. Perhaps the most important aspect of this passage is the final statement. It describes Creation as an ever-growing and constantly evolving organism, if you will. Not only that, but the “pain of childbirth” stresses that Creation has only just begun which leads us to believe that it is intended to last far longer than any of God’s people could possibly imagine. Thus, it makes plenty of sense for us to continue to care for God’s Creation until our timely deaths. It would be pointless and irresponsible for us to decimate the environment if its destruction is not meant to arrive for an undeterminable number of years. Lastly, Paul makes a final push in order to help us realize the importance of safeguarding the environment. “We have many parts in the one body, and all these parts have different functions. In the same way, though we are many, we are one body in union with Christ, and we are all joined to each other as different parts of one body” (Romans 12: 4-5). What Paul is trying to convey is how everything on earth is intertwined and connected. God’s Creation is made up of various creatures and plant life. Each form has its place and works with the others to set out a sustainable life for itself and the others. Pollution and other forms of environmental devastation would only serve to break the links between species, leading to a collapse of the food chain. This may unintentionally lead to our own demise. God’s Creation is here to stay and maintaining it to the best of our abilities will insure our preservation in His kingdom.

Revelation, the last book of the Bible, can be interpreted to confirm that the duty of God’s people is to preserve His Creation despite its adjoining cataclysmic interpretation. During the second to last chapter of Revelations, the story centers on God’s intentions for His Creation. “And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: ‘Now God’s home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God’” (Revelations 21: 2-3). Though not directly stating when Creation’s destruction may come, God does reveal to His people that He intends to be



with us and work around us to aid us in our times of pain and suffering. God's promise to join us on earth is strong proof of the fact that He wants His Creation grown, expanded, and prepared for His arrival. God would not come to live with His people if they would allow His Creation to decay and fade to nonexistence. The second chapter of Revelations gives a glimpse of yet another glory that is to come. "'To those who win the victory I will give the right to eat the fruit of the tree of life that grows in the garden of God'" (Revelations 2: 7). Tying into the second Creation story of Genesis, God offers His people a place in the Garden of Eden if they follow Him faithfully. Only by caring for the environment around us can we ever hope to return to the Garden. Leaving God's Creation to rot destroys any possibility for survival without His Garden and prevents us from finding a new livelihood and relationship with God. God would not dare offer His Garden to us if we could not care for the one in which we currently reside.

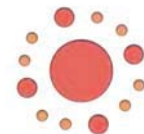
Finally, the last chapter of Revelation discusses God's plans for the planet earth. "The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb and flowing down the middle of the city's street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of nations" (Revelations 22: 1-2). This passage illustrates God's objective for His Creation. When He and His Kingdom arrive on earth, the healing waters that feed the tree of life will serve to regenerate the environment and correct the damage that has been done to it. However, what this means is that God intends to reside with us on earth. We cannot assume that the apocalypse is going to come to wipe things out and that is, therefore, all the reason we need to put the environment at the bottom of our priority list. God's Creation will be healed in time, but He expects us to care for it as best as we can until such a time when God tells us otherwise. That is our duty as environmental stewards.

Although Revelation has been interpreted to mean that God will send an apocalypse as His final judgment, He does not intend for His people to decimate the environment based on that prediction. Instead, through the books of Genesis, Romans, and Revelation, God illustrates His intention for us to act as His environmental stewards. The earth we inhabit is the only one we know. By polluting it, we shorten the lives of God's Creation and the lives of our descendents and ourselves. The book of Revelation should be our wake-up call that the damage we are doing to the environment is going against God's call for us to be environmental stewards. As Christians, we need to take time everyday to care for God's Creation and if we all do our part to preserve it, we will certainly grow closer to God, our communities, and our planet.

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Our Purpose

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“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” Genesis 1:28. This verse has been a great source of debate for many Christians. What did God mean when He gave humans “dominion” over all of creation? According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the word dominion means “sovereign or supreme authority.” In other words, God gave humans complete rule over all of creation. This is where the debate begins. In today’s society, natural resources, such as oil, are being heavily exploited. In 2009, the United States alone used up 18,686.22 barrels a day, ranking our country the number one consumer of petroleum. Exhausting natural resources can’t be the way Christians are supposed to be taking care of creation. I believe that God meant for humans to have dominion in the way of stewardship, not in an exploitative role.

