

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

“A NEW CREATION: REIMAGINING THE BEGINNING,  
THE END AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN”  
TOWARD AN EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHOS

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## DEDICATION PAGE

To my bright and beautiful companion in life, my wife, Tami. We have lived, loved and learned together on this planet well over thirty years now. It is not nearly long enough.

To my brilliant children, Blake, Holly and Matthew. I am thankful for everything you continue to teach me, now as adults. I have always been proud to be your father; I am even prouder to be your friend.

To Katelyn, my daughter-in-law and the mother of my grandboys, Avery and Micah; and to Jason, my son-in-law: thank you both for the wonderful people you are and the delightful assets you bring to our family table.

## EPIGRAPH

I have been puzzled most of my life by this contradiction: How can one believe deeply in God and yet be so cavalier about God's creation?

—Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*<sup>1</sup>

Good human work honors God's work.... It honors nature as a great mystery and power, as an indispensable teacher, and as the inescapable judge of all work of human hands.

—Wendell Berry, *The Art of the Commonplace*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind : God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 2005), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Wendell Berry and Norman Wirzba, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *The Art of the Common-Place: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002), 312.

## Table of Contents

<b>FIGURES.....</b>	<b>IX</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>XI</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION: THE BEGINNING, THE END AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Cultural Cognition .....	8
A New GroupThink .....	9
<b>SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS.....</b>	<b>11</b>
The Lay of the Land.....	11
A Model to Build On .....	12
<b>SECTION THREE: THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>PART ONE: EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 THE BIG WORD: DUALISM .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Examples of Dualism within Evangelicalism .....	18
Hearing the Heart of Ecofeminism .....	20
The Road to Wholeness .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 2: POSTMODERNISM .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Postmodernism: What is it? .....	24
Postmodernism: Why Does it Matter? .....	27
The Push-Me, Pull-Me Relationship with Science .....	27

Matrix Reloaded.....	28
<b>CHAPTER 3: A REDUCTIONIST GOSPEL.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Your Gospel is Too Small.....	31
Back to the Future .....	33
East Meets West Meets North Meets South .....	34
Ancient (Church) History .....	34
Orthodoxy .....	35
Out of Africa.....	36
Conclusion .....	36
<b>PART TWO: “THE BEGINNING” .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 THE BIG WORD: <i>COSMOGONY</i>.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: THE S WORD: <i>SCIENCE</i> .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Popular Science.....	43
The Coming Global Ice Age .....	44
The Firewall .....	46
God of the Gaps .....	48
<b>CHAPTER 6: THE E WORD: <i>EVOLUTION</i> .....</b>	<b>50</b>
Monkey Town.....	51
Everything Old is New Again.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 7: THE M WORD: <i>MYTH</i> WITH A CAPITAL M.....</b>	<b>56</b>
The M-Word .....	59
The New Mythbusters and the “Legends of the Fall” .....	61
<b>CHAPTER 8: THE A WORD: <i>ANTHROPOCENTRISM</i> .....</b>	<b>65</b>

	vi
Project Genesis.....	65
Anthropocentrism Defined.....	67
Lessons From Job .....	71
The Red Herring .....	73
<b>PART THREE: “THE END” .....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>CHAPTER 9: THE BIG WORD: <i>ESCHATOLOGY</i> .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>CHAPTER 10: <i>STAR TREK</i> THEOLOGY .....</b>	<b>77</b>
“Left Behind” ... in Dublin.....	78
The Late, Great Postmillennial Movement.....	79
Left Behind and the Bible .....	80
<b>CHAPTER 11: <i>TERRA NOVA</i> .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Surprised By Hope.....	84
Destruction or Transformation?.....	85
“Adam Again” .....	85
<b>A LONG AFTERWORD <i>WALKING IN MEMPHIS</i> .....</b>	<b>89</b>
The Beginning, the End and Everything in Between: Now What? .....	90
<b>CHAPTER 12: COMMON GROUND: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE.....</b>	<b>92</b>
“Occupy Jerusalem”.....	92
Adventures in Missing the Point.....	93
Change of Climate .....	95
Environmental Justice as the Cross-Roads .....	96
Shades of Green .....	96
A Greener Theology: Moltmann.....	98

A Greener Practice: Environmental Justice .....	100
<b>CHAPTER 13: THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS .....</b>	<b>104</b>
Texts and Traditions .....	104
Genesis 1:27-28 .....	105
Revelation 8:13 .....	105
Revelation 22:1-2.....	106
Christian Teachings .....	106
Hope.....	106
Creation Care. ....	108
<b>CHAPTER 14: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION.....</b>	<b>112</b>
Query Letter .....	112
Track 02 Artifact: Book Proposal—Non-Fiction .....	113
<b>POSTSCRIPT .....</b>	<b>118</b>
A Summary .....	118
The Approach.....	118
Conclusion .....	120
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>PROLOGUE: THE WISDOM OF THE AGES OR THE WISDOM OF THE AGE?</b>	
.....	<b>122</b>
Fool's Gold, ca. 1963.....	122
A Tale of Two Cities.....	122
<b>INTRODUCTION: WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT.....</b>	<b>126</b>



<b>APPENDIX: “CLIMATE CHANGE:” CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER SKEPTIC</b>	
<b>AS A MOVEMENT IN THREE PARTS.....</b>	<b>129</b>
Act One .....	129
Act Two .....	130
Act Three .....	131
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>136</b>

**FIGURES**

1 Cosmology: Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe.....	40
2 Pew Research on Evolution and Faith .....	57

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## ABSTRACT

One of the groups most resistant in polls to engaging in conversation around environmental issues is conservative Evangelicals who live in the United States. Although conservative American Evangelicals have often embraced several theological roadblocks to an “earth-friendly” view of scripture—including their cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology, among others—these Evangelicals possess rich resources within their tradition that unlock the door to embracing an earthkeeping ethic in their theology and praxis. This dissertation addresses the question, “Would conservative Evangelicals be drawn into a conversation around environmental issues that focused on historic, orthodox alternatives to some of these theological roadblocks?”

In the Introduction I will present the problem, context, definitions, thesis and the framing device for the conversation that will be used in the artifact: locating sociotheological issues around “the beginning,” that is, Evangelical cosmogony; “the end,” or Evangelical eschatology; and “everything in between,” with a focus on the dualism evident in many popular Evangelical theological expressions. Chapter one begins in the middle, the “everything in between,” and suggests that the greatest danger to a biblical earthkeeping ethic is a dualism that minimizes embodiedness, nature and the earth itself. Chapter two describes the value of seeing postmodernism as a tool to uncover the worldview of many Evangelicals—one that is more “modern” than “Christian.” Chapter three addresses the common conception of the American Evangelical “gospel” as one mere facet of the rich, full biblical concept of soteriology.

Chapter four moves to “the beginning” and introduces the significant relationship between Evangelical cosmogony and cosmology. Chapter five highlights the historic links between religion and science and offers an understanding of the value of science for Evangelicals. Chapter six builds on this groundwork to discuss ways Evangelicals might embrace evolution without adopting secular humanism. Chapter seven focuses on the critical importance of sound hermeneutics and revisits the long-abandoned concept of myth in the Evangelical interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative. In chapter eight, the attention moves to anthropocentrism and the relationship of human to creation, finding a model for proper understanding in the book of Job.

Chapter nine begins the third movement, introducing eschatology and its implications for humanity, earth and the individual. The tenth chapter hones in on premillennial dispensationalism and offers an alternative biblical vision to that of the *Left Behind* novels. Chapter eleven discusses the specific destiny of planet Earth, since popular Evangelical descriptions of its end generally include its final and complete destruction, replaced by the “new heavens and new earth.”

Chapter twelve begins a kind of afterword. In two chapters, we focus on peculiar and significant contributions of Evangelicals willing to engage in the environmental conversation. The first finds common ground for Evangelicals and environmentalists in the realm of environmental justice that seeks to aid “the least of these” impacted by toxins and climate disasters of all kinds, while chapter thirteen contends that hope is the singular and great gift Evangelicals can offer what many environmentalists view as a dying planet.

Chapter fourteen offers a conclusion and a reminder that we might find our way forward by stepping backward into Evangelical history, finding our moorings once again in a theological environment more conducive to stewarding earth's environment.

## INTRODUCTION:

### THE BEGINNING, THE END AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

Some people read books in order to find God. Yet there is a great book, the very appearance of created things. Look above you; look below you! Note it; read it! God, whom you wish to find, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth cry out to you: “God made me!”

—Augustine of Hippo<sup>1</sup>

For (God’s) invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made....

—The Apostle Paul, Romans 1:20

Nature herself is the mother tongue of every child, the native language of every human. Each of us responds intuitively to the sound of a babbling brook, the touch of a warm and furry pet, the sight of a gorgeous, colorful sunset.

Or at least that has been the case until recent generations of humankind have moved both indoors and inside their heads, fast trading a day at the park for a day at the theme park with all its artificial wonders. Richard Louv, in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, makes the poignant case for “the increasing divide between the young and the natural world, and the environmental, social, psychological, and spiritual implications of that change.”<sup>2</sup>

This divide is evident in the church, too.

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine and Vernon J. Bourke, *The Essential Augustine*, Mentor-Omega Book (New York: New American Library, 1964), 123.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Updated and expanded. ed. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2008), 1.

The earliest Christians often spoke of God's "two books"—nature and the Bible, a concept that resounds throughout the Hebrew scriptures and finds voice in passages like Acts 17:24, where Paul introduces the Athenians to the "unknown God," "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth...;" Hebrews 11:3, where the author declares, "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible;" and Romans 1:19-20 (cited in part above). One can trace a line from Tertullian in the second century to fourth-century writers like Augustine, St. Basil and John Chrysostom, the latter who wrote, "Upon this volume [of nature] the unlearned, as well as the wise man, shall be alike able to look; the poor man as well as the rich man; and wherever any one may chance to come, there looking upwards towards the heavens, he will receive a sufficient lesson ...."<sup>3</sup> Later the thread runs from Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) to the "father of empiricism," Francis Bacon, in the sixteenth century. It is Bacon who writes, "God's two books are... first the Scripture, revealing the will of God, and then the creatures expressing his power; whereof the latter is a key unto the former."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps this divide between Scripture and nature finds its seeds there in Bacon, suggesting incipient anthropocentrism as he notes a chasm between humanity and "the creatures expressing (God's) power." From a socio-theological standpoint, the seeds may have been sown earlier in the 1500s in the thought of Martin Luther and other early

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<sup>3</sup> "Homily IX" by John Chrysostom in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Electronic Edition*, 14 vols. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1994), Vol IX, 402.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, Ebook ed., Francis Bacon Series (Salt Lake City, UT: Project Gutenberg, 2004), MOBI (Kindle) ebook, loc 680.



reformers whose “radical rejection of traditional religious authority”<sup>5</sup> led them to privilege reason—“the intellectual crisis of the Reformation,”<sup>6</sup> so termed by influential historian Richard Henry Popkin.

In Bacon, undergirded by the intellectual environment of the Reformation, nature essentially becomes the subject of science and little more.<sup>7</sup>

Bacon’s empirical method then is the basic approach that served science through the Enlightenment, both in Europe and across the Atlantic in what would soon become the United States of America. Here in the States this new science found fertile ground.

Without the authority of the Crown (in this Revolutionary era) and with lax and dispersed ecclesial authority as well, the American Church took to this new empiricism as a way to underscore and demonstrate its authority. As Max Weber points out, and as Joel Mokyr underscores below, a new marriage of science and capitalism gave rise to the Industrial Age, as enterprising believers used Baconian principles to mechanize society—and commodify nature in the process:

The years 1760-1815 witnessed more than just some lucky breaks in a handful of industries: it was also the period in which people defied gravity through hot-air balloons, began the conquest of smallpox, and learned to can food, to use binary codes for manufacturing purposes, to infer geological strata from fossil evidence, and to burn gas for lighting.... In pottery, one of the oldest techniques known to

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<sup>5</sup> Peter G. Heltzel, "Interpreting the Book of Nature in the Protestant Tradition," *Journal of Faith and Science Exchange* 4, no. 1 (2009): 5.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Henry Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Poignantly suggested by the title of the book by Eric Katz, *Nature as Subject : Human Obligation and Natural Community*, Studies in Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

mankind, Josiah Wedgwood and others introduced new materials, new moulding (sic) techniques, and improved over-firing.<sup>8</sup>

Mark Noll, in an essay entitled "Science, Theology, and Society: From Cotton Mather to Williams Jennings Bryan,"<sup>9</sup> suggests how this happy arrangement with religion's use of science changed with the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Now the relationship of the "two books" of nature and scripture is altered. In this tectonic shift, as ethicist Ted Peters notes, science becomes no longer slave to the scripture but entirely independent—or worse: "Though nature was certainly held to reveal God's handiwork, this 'one book' began to gain independence, if not prominence, over against scriptural revelation."<sup>10</sup>

Charles Taylor, in his epic work, *A Secular Age*, offers a subtler explanation, a "change in the air" that not so much starts with Darwin, but ends there: "The transformation in outlook from a limited, fixed cosmos to a vast, evolving universe starts in the early seventeenth century, and is essentially completed in the early nineteenth century, though the final terminus might be fixed with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Joel Mokyr, cited in Deirdre McCloskey, "Review of the Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain," January 15, 2004, no. Times Higher Education Supplement (2004). <http://www.deirdremccloskey.org/articles/floud.php>.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Noll, "Science, Theology, and Society: From Cotton Mather to Williams Jennings Bryan," in David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart, and Mark A. Noll, *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Kindle ebook, loc 1558-1908.

<sup>10</sup> Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett, *Bridging Science and Religion*, 1st Fortress Press ed., Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), Kindle ebook, loc 2731.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), Kindle ebook, loc 5249.

It is in this environment of growing acrimony between science and faith that the cosmogony of mainstream Evangelicalism will begin to shift, even though, shortly after Darwin appears in print, as David Livingstone and Mark Noll note, “One of the best-kept secrets in American intellectual history is that B.B. Warfield, the foremost modern defender of the theologically conservative doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, was also an evolutionist.”<sup>12</sup> By 2010, James Davison Hunter, in his book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*, reports, “In a recent Gallup poll (of the American public) ... 45 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so.’”<sup>13</sup>

This division between the “two books” likewise impacts Evangelical eschatology. The New York Times reported that “The best-selling nonfiction book of the decade (1970s) was the evangelist Hal Lindsey's apocalyptic *Late, Great Planet Earth*.”<sup>14</sup> This vision of a premillennial apocalypse made a popular comeback in the mid-1990s and on through the first decade of the new millennium as the sixteen books in the *Left Behind* series sold more than 65 million copies between 1995 and 2008.<sup>15</sup>

In many respects, this apocalypticism seems to represent the marriage of growing Evangelical disdain for mainstream science with Evangelical dualism. This dualism

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<sup>12</sup> D. N. Livingstone and M. A. Noll, “B. B. Warfield (1851-1921). A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist,” *Isis* 91, no. 2 (2000).

<sup>13</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Kindle ebook, loc 297.

<sup>14</sup> George Johnson, “Portrait of the 1980s: Back in 1979, the Word Was Malaise,” *New York Times*, December 24 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon L. Isaac, *Left Behind or Left Befuddled: The Subtle Dangers of Popularizing the End Times* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2008), EPUB ebook, vi.

privileges heaven over earth, spirit over body and—in some critiques (notably among ecofeminists)—includes racism, classism and sexism. Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests the result is a “system of power,” and ecofeminism’s work includes “exposing it as aggravating environmental destruction, disabling authentic democracy, undermining cultural diversity, destabilizing social integrity, and increasing the gap between rich and poor worldwide.”<sup>16</sup>

The end result is an Evangelical eschatology anxious to shed this earth, doomed for destruction.<sup>17</sup> This cannot but minimize Evangelical motivation for authentic care for creation on a planet that will be soon be changed like worn out clothing.

In this thesis, I have characterized these various resistance points as “The Beginning, the End—and Everything in Between.” Underneath broad Evangelical apathy and theo-political resistance to environmentalism is a worldview steeped in dualism and consumerism (“everything in between”) that holds a utilitarian view of Earth’s creation (“the beginning”) as well as its eventual dissolution (“the end”).

Evangelicals must reimagine our entire worldview and these foundational (though secondary) theologies before we can become part of “...a religious and moral transition in which, because planetary health is primary and human well-being derivative, the center

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<sup>16</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, Nature's Meaning (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), xi.

<sup>17</sup> Consider for example, the title of the book by Grace Halsell, *Forcing God's Hand: Why Millions Pray for a Quick Rapture--and Destruction of Planet Earth*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Beltsville, Md.: Amana Publications, 2003).

of ethics shifts from the ego to the ecosphere as the relational matrix of our lives and responsibility.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Larry Rasmussen, "New Wineskins," in Yale Symposium on Religion and Environmental Stewardship, New Haven, CT, June 6, 2012.

## SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

### Cultural Cognition

To couch a religious difficulty in scientific terms, the problem, in two words, is this: “Cultural cognition.” Cultural cognition is the term researchers have coined to describe a working hypothesis of how we as humans define, compare and contrast ourselves with and against others. Humans are especially adept at reading others, and while the goal of our constant attention to mind-reading is understanding the *beliefs* of others, “the foundational skill is understanding *intentions*.”<sup>19</sup>

What is more, the holy grail of cultural cognition is “shared intentionality:”

Human beings are biologically adapted for participating in collaborative activities involving shared goals and socially coordinated action plans (joint intentions). Interactions of this type require not only an understanding of the goals, intentions, and perceptions of other persons, but also, in addition, a motivation to share these things in interaction with others....<sup>20</sup>

How does this impact Evangelical response—and resistance—to climate change and other environmental issues? A recent news release from Yale University reads, “Yale study concludes public apathy over climate change unrelated to science literacy,”<sup>21</sup> and it represents a stunning example of cultural cognition at work. In short, a formal study funded by the National Science Foundation in association with the Cultural Cognition Project at Yale Law School determined that “as members of the public become more

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<sup>19</sup> M. Tomasello et al. , "Understanding and Sharing Intentions: The Origins of Cultural Cognition," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28, no. 5 (2005): 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Karen N. Peart, "Yale Study Concludes Public Apathy over Climate Change Unrelated to Science Literacy," in *YaleNews*, ed. Yale University (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2012) Yale University <http://news.yale.edu/2012/05/29/yale-study-concludes-public-apaty-over-climate-change-unrelated-science-literacy> (2012), accessed September 29, 2012.

science literate and numerate ... individuals belonging to opposing cultural groups become even more divided on the risks that climate change poses.”<sup>22</sup>

The bottom line of the Yale study is that an avalanche of new and better information about the science of climate change is unlikely to sway people who may already be predisposed to believe it. Cultural cognition leads us to adopt or dismiss facts on the basis of what is essentially “groupthink”—values that correspond to the groups we align ourselves with. This has to inform the way we address “inconvenient truths” with audiences resistant to change:

As citizens understandably tend to conform their beliefs about societal risk to beliefs that predominate among their peers, communicators should endeavor to create a deliberative climate in which accepting the best available science does not threaten any group's values.<sup>23</sup>

### **A New GroupThink**

This topic is of interest to me because I want to better understand how certain theologies and sociopolitical alliances are predictors of Evangelical openness to participate in the environmental discussion, and I want to find a way to change the conversation; in essence, I want to change the “groupthink” of conservative American Evangelicalism, to engage Evangelicals in earthkeeping and environmental justice.

What are the contours of the existing “groupthink” within Evangelicalism? For

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>23</sup> D.M. Kahan et al. , "The Polarizing Impact of Science Literacy and Numeracy on Perceived Climate Change Risks," *Nature Climate Change* 2, no. 10 (2012): 3.

example, many writers have noted that our cosmology,<sup>24</sup> eschatology,<sup>25</sup> our soteriology<sup>26</sup> and even our Trinitarian theology<sup>27</sup> all play into our response to environmental issues.

In an article tellingly entitled, “Ecological ‘Blind Spots’ in the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies,” John Jefferson Davis, of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, examines twenty Evangelical systematic theology texts published since 1970. His intention is to identify any application of theology to environmental issues within these texts. Hence, he looks first in the most obvious place: the creation.

This examination of twenty representative systematic theology texts published since 1970 has shown that evangelical theologians tend to devote a disproportionate amount of space in their treatments of the doctrine of creation to matters related to evolution, the age of the earth, and the days of Genesis one ... with the median being close to 31%. The amount of space in these same chapters devoted to developing the implications of the Biblical doctrine of creation for environmental stewardship (resulted in) the median figure being about 1%.<sup>28</sup>

What if we might find a way to change the course of conversation, to create a safe place for Evangelicals to hear what has become a dangerous message—the call to care for God’s good creation?

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Alister E. McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> See for example Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America* (Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> See for example Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> See for example Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> John Jefferson Davis, "Ecological "Blind Spots" in the Structure and Content of Recent Evangelical Systematic Theologies," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43, no. 2 (2000).



## SECTION TWO: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### The Lay of the Land

Steven Bouma-Prediger outlines at least seven approaches people might gravitate to within a general framework of “earth care,” and they can in some sense be envisioned on a scale of “greenness,” from less so to more so:

Conservation movement, future generations, animal rights, biocentrism, wilderness movement, land ethic, deep ecology—such is (in large part) the landscape of contemporary ecological ethics.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, Bouma-Prediger suggests a “theocentric” vision for earth care: “... any ecocentric perspective must, from a Christian point of view, be transmuted into a theocentric perspective, for our earthly home, for all its importance, does not lie at the center of things. God is at the center, and all things, whether on earth or in heaven, exist to praise God.”<sup>30</sup>

Bouma-Prediger’s text, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, is ground-breaking in both its breadth and depth, but it is largely aimed at academics and its look and feel suggest that the people who find their way to Bouma-Prediger have already taken their place in the proverbial choir to whom he is preaching. His book, however, aids us as a frame from which to hang the approach many other authors take to addressing this problem of Evangelical cultural cognition. Various books have been written from inside Evangelicalism that usually land on one of those points along Bouma-Prediger’s “greenness” scale—most often a version of the Conservation Movement “Christianized”

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<sup>29</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, Engaging Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 130.

by use of the term "stewardship." Dan Story's recent and important book, *Should Christians Be Environmentalists?* is representative of this genre. Dan has worked on the frontlines of many conservation and wilderness agencies through the years, and his book is inspiring and informative as an account of how the loss of wilderness diminishes us all. It is an important work that may cause many Christians who live, work and play in the natural world to reconsider their engagement in environmentalism, but it will not touch academics or urban dwellers.

Many other books on the market are general "how to" books, aimed at motivating their audience to recycle and change out their incandescent light bulbs;<sup>31</sup> others are aimed at motivating pastoral leadership;<sup>32</sup> and many more are academic or otherwise deeply theological in nature.<sup>33</sup> I contend any one is woefully inadequate to embrace or embody the full spectrum of possibility as we anticipate the engagement of thoughtful Evangelicals.

### **A Model to Build On**

The book that comes closest to addressing "what lies beneath," at the level of cultural cognition, is David Gushee's book, *The Future of Faith in American Politics*. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University, and part of the team that drafted the landmark Evangelical Climate Initiative's Call to Action in 2006 that caused

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet : A Christian Call to Action* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Pub. Co., 2006).

<sup>32</sup> See for example, Tri Robinson and Jason Chatraw, *Saving God's Green Earth : Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship* (Norcross, GA: Ampelon Publishing, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> See for example, H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature : The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

an incredible uproar within the National Association of Evangelicals. In part because of his work at the frontiers of Christian ethics, he knows the territory and the cast of characters on both sides of the Evangelical response to climate change very well. Unfortunately, Gushee spends only one chapter on environmentalism in his recent book, and its focus is almost exclusively on climate change. Even so, he offers a roadmap to understand the conservative American Evangelical “groupthink” approach on environmental issues that extend beyond his narrow focus, something he calls a “climate change skeptic recipe:”

- Begin with a longstanding disdain for the (“leftist”) environmental movement.
- Add deep distrust of mainstream science, its leaders and academies, traceable to the still unresolved debate over Darwin and evolution.
- Blend in a similar mistrust of the mainstream mass media; if they are hyping an issue, it should be treated with skepticism.
- Throw in loyalty to a (Republican) president or party, which tends to be skeptical of environmental worries or commitments.
- Combine with libertarian, free market economics and distrust of government and its interventions with the market.
- Add a dash of general human reluctance to accept the hard-to-comprehend, unprecedented news that human beings are actually changing the climate.
- Mix in the belief that God ordains all that happens on this planet, and therefore all is in his hands and we need fear nothing.
- Add the conviction that the Bible gives human beings free rein to manage the creation as we see fit.
- Season with the belief that human beings are too frail, small, and insignificant to change something as big as the planetary climate.<sup>34</sup>

For Evangelicalism to move forward on the issues around earthkeeping, we need to change the nature of the conversation, to engage at the level of cultural cognition. We need tools of understanding to connect thoughtful people on both sides of what has become a polarizing divide with social, political, economic—and biblical—implications.

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<sup>34</sup> David P. Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics : The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008), 178-179.

We need a way forward through sticky theology and uncertain praxis. When it comes to the environmental questions of our time, what *would* Jesus do?

In the chapters that follow, there are a number of references to how Evangelicals have approached both the theology and praxis of interacting with our physical environment. I will address each of these by topic, and demonstrate the ways in which they fall short of an adequate analysis of and/or a corrective approach to the problem.

### **SECTION THREE: THE THESIS**

**PART ONE:**  
**EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN**

Have you ever asked someone, “Where is Nature? Where is the environment?”  
How do you think they would respond? How would you respond?

One icy afternoon, from the heated confines of a classroom, I asked this same question. Student after student repeated a similar motion. “There,” they said, immediately pointing across the room to the half-frosted window. “Out there.”

—Stephen Goobie<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Stephen Goobie, "Dualism Doesn't Make Sense," in *Ecological Thoughtprint*, ed. Stephen Goobie (Vancouver, BC: 2011) <http://ecologicalthoughtprint.org/2011/12/04/dualism-doesnt-make-sense/>), accessed June 20, 2012.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE BIG WORD: DUALISM

I have been talking, of course, about a dualism that manifests itself in several ways; it is a cleavage, a radical discontinuity, between Creator and creature, spirit and matter, religion and nature, religion and economy, worship and work, etc. This dualism, I think is the most destructive disease that afflicts us. In its best known, its most dangerous, and perhaps its fundamental version, it is the dualism of body and soul. This is an issue as difficult as it is important, and so to deal with it we should start at the beginning.

—Wendell Berry<sup>36</sup>

While dualism is not, in essence, about the “beginning,” in the sense of the creation of the world, it is nonetheless where we begin. Perhaps dualism sprang into existence somewhere “east of Eden”<sup>37</sup> as humankind began to live in the rift between a new, harsh reality and the increasingly vague memory of God’s manifest presence in the Garden. In any case, Graham Buxton observes, “The problem that the Church has fallen into over the centuries ... is that it has too easily and uncritically identified evil with the natural, material world. This is the Augustinian, Neoplatonic legacy.”<sup>38</sup>

Ludwig Feuerbach, the philosopher who deeply influenced Karl Marx, indicted the faith with these words in 1843 in his book, *The Essence of Christianity*. “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself, and the salvation of his soul.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Berry and Wirzba, 313.

<sup>37</sup> Genesis 3:24.

<sup>38</sup> Graham Buxton, *Celebrating Life: Beyond the Sacred-Secular Divide*, Faith in an Emerging Culture (London ; Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 21.

<sup>39</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach and George Eliot, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, NY: C. Blanchard, 1855), 282.

### Examples of Dualism within Evangelicalism

In broad terms, dualism represents that preference for the spiritual over the material, and this notion, that has its roots in Platonic thought and Gnosticism, lies beneath popular conceptions of Evangelicalism. N.T. Wright, for example, describes:

“The ‘just passing through’ spirituality (that) ... encourages precisely a gnostic attitude: the created world is at best an irrelevance, at worst a dark, evil, gloomy place, and we immortal souls, who existed originally in a different sphere, are looking forward to returning to it as soon as we’re allowed to.”<sup>40</sup>

This dualism is evident in various facets of Evangelical thought and praxis, including our eschatology, as colorfully and pithily noted by Craig Hill, “One might say that the apocalyptic palette is short on grays but copiously supplied with black and white.”<sup>41</sup> This is a point to which we will return when we describe “The End.”

Scholars also suggest that many within the scientific community in the U.S. share this essential dualism, so dualism may be particularly acute for American Evangelicals. In his book exploring *Science and Religion*, Thomas Dixon bemoans the reactions of both disciplines to news about the supposed “God spot,” that area in the brain that seems to house religious experiences:

According to this sceptical [sic] stance, an experience can be caused by the brain or by an immaterial being (God or the soul) but not both: a neurological explanation of an experience rules out a supernatural or religious one. Science has explained away the supernatural.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 103.

<sup>41</sup> Craig C. Hill, *In God's Time: The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 61.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Dixon, *Science and Religion: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2008), ebook, loc 1608.



When it comes to our conception of nature and the universe, James K.A. Smith, plainly believes "... the biblical affirmation of the goodness of creation, coupled with the implications of the incarnation, will require jettisoning the Gnosticism of a certain platonic heritage."<sup>43</sup> Wright adds, "Secularists often criticize Christians for having contributed to ecological disaster, and there's more than a grain of truth in the charge."<sup>44</sup>

In many respects, this dualism is invisible to us; like the air that we breathe, it simply "is." In a presentiment of another theme we will explore further, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s motivation for the broad civil rights work he led was, in contrast to this dualism, a deep recognition of connectedness: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."<sup>45</sup> This led to his understanding that "the just act is the ethical act is the religious act."<sup>46</sup>

King's example has inspired a new generation of Evangelicals:

... climate care leaders are also reevaluating sarcophobic versus sarcophilic sensibilities and resisting spirit-flesh dualism—a reevaluation that resonates with their views on justice, eschatology, and social sin.... (These) leaders are engaged as much in a hermeneutical struggle—a battle of interpretation to set out a biblically based evangelical social ethic—as they are in a struggle to ameliorate climate change.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation : Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2012), ebook, loc 4977.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "'Reimagining Awake through a Great Revolution,'" Address at Morehouse College Commencement, June 2, 1959," in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Volume V: Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 224.

<sup>46</sup> Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God & Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 82.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.,

With King's example in mind, we turn now to one front in the resistance against dualism, pioneered largely by brave Christian women.

### **Hearing the Heart of Ecofeminism**

Within the broad Christian community, no one has connected the dots between dualism and an apathetic Christian response to the environment like a group of theologians known as *ecofeminists*. While the notion of ecofeminism might well strike terror into the minds of many conservative Evangelicals, in fact, ecofeminist theologians make a lucid, compelling case for a Jesus-centered “least of these” theological understanding of systemic oppression.

Consider, for example, the work of Brazilian Ivone Gebara:

Within the traditional philosophical perspective of our theology, the discourse on body and spirit is more than just using dualistic language in order to look at our human reality from two different perspectives. In fact, it refers to two different "substances" simultaneously present in that reality. What we have here are a clearly defined metaphysics, cosmology, and anthropology that focus on and grant superiority to one world to the detriment of another; to some parts of the body to the detriment of others; to one sex to the detriment of the other; and to the will of the Creator as opposed to that of creatures. This means we think, work, and act not only as if our universe contained these divisions, but as if God had willed it to be that way. God is imaged as the One who imparts grounding and legitimacy to these divisions—or, more accurately, to these imaginary constructions of reality.<sup>48</sup>

This dualism that frames much popular-level Evangelical theology is found, according to ecofeminist authors, in two essential human relationships: in the gendered world and in the created world; that is, the relationship of men to women and of humanity to the rest of nature.

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<sup>48</sup> Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 57.

One of the most stunning and controversial examples<sup>49</sup> of this intimate connection between women and the environment comes from the mouth of the Christian “father of empirical science,” Francis Bacon:

... his attitude toward gender and sexuality, expressed in his vision of science as a "Masculine Birth of Time" that will issue in a "blessed race of Heroes and Supermen"— a force that can "hound," "conquer and subdue Nature," "shake her to her foundations," "storm and occupy her castles and strongholds"— retrospectively marks him as a kinsman of the later Fellows of the Royal Society .... One might almost say that the real impact of the scientific revolution was, in a single move, to take God out of woman and out of material nature.”<sup>50</sup>

Ecofeminists are able to point to countless examples beyond Bacon, of course. In the modern era, both Wangari Maathai, Kenyan environmentalist and Nobel laureate,<sup>51</sup> and Rachel Carson were often maligned because of their gender and their work on behalf of the environment. In the case of Carson, for example, Cliff Conner reports:

Because ‘in postwar America, science was god, and science was male,’ it was inevitable that the author's gender would be a conspicuous element of the campaign against *Silent Spring*. The chemical industry’s flacks portrayed Carson as a hysterical woman whose alarming view of the future could be ignored or, if necessary, suppressed. She was a “bird and bunny lover,” a woman who kept cats and was therefore clearly suspect. She was a romantic “spinster” who was simply overwrought about genetics. In short, Carson was a woman out of control. She had overstepped the bounds of her gender and her science.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The *Journal of the History of Ideas*, for example, has an ongoing debate between Carolyn Merchant and her detractors with regard to what some see as an anachronistic reading of Bacon. See Brian Vickers, "Francis Bacon, Feminist Historiography, and the Dominion of Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>50</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 33-34.

<sup>51</sup> In a press release upon her death, the UN noted, a "job promised to her in an official letter of appointment as a research assistant to the professor of zoology at the University College of Nairobi had been withdrawn. It was given instead to a man." United Nations Environment Programme, "Wangari Maathai, Kenyan Environmentalist and Political Activist, Died on September 25th, Aged 71", United Nations <http://www.unep.org/gender/data/News/WangariMaatha/tabid/55559/Default.aspx> (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Clifford D. Conner, *A People's History of Science: Miners, Midwives, and "Low Mechanics"* (New York: Nation books, 2005), 468.

### **The Road to Wholeness**

In summary, this kind of dualism, according to Don Sik Kim, “legitimizes both the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the nature.”<sup>53</sup> Hence, we need “a Christian ecological theology (that) must incorporate a more holistic anthropology, that is, one which does not sanction the domination of women or the earth....”<sup>54</sup>

The road to environmental understanding requires a reimagining of our relational understandings; of an orthodoxy that prefers spirit over body, and understands heaven as the “sweet by and by;” and an orthopraxis that too often legitimizes oppression of women, nature and the “least of these.”

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<sup>53</sup> Don Sik Kim, "Rediscovering and Developing Cosmic Pneumatology from an East Asian Perspective," in Society for Pentecostal Studies and Wesleyan Theological Society, Duke University, Durham NC, March 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Don Sik Kim here summarizes the work of Sallie McFague, in *ibid.*, 19.