Unfortunately, Christians have interpreted the Bible in many different ways and often disagree on what certain passages are really saying. According to Marcus Borg, there are three main questions about the Bible: What is the Bible’s origin? What authority does the Bible have? How can Christians interpret the Bible? The origin, or foundation, of the Bible can be seen in both hard and soft forms. With the hard form, it is believed that, since the Bible is a divine product made from God, all that is written in the Bible is the absolute will of God. This means that everything written must be understood in a strictly literal fashion. The soft form, on the opposite side of the spectrum, is very lenient in its interpretation. Through the soft form, the origin of the Bible is through God speaking to people and they, in turn, write out his word. This can lead to a freer way of following God’s word, where metaphorical interpretation is used instead of a literal understanding. As far as what authority the Bible has, it is thought through both hard and soft forms that since God created the Bible, the book itself is authoritative and must be taken seriously. To find out the interpretation of the Bible, humans will base the verse on what their beliefs are on the Bible. Depending on if they follow the hard or soft form of the Bible, people can think of God’s word as the absolute or only partial truth in its accounts.

For example, those who follow the hard form scorn the theory of evolution because it goes against the creation story where everything was made perfect and therefore needed no changing. On the other hand, if one were to see the Bible through the soft form, he/she could accept the theory of evolution, but still claim that the very important or incredible accounts that take place in the Bible really did occur. To synopsis what has been formerly stated, Christians interpret scripture based on how they believe the Bible was created. Some think the Bible to be a collection of stories through which God played key roles in each part. Others believe that all the words from the Bible come directly from God, creating the hard and soft forms.

Looking back on Genesis 1:28, there can be two different views on what God meant when he said the word “dominion.” In the hard form, one could imply that because God said “dominion,” that means that man-kind has complete rule over everything. This would allow us, as humans, to use the Earth in an exploitative fashion. In today’s society, this view can be seen plainly. When looked through the soft version, however, we are able to more freely interpret God’s word because we believe that God inspired

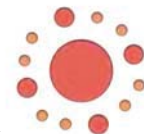


those words, but they could have been slightly altered by the anonymous author of Genesis. We can now interpret the verse differently where God stated dominion in meaning that humans are higher than animals and creation, but have to use the Earth in a caring manner. Out of these two interpretations, the soft form can easily be viewed as the healthiest choice for the human-to-creation relationship. If we view the Bible as a guide book, instead of a book of rules that must be followed to every sentence, looking for answers can be more easily achieved.

Still other ways to interpret the Bible are by looking at direct translation or through reading other verses to gain a better understanding. Interpretation of a word can be greatly changed by the translating of words into different languages. The Hebrew word for dominion, for example, means rule in the English language. This does not mean that we, as humans, are the highest of the high. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* states exactly that under the word 'dominion.' In that passage it reads that the "ultimate rule" of creation belongs to God. This means that all of creation fully belongs to God, but He saw fit to bestow humans with a higher ranking than all else of creation. Through this interpretation, a model can be created that views God as being the High King, whereas humans are more stewards, meant to take care of creation in God's stead. If we read further into the Bible, to Genesis 2:15, this model can be seen as truthful as "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to *till it and keep it.*" God created man to take care of the Earth, to help produce life and health instead of abuse and devastation. A king does not hand his people over to criminals, and so God does not hand his creation over to people who would wish it harm.

Jesus tells a story in Matthew (25:14-30) about a master who entrusted each of his slaves with pieces of his property. He gave one slave five talents, to another two talents, and to the final slave one talent. The master then set off on a journey, leaving the slaves to care for what he had given them. The slave with five talents set off and traded with the talents he was given. By doing so, the slave gained five more talents. So, too, did the slave with two talents trade and earn two more talents. The third slave, however, decided to bury his master's money to hide it until his master came home. After his long journey, the master returned and found his servants waiting for him. The slaves who had the five and two talents went forward and presented their master with the talents he had given them, plus the talents they had each gained while he was away. The master was very pleased and rewarded the slaves with being in charge of more duties. When the third slave went before his master and returned the one talent the master had given him, the master charged him with being wicked and lazy. The moral of the parable is that people need to work with what they have been given in order to make it better. The Lord has given humans rule over creation in his stead. While He is away He expects us to take care of creation and make it into something more. God does not want us to be lazy slaves like the third slave was. "Work with your hands, as we directed you." (1 Thessalonians 4:11). He wants us to go out and work so that more may be gained for the good of all.

Creation is a gift that must be cherished and taken care of. It is a promise from God for the better things to come, as David Neff writes in *Second Coming Ecology*. He believed that there were five reasons why we should take care of creation. The first reason is that as a people we need to know that creation is not "unbound." Natural resources may be plentiful, but they will not last forever, especially if they continue to be overused. We need to understand that if we do not start taking care of creation, then it will begin to



disappear, just as many animals have gone extinct from being over-hunted. The second aspect we should realize about creation is that it is not a higher being that can take care of itself. The land doesn't need to be worshipped like a god, it needs help and to be nurtured like a child. If humans start to believe that the Earth will solve its own problems, then it will diminish faster than it already is. The third idea that should be followed is that we need to look at the big picture of creation, not keep our minds focused on the little things only. If man doesn't broaden his scope and think ahead about what he is doing, he may cause future devastation that could destroy the environment.

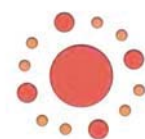
The fourth reason we should care for creation is because God has a bigger plan for it. He is trying to make it better than it is now. In order for Him to be able to accomplish this, we have to make sure that there is a creation for Him to work with. He put humans on the Earth so that we may subdue and have dominion over it; to care and help rule over it, to keep it healthy. The fifth and final reason why we should look after creation is so humans can learn to create a deeper bond with all people and all of creation. By taking care of creation, you can learn more about it. What certain creatures need in order to survive and what types of products help plants the most are two examples of what could be accomplished. The more one knows about the patient (Mother Earth), the easier it will be to take care of her.

People need to realize that we are all here together in creation. All of creation breathes, in a sense, absorbs sustenance in some way and reproduces. If all of creation were to remove its earthly body, we would all be the same. We would all be spirit, where we are one. God created everything by breathing the breath of life, the Holy Spirit, into it. Humans may have a higher role in creation than other creatures, but that is to better help all that lives and breathes on this Earth. We were made with hands to do work, feet to move to all who need help, and brains to help solve the problems of this world. If we all work together, then one day we may very well find ourselves in the utopia that is revealed in the book *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn and make the new creation that was stated in Revelation 21:1-5.

I believe that God created man with the intention that humans would take care of creation as a steward, not as an exploiter. The word dominion can often lead Christians to think that God wanted humans to rule over the earth in whatever way suits them, but that is not the case. True, the word dominion does mean rule, but God also stated that man's job was to till and keep the earth, to take care of it. The world cannot continue to exist as it is if people refuse to stop exploiting the resources of Earth. Many people are starting to see that the earth needs help, so they are going green in their ways, but so few cannot make a huge difference by themselves. They can start the movement, like a few rocks can start an avalanche, but it is up to others to join the fight in saving our planet. There is no other planet like our Earth in the universe. If we, as man-kind, don't stand up and do something the world is lost. No other creature is designed to take care of the Earth as we are. We need to rise up now, before the Earth and creation as we know it falls into total destruction.

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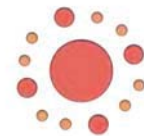
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Parasites, Never to be Satisfied

Amber Kalina, Perham, MN

In a beginning, there was man. He, with the Bible folded zealously to his bosom, enjoyed the ecstasy of being the center of the universe. Supported by Ptolemy and the Church, the geocentric view was the only one the man knew, and he was content, or too afraid to ask questions. And then there came Copernicus. Shunned so quickly from universal domination, man's grip on reality began to fade. He floundered desperately in the dark, grasping at stones, hairs, and raindrops, seeking control. In such a fashion, man found Earth, and he greedily dug the nails of his left hand into the loamy surface with all his strength, the right clutching still the Holy Book. So it is today that man finds himself, knuckles white from strain and burning with fatigue as he gives his all to keep hold. Despite man's pitiful groveling appearance on the ground, he is by no means powerless. Man is latched on like a leech, guzzling away as if the world were going to end tomorrow.

What a delightfully parasitic lifestyle man lives. How is it that he can live with such blatant disregard for the environment? Simple, he sees himself as "above" the earth versus being "of" the earth, thus making him a bloodthirsty invasive species bent on instant gratification, despite the outcome for other species. If man ever intends to combat this leech lifestyle, he must first encounter the enemies that support it: "self-preservation" and, again, the Church. Both have given reassurance that the anthropocentric view is perfectly sane, just as Ptolemy and the Church did with the concept of a geocentric universe. Through discovering what binds him, man is allowed to find the safest route to prying himself away without further harming the environment and, in turn, killing himself in the process.

Every organism has the embedded drive to survive and thrive. In other terms, every living thing knows the ultimate goal is to stay alive long enough to procreate in order to pass along DNA and for the continuation of the species. Man is just as tied to this primal instinct as the rest of creation (look at the population) but the manner through which he achieves this has seemingly changed the rules. Much of man's survival can be attributed to his unparalleled ability to massively modify that which surrounds him. In Lynn White's article *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*, he concurs that "all forms of life modify their contexts," such as a bird building its nest in a tree. Yet, humans have a way of "affect[ing] nonhuman nature," meaning that, when man makes changes, he is not the only one to feel the effects. The very idea of survival for man has become, in many ways, superficial. He is already at the pinnacle of the adaptable hierarchy. That being so, he is allowed to let his intentions wander in terms of where to expend his vigor.