## CHAPTER 2:

### POSTMODERNISM

... as W. H. Auden once described this kind of cultural upheaval, "It's as if we had left our house for five minutes to mail a letter, and during that time the living room had changed places with the room behind the mirror over the fireplace."

—James K. A. Smith<sup>55</sup>

If there is a rift in Evangelical culture, it may be along the fault lines of postmodernism. Some Christian authors and thinkers have written about postmodernism in glowing terms, as a worldview of sorts that the Church ought to embrace,<sup>56</sup> while others seem to suggest postmodernism is surely a sign of the impending apocalypse.<sup>57</sup> The *Christian Post*, for example, reported that Focus on the Family's "Truth Project," begun in the middle of the past decade, titled its live training sessions, "Truth vs. Lies: Christian Worldview vs. Postmodern Worldview."<sup>58</sup>

The "New Calvinists," often associated with the Gospel Coalition and the writings of people like Mark Driscoll, John Piper and D.A. Carson, tend to indict postmodernism as a new evil to be rejected. The "emerging church" movement (which appears to be an especially fast-moving—and somehow dissipating without disappearing—target) that might be represented by thinkers including Brian McLaren, Tony Jones and Doug Pagitt, tends to view postmodernism as an exciting new reality to be embraced.

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<sup>55</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 17.

<sup>56</sup> Brian McLaren, Carl Raschke and James K.A. Smith are among those who view postmodernism in a primarily positive way.

<sup>57</sup> Douglas Groothuis, David Wells and D.A. Carson represent this side of the equation.

<sup>58</sup> Lillian Kwon, "The Truth Project: Christian Vs Postmodern Worldviews," *The Christian Post*, September 30, 2006.

Reading Christian books on the topic, it would seem postmodernism can almost mean whatever an author decides it may mean. James K. A. Smith, for example, cites Graham Hughes, who suggests “both modernity and postmodernity are characterized by a trenchant ‘disenchantment of the world,’”<sup>59</sup> though Smith himself seems to contrast postmodernism as a way out of “the disenchanted world bequeathed to us by the immanentism of modern science.”<sup>60</sup>

Speaking particularly of the use of the term “postmodern” by Doug Groothius, and by extension, others who emphasize a “propositional Christianity,” Carl Raschke says:

Postmodernism thus was equivalent to virtually all the isms of the twentieth century that traditionalists had been pounding against for more than a hundred years—libertarianism, subjectivism, feminism, relativism, sociologism, psychologism, Marxism, social constructivism, fascism, and so forth .... Groothius went so far as to identify postmodernism with everything (wrong) about American culture itself.<sup>61</sup>

### **Postmodernism: What is it?**

So what then is postmodernism?

Myron Penner, in the introduction to his anthology, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn*, pithily states, “Postmodernism is what happens when modernity is given up, or forgotten, or no longer valued.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>61</sup> Carl A. Raschke, *The Next Reformation : Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2004), 16.

<sup>62</sup> Myron B. Penner, *Christianity and the Postmodern Turn: Six Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 24.

The very word, *postmodern*, suggests an essential reference to and distinction from that which is *modern*. What that difference may constitute, however, is far from obvious, often moving in at least three directions.<sup>63</sup>

First, one may view postmodernism as a concept that transcends modernism, as posited by Thomas Oden, “The postmodern person is looking for something beyond modernity, some source of meaning and value that transcends the assumptions of modernity.”<sup>64</sup>

Second, postmodernism might be seen as a kind of terminal moment within modernism. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, for example, suggest one might use *postmodern* interchangeably with *hypermodern* and *ultramodern*.<sup>65</sup> In this view, postmodernism “is modernity come of age.”<sup>66</sup>

Finally, one of the French philosophers with whom postmodernism is closely associated, Jean-François Lyotard, cryptically suggests, “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state...”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> These three options are suggested by Penner. in *ibid.*,

<sup>64</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity-- What? Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1990), 60.

<sup>65</sup> J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 42.

<sup>66</sup> Penner, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 79.

Lyotard makes more sense in the light of Penner's neat, historical mile markers.<sup>68</sup>

The first significant movement in philosophy dates to the Presocratic era when the first Greeks turned toward *logos*, or reason, and away from *mythos*, or mythological interpretations of the world. Premodern philosophy, then, made a *metaphysical turn* and began to privilege reason. By the time of the Enlightenment, the presuppositions of the premodern view, taking the world as it is, are fading, as philosophy begins to wonder whether the world can be known at all. Modernism is born, taking an *epistemological turn* toward "René Descartes's self-knowing self, or Immanuel Kant's transcendental subject."<sup>69</sup> The Age of Reason becomes the Age of Science, as humanity searches for ways to ground reason and measure reality. Finally, late in modernity, we find philosophy making a *linguistic turn*: "What is now philosophically engaged in the language that constitutes the self that knows itself and the world."<sup>70</sup>

So to return to Lyopold's point, postmodernism confronts the issues and weaknesses in late modernism with a kind of premodern understanding and ethos, wary particularly of overarching metanarratives that modernism developed to explain everything, notably scientific rationalism.

Now again, what is postmodernism? It is all of these things: it transcends modernism, it is a kind of pinnacle of modernism, and it looks ahead by looking

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<sup>68</sup> These mile markers are described at length in Penner, 19-24.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 24.



backwards (think, for example, of the apt phrase coined by Robert Webber, *ancient-future*.<sup>71</sup>)

### **Postmodernism: Why Does it Matter?**

Why does the modern/postmodern debate within Evangelicalism matter in a thesis oriented toward engaging Evangelicals in a conversation on the environment, in reframing our environmental ethics?

One definition of postmodernism suggests, “It is simply a descriptor or locator for the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times, for better or for worse.”<sup>72</sup> Surely, the “better,” with respect to the furor over postmodernism, is that we have become aware of the question of worldviews, and in the current state of affairs, I suggest Evangelicals need to recognize their own worldview.

#### *The Push-Me, Pull-Me Relationship with Science*

Robert T. Pennock is no particular friend of conservative Evangelical Christianity. A philosophy professor at Michigan State University, Pennock won a Templeton Prize and a Templeton Science and Religion Course Award. His breakout book, however, is *Tower of Babel: The Evidence Against the New Creationism*, and he is notorious in some circles as an expert witness against Intelligent Design in the infamous Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District trial of 2005.

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith : Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> Raschke, 20.

Pennock has written extensively and professionally on the Intelligent Design movement, and he offers a provocative opinion in the journal, *Science and Education*, on how Intelligent Design came about as an educational initiative:

That Intelligent Design Creationism rejects the methodological naturalism of modern science in favor of a premodern supernaturalist worldview is well documented and by now well known. An irony that has not been sufficiently appreciated, however, is the way that ID Creationists try to advance their premodern view by adopting (if only tactically) a radical postmodern perspective.... Intelligent Design Creationism is the bastard child of Christian fundamentalism and postmodernism.<sup>73</sup>

Ernest Sandeen, writing in 1970, speaks of the then-already-obvious Evangelical proclivity to create “parallel institutions,”<sup>74</sup> and Intelligent Design, with its earlier incarnation as creation science, represents a kind of “parallel science.” Pennock’s genius is in naming the postmodern tendency to question the absolute authority of Science (intentionally capitalized here) late in the modern era as an integral part of the Evangelical reaction. If Pennock is right, then even the most conservative and insular wing of Evangelicalism is itself embracing postmodernism in ways it may not generally recognize. I am hopeful this can lead us to re-frame the story in the cosmic drama often described as “Christian Worldview vs. Postmodern Worldview.”

### *Matrix Reloaded*

If I am opposed to the epistemology, or theory of knowledge, that plagues modern Christianity, then I am also opposed to the ecclesiology (or lack thereof) that accompanies this modernist version of the faith. Within the matrix of a modern Christianity, the base “ingredient” is the individual; the church, then, is simply a collection of individuals.... Modern evangelicalism finds it hard to articulate just how or why the church has any role to play other than providing a place to

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<sup>73</sup> Robert T. Pennock, “The Postmodern Sin of Intelligent Design Creationism,” *Science & Education* 19, no. 6 (2010): 757.

<sup>74</sup> E.R. Sandeen, “Fundamentalism and American Identity,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387, no. 1 (1970): 56.

fellowship with other individuals who have a private relationship with God. With this model in place, what matters is Christianity as a system of truth or ideas, not the church as a living community embodying its head.... As such, Christianity becomes intellectualized rather than incarnate, commodified rather than the site of genuine community.

—James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*<sup>75</sup>

James K. A. Smith, cited above, wants “to advocate a shift from modern Christianity to a postmodern church”<sup>76</sup>, since “while postmodernism may be the enemy of our modernity, it can be an ally of our ancient heritage.”<sup>77</sup> Smith considers the three “slogans” associated with each of these philosophers:

- “There is nothing outside the text” (Derrida).
- Postmodernity is “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard).
- “Power is knowledge” (Foucault).

In each case, Smith demonstrates the meaning behind the “bumper sticker” synthesis, and in each case he finds important ways that the church can learn from postmodern sensibilities.

Of particular interest to this thesis is Smith’s treatment of Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard himself offered a working definition of postmodernism: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives,”<sup>78</sup> literally “big stories” in French. Since the gospel is often described as a grand metanarrative, this indeed sounds as though Lyotard would find Christianity incompatible with his thinking, but for Lyotard, a metanarrative is more than a mere grand story; it is a story that tries to

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<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>78</sup> Lyotard, xxiv.

“self-authenticate” by an appeal to universal reason. “The central tension for Lyotard is not between big stories and little stories or global narratives versus local narratives.

Instead, he formulates the tension as a conflict between science and narratives.”<sup>79</sup>

Scientific rationalism, steeped in materialism, is the metanarrative that Lyotard critiques; the grand story of the gospel, with its corresponding call to faith, is an ancient story that speaks at a level that transcends mere rationalism.

What is more, Smith suggests the Incarnation is the primary (and literal) embodiment of a story that both manages to transcend space and time even as it fills them both with meaning:

A radical affirmation of the incarnation means affirming not only time (and history and tradition) but also space; that is, it must entail an affirmation of the goodness of the stuff that Descartes described as extended and then wrote off so quickly: bodies, buildings, and bowls of soup. ("Thinking things" never get hungry.) The materiality of God's good creation, like time, is something that modernity sought to repress.... A radically orthodox worldview is fundamentally sacramental. It affirms not only the goodness of material bodies but also that the whole realm of the material has a revelational potential.<sup>80</sup>

In short, the modern/postmodern discussion within Evangelicalism reminds us how our worldview is too often merely “modern” when we have deigned it to be “Christian,” and we can find our way forward by looking back with an ancient-future sensibility.

In the end, matter matters.

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<sup>79</sup> Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.,

## CHAPTER 3:

### A REDUCTIONIST GOSPEL

... the Reformation, for all its good, has led to a “salvation” culture instead of a “gospel” culture. This has created a profound problem for evangelicals: we are constantly trying to show the connection of salvation to transformation. So we try to show that justification inevitably leads to sanctification, or that justification leads to justice, or that regeneration leads to mobilization. I understand this impulse, but I would like to suggest that the near-reduction of “gospel” to “personal salvation” is at the heart of this problem, and recapturing the biblical sense of “gospel” will lead in an entirely different direction.

—Scot McKnight<sup>81</sup>

### Your Gospel is Too Small

What is salvation? For countless Evangelicals, one answer might be found in *The Four Spiritual Laws*, developed near the middle of the twentieth century by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. Bright was a former salesman who developed a “clincher” talk called “God’s Plan for Your Life,” but at twenty minutes in length, it was difficult to memorize. “By 1959,” according to John Turner, “Bright had condensed the talk to highlight four basic points:”

- I. God loves you and has a wonderful Plan for your life.
- II. Man is sinful and separated from God, thus he cannot know and explain God’s plan for his life.
- III. Jesus Christ is God’s provision for man’s sin through whom man can know God’s love and plan for his life.
- IV. We must receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord by personal invitation.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Scot McKnight et al. , *Church in the Present Tense: A Candid Look at What's Emerging* , Emersion: Emergent Village Resources for Communities of Faith (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), Kindle ebook, loc 2704.

<sup>82</sup> John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), ebook, loc 1267.

These “laws”—a remarkable word choice for an Evangelical like Bright who consistently pointed to his brand of Christianity as a grace-filled religion no longer “under the Law”<sup>83</sup>—have been unquestionably and effectively used to reach countless thousands of “decisions for Christ.” Indeed, in 2001, *Time* magazine noted, “Campus Crusade now has 24,000 paid staffers, 550,000 trained volunteers, operates in 190 countries, and was listed in the 90's as one of the country's biggest and most efficient charities.”<sup>84</sup>

Still, Bill Bright himself would agree this tool is, at best, a reductionist Gospel or a small insight into one aspect of the Gospel, since his ministry “... did not suggest that Christian instruction ended with the Four Spiritual Laws, and the organization encouraged new converts to join Bible studies and proceed through a set of study materials about various Christian doctrines.”<sup>85</sup> As Dean Flemming notes:

We might even be tempted to think that our tried and true ways of telling the story are timeless expressions of the “pure” gospel. But we would only be fooling ourselves. All theology is contextual theology, from the creeds of the early church to the modern “Four Spiritual Laws.” All theologizing is done from a particular location and perspective whether we are conscious of it or not. Contextualized theology is not just desirable; it is the only way theology can be done.<sup>86</sup>

*The Four Spiritual Laws*, with its four easy, how-to steps that emphasize the individual and demand a response to the inherent sales pitch, worked remarkably well in

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<sup>83</sup> In fact, in the wake of Bright’s death in 2003, the former Campus Crusade itself recently changed the name of its entire organization to Power to Change. The old weblink to The Four Spiritual Laws, <http://www.crusade.org/fourlaws/>, now resolves to a page titled “Discover Purpose” that offers a version with updated language and FIVE bullet points!

<sup>84</sup> David Van Biema, “Bill Bright: Twilight of the Evangelist,” *Time* August 29(2001). <http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,172188,00.html> (accessed August 17, 2012).

<sup>85</sup> Turner, 102.

<sup>86</sup> Dean E. Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 298.

the U.S. culture in the late modern era with its own emphasis on individualism and pre-packaged, fast-food consumerism. Yet *Time* notes, “Mark Noll once said (the Laws) led to an Evangelical environment that is ‘naive, inept or tendentious.’ Columbia University religion professor Randall Balmer contends that the Laws ‘flatten the Gospel.’”<sup>87</sup>

Here in what many sages point to as the postmodern, global era, with a growing awareness of the world’s dwindling resources, booming population and looming climate change, it is time to re-contextualize the Good News for our age.

### **Back to the Future**

... Salvation talk is notorious for drawing lines of exclusion among traditions and religions, and for subordinating earthly life to higher values. Salvation has often appeared as a very human-centered concern, narrated by an exclusive community for the sake of life in another world. For those interested in moral responses to environmental problems, then, the topic of soteriology often seems so tied to cosmologically impoverished notions of faith that it might be best to avoid it altogether.<sup>88</sup>

Will Jenkins, above, aptly summarizes the perception surrounding Western notions of soteriology we bring forward like so much baggage into the twenty-first century. The caricature of Christian soteriology is that it is exclusivist, dualistic, anthropocentric and eschatological in its focus. A fortunate few humans are “saved,” while other created beings and Earth itself—almost blessedly—are destroyed at the final end of their period of human domination. As Sarah McFarland Taylor notes, “Making

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<sup>87</sup> Van Biema.

<sup>88</sup> Willis Jenkins, "Searching for Salvation as Public Theological Exercise: Directions for Further Research," *Worldviews: Environment Culture Religion* 14, no. 2/3 (2010): 258.

this shift from being ... ‘dominators of creation’ to ‘participants in a cosmic story’<sup>89</sup> is never easy.

Jenkins though offers hope as he points to a way forward with a renewed purpose: “to demonstrate practical possibilities resident in ancient traditions.”<sup>90</sup>

It is on these ancient stone paths that we may find our way home.

### **East Meets West Meets North Meets South**

#### *Ancient (Church) History*

Long before the split between the Eastern and Western Church, even before Augustine, “the man most crucially involved in reshaping Christianity as an imperial religion,”<sup>91</sup> had thoroughly cemented the direction of the Church, infused with bits and pieces of Platonic philosophy, there was a Pope whose leadership was so compelling he was the first to be given the moniker, “the Great.” High church leaders of both East and West to this day venerate Leo, a younger contemporary of Augustine. Phillip Cary states:

(His) was also a generous orthodoxy in which Christ’s human nature had salvific import not just for the elect but for all humanity, all of whom are included in the human nature Christ took up, with the result that his humiliation, death, resurrection, and exaltation affect every human being.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 27.

<sup>90</sup> Jenkins, "Searching for Salvation as Public Theological Exercise: Directions for Further Research," 263.

<sup>91</sup> Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom, After Christendom*. (Carlisle England: Paternoster, 2004), 74.

<sup>92</sup> Phillip Cary, "Bernard Green, the Soteriology of Leo the Great," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 3 (2010): 412.



Ruling the Church during an era when the great Councils were wrestling with the divine and human natures of Christ, Leo insisted on “grounding God,” emphasizing that Jesus was an utterly earth-bound being: It’s a beginning—an important beginning.

### *Orthodoxy*

While Leo’s emphasis on Christ’s nature was important to root God to the dust of our planet, immanent as well as transcendent, historians find in his sharp distinction between the two natures the seeds of the later split between East and West. Indeed, the strict *miaphysites*, such as the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church that traces its roots to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, began withdrawing immediately after the Chalcedonian Declaration of 451 CE.