Take the World Cup of 2010, an evidently extravagant event monitored by die-hard fans and curious on-lookers alike but by no means pertaining to man's survival. The truth: the World Cup of 2010 was an environmental nightmare in terms of carbon dioxide emissions. Let us take a deeper look. South Africa was host to this year's games. Inconveniently, unlike many European countries who hosted previously, South Africa lacked the great stadiums needed for the event. So being, the country needed to build completely new structures from scratch, plus supply them with ample amounts of energy, mainly coal based. This alone may not have been much ground for concern, but when taking into consideration the carbon emissions from transportation vehicles



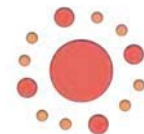
coming to and traveling around the country, not to mention the energy consumption from fans staying in local hotels, we are looking at a carbon footprint of 2,753,251 tons. That much carbon dioxide is the equivalent of emissions created by one million cars in a year. The World Cup officially lasts about a month.

Man is blissfully deaf to the incessant drive to survive, giving him the opportunity to concentrate on thriving and enjoying what life has to offer, such as huge sports events. However, he has also turned a blind eye to other organisms following that very drive. Their survival has become immaterial, dismissed as “not worth the effort,” so long as man cannot directly benefit from lending a hand. As ironic as it may be, the agricultural industry knows this mindset all too well, illustrates Aldo Leopold in his book *A Sand County Almanac*. After dissecting an attempt by the Wisconsin Legislature to conserve deteriorating topsoil by teaming up with local farmers, he concludes, “The farmers... selected those remedial practices which were profitable anyhow, and ignored those which were...not clearly profitable to themselves,” despite the implied environmental consequences of failing to help.

To summarize the bulk of this information, man's form of “self-preservation” supports the anthropocentric lifestyle because he has freedom from worry and want. Therefore, he is left to carry on as he will, doing whatever fits his fancy at a given time, even at the expense of the environment. Looking back to the illustration portrayed in the beginning, “self-preservation” can be seen as the left hand dug firmly into the ground. However, one hand has not yet been fully examined: the right one, clinging to the Bible. This hand ultimately holds more power than the other, if that can be believed, because it holds not only beliefs, but man's very foundation of morals and ethics, that which controls his actions.

“The Bible has nothing to say directly about modern ecological issues, but does contain key information about creation and our role in it,” stated Professor Karl Jacobson of Augsburg College. True enough; there are answers to be found if one is willing to look. The Bible is a tricky book, though, in the way that much of what is to be learned within its pages is due to interpretation. However, man on a regular basis lacks the intrinsic motivation to even attempt such a search, not to mention spend time finding the hidden meaning. So being the case, one will not find what one does not seek, and man tries his best to take the written word straight up on its texts, especially when dealing with the creation story and Jesus' teachings on how to live.

In Genesis 1:28, “God said [to mankind]...‘fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over... every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” One can immediately see how, when taken literally, this verse becomes a hazard to all non-human beings; every man becomes a king with full range of power over, well, everything with no duty other than to rule. Only in the beginning was there this one command, though, for new responsibilities were piled on with the progression of time and prophets, ones not worth repeating until the appearance of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Jesus' teachings focused on the single greatest commandment of them all: “...love the Lord your God with all your heart...soul...and...mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” (Luke 10:27). When questioned as to who a neighbor is, Jesus replied with the tale of the Good Samaritan. Nowhere in the parable is there mention of creation falling under the “neighbor” category. Which suits man just fine; after all, how can he rule over creation if he treats it as a neighbor? Impossible.



Man is further educated in how to live by learning where to keep his mind. Colossians 3:2 reads, "Set your minds on things that are above, not things that are on earth." Simple enough, detached as man is from the earth already. By failing to read further, man can easily bypass Paul's explanation of what "earthly things" entails and insert whatever fits his fancy -such as the literal Earth, perhaps? Man is also coaxed to "store up for [himself] treasures in heaven... For where [his] treasure is, there [his] heart will be also," (Matthew 6:20-21). Meaning, don't bother with what is on earth, for what is waiting in Heaven will be greater than one could ever hope. Why worry about anything that happens on the earth? It's all going to come to an end anyway, right?

Obviously, man is content to not delve further than the surface of many biblical texts. On top lies what he wants to see, and to pry may turn the tables on his destiny to rule with an iron fist. Left in the dirt, right with the Bible, both hands clenched in a death grip, the anthropocentric lifestyle is now laid in full before us. Such assurances that all is as it should be sail soft and warm like the sunshine and settle on man's back in a comforting embrace. However, if this is the way life was meant to turn out, why does man - why do *we*- have to fight so hard to keep the hold? As heavily guarded as the old geocentric outlook, we again find ourselves at the stage of contentment not, or fear to contradict. We do not know what form Copernicus will show up in, nor how we as a species will react to such a change. Regardless, a universal revelation must be made, this time with each of us on board and complying. We cannot be thrown back to floundering in the darkness. Otherwise, history may yet be allowed to repeat itself.

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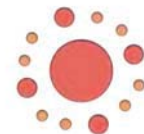
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Create or Destroy?

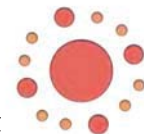
Alicia Papke-Larson, Bemidji, MN

The idea that God single handedly formed, created, and knows every human face and soul by name is a huge comfort to us. When we hear this we know that we are beautiful and unique in the way that God has created us. We know the passion in which God loves us demonstrated in Isaiah 43: 1 (NRSV): “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name and you are mine.” But what about the rest of creation? Surely we believe that God could know all of creation in the same way She knows us; that She could look at every twig and rock and know it too, by name. Surely we believe that God has a close relationship with all of creation; perhaps not in the same manner She has with us, but still a close and loving relationship.

When we read the Bible we always focus (with good reason) on our relationship with God. We seem to entirely forget about our vitally important relationship with the earth, or about God’s relationship with the earth. We don’t always understand these relationships, or the close ways in which we are connected to Earth and all her beauty. “The forest is not other than us, and not apart from the God who created us.” (Ramshaw, p.130) We see creation and ourselves as two different things, when really, they are tied together so closely there could not be one without the other. As Christians, we turn to see what the Bible says about creation. Exploring the different imagery through the Bible about creation helps us understand that we are called to be stewards of the earth. The imagery in the Bible is a message of love and renewal, imagery that we all need to consider when we think about our Earth and our faith.

The tale of the Good Samaritan is a well known story. (Luke 10: 25-37) It tells us how we are all called to help our neighbors, to assist the beaten and lonely person on the side of the road and give them a hand. Jesus tells his disciples that everyone is your neighbor, and that it is your duty as a Christian to give them your help and love. Now, an important question that one could ask is this: Can your neighbor also be something that is not human? An animal, perhaps, or a forest, or the earth? The story that Jesus told, (a story of compassion, love and renewal) told us who the neighbor to the beaten man was. Perhaps now we can draw from that a parallel to the earth. The world is beaten and bruised, and instead of walking by, not wanting to get our hands dirty, God wants us to dig in and lend a hand. We are called by God to be stewards to one another, an idea that should not stop at our human neighbors, but continue on to the life that surrounds us.

An interesting idea from the book *To Work and to Love*, by Dorothee Soelle and Shirley C. Cloyes, from chapter four is the idea that we are co-creators in the world, a new idea that is strange to think about. When we think about creation we often think of something that happened at one time, long ago. Creation, however, is continually growing and changing. One easy way of thinking about this is to think of yourself. You were born into existence as a complicated and wonderful being, yet no one would argue that you are a fully developed directly after birth. Similarly, the way the earth was not fully “developed” or fully “created” directly after creation. It takes humans years to fully develop physically and yet our brains continue to develop our entire lives. Earth is similar. Creation continues after God has done Her first bit. We are the co-creators. It is our job to renew creation, to give it new life. God is sharing Her creation power with us



so that we can renew and watch over the earth. We are the managers of creation and it is our duty to take care of it.

In thinking about the body of Christ the apostle Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 6:19 (NRSV): "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" Paul is saying that we are the body of Christ, our bodies are the Holy Spirit's temple, and God dwells within us. When we broaden our view of this, we can see further than just the words of Paul. We know, now, through modern science that we are made of the same particles and atoms as everything else on the planet. We are not different from all of creation. God made Earth as Her holy temple, God dwells within us and all of creation, giving us even further motive to take care of our green Earth. We are the body of Christ and so is all of creation. We are told that our bodies are not our own, that they are made to praise the Lord. So is all of creation. Creation was made to praise God's holy name. Creation is not ours to destroy, it is ours to protect. Our bodies are given to us to keep healthy and to use to praise God's holy name in the same way the earth was given to us to keep healthy for God.

Genesis 1: 28 (NRSV): "God said to them...fill the Earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth." Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, an Episcopal priest and founder and president of the Regeneration Project, is looking at the word 'dominion' in a new light. She believes that the word dominion does not mean to dominate or destroy, but rather, means to care for or have compassion for. She thought of looking at ourselves as parents to the Earth, that we are to look after the Earth in the way a loving parent would look after their child. The parent would want their child to 'be the best they could be.' She said, "If we are not protecting God's creation then we are not being the stewards of creation as we are called to be." (Bingham, Rev. Canon Sally). The Earth was given to us, not to destroy, but to love.

The Earth has been looked at as a child in many different respects. In an idea from Gail Ramshaw, she saw the World as "the growing infant within the womb of mother God." (Ramshaw, p.129) We were placed here on Earth to take care of the baby.