Elizabeth Theokritoff uncovers and builds on this Orthodox predilection to refuse to break things into their component parts:

Salvation for Orthodoxy is not a discrete theme or sub-section of theology. It is very hard to find Orthodox writings focused specifically on salvation; rather, the saving work of Christ is the matrix within which we understand the meaning and purpose of all creation .... We are thus looking for a concept of salvation that connects us with the rest of creation. Such a concept sees salvation as involving the whole created world and our relationship with it, which in turn entails an eschatological vision of salvation with the world, not from it. Any narrowing of the idea of salvation to focus primarily on the redemption of humans from sin would seem profoundly unhelpful.<sup>93</sup>

Salvation for the Orthodox is “a comprehensive process rather than an individual attainment.” Monastic communities, and even the very bodies and clothing of the monks

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “The Salvation of the World and Saving the Earth: An Orthodox Christian Approach,” *Worldviews: Environment Culture Religion* 14, no. 2/3 (2010): 142.

are in some way “pointing forward to the transfiguration of the whole material creation.”<sup>94</sup>

### *Out of Africa*

One in five Christians worldwide today come from Africa.<sup>95</sup> Its Christianity is both natal—many of the early church fathers (and its largely unsung mothers) were from Alexandria—and recent, reintroduced by the Western colonizers who exported slaves and imported their version of the Gospel. As Africa struggles with its history, she is finding her way to an authentically African Gospel, steeped in the land.

Isabel Mukonyara reminds us that the root word for “salvation” is the Latin *salvus*, from which we likewise get our word “salve.” She studies the Masowe (“Wilderness”) Apostles, who ...

... teach hope for *salvus* as healing from poverty, hunger, violence and diseases which drives people to the wilderness of prayer. Once there, the open air reminds believers of their place in an ecosystem that is struggling to sustain life and calling upon them to do what they can to reduce the damage they see around them as one of the lessons to take home from prayer meetings.<sup>96</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Hope ... healing ... humanness ... oneness with creation and Creator ... mystery ... transformation. These are aspects of salvation largely unexplored and unexpressed in the Evangelical wing of the Church today. Our own ancient pathways are calling us to

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>95</sup> Isabel Mukonyora, "An African Gospel of Survival in an Age of Ecological Destruction," *ibid.*: 171-172.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 183.

reconsider “‘plans of salvation’ that enumerate and consolidate the gospel message.”<sup>97</sup>

Like the Masowe Apostles, we will find that those ancient pathways are often meant to take us outdoors.

As Aldo Leopold said, “In wildness is the salvation of the world.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> This phrase comes from a remarkable source: John MacArthur, in a footnote that runs through conceptions of the gospel related to numbers from one to six, inclusive. John MacArthur, *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully*, The John Macarthur Pastors' Library (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 317.

<sup>98</sup> Aldo Leopold, cited by Jenkins, "Searching for Salvation as Public Theological Exercise: Directions for Further Research," 262.

**PART TWO:**  
**“THE BEGINNING”**

## CHAPTER 4

### THE BIG WORD: *COSMOGONY*

This is it. This is where it all comes down to, the understanding of creation.

—Phillip Johnson, law professor, author and proponent  
of Intelligent Design Creationism<sup>99</sup>

The science of nature, then, or rather observation, as contained in the gnostic tradition according to the rule of the truth, depends on the discussion concerning cosmogony, ascending thence to the department of theology. Whence, then, we shall begin our account of what is handed down, with the creation as related by the prophets ...

—Clement of Alexandria<sup>100</sup>

“Cosmogony” is technically a subset of “cosmology,” though in popular conception, the two terms are used as virtual synonyms. “Cosmology” comes from the Greek words “cosmos” and “logos,” terms that together suggest the field of study that has the entirety of the universe in view. It is also used as a description of particular perspectives on the structure of the universe so we may, for example, speak of an ancient Hebrew cosmology, as represented below:

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<sup>99</sup> Tim Stafford, "The Making of a Revolution," *Christianity Today* (1997).  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1997/december8/7te016.html> (accessed September 15, 2012).

<sup>100</sup> Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata, or Miscellanies," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume II: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* ed. A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, and A.C. Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 409.

# Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

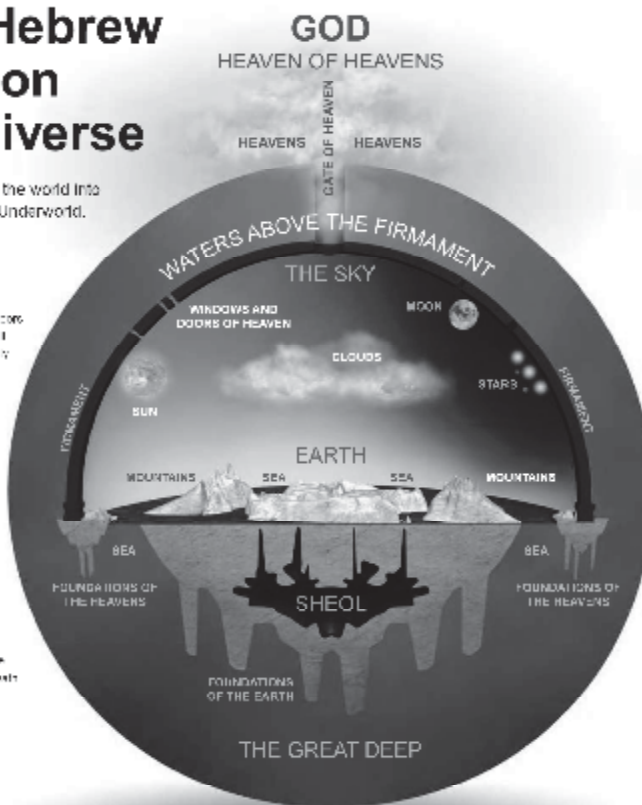
The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vault resting on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the sun, rain, wind, and clouds. The sky, hidden in cloud and mystery.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, because the ground was flat. The south was the only known direction—the rest of the world was considered unreachable.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty prison from which no one returned. Engraved as a place of place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.

GRAPHIC BY KATHIE MATHIAS,  
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## 1 Cosmology: Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

“Cosmogony” comes from two Greek words, too: “cosmos” and the root word for “genesis.” Cosmogony has a narrow focus on the origins of the cosmos. Clement of Alexandria, cited above in a convoluted English translation, highlights the relationship between cosmology and cosmogony as a critical issue of interpretation, writing at the turn of the second century.

While Intelligent Design infers that one cannot understand cosmology without a proper understanding of cosmogony, in fact the reverse is true when one applies it to hermeneutics: one cannot understand cosmogony without a proper understanding of cosmology. Michael Stone, for example, offers this in the context of a conversation about the medieval understanding of the Creation story:

A relationship often exists between cosmogony and the origins of sin on one hand and eschatology and redemption on the other. The medieval placing of the angelic rebellion before creation and fully developed long before Milton’s description of it in *Paradise Lost* may have come about because that rebellion was regarded as constitutive of the present state of the world.<sup>101</sup>

In other words, medieval theology that emphasized original sin and the resulting “fallen planet” as a part of its cosmology required an eisegetic understanding of the timing of the angelic rebellion suggested in readings of Isaiah 14, et al. A part of the medieval cosmology demanded a fallen earth at the center of both the universe and God’s attention, and so its premise was read into the “gap” between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

Unfortunately, sometimes Evangelicals with fundamentalist leanings in particular directions, and with premillennial, dispensational charts and graphs in hand impose a literalistic, young earth cosmology on their reading of the cosmogony of Genesis 1-11. Of course, no one is immune to reading their own biases and understanding into the text,

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<sup>101</sup> Michael E. Stone, *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 56-57.

as Jacques Derrida suggests when he says, “in the beginning is hermeneutics,”<sup>102</sup> but Evangelicals seem especially prone to layering an entire and peculiar worldview on the Creation narrative.

John Walton, professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, says it this way:

Some Christians approach the text of Genesis as if it has modern science embedded in it or it dictates what modern science should look like. This approach to the text of Genesis 1 is called "concordism," as it seeks to give a modern scientific explanation for the details in the text.... The problem is, we cannot translate their cosmology to our cosmology, nor should we.... If we try to turn it into modern cosmology, we are making the text say something that it never said. It is not just a case of adding meaning (as more information has become available) it is a case of changing meaning. Since we view the text as authoritative, it is a dangerous thing to change the meaning of the text into something it never intended to say.<sup>103</sup>

Several important concepts and relationships are a part of this cosmogony/cosmology (mis)understanding, and in the pages that follow, we explore them in turn: the relationship of religion and science, the impact of evolution, the Evangelical understanding of the term “myth,” and a biblical conception of humankind’s role in creation (couched in a discussion of anthropocentrism).

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<sup>102</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 73.

<sup>103</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One : Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), Kindle ebook, loc 126.



## CHAPTER 5:

### THE S WORD: *SCIENCE*

The good thing about science is that it's true, whether you believe in it or not.

—Neil deGrasse Tyson<sup>104</sup>

Science went out the door with Aquinas, and we never invited her back.

—Edward O. Wilson, citing a U.S. theologian at a two-day retreat  
of U.S. Catholic Bishops on religion and science<sup>105</sup>

### Popular Science

Something happened at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The fundamental relationship between religion and science, that was in some sense nurtured in the womb of the Church, changed dramatically. Witness Mark Noll:

The relation of evangelicals to science, as indeed the perception of science itself, underwent a great shift between the Civil War and World War I.... (Evangelicals) were troubled by possible atheism lurking in ateleological evolution, by agnostic conclusions promoted by popularizers of the new science, by the heartache in abandoning traditional interpretations of Scripture, and by efforts of scientific professionals to replace religious professionals as society's key arbiters of truth.<sup>106</sup>

What was the relationship of science to religion in colonial and Enlightenment-era America that led to this remarkable turn of events?

Following the infamous 16<sup>th</sup> century Catholic mishandling of Copernicus, repeated a century later when Galileo Galilei was charged with heresy for heliocentric views, perhaps the Anglicans learned to make room for someone like Francis Bacon,

<sup>104</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, on Bill Maher, "Real Time with Bill Maher," (New York, NY: HBO, 2011), selected quote available at <http://www.hbo.com/real-time-with-bill-maher/episodes/0/201-episode/synopsis/quotes.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 159.

<sup>106</sup> Mark A. Noll, "Science, Theology, and Society: From Cotton Mather to Williams Jennings Bryan," in Livingstone, Hart, and Noll, *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*, loc 1715.

Galileo's 17<sup>th</sup> century contemporary. Whatever the case, Bacon, in England in the era of King James, was well able to pursue his scientific inquiries and ultimately develop empiricism, a set of inductive approaches that came to be called the Baconian method.

Darwin—and the varied responses to his work, *On the Origin of Species*—changed everything, as we will explore further in the next chapter. Religion and science began to chart separate courses after at least two centuries of sharing a common purpose.

### **The Coming Global Ice Age**

With the rise of creation science (which later would morph into the Intelligent Design movement), Evangelicalism began to offer alternatives to mainstream science, until today, Daniel Abbasi of Yale, writes:

Scientists are not always seen as credible messengers by religious groups, in part because they are often perceived to favor a meaningless, purposeless and Godless world that is anathema to religious people. The evolution/creationism debate, in particular, has continued to fuel religious distrust of scientists.<sup>107</sup>

As Abbasi likewise notes, this growing divide between religion and science has led to a “pronounced religious suspicion of environmentalists,” and this suspicion is not helped when Americans hear of what seems to be “science’s erratic nature: chocolate and red wine were bad for you, now they’re good for you, etc. The food pyramid long indicted on us has now been rebuilt. And so it goes.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Daniel R. Abbasi, *Americans and Climate Change: Closing the Gap between Science and Action*, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies Publication Series (New Haven, CT: Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, 2006), 40.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

One particularly cogent example that researchers point to is the “ice age” scare of the mid-1970s, something climate change deniers are prone to mention,<sup>109</sup> and which indeed was a repeated news story of the era. Time magazine included an article in their June 24, 1974 issue that asked, “Another Ice Age?”<sup>110</sup> A book that prominently featured eighteen scientists was released in 1977 entitled, *The Weather Conspiracy: the Coming of the New Ice Age*.<sup>111</sup> However, by the end of the decade, the scientific consensus was clearly changing, away from an “ice age” toward a planet that was heating up. How did this happen and why did it seem like it a whimsical reversal to the public? Abbasi notes:

The somewhat oversimplified explanation is that three key drivers of climate change were coming into better focus in the mid-1970s, but scientists had yet to understand their relative strength<sup>112</sup> .... Some scientists indeed produced a faulty projection of the net effect .... Yet the scientific consensus at the time was responsibly cautious, a fact that seems to have since been lost to the public amidst the popularization of the dramatic ice age scenario.... This brief account indicates the measured caution with which concern about climate change actually emerged, and varies considerably from the picture Americans might otherwise have of indecisive scientists ! itting impetuously from one doomsday scenario to another.<sup>113</sup>

The U.S. media, of course, is readily implicated in the general public’s negative perception of climate science. Mark Maslin, a British scholar, comparing a much broader

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<sup>109</sup> See for example, “The Coming of the New Ice Age: End of the Global Warming Era?” Pastorius, “The Coming of the New Ice Age: End of the Global Warming Era?,” in *Infidel Blogger's Alliance* (2012) <http://ibloga.blogspot.com/2012/02/coming-of-new-ice-age-end-of-global.html> (2012), accessed

<sup>110</sup> Time staff, “Science: Another Ice Age?,” *Time*, June 24 1974.

<sup>111</sup> Impact Team, *The Weather Conspiracy: The Coming of the New Ice Age : A Report*, 1st ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977).

<sup>112</sup> These three were “1) ice age cycles caused by slow variations in the Earth’s orbit; 2) the reflective, cooling effects of sulfate aerosols from man-made air pollution; and 3) the heat-trapping effects of increased greenhouse gas concentrations.” Early on, some scientists over-emphasized the cooling effect of aerosols.

<sup>113</sup> Abbasi, 34-35.

European consensus around climate change, suggests that the American media's reporting "has led to a barrier between scientists and the public in the USA."<sup>114</sup>

In addition, for Evangelicals there remains a perception that scientists are largely atheists promoting a godless agenda. In this regard, the scientists do not always vindicate themselves. Hipster astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson, for example, speaking at the University at Buffalo, said this about God:

Every account of a higher power that I've seen described ... include many statements with regard to the benevolence of that higher power, and when I look at the universe and all the ways the universe wants to kill us, I find it hard to reconcile that with statements of beneficence. So personally, it's hard for me to make that connection.<sup>115</sup>

Tyson goes on, however to note, "... That being said, there's about forty percent of American scientists (who) pray to a personal God. So empirically, to be a scientist is not the same thing as to be an atheist."<sup>116</sup>

### **The Firewall**

Neil deGrasse Tyson leads us to another clarification in the discussion of the relationship between religion and science: while there is certainly a strong relationship between science and religion, and we can even say that each informs the other, they operate in different realms. Each has its own focus, and reasonable theologians and scientists alike understand this "firewall."

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<sup>114</sup> Mark Maslin, *Global Warming : A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed., Very Short Introductions (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Kindle ebook, loc 732.

<sup>115</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, *God and Science* (Buffalo, NY: University at Buffalo), video.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*,

Thoughtful atheists who are accomplished scientists know this to be true, and Tyson is one example. Alister and Joanna Collicutt McGrath offer another eminent illustration in the person of Harvard's late Stephen Jay Gould:

Though an atheist, Gould was absolutely clear that the natural sciences—including evolutionary theory—were consistent with both atheism and conventional religious belief. Unless half his scientific colleagues were total fools—a presumption that Gould rightly dismissed as nonsense, whichever half it is applied to—there could be no other responsible way of making sense of the varied responses to reality on the part of the intelligent, informed people that he knew.<sup>117</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, by all accounts one of the most brilliant minds to emerge in the thirteenth century, suggested “we might conclude that God governs the universe in the same way that an archer directs an arrow to a target.”<sup>118</sup> Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett explore this metaphor:

Remember that science has, as its specific goal, a physical description of the world. It is as though science is able to witness the arrow in flight. Science can study the physical aspects of the arrow; measure its speed and even trajectory. But without being able to “see” that there is an archer and a target, there is no way that science can see any purpose in the flight of the arrow.<sup>119</sup>

At the same time, while the Bible may be timeless and authoritative for countless believers, it is at the same time, in some sense a product of its time, a sign of its magnificent incarnational interplay between the human and divine:

... we can conclude that it was not God's purpose to reveal the details of cosmic geography (defined as the way one thinks about the shape of the cosmos). The shape of the earth, the nature of the sky, the locations of sun, moon and stars, are

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<sup>117</sup> Alister E. McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion? : Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2007), ebook, loc 54.