The story of Job is a powerful lesson in creation and the power of humankind. In the story God puts all that Job has in the power of Satan. Job is a very wealthy man, he has seven sons and three daughters, he has many servants and livestock and a large amount of property. Satan is trying to harass Job into cursing God by taking away all of his possessions because Job is favored by God. Following the destruction of all of Job's servants, livestock and even the death of his children he does not curse God, instead he says this in Job 1:20 (NRSV): "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." Next Satan gives Job boils all over his body. (Job 2:7, NRSV) "...from the sole of his foot to the crown on his head." Job continues to praise the LORD. When three of his friends hear all that has happened to him they come to comfort him. After they came Job cursed the day of his birth, (Job 3, NRSV) "Let that day be in darkness!" he shouted to the LORD. Job demands that God appear and tell why all these things have happened to him. When God answers him not with the answers Job seeks but a speech about the "majesty of nature" She says this in (Job 38:4-5, 34, NRSV) "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth? Who determined its measurements-surely you



know?... Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, so that a flood of waters may cover you? ...Is it your wisdom that the hawk soars?" Job answered Her: "See, I am of small account, what should I answer you?"

According to Bill McKibben (a leading environmentalist and writer) through God's speech, Job realizes how small he is, he realizes that he is not the center of things and he is okay with it. He knows that he cannot control nature, he does not have to wisdom to do so. For the first time in human history we are not in Job's position. We feel that we can control nature. We push it around like it is second best to ourselves. We have the technology to do so. Whether we are doing it intentionally or not, it really does not matter. We see our species as dominant and ourselves at the center of the world. We have made ourselves big when, like Job, we were small. We were a "small part of something beautiful." (Bill McKibben) Now we consume what was beautiful. It is our job to make ourselves small again. It is our job to be like Job, to see who we are and accept our roles as being a part of creation. We have to step back and see that we are not the center of the world, we are just one of the many small and beautiful species that dwell here on planet Earth.

The earth was created about 5 billion years ago. Throughout that 5 billion years miracle after miracle has happened, life keeps on creating and the earth is constantly renewing itself. Each day something new is born into creation and each day something dies to fertilize the earth. Only now we face a problem that we have never had to face before. The natural cleansing cycle of the earth has gone awry due to our mistreatment of it. The earth is dying because of the toxins we are feeding it. It is now our job as 'co-creators' and as Christians to help renew the earth. We are now understanding what the Bible has to say through its beautiful imagery about the earth, creation and the role we have to play as members of the cycle of life. The imagery of love and renewal in the Bible can be transformed into action by the people of this world.

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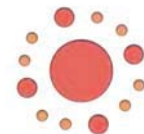
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Wake Up, Westerners

Sam Hoffman, Maple Grove, MN

We as humans have made a mess of everything. Thinking we are above animals and the creation we live in simply because we can bend it to our will is disgustingly arrogant. The overwhelming majority of Christians do not lead Christian lives in the way that they treat creation and the lives around them, human and animal alike. We have a completely lax view of sin, we treat creation like garbage, and we are fundamentally hypocritical in our religious lives.

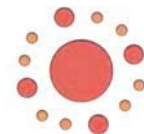
Now I am not suggesting we treat someone who has sinned once like they are unclean, going to hell, and holistically dead to society. That would be silly. We all sin, no one person is perfect; it is a fact of life. Gandhi sinned, not only according to Christianity, but according to Hindu principles as well. He repented and moved on. A life dwelling on your failures is a life wasted. It does no good to dwell on the past- you must simply learn from your mistakes and move on, going forth with a hopefully better understanding. I believe that is a fundamental concept that any group of people in world will agree with. However, most groups of people in the world would also agree the sins and failures are things that should be avoided, because even though they are not something that can permanently damn you, they are still negative forces impacting your life.

All religions have a way of combating this principle of failure, and making it a thing we all can cope with. Buddhists and Hindi people believe in the power of karma, meaning that bad things will come to you if bad things are done by you, but also the exact opposite- one can beget good by simply being good. So, in this system, sins are not ignored. In fact, they are a huge part of these belief systems. However, they have a counter, and it is being good. Living a life for others, and doing good deeds. No bad deed goes away on its own, but we can make up for our mistakes with hard work.

Islam has a related view. It states that only through the grace of Allah can you be saved. But, good deeds and helping others are the way to receive that grace. No one can gain righteousness by good deeds alone; it is the grace bestowed upon one by Allah because of those good deeds that truly saves.

We Christians have a similar view. Through the grace of God we are saved and brought forth to eternal life. Jesus died for our sins, and by his death we have all overcome the grave and will join him in heaven. We have been saved by God.

Now how selfish does that sound honestly? We believe that we are the center, the righteous, the ones with the answer. That is such bullcrap. When we Christians confess our sins, they are simply forgiven. My Lutheran congregation even says at the beginning of every service that you have been forgiven of all your sins. It's like...What!? I didn't do anything...? But apparently Jesus died and so I have license to do whatever I want as long as I repent and feel bad afterwards. Catholics have confession, a practice that seems to me is just plain sacrilegious. You tell somebody all the bad things that you've done, which you could never actually cover because we all sin way more than we could confess in a timely manner, and he is supposed to quantify it into a certain amount of good works? Of course once you've memorized something like a Hail Mary enough to where you can say it on command, it starts to lose meaning, and you just run



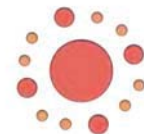
through it on autopilot. The point being, both of these common practices of forgiveness require no real action. Yes, they may make you feel better about yourself. But that's just as misguided as the practices themselves. When you step back and look at it, you didn't actually do anything. You just said sorry to yourself. The only way to correct behavior is through action, and we modernday Christians have adopted a school of thinking where we are somehow above that. That we can just be sorry and move on. A feeling cannot change the world. An action caused by a feeling can. We all need to stop acting like we are special. We need to make repairs where repairs are due, and actually try and move forward and lead Christian lives.

We have failed as a species because of modernization. Two hundred years ago, people lived lives. They were happy and content, at least just as happy and content as we are today. For all of our modern day achievements and so-called progress, we really have just made a much softer people. We don't know a hard days labor the way that we used to. We don't have the same community with nature. Somebody in our time could live their entire life and never even really experience nature. We play video games and watch TV and plug away at the keyboards of our cell phones and computers, forever flooding our social lives with meaningless pleasantries. We have become a distracted people, and one of the scary parts of that distraction is that more and more people aren't even seeing a reason to go to church. At least 75% of my friends who consider themselves Christians go to church no more than twice a year, usually Christmas and Easter. And that is it. And they don't have a lack of church in their lives because they go out and live like a saint. They don't avoid it because it's not needed for them to have a relationship with God. They just avoid it because plain and simple, they don't really care. But they call themselves Christians. Christianity in America has become less of a religion, and more of an inherited trait.

The bible calls us forth to care for creation several times, in several different books. We as Christians should heed that call and be stewards of the environment. We used to be. But we aren't anymore. We have destroyed the planets natural processes with interruptive processes of our own, made only to reap profit. We live and thrive off of the habitats that other species lived in. We have eradicated entire species, and we are still doing that. Humans perform genocide on the worlds animals like it no big deal. We are the only important things on this planet apparently, and this planet and all of its beings live to serve us. We are selfish. We are unjust. We are terrible and dominating and dictating. When we do these things to our own species, outrage sets in. When we destroy rainforest and homes of others of God's creation, what do we do? We may feel regret, and maybe even sorrow. But we do it anyway. The machine must be fed. The consumers must be pleased. Even just take that word- consumers. The mass populous of America does nothing to contribute to the better well being of the state. We just consume. That is not the way God intended us to live, with no regard for anything else. We are called directly by Jesus to love they neighbor. Are not the ants and the squirrels your neighbor just as much as the people who live next to you? In fact, you owe them a much higher debt of gratitude. The land you live on used to belong to them, to belong to everyone. The American Indians were taken advantage of by this fact, they couldn't even wrap their mind around land ownership. Land was for everyone, and belonged to no one. They were killed by "Christians" who wanted their land for their own means. That is not living according to God's plan. God did not choose us over them. God does not pick favorite cultures and lead them to fruition. It is our own twisted way of thinking that even opens up our minds to the possibility of that being true.



Now, please take what I am saying with a grain of salt. Nobody is perfect, and we all can change our Christian lives for the better, no matter how good they are already. But we just seem to act with such a laxness toward religion in our daily lives. For most of the world's religions, life is consumed by religious doctrine. But for most Western Christians, it would appear as though we are God-fearing for about an hour once every week. We all could use a reawakening. To go forth and serve our neighbor. The humans we encounter in life, as well as the earth around us and every living creature.



Stewards of Smart Food Choices

Zach Malecha, Cannon Falls, MN

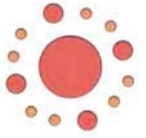
I procrastinated on writing this paper. Every day the people of this world procrastinate on taking care of our planet. Yet, I have been able to take care of this paper, despite my procrastination due to the love of the people who overlook this project. Just as we in the world have procrastinated to take care of the environment, it is not too late to make a difference. I believe that if we act as stewards of the Lord and make smart food choices, we can inspire others and together we can make a huge difference. This will impact the world community, the world's natural environment, and the individuals of the world as well, but first; let's establish what making a smart food choice is.

Making a right food choice is not exactly what my mother told me when I was a young child. Sorry Mom, but eating my fruits and veggies just won't cut it. With a few questions, and a little investigation we can quickly decide if a product is a smart food choice. "Where does this come from?" is perhaps the most beneficial question to ask about our food. "From Dole in Nicaragua" may be the answer to this question, but a quick search on Google will quickly say that this banana probably isn't a smart food choice. Maybe "A farm" is the answer a young teen gives from working behind the KFC counter. A Google search will quickly reveal the disgusting ins-and-outs of the massive chicken farming industry. But if "Felipe from the Farmer's Market" is the answer, I believe gold has been struck. More than likely Felipe would love to talk about farming and answer questions of why he makes the farming choice he does, probably resulting in the best food choice one could make.