<sup>118</sup> Ted Peters and Martinez J. Hewlett, *Can You Believe in God and Evolution? : A Guide for the Perplexed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 79.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

simply not of significance, and God could communicate what he desired regardless of one's cosmic geography.<sup>120</sup>

John Walton, cited here, gives a name to this folly of trying to mix science and religion in unnatural ways, “concordism:”

Concordism tries to figure out (for example) how there could have been waters above the sky (Genesis 1:7), whereas the view proposed here maintains that this terminology is simply describing cosmic geography in Israelite terms to make a totally different point.... Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture. No passage offers a scientific perspective that was not common to the Old World science of antiquity.<sup>121</sup>

Indeed, as Walton points out, “By its very nature science is in a state of flux.” Hence, when we demand that the Bible should be understood in reference to science as we know it today, it inevitably means the text “would have been unintelligible to people who lived prior to the time of that science, and it would be obsolete to those who live after that time.”<sup>122</sup>

### **God of the Gaps**

Another fatal flaw of concordism is its faith in the “God of the gaps,” a phrase coined by a nineteenth century Evangelical theologian, Henry Drummond. Dixon comments about Drummond:

He spoke of those ‘reverent minds who ceaselessly scan the fields of Nature and the books of Science in search of gaps – gaps which they will fill up with God. As if God lived in the gaps?’ God, he said, should be sought in human knowledge, not in human ignorance. He pointed out that if God is only to be found in special and occasional acts, then he must be supposed to be absent from the world the majority of the time. He asked whether the nobler conception was of a God

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<sup>120</sup> Walton, ebook, loc 140.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., ebook, loc 140-146.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., ebook, loc 132.

present in everything or one present in occasional miracles. Drummond concluded that ‘the idea of an immanent God, which is the God of Evolution, is infinitely grander than the occasional wonder-worker, who is the God of an old theology’.<sup>123</sup>

John Walton again suggests that we often envision the relationship between science and religion as a pie; as science advances in its ability to explain the world around us, God’s piece of the pie grows ever smaller, mere crumbs in the remaining gaps in human knowledge and understanding.

If we want to adopt a more biblical view, we have to switch desserts! We need to think in terms of a layer cake. In this view the realm of scientific investigation would be represented in the lower layer.... It is subject to scientific observation, investigation and explanation. Discovery in this layer does not subtract from God or his works. This is the layer in which science has chosen to operate and where it is most useful. In contrast, the top layer represents the work of God. It covers the entire bottom layer because everything that science discovers is another step in understanding how God has worked or continues to work through the material world and its naturalistic processes.<sup>124</sup>

Science is not the enemy of faith; nor can it “prove” faith. It is neither angel nor ogre.

Evangelicals must reclaim science for what it is—a fruitful human endeavor that offers understanding of God’s creation.

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<sup>123</sup> Dixon, Kindle ebook, loc 784.

<sup>124</sup> Walton, loc 1022.

## CHAPTER 6:

### THE E WORD: *EVOLUTION*

We are living in a world which is so designed that we are enabled to live beyond design.

—Niels Henrik Gregersen<sup>125</sup>

... Political leaders are well aware that when they comment in favor of intelligent design or creationism, they are signaling distrust of science more broadly, including on issues like climate change.

—Daniel Abbasi<sup>126</sup>

Daniel Abbasi, above, suggests that, in some way, Evangelicals have “been played.” We have created an alternate science in creationism, and politicians with motives that may be less than “sacred” often connect the dots between the science of evolution and the science of climate change in order to undermine Evangelical adoption of environmental causes.

We have argued that the Evangelical perspective on science and its relationship to the Bible and faith is critical if we have any hope of engaging the environmental conversation. “Exhibit A” is the Evangelical relationship with evolution.

If Francis Bacon provided the essential methodology for modern science, René Descartes provide its essential philosophical foundation. The pithy saying, “I think therefore I am” suggest the “Cartesian split” or “substance dualism” that undergirds scientific endeavor. Peters and Hewlett observe:

When the French mathematician and philosopher, René Descartes, separated his world into his mind (his "thinking thing") and everything else ("the extended

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<sup>125</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen and Ulf Görman, *Design and Disorder: Perspectives from Science and Theology*, Issues in Science and Theology (London ; New York: T & T Clark, 2002), 79.

<sup>126</sup> Abbasi, 132.



thing"), he precipitated a philosophical shift that had good points and bad points. On the good side, his insight allowed the development of a systematic approach to asking questions about what we observe. On the bad side, he created a rift between the physical and the spiritual that ... separated subjects and objects. He separated our subjective minds from the material objects we observe.<sup>127</sup>

We have noted how empirical science was, in some sense, birthed in the womb of the Church, and this new Baconian-Cartesian age (Bacon was Anglican, Decartes a Catholic), and we now see how their thinking influenced both the dualism previously decried and the anthropocentrism (addressed in chapter 8). Their work also serves as the foundation for Darwinism.

### Monkey Town

Charles Taylor, in his epic work, *A Secular Age*,<sup>128</sup> speaks of a creeping “move to a disenchanted universe in purely secular time”<sup>129</sup> to describe how the empirical, black and white world of Baconian science (and Cartesian philosophy) morphed into the organic, evolutionary world of constant variability described by Charles Darwin and his followers.

Early on, Evangelicals identified two separate issues with Darwin. On the one hand, the essence of evolution itself was not necessarily viewed as inconsistent with scripture.<sup>130</sup> As a case in point, David Livingstone offers a fascinating account of three

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<sup>127</sup> Peters and Hewlett, *Can You Believe in God and Evolution? : A Guide for the Perplexed*, 24.

<sup>128</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, loc 5275.

<sup>129</sup> For an example of another voice working with this same theme, see Alister E. McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature : The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

<sup>130</sup> Indeed, even before Darwin many Evangelicals were content with either the “day-age theory,” that took the six days of creation to represent vast eons of time, or the “gap theory,” that read the creation “in the beginning” as separate from the Edenic creation, in essence a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

contemporaneous examples of Presbyterian communities wrestling with Darwin in 1874—in Belfast, Ireland, Edinburgh, Scotland and Princeton, New Jersey.<sup>131</sup> Though they all shared a common theology and a common timeframe, they had very different reactions: “adoption” in Edinburgh, “repudiation” in Belfast and “tolerance” in Princeton, all on the basis of their unique local sociopolitical circumstances.

The second aspect of Darwinism met with near-universal skepticism among religious leaders, however: natural selection. This aspect of Darwin’s work has two unkind implications: the first is absolute secularization as there is no longer a Designer necessary without a design. And Mark Noll cites Henry Beach to describe the second consequence. Beach foresees with deep, dark foreboding the implications of the notion that will not take full form till Nazism rears its ugly head in the Second World War (along with the eugenics movement popular in the early 20th century): “Darwinists have been digging at the foundations of society and souls.... Natural selection is a scheme for the survival of the passionate and the violent, the destruction of the weak and defenseless.”<sup>132</sup>

As Evangelicals in various contexts and circumstances wrestled through various flavors and aspects of Darwinism<sup>133</sup> over the better part of a half century, Taylor again describes the angst and dissociative effect the new science had on the faithful:

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<sup>131</sup> David Livingstone, "Situating Evangelical Responses to Evolution" in Livingstone, Hart, and Noll, *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective*, loc 3144.

<sup>132</sup> Mark A. Noll, "Science, Theology, and Society: From Cotton Mather to Williams Jennings Bryan," in *ibid.*, 1773.

<sup>133</sup> Ronald Numbers, writing in “Creating Creationism” (Livingstone, Hart & Noll), notes how “malleable and politically serviceable” a label like Darwinism can be. For early Evangelical proponents, it merely meant “naturalistic evolution,” while in the mouths of opponents, it was synonymous with “natural selection.”

The new science wanted to sweep this [old order] away as so many Idols, in Baconian terms, and propound a literal account of physical reality.... This, along with the Protestant emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate authority, led to a suppression of the older many-levelled (*sic*) Biblical commentary, with its analogies, correspondences and relations of typicality. Hence the idea of fastening on the Bible primarily as a chronicle of events, and trying to extract the maximum of exactitude from the accounts one finds there: a project typical of the post-Galilean age, and which ends up in the ludicrous precision of Archbishop Ussher's calculations.

Seen within this framework, the whole of Christian faith stands or falls with the exact historicity of the detailed accounts of the Book of Genesis. There has, e.g., to be a universal flood 1,656 years after Creation, or close thereabouts; or else the Bible is "refuted".

What is remarkable about this outlook, in relation to what preceded it, is the elimination of mystery.<sup>134</sup>

And so we return to that notion, earlier expressed as disenchantment. But

“disenchantment” is a term cleanly associated with modernism. This postmodern age that is breaking through craves mystery that makes space for the re-enchantment of both science and theology. In the Postmodern paradigm, says Nancey Murphey, “theological thought would also have to be constrained by demands for consistency with beliefs in neighboring regions of the total web of knowledge. Thus relations between theology and science are built into postmodern epistemology.”<sup>135</sup>

### **Everything Old is New Again**

Science today suggests the universe as we know it is some fourteen billion years old. As Elizabeth Johnson notes, it is “old,” it is “large” and it is “interconnected” in ways we are just beginning to imagine.<sup>136</sup> In helpful and magical ways theologians are

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<sup>134</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, loc 5295.

<sup>135</sup> Nancey Murphey, "Bridging Theology and Science in a Postmodern Age" in Peters and Bennett, *Bridging Science and Religion*, EPUB, loc 945.

<sup>136</sup> Elizabeth Johnson, "The Banquet of Faith: Address at L.W.C.R. And S.M.S.M. Assembly," (2008).

only beginning to understand, the vastness of creation must expand both our vision of God and our appreciation of creation. It mitigates our tendency toward anthropocentrism as we can only pause in wonder as we consider the workings of a massive God over such a massive period of time. The finite stretches toward infinity, like the finger of Adam reaching out to touch the finger of God in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.

Looking forward to a "kinder, gentler" theological framework for Christian earthkeeping, clearly the doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation will play important roles as thoughtful Christians integrate our best understanding of science with our best theology, a theme we will return to in chapter twelve.

Alister McGrath suggests the outlines of just such a theology:

The Trinitarian grammar of faith certainly offers a new way of making sense of the suffering of a Darwinian world. But perhaps more importantly, it also allows us to cope with it, by providing a framework of interpretation that enables suffering to be engaged both cognitively and existentially.<sup>137</sup>

McGrath also makes reference to Simone Weil, the French philosopher who died at the age of 34 in London after contracting tuberculosis. Weil was an expatriate member of the French Resistance in World War II who, before her death, refused to eat more than what she believed her fellow French residents were able to eat under German occupation. Her brief, difficult life was marked by a late conversion to Christ. She writes: "The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering but a supernatural use for it."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> McGrath, *Darwinism and the Divine: Evolutionary Thought and Natural Theology*, 287.

<sup>138</sup> Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 1st complete English language ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

If indeed this world is characterized by science as “Nature, red in tooth and claw,”<sup>139</sup> Christ’s incarnation makes all the difference. Rachel Held Evans a young author wise beyond her years, writes in a prescient book, *Evolving in Monkey Town*, “I have a feeling that if Darwin turns out to be right, the Christian faith won’t fall apart after all. Faith is more resilient than that.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Alfred Tennyson Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H* (New York: The Bankside press, 1900), 61.

<sup>140</sup> Rachel Held Evans, *Evolving in Monkey Town: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask the Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 16.

## CHAPTER 7:

### THE M WORD: *MYTH* WITH A CAPITAL M

The biblical cosmologists drew both from the imaginative world of myth and from the immediate world of sensory perception for articulating their various accounts. Yet myth and the visible world were not discrete realms of knowledge for the ancients. The sky, readily apprehensible by sight, was also the dwelling of transcendence.... In the ancient cosmologies, moral imagination constituted a generative nexus between mythos and ethos, between sense perception and faith. What ought to be and what is, what could be and what has been, find their sublime convergence in creation and ... in the exercise of moral conduct.

—William P. Brown<sup>141</sup>

As we have previously established, our cosmology and cosmogony matter a great deal when it comes to developing our environmental sensitivity and our ways of viewing environmental issues. For example, after offering a simple definition (“beliefs about the origin of the universe,”), the website [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org) offers this note about a particular subculture—“conservative Christians”—in its glossary entry for the term *cosmogony*:

While over 95% of scientists and many other North American adults believe that the world and the rest of the universe is billions of years old, many conservative Christians believe in a universe less than 10,000 years of age.<sup>142</sup>

Similarly, The Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life presented a fascinating study on “Religious Differences on the Question of Evolution” in February of 2009, just ahead of the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin. Their findings, represented in the chart below, offer an enlightening snapshot that suggests a connection between biblical

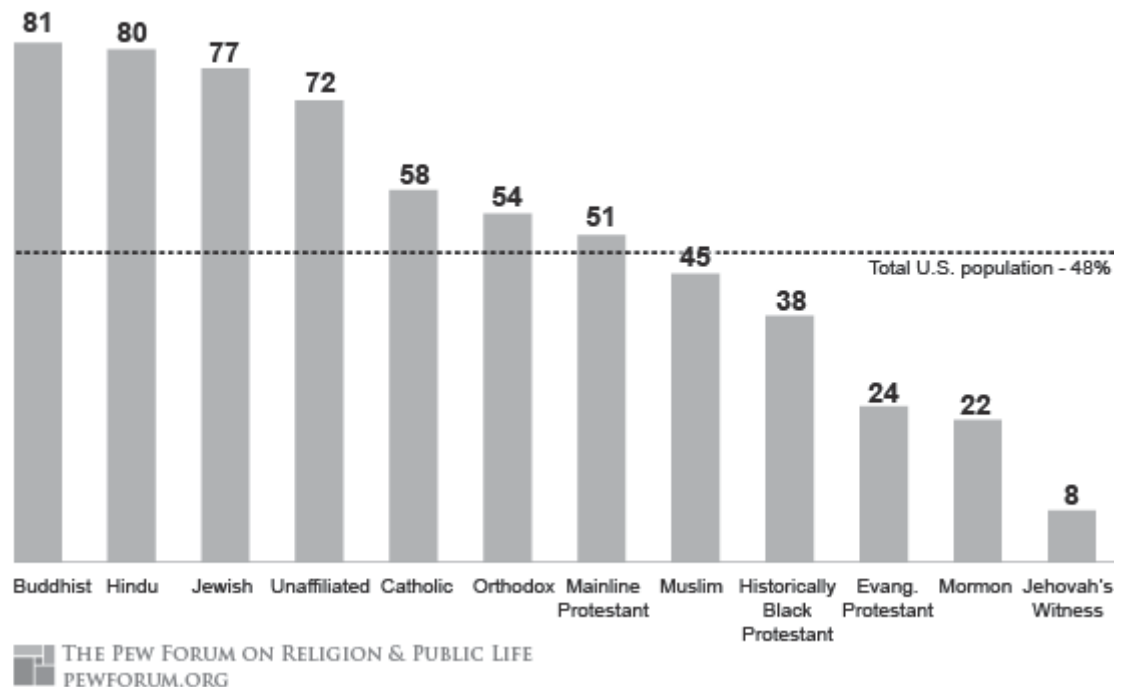
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<sup>141</sup> William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 22.

<sup>142</sup> "Religious Tolerance, Glossary", Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (accessed February 9, 2012). Available online at [http://www.religioustolerance.org/gl\\_c.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/gl_c.htm), accessed February 9, 2012

literalism, cosmogony and the acceptance of scientific contributions to matters related to the care of the earth. While roughly 80% of Jews, Hindus and Buddhists accept the theory of evolution, just over half of Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Mainline Protestants take that view. Stunningly though not surprisingly, less than a quarter of Evangelicals accept evolution.

*% who agree that evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth*



## *2 Pew Research on Evolution and Faith*

There are some issues with the Pew study. For example, an Evangelical might well accept the notion of evolution without fully assenting to the form the question takes here: “Do you agree that evolution is the best explanation for the origins of human life on earth?” As noted earlier, this description might well include some of the founders of Protestant Fundamentalism:

One of the best-kept secrets in American intellectual history is that B.B. Warfield, the foremost modern defender of the theologically conservative doctrine of the inerrancy of the Bible, was also an evolutionist.<sup>143</sup>

Sociologists of various kinds have suggested a link between one's position on evolution and the environment. One Cambridge University graduate, Tristan Fischer, has written an interesting article entitled, "Roots: A Historical Understanding Of Climate Change Denial, Creationism And Slavery – 1629-1775," where he attempts to connect the dots between creationism and climate change denial using three demographic maps of slave states, red and blue states in the 2008 presidential election, and leading church bodies in the US circa 2000.<sup>144</sup> Whatever the validity of such a study, as we have already established, the evolution versus creation debate in America has taken on such vitriolic proportion that it becomes far too easy to discount entire fields of science for some people of faith.

William Raeper and Linda Edwards enter the fray at this point, too—they have an entire section of their book devoted to "Science and Belief." In their chapter on creation and evolution, they describe several Christian theologies that find room for both creation *and* evolution:

The theory of evolution represents a turning-point in human understanding. New findings challenged old philosophies and religion was forced to rethink some aspects of its claims to 'truth'. But if science appeared to triumph over religion that was not necessarily science's gain, but humankind's loss. Understanding the questions posed by existing in the world cannot be reduced to science, though science has clarified many issues. The challenge to science is surely to fight for its

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<sup>143</sup> Livingstone and Noll, "B. B. Warfield (1851-1921). A Biblical Inerrantist as Evolutionist."

<sup>144</sup> Tristan Fischer, "Roots: A Historical Understanding of Climate Change Denial, Creationism and Slavery – 1629-1775," in *History, Future. Now.* (Buckinghamshire, England: 2012) <http://www.historyfuturenow.com/wp/roots-a-historical-understanding-of-climate-change-denial-creationism-and-slavery-1629-1775/#>, accessed



truth in the face of prejudice; the challenge for religion is to present its truth afresh to each new generation.<sup>145</sup>

Later they describe the interesting work of Thomas F. Torrance, who has thought long and hard about this intersection of religion and science, or “natural theology.” Torrance is remarkably prolific, but Elmer Colyer summarizes one of his pertinent points this way: “In scientific inquiry, we are faced not only with an astonishing intelligibility, but also with the question of *why* there is a contingent intelligible universe. But it is a question science cannot answer. And so, Torrance contends, this contingent and intelligible universe cries out mutely for a sufficient reason, and in so doing points beyond itself.”<sup>146</sup> Raeper and Edwards underscore this point: “If Torrance is correct, science and religion are not rivals but twins.”<sup>147</sup>

### *The M-Word*

What is the “M-word?” The “M-word” has had an unfavorable resonance among Evangelical theologians. “Myth” is the “M-word,” a term that can make or break pastoral and theological careers. Over the past half-century within Evangelicalism, any time you dare to connect the Bible with the term myth, you are in danger of heresy. For example, Peter Enns, who readily uses the term and admits he believes in theistic evolution, when

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<sup>145</sup> William Raeper and Linda Edwards, *A Brief Guide to Ideas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 232.

<sup>146</sup> Elmer M. Colyer, *How to Read T.F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian & Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 202.

<sup>147</sup> Raeper and Edwards, 240.

he writes to a largely Evangelical audience in his book, *Genesis for Normal People*, uses the word “myth” exactly once—and then only in reference to the Greek pantheon.<sup>148</sup>

Why is that so? And why might we hope to redeem “myth” for a new generation of thoughtful Evangelicals? Again we turn to Raeper and Edwards for insight.

Germany was the hot-bed of intellectual theological work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In response to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and later, Albert Schweitzer (whose book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, was published in 1906), Karl Barth (1886-1968) introduced “neo-orthodoxy” to pull the pendulum back toward a more conservative position. His contemporary countryman, Rudolf Bultmann, moderated somewhere between Barth and the earlier liberals:

Rudolf Bultmann (1844-1976) was Professor of Theology at Marburg in Germany from 1921-1951. He believed that most of the sayings of Jesus were created by the early church, and were not spoken by Jesus himself .... Bultmann is best-known for ‘de-mythologizing’ the New Testament. For the first-century world to speak to modern times, the ‘mythical’ world-view of that era has to be stripped away.<sup>149</sup>

As these German ideas were translated and made their way to England and then across the Atlantic to the US, it became clear to American Evangelicals who were growing increasingly conservative that Bultmann was using this term “myth” in a manner that undermined biblical authority. While Bultmann himself wrote, “Basically, the mythological talk seeks to do nothing other than to express the significance of the historical event,”<sup>150</sup> and while he was simply striving mightily to express the significance

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<sup>148</sup> Jared Byas and Peter Enns, *Genesis for Normal People: A Guide to the Most Controversial, Misunderstood and Abused Book of the Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Patheos Press, 2012), ebook, loc 876.

<sup>149</sup> Raeper and Edwards, 220.

<sup>150</sup> Rudolf Bultmann and Schubert Miles Ogden, *The New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 35.

of Scripture in a harsh, critical context steeped in modernism, for an American audience, his “myths” appeared as mere legends that had sprung up around the person and work of the “historical Jesus.”

While there may be Evangelicals who adhere to some version of Bultmann’s notions of “myth” today, surely the majority would react with disdain to the idea that the miraculous ministry of Jesus is little more than the story of an ordinary man riddled with legends.

*The New Mythbusters and the “Legends of the Fall”*

Even so, we need to redeem the word myth in its classic sense. Used properly, a “myth” is surely not the same as a “legend.” We need the “M-word” more than ever to help us with nuances of biblical hermeneutics. We need this word to help us negotiate our faith in an environmentally sensitive era.

There is always science involved in biblical interpretation. We are not often aware of it, but of course every time we simply pick up and start to read an English translation of the Bible, countless decisions about the way we interpret that text have already been made for us. These are the “dark arts” of biblical interpretation:

... in order to communicate his Word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses. To interpret properly the “then and there” of the biblical texts, you must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but you also need to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms (genres). The way God communicates his Word to us in the “here and now” will often differ from one form to another.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003), ebook, loc 420.

This counsel above from Fee and Stuart's classic, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth*, suggests that we approach the Psalms, for example, differently than Romans; and Revelation requires yet an additional skill-set and understanding of Jewish apocalyptic literature. And this understanding of genre must come before we start dissecting the text with our historical-grammatical tools. We have to know where the forest is before we can locate the individual tree.

Why did untold generations of Christians not insist on a very wooden, literal six-days of creation—including the earliest Princeton-based Fundamentalists—in their reading of Genesis 1-3? Why did B.B. Warfield, the father of modern biblical inerrancy, respond favorably to the newfangled notion of evolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? It is all about understanding genre. In a word, it is all about myth.

Speaking with hermeneutics in mind, it is not that the earliest chapters of the Hebrew Bible are not true. Nay—they are deeply true. There is a certain symmetry between ancient Israel and the native peoples in the Americas. Like the ancient Israelite community, indigenous peoples are historically agrarian, living close to the land, largely unaffected by Western ways of thinking, by Greek philosophy and modern capitalism and absolute literalism.

In Native American culture, the deepest and truest values, the most revered history, is passed on through story and song and dance, through art and dress. Randy Woodley, for example, reminds us, “Myth is not about whether something is fact or fiction; myth is more about truth. Good myth, according to the old adage, is about

something that continues to be true again and again, over time.”<sup>152</sup> Speaking elsewhere of his grandmother, Woodley adds, “...Her stories carried a mystique that caused us kids to listen to her intently. Those stories were real to me—some historical, some clearly fictional, but most falling into that mysterious category that even a child knew better than to classify too narrowly.”<sup>153</sup>

This “epic ethic” is not unlike ancient Israel. The truest truths, the most primal archetypes expressing their core beliefs and the essence of their relationship to their God are found in those ancient myths.

These are Myths with a capital “M.” Technically speaking, a myth is simply a story about a god, and in the case of Genesis, this god is the one who self-reveals as the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This God is too big for prose alone, for bullet point lists of what was created in which 24-hour period. This God demands our highest art, our finest songs, our most passionate dances, our truest stories.

If Rudolf Bultmann was interested in “demythologizing” Scripture, we must become interested in “re-mythologizing” Scripture, something akin to that which is suggested by Alister McGrath’s book, *The Re-Enchantment of Nature*:

Christianity is more than a theory in which one can take intellectual delight, offering a new appreciation of the beauty of the world--to be compared to Newton's optics or laws of motion or Maxwell's electrodynamic equations. It points to something that transcends these, which can be intuitively grasped in the present and which will be fully possessed in the future.... As the great English

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<sup>152</sup> Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation : An Indigenous Vision*, Prophetic Christianity (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), ebook, loc 1014.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., loc 101.

religious poet George Herbert (1593-1633) put it, we are enabled to catch a glimpse of "heaven in ordinary."<sup>154</sup>

When we read the Bible with eyes full of wonder, we encounter a brilliant and mysterious God creating a diverse web of related ecosystems designed to support a miraculous array of life begetting life. That is the power of myth, properly understood; that is a good hermeneutic that supports a high view of Scripture and biblical authority.

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<sup>154</sup> McGrath, *The Reenchantment of Nature : The Denial of Religion and the Ecological Crisis* , 5.

## CHAPTER 8:

### THE A WORD: *ANTHROPOCENTRISM*

(*Speaking of God's lengthy response to Job.*) What should we make of all this? And more exactly, how does this enigmatic text address the question, "Who is at the center of things?" First, it is clear that we humans are not at the center of things. In this text our anthropocentric pretensions to superiority are laid waste. We, like Job, are put in our rightful place.

—Steven Bouma-Prediger<sup>155</sup>

Abraham knew what the land was for—it was to drip milk and honey into Abraham's mouth.

—Aldo Leopold<sup>156</sup>

### Project Genesis

It seems humans have always thought we could do better than God. In *Star Trek 2: Wrath of Khan*, the Enterprise unleashes "Project Genesis," a military device that can create life on previously uninhabitable planets. According to Dr. McCoy, the device can accomplish in six minutes what it took God six days to do.

This Babel-like dynamic is at work in our era, too. In our hubris, have we missed the hand of God in creation of the so-called "animal kingdom" in the Genesis account?

Lisa Kemmerer says:

On the sixth day land animals (including human beings) were created. The Tanakh reveals what science has made clear: we are land mammals, primates, Great Apes, created with all other land-animals. Six times before humans are created, God declares creation to be good, revealing the "intrinsic worth of

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<sup>155</sup> Bouma-Prediger, 96.

<sup>156</sup> Aldo Leopold, "A Sand County Almanac: The Land Ethic," 21, no. 07 (2008): 204-205.

species... ‘*kol tov*—and it was good.’” The Hebrew deity created a good earth, with many good creatures.<sup>157</sup>

Here, Kemmerer underscores what Ellen Bernstein notes, too—human and animal are both formed from the same soil of the same earth, and both are considered “living souls.”<sup>158</sup>

Creation theology understands the intimate relationship between earth, humans and animals. God creates *adam* (humans) from *adamah* (soil). Both humans and animals are made from soil, cut from the same cloth. Both fall in the same category of *nephesh chaya*, “living souls.”<sup>159</sup>

Moreover, the stark utilitarianism that, on the basis of Lynn White’s iconic attack (that we will soon address),<sup>160</sup> springs from our essential Reformed American heritage, is challenged in the cold, hard facts of the Genesis account: Adam and Eve were vegan.

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.<sup>161</sup>

On the basis of the Genesis account, both humanity and the “animal kingdom” were, in God’s original design, vegetarians. In fact, it was not until after the flood that meat entered the menu. In the words of David Vogel, for God this is “... the divine

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<sup>157</sup> Lisa Kemmerer, “Jewish Ethics and Nonhuman Animals,” *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 5, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>158</sup> This equality is underscored once more when the animals on the ark are noted as full participants in the “Noahic Covenant” of Genesis 9.

<sup>159</sup> Ellen Bernstein on “Creation Theology: A Jewish Perspective” in *The Green Bible: Old Testament*, New Revised Standard Version ed., 1 vols. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), Kindle ebook, loc 1141.

<sup>160</sup> Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, (1967).

<sup>161</sup> Genesis 1:29-30.



compromise with Noah, which permitted humans to eat meat, but only under certain conditions.”<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, according to Genesis, some readers conclude that animals were, like Eve (and using a phrase from the King James Version), intended to be God’s “helpmeet.”

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.<sup>163</sup>

So “Project Genesis” establishes the value of animals, that they—like humans—are “living souls.” It likewise startles us into understanding that God’s original intent was a vegetarian diet. And while they failed to live up to the full promise of being counted as “helpmeets,” the animals were meant to be Adam’s “helpers” in tending the earth.

### **Anthropocentrism Defined**

Anthropocentrism is expressed either as a charge of human chauvinism, or as an acknowledgement of human ontological boundaries. It is in tension with nature, the environment and non-human animals (as well as non-humans per se). It is in apparent contrast to other-worldly cosmologies, religions and philosophies. Anthropocentrism has provided order and structure to humans’ understanding of the world, while unavoidably expressing the limits of that understanding. It influences our ethics, our politics, and the moral status of others.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> David Vogel, “How Green Is Judaism? Exploring Jewish Environmental Ethics,” in *Religious Perspectives on Business Ethics*, ed. T. O’Brien Paeth and S. Lanham (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 70.

<sup>163</sup> Genesis 2:18-22.

<sup>164</sup> Rob Boddice, *Anthropocentrism: Humans, Animals, Environments* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 1.

Anthropocentrism is one answer to the question, “How is the human defined through or against animal and objectified others, abstract environments and ecologies, and constructed cosmologies?”<sup>165</sup> It is also the classic charge against Christianity by the aforementioned Lynn White, whose 1967 article in *Science*, “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,”<sup>166</sup> linked environmental devastation to the anthropocentrism he felt was deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

White’s indictment remains a kind of “stake in the ground” that environmentalists and theologians alike feel compelled to engage. In 1985, Bill Devall and George Sessions broadened White’s accusation to suggest anthropocentrism represents the *de facto* worldview of Western society in their book.<sup>167</sup> Eccy de Jonge notes:

Devall and Sessions argued that our understanding of human nature has been so conditioned by the paradigm of domination—a paradigm that regards humans as isolated and fundamentally separate and superior to the rest of nature—that it has come to include all aspects of domination, e. g., masculine over feminine, the powerful over the poor, Western cultures over non-Western cultures, and so on.<sup>168</sup>

The subtitle of de Jonge’s article, “Deep Ecology and the Metaphysical Turn,” suggests that deep ecology in many ways represents a turn from Western anthropocentrism and utilitarianism, which sees creation as humanity’s “treasure chest” for its own purposes, toward a more creation-friendly spirituality. Dorothy Howell outlines what she sees as the tenets of “deep ecology:”

1. All life has intrinsic value.

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>166</sup> White.

<sup>167</sup> Bill Devall and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as If Nature Mattered* (Gibbs Smith, 1985).

<sup>168</sup> Eccy de Jonge, “An Alternative to Anthropocentrism: Deep Ecology and the Metaphysical Turn,” in Boddice, 308.

2. The richness and diversity of life have value.
3. Human life is privileged only to the extent of satisfying vital needs.
4. The relationship of humans to the natural world endangers life's richness and diversity.
5. Maintenance of life's richness and diversity mandates a decrease in human population.
6. Changes are needed to accommodate cultural diversity affecting basic economic, technological, and ideological components.
7. Ecologically sensitive ("green") societies value quality of human life over quantity of human life.<sup>169</sup>

While one might identify potential areas of disagreement between a biblically-oriented earthcare and a spirituality based on deep ecology, it is also clear that deep ecology is not necessarily the demonic ogre it is sometimes made out to be, as suggested for example in the title of E. Calvin Beisner's (of the Cornwall Alliance, a right-wing Evangelical think-tank often associated with climate change denial), "Deep Ecology, Neo-Paganism, and the Irrationalism of Global Warming Hysteria."<sup>170</sup>

Likewise, Evangelicals have often heard of *The Gaia Hypothesis*, a book by Sir James Lovelock, and Gaia has become associated in the *zeitgeist* as the goddess of a nature religion that assumes the earth itself is a sentient creature. While Lovelock's work invites metaphysical interpretation by its association with what is essentially the "Mother Earth" figure in the ancient Greek pantheon, Gaia, Lovelock himself emphasizes the scientific aspects of his hypothesis, representing earth as a complex, interrelated web of life.

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<sup>169</sup> Dorothy J. Howell, "Ecology for Environmental Professionals," (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1994). <http://www.questia.com/read/6485298>.

<sup>170</sup> E. Calvin Beisner, "Deep Ecology, Neo-Paganism, and the Irrationalism of Global Warming Hysteria," in *Christian Witness to a Pagan Planet*, ed. Peter Jones (Escondido, CA: 2008).

In fact, as Dan Story points out in his recent book, *Should Christians Be*

*Environmentalists*,

... extremists of any ilk do not represent rank-and-file environmentalism. During the past thirty-plus years I have been a member of several non-Christian environmental organizations. I've never met anyone who worshipped nature or believed that animals and natural objects are as valuable as people. The majority love outdoor activities and merely want to enjoy nature, set aside natural habitats, prevent the extinction of wildlife, and manage natural resources in an environmentally sensitive fashion. I'm sure few Christians would object to these goals.<sup>171</sup>

So, too, Katharine Wilkinson, suggests:

... conservative Christians may have perceived a number of reasons for apprehension or aversion. First, the pantheism or "nature worship" of some ecospiritual perspectives can be disconcerting. Second, the implicit reference to Greek mythology in James Lovelock's "Gaia Hypothesis" points to polytheistic underpinnings of this well-known environmental view. Third, the "biospheric egalitarianism" or moral equivalency of Arne Naess's deep ecology conflicts with a Christian perspective that perceives human beings to be unique among creatures. Fourth, connections between mystical new age movements and environmentalism indicate the green movement is tied to an alternative spirituality.<sup>172</sup>

Wilkinson adds, however, based on her research, "Paganism no longer appears to be the driving concern it once was" among Evangelicals.<sup>173</sup> Still that essential anthropocentrism and utilitarianism remains part of Western Christianity.

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<sup>171</sup> Dan Story, *Should Christians Be Environmentalists?* (Kregel Publications, 2012), Kindle ebook, loc 741.

<sup>172</sup> Wilkinson, 90.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*,

### Lessons From Job

So the relationship between humanity and the natural world is going to be challenging, especially if it's not seen for what it really is, a relationship between people and God manifested around us in creation.<sup>174</sup>

Bill McKibben, Harvard graduate and author of *The End of Nature*, is best known as a writer, speaker and environmental activist, but he is also a strong Methodist who cares deeply about God and people. While that may be deduced from virtually anything he has written, it is never clearer than in his book, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, that specifically tackles the book of Job and what McKibben sees as a genuine “game changer” in the modern human relationship to God’s creation.

McKibben portrays Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar—Job’s so-called comforters—as “the syndicated columnists of their day, repeating the old truths ad infinitum.” He cites liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez:

The author of this book may be trying to tell us by this wearisome repetition ... that their theology is an exhausted mine and that it keeps turning in place like a serpent biting its own tail. The only thing that changes in their speeches is the tone, which becomes steadily more hostile and intolerant.<sup>175</sup>

This “rigorously orthodox interpretation of the friends” is elegant in its simplicity: God is just and Job is guilty. That is why he now suffers. First in Job’s protestations and then in God’s explosive rhetoric, this orthodoxy will crumble. McKibben compares the “party line” in Job’s day to our own here in the modern era:

We have raised More on a pedestal; it is every bit as unchallenged an orthodoxy as the piety of Job’s friends or the mechanical earth-centered universe of Ptolemy

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<sup>174</sup> Benjamin Sewell Webb, “How Do We Respond When All Our Ways of Knowing Converge on Subversive Truths? An Interview with William McKibben,” *Religion and Education* 29, no. 1 (2002): 71.