Once we make the right food choice, we must depend on God for our actions to inspire others to act with us. We as the Christian community are a large community, but we are not the whole world. If others like what they see us do, they may join us in our actions. If they join us in our actions they may join us in our faith. If this happens, we would not only be taking care of the world, as the bible asks us to in Genesis, but also we would be creating disciples of all nations as Christ asks us to do. Inspiring others to act with us is a key part of this collage, because I know we cannot do this alone.

Making smart food choices will impact our communities. Felipe and the Farmer's Market is a perfect example. A Farmer's Market gives opportunity for farmers to sell locally and selling locally increases networking and multiplies profits. A local Farmer's Market benefits the consumer by providing easy contact with the farmers themselves. With this access more questions can be asked, and more questions can be answered, creating a more personal level of business between the farmer and the consumer. (A benefit for both the consumer and farmer.) Questions that could be asked; "How long have you been farming?" "What is your most popular product?" "Why do you farm?" "Why do you choose to sell at the Farmers Market?" "What is your farming philosophy?" "Do you use pesticides?" and don't forget to follow up all of the questions with the best question of all- "Why?"

The more popular Farmer's Markets and healthy products become, the right food choice may become easier for the super food giants to make. Chipotle, the emerging burrito shop, is the perfect example of this. Chipotle saw this market and had a similar philosophy, so they jumped on the bandwagon. They sell locally grown products on



their burrito line, including beef, chicken, corn and tomatoes. They also take a unique approach to their bags and cups- they write humorous stories on these products and at the end attempt to persuade the consumer to recycle or reuse the cup or bag. Chipotle is a leading steward in what all businesses should be doing. We must pray that this business will inspire other businesses to follow suit. For it is not too late to try the right way.

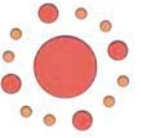
If more companies were to see through the same eyes as our friends at Chipotle, there would be a bigger market for organic and locally grown products. Therefore farming giants would have to provide to the demand. If this were to happen more chickens would see grass, and less crops would see pesticides. The commercial farms could not do what they do now if we chose to change and lead this market in this different direction. This is just one more example of how making smart food choices can impact our different communities.

Making a smart food choice also has the ability to affect our environment. The two main ways this is able to happen are: reduction in pesticides and the ability to recycle and re-grow. Growing up, I have seen the direct effect of pesticides on the environment. My local lake, Lake Byllesby, has been slowly turning green, and by green I do not mean that the water looks green, but that if one were to exit the water after a nice dip, their body would be covered in green grime. My science teachers have told me since then that this is a direct result of pesticides and other farm run-off into our ecosystem.

A smart food choice is not a choice of crops grown using pesticide sprays and other chemicals, but is one that does not involve these. If we make this choice to only eat non-chemically enhanced food. The farming industry will stop using pesticides if we stop buying them- sound familiar? By doing this we will set an example for others to follow. We need to pray that they be inspired by what we are doing. And this, in the long run, will result in healthier lakes, and healthier ecosystems. I look forward to the day when Lake Byllesby is no longer a green slime bath.

Another way to save our ecosystem is through reusing our food through compost. Compost makes for more nutrients to be mixed back into our ecosystem and this enables better, healthier plants to be grown. When I was young, I recall my dad had a black bin in the backyard that he referred to as his compost bin. I thought he was crazy for wanting to do this, but he was determined. The next year, sure enough, we had a more plentiful garden than we had ever had before. My dad had used the earth's natural resources to give back to the earth and this yielded a great garden. This saves our ecosystem because we achieve the same result from compost as we would from chemical growth enhancers. By eliminating pesticides and chemicals from our ecosystems we can save our ecosystems.

We can also benefit from smart food choices on an individual level, for it is healthy and economical to make these choices. Health comes in two different forms- physically and mentally. Organic, natural foods are great for the body. They give us plenty of vitamins and nutrients. Making the right food choice is mentally healthy because we know that it is what we are supposed to do, and as a result we feel self-gratified. To know that a right choice was made is perhaps one of the most self-rewarding experiences I know of.



Economically speaking, making the right food choice is quite beneficial as well. Veggies from the supermarket are more expensive than the delicious greens of the Farmer's market. Locally grown beef can be bought for the price of an oversized grease blob from Burger King. It is quite easy to save some money from making the right food choices.

Just like this paper it is not too late to do something about the issues before us. God has given us a grace period to act and to make a difference. We can no longer sit around and wait, but we must choose to make this change and do so now.