<sup>175</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, cited in Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Cowley Publications, 2005), 2.

.... There is no question that growth seems desirable to us—it seems obviously, intuitively right. More is better. It fits with our understanding of the world—more means easier, more comfortable, more secure.<sup>176</sup>

When God finally speaks near the end of the book of Job, it is withering. The tone is caustic, even sarcastic. McKibben particularly notes the setting: “God is describing a world without people—a world that existed long before people, and that seems to have its own independent meaning.”<sup>177</sup> He goes on:

God seems untroubled by the notion of a place where no man lives—in fact, God says he makes it rain there even though it has no human benefit at all. God makes the *wilderness blossom*—what stronger way could there be to make the point, what more overpowering fact to rebut the notion that we are forever at the center of all affairs. The first meaning, I think, of God’s speech to Job is that we are a part of the whole order of creation—simply a part.<sup>178</sup>

If indeed “our anthropocentric bias is swept away” by God’s strong reminder to Job, what are we left with?<sup>179</sup> McKibben offers two antidotes to anthropocentrism: humility and joy. Humility, for McKibben, means figuring out “the proper relationship between people, the earth and God.”<sup>180</sup> Joy suggests that “this nonrational world of smells and sounds and sights, of immersion, of smallness and quietness, (that) answers to some of our deepest longings.”<sup>181</sup>

What is more: we need these two imperatives together. Humility and joy go hand-in-hand. “Together they are reinforcing, powerful—powerful enough, perhaps, to start

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 47.

changing some of the deep-seated behaviors that are driving our environmental destruction, our galloping poverty, our cultural despair.”<sup>182</sup>

McKibben suggests that God’s best ally in these critical times ought to be the church, for two reasons that relate to the divine imperatives of humility and joy:

The first is because they are the only institution left in society that understands some goal other than material progress .... The second reason that the churches could be so important is because they understand better than any other institution the possibilities of *transcendent* joy. At their best, they stand outside the consumer society.<sup>183</sup>

### **The Red Herring**

Anthropocentrism, then, is a red herring of sorts. The “A-word” is a charge that has some Evangelicals beating the bushes looking for wild-eyed tree worshipers who prefer the company of animals, while in fact an awareness of our collective tendency for selfishness ought to point us back to our relationship to the Creator and creation.

Humanity does indeed have a unique role to play in God’s universe. The final word goes once more to Bill McKibben:

*Witnessing* the glory around us—that is a role no other creature can play. When God tells us we are created in his image, the only thing we know about God is that he finds creation beautiful—“Good. Very good.” Perhaps that is a clue as to how we should see ourselves. Humans—the animal that appreciates. Appreciates each other, loves each other, protects each other from harm. Appreciates the rest of creation, loves the rest of creation, protects the rest of creation.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 67.

**PART THREE:****“THE END”**

This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends. This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.

—T. S. Eliot



## CHAPTER 9:

### THE BIG WORD: *ESCHATOLOGY*

No matter what one's initial impression of the *Left Behind* series may be, it is a fact that its presence is pervasive. It is this very fact that makes further reflection on the *Left Behind* series a matter of great importance. What is the worldview set forward? What is the origin of this way of thinking? What is the relationship between this point of view and the relevant biblical texts? What are the theological consequences of viewing the world in this way? What are the ethical implications of end time teaching and how should one read the book of Revelation?

--Gordon L. Isaac

May 21, 2011 is the date that was trumpeted on billboards across the U.S. after a Christian broadcast network, led by Harold Camping, the nearly 90-year old founder of Family Radio, calculated the date of the rapture. In an article published May 23, the Washington Post recounted the tragic tales of the true believers, like Robert Fitzpatrick, a former transit worker who spent his entire retirement spreading the news; and 27-year old Adrienne Martinez, who gave up medical school and likewise spent her family's savings to share the "good news."<sup>185</sup>

After enjoying a very public resurgence over the past decade with the success of the *Left Behind* series, there are signs that premillennial dispensationalism has gone back underground in many quarters. In 2012, Wheaton's Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, for example, notes that while "... the doctrine has experienced fluctuations

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<sup>185</sup> Elizabeth Tenety and Elizabeth Flock, "Harold Camping Speaks after Rapture Fails to Begin on May 21," *Washington Post*, May 23 2011.

in its popularity over the years,” “... the percentage of the evangelical population which holds to a dispensational view of the Bible is actually dropping.”<sup>186</sup>

Evangelicals are not alone in their appetite for apocalypticism. Americans in general seem to have a predilection for the apocalyptic. Just before the turn of the century, it was widely believed the Y2K bug, a programming flaw in early computer chips, would create economic and general devastation. The Centers for Disease Control created a stir in 2011 when their Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response posted a serious looking webpage entitled, “Zombie Preparedness.”<sup>187</sup> Science has its own dark story of the end of the world: writing in the shadow of Camping’s prediction, Richard Dawkins suggested as much in an interview with Sally Quinn entitled, “Science Explains the End of the World.”<sup>188</sup> All of this suggests that American Evangelicals are uniquely subject to embracing apocalyptic visions of the future.

Eschatology, of course, is meant to address more than “the end times.” It likewise encompasses the fulfillment of God’s coming Kingdom, the destiny of the planet and life in the ever-after. We now turn our attention to these things.

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<sup>186</sup> Larry Eskridge, “Evangelicals and the End Times”, Wheaton College <http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/End-Times> (accessed September 20).

<sup>187</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Zombie Preparedness”, Office of Public Health and Response <http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/zombies.htm> (accessed September 20 2012).

<sup>188</sup> Sally Quinn, “Science Explains the End of the World,” *Washington Post*, May 10 2011.

## CHAPTER 10:

### *STAR TREK* THEOLOGY

Contrary to popular apocalyptic thinking, there is no “rapture” or a future snatching of born-again Christians up from the earth in Revelation. Instead, God is “raptured” down to earth to take up residence among us. Revelation declares God’s commitment to the earth as the location of salvation. God’s bridal city will descend to earth, and God will dwell in the midst of the renewed city. With great tenderness God wipes away people’s tears and takes away their sorrow.

—Barbara Rossing

By any account, *Star Trek* is a phenomenal entertainment success. This modest program, televised for just 79 episodes over three seasons from 1966-1969, has arguably spawned more films, sequels, prequels and spinoffs than any other show in television history.<sup>189</sup>

One of its most enduring dramatic conventions involved the “transporter beam,” a device able to move people and materials from point A to point B by disassembling and then reassembling them at the subatomic level—all within a matter of seconds. Inevitably, Captain Kirk and company would be on the verge of certain doom when Kirk would flip open his communicator and yell, “Beam me up, Scotty!” to Mr. Scott, the chief engineer aboard the Enterprise. Just in time, the endangered would find themselves back on the ship, safe and sound. It was the space-age equivalent of the old American Western where the cavalry would inevitably ride in to save the day.

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<sup>189</sup> For science fiction fans, a determination of ultimate popularity is a complex argument. Consider, the article that appears within the “Star Wars Fanpedia” website, posted here [http://swfans.wikia.com/wiki/Star\\_Trek\\_versus\\_Star\\_Wars](http://swfans.wikia.com/wiki/Star_Trek_versus_Star_Wars). Each franchise has its alternative “canons” that may or may not include what the primary studio considers unauthorized versions of the series. For example, “Although *Star Trek: The Animated Series* was previously ‘disowned’ in canon, recently Paramount has stated that now, *The Animated Series* is indeed canon, with events occurring in the series being referenced in later canon live-action series.”

It also sounds remarkably like the *Left Behind* theology of Tim Lahaye and (earlier still) Hal Lindsey. This is uniquely Evangelical and thoroughly American, though it was initially imported from Ireland.

### **“Left Behind” ... in Dublin**

David Bebbington notes the roots of premillennialism in England in the 1820s:

The belief that Christ would come again in person was an innovation in the Evangelical world of the 1820s. It was part of the Romantic inflow into Evangelicalism. Christ the coming king could readily be pictured by poetic imaginations fascinated by the strange, the awesome and the supernatural.<sup>190</sup>

More, prior to that time, Evangelicalism was postmillennial in its views. Again, Bebbington:

Optimism was expressed in doctrinal form through belief in a millennium.... The particular version of the belief held in the Enlightenment era was uniformly postmillennial: the second coming of Christ, that is to say, would not take place until after the millennium ... the result of gradual improvement—a belief that shaded into the idea of progress. (Jonathan Edwards speculated) that the millennium would come to birth in America.<sup>191</sup>

It was into this “Romantic inflow” that John Nelson Darby was born (1800), eventually graduating from Trinity College Dublin. There, he developed “a fundamental dichotomy that shapes all of his thinking. According to him, God has two completely different economies of operation, one for an earthly people (Israel), and another for a heavenly people (the church).”<sup>192</sup>

Darby sharpened his theological system in a series of trips to the United States. He began to teach that God had made a series of covenants that marked seven

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<sup>190</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, 83.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>192</sup> Isaac, 37.

“dispensations” through history that involved Israel or, later, the church. Studying Daniel, Darby identified a trigger for getting the “prophetic clock” ticking toward the Second Coming—“the secret pretribulational rapture of the church ... the Rapture thus becomes the first in a two-stage coming of Christ.”<sup>193</sup>

Gordon Isaac tracks the spread of Darby’s ideas into the Evangelical mainstream:

The small group of believers grew steadily to become a movement. The real boost to the acceptance of the system came through at least four important impulses: a set of strategic biblical prophecy meetings known as the Niagara Bible Conferences, the Scofield Reference Bible, the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy, and the earth-shattering shock of the First World War.<sup>194</sup>

The Niagara Bible Conferences, initially convened in New York City in 1878 by prominent Presbyterian minister, James Brookes, were attended by a broad mix of American Protestants who had grown disenchanted with postmillennialism. C.I. Scofield was an occasional teacher at the conference series, and he eventually produced the annotated Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909, one of the first “study Bibles” with its extracanonical aids that swayed its readers to adopt a premillennial dispensationalist viewpoint. Modernists moved ever farther to the left to accommodate recent science and biblical criticism while Fundamentalists moved to the right toward alternative science and biblical literalism. And World War I put an end to any romantic notions postmillennialists may have had about the prospects for human advancement.

### **The Late, Great Postmillennial Movement**

In the minds of many then, early in the twentieth century, Jonathan Edwards, cited above, along with the other earliest Evangelicals, was wrong about America’s role in the

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 41.

millennium—or at least about their postmillennial viewpoint, if not about America’s role in the days to come. Later dispensationalists would have something to say on this latter point:

The cutting edge of the evangelical right is organized around a vengeful vision of the Second Coming modeled upon one reading of Revelation and dramatized in the best-selling series of novels, “Left Behind.” The series has sold over sixty million copies to date, and film versions are also in wide circulation. While Revelation itself protested the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire, the new series maintains the ethos of revenge expressed in the book on behalf of American sovereignty and world hegemony.<sup>195</sup>

*Left Behind* is not the first Evangelical, commercial success to cross over into the public consciousness. As noted in the Introduction, Hal Lindsey’s *The Late, Great Planet Earth* was the number one non-fiction bestseller in the 1970s.

Lindsey had been a campus coordinator at UCLA for Bill Bright’s Campus Crusade for Christ before parting ways and writing this book that weaved the standard dispensationalism he had learned under John Walvoord at Dallas Theological Seminary with current headlines. In the thick of the Jesus Movement and in the wake of Vietnam with the corresponding heating up of the Cold War, the book captured the angst of a generation.

### **Left Behind and the Bible**

To ask a bald question, is premillennial dispensationalism scriptural? What is “scriptural” is too often in the eye of the beholder. Tim LaHaye, coauthor of *Left Behind*,

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<sup>195</sup> William E. Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 44.

surprisingly notes “that almost thirty percent of Scripture is dedicated to Bible prophecy.”<sup>196</sup> Further:

Failure to understand God's plan, from the coming of the 'first Adam' to the second coming of Christ to establish His kingdom, will keep you from answering the big philosophical questions in life: *Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I get there?* Only a study of prophecy adequately answers all of these questions.<sup>197</sup>

It is difficult to argue with a worldview that ties the deepest meanings of life to one's perspective on biblical prophecy from a premillennial dispensationalist viewpoint.

There certainly are, however, other faithful Christian voices, both from within and outside Evangelicalism. British scholar N.T. Wright labels *Left Behind* “openly dualistic” and “blatantly right-wing American.”<sup>198</sup> Barbara Rossing is a Lutheran and an Evangelical who writes:

The message of the biblical book of Revelation is not of despair or war, but of transformation and justice. Its tree of life and river of life give hope for each one of us and for our whole world. Revelation's urgent message to us is one of ethics, not escape. We must re-claim the heart of the Bible as a story of God's love for the world—a world that will not be left behind.<sup>199</sup>

Craig Hill is a United Methodist who is more direct in his assessment of what is and is not a proper reading of scripture:

In sum, contemporary America's most popular Christian eschatology is unscriptural. Ironically, in their effort to interpret the Bible literally and consistently, proponents of the rapture have mangled the biblical witness almost beyond recognition. At the end of all their theorizing and systematizing, it is the

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<sup>196</sup> Tim LaHaye, cited in Isaac, 103.

<sup>197</sup> Tim F. LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Are We Living in the End Times?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 10.

<sup>198</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Last Word : Beyond the Bible Wars to a New Understanding of the Authority of Scripture*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 106.

<sup>199</sup> Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed : The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, Pbk. ed. (New York: Basic Book, 2005), viii.

Bible itself, this wonderfully diverse and complex witness to God and Christ, that has been left behind.<sup>200</sup>

While our rich Evangelical history, and the legacy of the Wesleys, Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards and others, points a way forward for Evangelicals beyond premillennial dispensationalism and its “Star Trek theology,” it is absolutely possible for conservative Evangelicals who retain premillennialism to yet find their way into earthkeeping. Speaking of her relationship with fundamentalists whom she interviewed, Amy Johnson Frykholm, in her book, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*, tenderly reports:

I could tangibly sense the way that apocalyptic language and belief in the rapture gave them hope, both cultivated and assuaged fear, and compelled them toward compassion for the world.<sup>201</sup>

For the sake of both those who remain in the hold of Left Behind as well as all of humanity and this earth that is our home, may it be. On this point—the earth that is our home—we now turn our full attention.

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<sup>200</sup> Hill, 207.

<sup>201</sup> Frykholm, loc 106.



## CHAPTER 11:

### *TERRA NOVA*

As a result, I have grown strangely attached to the Terra Nova

—Robert Falcon Scott, British explorer, speaking of his ship prior to the ill-fated Antarctic expedition that cost him his life in 1912

God has not revealed to human beings details about how the world began or how the world will end, and failing to recognize that, one is likely to misread both the first book and the last book in the Bible. *The author of Rev(elation) did not know how or when the world will end, and neither does anyone else.*

—Raymond Brown, (*italics are his*)

The common eschatological conceptions of modern conservative Evangelicalism have everything working in reverse. While we too often understand the present as hurtling into a dark and ominous future, in truth, throughout its history much of the Church has understood that the future is hurtling toward the present. The oft-quoted phrase that the kingdom of God is “now but not yet” has it exactly right. The fullness of God’s kingdom is coming, and all creation groans in anticipation of that day.<sup>202</sup>

Likewise, as Evangelicals we sometimes speak of throwing off this matter that makes up our bodies and the world around us, longing for a day when God unleashes cosmic “weapons of mass destruction” that free us to finally “slip the surly bonds of earth,” transported to heaven to touch “the face of God.”<sup>203</sup> But again, in truth heaven is hurtling toward earth.

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<sup>202</sup> Romans 8:22.

<sup>203</sup> The latter allusions are to John Gillespie Magee, Jr.’s poem, “High Flight,” oft-used by the US Air Force, as well as the Royal Air Force (UK) and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

## Surprised By Hope

N.T. Wright makes just these points in his writings, and particularly in *Surprised by Hope*.<sup>204</sup> Wright also recognizes how what he calls “the American obsession” with the second coming has particular import for directing our praxis when it comes to stewarding God’s creation:

... I was giving some lectures in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in the early 1980s. I was talking about Jesus in his historical context; and to my surprise almost all the questions afterwards were about ecology—about trees and water and crops, which is after all what there mostly is at Thunder Bay. It turned out ... that many conservative Christians ... just to the south in the United States, had been urging that since we were living in the ‘end times’, with the world about to come to an end, there was no point worrying about trying to stop polluting the planet with acid rain and the like. Indeed, wasn’t it ‘unspiritual’, and even a sign of a lack of faith, to think about such things? If God was intending to bring the whole world to a shuddering halt, what was the problem? If Armageddon was just around the corner, it didn’t matter....<sup>205</sup>

Wright speaks of the essential *continuity* in the biblical accounts that address the nature of the resurrected body, the new heavens and the new earth. We must acknowledge this continuity that aids us in shedding the dualism of our “sweet by and by” theology. At the same time, Wright reminds us of the *discontinuity* likewise evident in these accounts; there is neither a “shedding” of the old nor the progressive perfection of the status quo:

(Redemption) doesn’t mean scrapping what’s there and starting again from a clean slate, but rather liberating what has come to be enslaved. And, because of the analysis of evil not as materiality but as rebellion, the slavery of humans and of the world does not consist in embodiment, redemption from which would mean the death of the body and the consequent release of the soul or spirit. The slavery

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<sup>204</sup> This section makes extensive use of “Part 2: God’s Future Plan,” in Wright, *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 91-198.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

consists, rather, in sin, redemption from which must ultimately involve not just goodness of soul or spirit but a newly embodied life.<sup>206</sup>

### **Destruction or Transformation?**

Steve Bouma-Prediger advances Wright's points as he specifically addresses 2 Peter 3:10 that reads, in the King James Version, "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." The King James translators here cannot be faulted; most English versions convey the idea that this planet is destined for destruction:

To put it bluntly, this verse represents perhaps the most egregious mistranslation in the entire New Testament.... The Greek verb in question here is *heurethêsetai*, from *heurêskein*, "to find," from which we get the English expression "eureka." This text ... is not about the destruction of creation. It refers, rather, to the purification and renewal of creation. As Thomas Finger insists in his careful study of this text, "The main emphasis of the text is that everything will be scrutinized or assessed by God, and not necessarily destroyed...." Biblical eschatology affirms the redemption and restoration of creation.<sup>207</sup>

Responding to a theology that views the earth as little more than a temporary habitation for Christians who are sure to be raptured, Barbara Rossing adds:

This theology is not biblical. We are not Raptured off the earth, nor is God. No, God has come to live in the world through Jesus. God created the world, God loves the world, and God will never leave the world behind!<sup>208</sup>

### **"Adam Again"**

Can we ever be Adam again?

—Michael Omartian

J. Richard Middleton builds further still on what the *eschaton* will actually look like, summarizing "the bold, even startling, theological claim that the eternal destiny of

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>207</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger, "Is Christianity to Blame? The Ecological Complaint against Christianity," in Creation Care Conference, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 30-31.

<sup>208</sup> Rossing, 55.

the redeemed consists in the renewal of earthly life, to the exclusion of a disembodied heaven hereafter.”<sup>209</sup> Wright achieves this same sense of wonderment in his readers by noting, “The idea of the human being Jesus now being in ‘heaven’, in his thoroughly embodied risen state, comes as a shock to many people, including many Christians.”<sup>210</sup>

The surprise factors for both authors point to just how far askew our common conception of the afterlife is relative to the scriptural account. Middleton suggests we have misunderstood both the nature of *creation* and *redemption*. For Middleton, *creation* must include human society and culture that builds on the environment: “The reduction of creation to “nature” results in the absence of critical reflection on the defining human calling to develop culture and the redemptive calling to participate in its transformation.”<sup>211</sup> The biblical view of *redemption* is much more than transferring our address from a lower realm to a higher realm:

Whereas a dualistic understanding of redemption typically devalues the good world God created and encourages an aspiration to transcend finitude, the biblical worldview leads to an affirmation of the goodness of creation, along with a desire to pray and work for the redemption of precisely this world (including human, socio-cultural institutions) that earthly life might be restored to what it was meant to be.<sup>212</sup>

Middleton takes a narrative view of scripture, but he adds a fourth element to the usual creation-fall-redemption movement: *consummation*, and he is careful to note that the restoration of creation does not mean a return to “primitive beginnings:”

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<sup>209</sup> J. Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11, (2006): 73.

<sup>210</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 114.

<sup>211</sup> Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption," 74.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

The Bible itself portrays the move from creation to *eschaton* as movement from a garden (in Genesis 2) to a city (in Revelation 21-22). Redemption does not reverse, but rather embraces, historical development. The transformation of the initial state of the earth into complex human societies is not part of the fall, but rather the legitimate creational mandate of humanity.<sup>213</sup>

Middleton, Wright and others paint a full-orbed picture of the *eschaton* that includes humankind, earth and the entirety of creation. The “new earth” is in some essential sense the old earth, renewed and redeemed for God’s good purpose that includes human society and culture. In the incarnation, and particularly in the resurrection, Jesus becomes the second Adam,<sup>214</sup> the *adam* from the *adamah*, the human from the humus. Might his resurrected body—with striking aspects of both continuity and discontinuity—suggest a similar destiny for the second *adamah*, a redeemed creation? Middleton surely thinks so:

But “heaven” simply does not describe the Christian eschatological hope. Not only is the term “heaven” never used in Scripture for the eternal destiny of the redeemed, but continued use of “heaven” to name the Christian hope may well divert our attention from the legitimate biblical expectation for the present transformation of our earthly life to conform to God’s purposes. Indeed, to focus our expectation on an otherworldly salvation has the potential to dissipate our resistance to societal evil and the dedication needed to work for the redemptive transformation of this world.

Speaking of this bright and beautiful expectation of transformation, N.T. Wright adds:

In other words, that which we are tempted to regard as the permanent state of the cosmos—entropy, threatening chaos and dissolution—will be transformed by the Messiah, acting as the agent of the creator God.... The gospel of Jesus Christ announces that what God did for Jesus at Easter he will do, not only for all those who are ‘in Christ’, but for the entire cosmos. It will be an act of new creation,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>214</sup> As Paul suggests in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15.

parallel to and derived from the act of new creation when God raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>215</sup>

If indeed, heaven is coming, transforming this earth, we must, to quote Jesus, be about our “Father’s business,” renewing the earth. *That servant will be blessed if his master finds him doing this job when he comes.*<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Wright, *Surprised by Hope : Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 111.

<sup>216</sup> Matthew 24:46, in *God's Word Translation*, (Cleveland, OH: God's Word to the Nations Bible Society, 1995).

## A LONG AFTERWORD

### *WALKING IN MEMPHIS*

Now Muriel plays piano every Friday at the Hollywood  
 And they brought me down to see her and they asked me if I would  
 Do a little number, and I sang with all my might  
 And she said, "Tell me, are you a Christian, child?"  
 And I said "Ma'am, I am tonight"

Put on my blue suede shoes and I boarded the plane  
 Touched down in the land of the Delta Blues  
 In the middle of the pouring rain

—Marc Cohn, *Walking in Memphis*<sup>217</sup>

Others, however, see more hope embedded in the irony that naturalists/biologists and creationists are the two groups that are perhaps closest to one another on the importance of caring for nature. If they could put aside their differences over how the world began, they might find surprising depths of common ground.

—Daniel Abbasi<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Mark Cohn, *Walking in Memphis* (New York: Atlantic Records).

<sup>218</sup> Abbasi, 132.

## **The Beginning, the End and Everything in Between:**

### **Now What?**

The city of Memphis, Tennessee today is a larger-than-life tourist's delight. It offers Beale Street, with its cornucopia of blues clubs; the Rock 'n' Soul Museum; world-class barbeque joints; an arena shaped like a massive pyramid; riverboats steaming down the Mississippi; the Pink Palace Mansion, originally built as the home of the founder of the Piggly Wiggly grocery chain; and of course Graceland, the kitschy home and eternal resting place of Elvis Presley.

Memphis is also home to the National Civil Rights Museum, site of the former Lorraine Motel and its second story balcony where Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot on April 4, 1968, the morning after he delivered his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech to 25,000 people assembled at Mason Temple on a stormy spring evening.

King had come to a crossroads in his civil rights work. Critics were chastising him for becoming involved in secondary causes, and in fact, he was in Memphis in support of a sanitation workers' strike. He was in Memphis in support of environmental justice.

Some ninety percent of the city's sanitation workers were African American. At the time, residents did not take their cans to the curb, so workers had to collect the garbage from the sides of homes and metal cans that often leaked and had no lids. The city refused to provide even the most basic personal protective equipment. There were no gloves, no safety boots, no uniforms, no place to shower in the case of exposure to toxins. Two recent incidents had caused the workers to strike. First, a particularly nasty rainstorm had sent garbage streaming through the streets; the unsafe conditions led the city to send the workers home. White workers were paid for the day off; African



Americans were not paid. Second, the city had stalled in upgrading the common sense safety measures most other municipalities had already added to their fleet of trucks. Two African American workers were crushed when they took refuge inside their truck in another storm—the safety shut-off was located only on the outside with no safety switch inside the truck’s interior.<sup>219</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr. was in Memphis with “the least of these.” King’s presence in Memphis that rainy April also represents the great gift the Church might offer earth’s inhabitants as we take our rightful place as leaders in the environmental crisis. That gift is hope.

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<sup>219</sup> Many of the facts surrounding King at Memphis are adapted from Sarah Berkley, “Recognizing Environmental Justice in History: Resistance and Agency in the Cross Bronx Expressway and the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike” (Connecticut College, 2011).

## CHAPTER 12:

### COMMON GROUND: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

If there's a proposal no one else wants, it's going to find its way to the poorest community.

—Ana Baptista, PhD, Director,  
Ironbound Community Inc., Newark, NJ<sup>220</sup>

#### “Occupy Jerusalem”

What did Amos know that we have forgotten? Amos 5:11 might well represent the prophet's early attempt to “Occupy Jerusalem.” “Therefore, because you trample upon the poor and exact from them the grain tax—though you have built houses of dressed stone, you shall not live in them; you have planted delightful vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.”

Jim Wallis, *Sojourners* president, writing in the early days of the Occupy Wall Street movement, noted the mixed messages within such a large, leaderless group and he hedged his bet by suggesting that time would tell if the movement had meaning. Even so:

Here are a few things I **do** know about the Occupy Wall Street protesters: When they stand with the poor, they stand with Jesus. When they stand with the hungry, they stand with Jesus. When they stand for those without a job or a home, they stand with Jesus. When they are peaceful, non-violent, and love their neighbors (even the ones they don't agree with and who don't agree with them), they are walking as Jesus walked. When they talk about holding banks and corporations accountable, they sound like Jesus and the biblical prophets before him who all spoke about holding the wealthy and powerful accountable.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ana Baptista, "Environmental Justice Tour," in *GreenFaith Environmental Justice Conference* (Newark, NJ: 2011).

<sup>221</sup> Jim Wallis, "Praying for Peace and Looking for Jesus at #OccupyWallStreet," in Jim Wallis, "Praying for Peace and Looking for Jesus at #Occupywallstreet," in *Huffington Post* (Huffington Post, 2011) *Huffington Post* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/occupy-wall-street-looking-for-jesus\\_b\\_998381.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jim-wallis/occupy-wall-street-looking-for-jesus_b_998381.html) (2011), accessed December 10, 2011.

Consumerism, in the context of Western capitalism, can often seem like *The Matrix*, “the world pulled over our eyes”<sup>222</sup> That description might best fit the lens with which many of us in the Evangelical church perceive our lives and the socio-political issues of our time. We cannot see the dots that might connect our relative wealth, power and privilege with systemic disadvantages for others.

As Dr. Peter Montague, co-founder and director of The Environmental Research Foundation in Annapolis, Maryland, has noted, “The system continues to produce outcomes based on race and class. It’s not just about who is disadvantaged, but who is advantaged.”<sup>223</sup>

### **Adventures in Missing the Point**

A few years ago Tony Campolo and Brian McLaren had a kind of public discussion via their book, *Adventures in Missing the Point*.

Are our churches and broadcasts and books and organizations merely creating religious consumers of religious products and programs?<sup>224</sup> Are we creating a self-isolating, self-serving, self-perpetuating, self-centered subculture instead of a world-penetrating (like salt and light), world-serving (focused on ‘the least and the lost,’ those Jesus came to seek and save), world-transforming (like yeast in bread), God-centered (sharing God’s love for the whole world) counterculture? If so, even if we proudly carry the name evangelical (which means, ‘having to do with the gospel’), we’re not behaving as friends to the gospel we seek to live and proclaim. This book is our attempt, flawed and faltering to be sure, to get us

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<sup>222</sup> Larry Wachowski and Andy Wachowski, “The Matrix,” (USA: Warner Bros. Entertainment, 1999).

<sup>223</sup> Peter Montague, “Environmental Justice Municipal Ordinance Workshop,” in *GreenFaith Environmental Justice Conference* (Newark, NJ: 2011).

<sup>224</sup> The authors here sound remarkably like James Davison Hunter with his critique of the Evangelical “shadow” culture that merrily goes about its endeavors largely unnoticed by the rest of society.

thinking about the frightening possibility of unintentional betrayal of the gospel by those entrusted with it.<sup>225</sup>

This chapter continues that discussion, narrowly focusing on that sociopolitical peninsula where economics and environmentalism join: *environmental justice*.<sup>226</sup> I suggest it is also the space where environmentalists and Evangelicals might meet.

In his book, *Garbage Wars*, David Naguib Pellow cites Bunyan Bryant's definition of "environmental justice":

Environmental justice ... refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behaviors, policies, and decisions to support sustainable communities where people can interact with confidence that the environment is safe, nurturing, and productive. Environmental justice is served when people can realize their highest potential.... [Environmental justice] is supported by decent paying safe jobs; quality schools and recreation; decent housing and adequate health care; democratic decision-making and personal empowerment; and communities free of violence, drugs, and poverty. These are communities where both cultural and biological diversity are respected and highly revered and where distributive justice prevails.<sup>227</sup>

Evangelicals and environmentalists often speak past one another, as we will now demonstrate.

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<sup>225</sup> Brian D. McLaren and Anthony Campolo, *Adventures in Missing the Point: How the Culture-Controlled Church Neutered the Gospel* (El Cajon, CA: EmergentYS, 2003), 11-12.

<sup>226</sup> Environmental justice is sometimes called eco-justice. Certain authors have suggested fine points of distinction. See for example, Whitney Bauman, Richard Bohannon, and Kevin O'Brien, *Grounding Religion a Field Guide to the Study of Religion and Ecology*, (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 2010). Hence, "environmental justice-a movement advocating the rights and participation of marginalized peoples in environmental concerns-and eco-justice-a theological and ethical ideal that harmoniously incorporates both social and ecological concerns."

<sup>227</sup> David N. Pellow, *Garbage Wars: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Chicago*, Urban and Industrial Environments (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), MOBI ebook, loc 133.

## Change of Climate

Evangelicals can change at the drop of a hat.... They have no one to answer to other than the Bible. So if the Bible says it, they do it.... They are used to conversion.

—Calvin DeWitt, Director  
Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies<sup>228</sup>

Maybe we can blame James Hansen, Director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies since 1981. In his book, *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Hansen tells the story of how his continual use of the phrase “global warming” led to increasing resistance until a colleague warned him to use “climate change” instead.<sup>229</sup>

Whatever the case, there is a distinct difference in response to the two phrases. In a recent scientific survey:

Republicans were less likely to endorse that the phenomenon is real when it was referred to as “global warming” (44.0%) rather than “climate change” (60.2%), whereas Democrats were unaffected by question wording (86.9% vs. 86.4%). As a result, the partisan divide on the issue dropped from 42.9 percentage points under a “global warming” frame to 26.2 percentage points under a “climate change” frame.<sup>230</sup>

In another recent survey, it becomes clear the Evangelical audience is even more complex and nuanced:

Among those who believe the earth is getting warmer [69% overall], nearly two-thirds (64%) believe that climate change is caused by human activity, compared to 32% who say it is caused by natural environmental patterns.... White evangelicals are significantly less likely to believe that the earth is getting warmer

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<sup>228</sup> David Roberts, "The Soul of Dewitt: An Interview with Environmental Scientist and Evangelical Leader Calvin Dewitt," *Grist* (2006). <http://www.grist.org/article/dewitt>.

<sup>229</sup> James E. Hansen, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2009), Kindle ebook, loc 1586.

<sup>230</sup> J.P. Schuldt, S.H. Konrath, and N. Schwarz, "'Global Warming' or 'Climate Change'?", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2011).

and that changes are caused by human activity (31%) than ... the unaffiliated (52%).<sup>231</sup>

Calvin DeWitt, the current senior spokesman among Evangelicals interested in the environment, suggests that, given the proper understanding, Evangelicals can change their minds in a moment: "They are used to conversion."<sup>232</sup> And that brings us back to the subject of environmental justice.

### **Environmental Justice as the Cross-Roads**

We have been waiting since the 1990 Clean Air Act for this day to come.... As a father and now a grandfather, this is personal. It is also central to the Evangelical Environmental Network's ministry of creation care, because for us creation care is a matter of life.

— Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox, Evangelical Environmental Network<sup>233</sup>

#### *Shades of Green*

It should be clear that there are all shades of "green" within the environmental movement, and Evangelicalism has every reason to react to certain extreme forms "... because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Romans 1:25). Consider, for example, this entry from the popular *Woman's Study Bible* on "Goddess Religion":

Goddess worshipers believe that deity is immanent in all things. They view "God" as an internal, universal feminine force rather than an external, autonomous Being ... Goddess worshipers seek to create justice as well as ecological and social

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<sup>231</sup> Lauren Markoe, "Survey: Climate Change and Evolution in the 2012 Elections", PRRI/RNS Religion News Survey <http://publicreligion.org/research/2011/09/climate-change-evolution-2012/> (accessed October 10 2011).

<sup>232</sup> Roberts.

<sup>233</sup> From a statement in response to the EPA's ruling against mercury. Mitchell C. Hescox, "Evangelicals Praise Epa's Mercury Rule for Protecting Unborn Children," *christiannewswire.com* (2011). <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/4606218515.html> (accessed September 12, 2012).

balance through ritual magic, spellcasting, and the generation of energy. They purport that the New Age will appear when all people come to recognize their oneness with the universe and respect the deity of others and of nature. Goddess religion stands in direct opposition to the monotheistic worship of Yahweh God.<sup>234</sup>

Often, environmental leaders, whether intentionally or not, alienate Evangelicals by overemphasizing the sacredness of the biosphere, using incarnational terms like Gaia to address what they see as Western society's anthropocentrism.<sup>235</sup> This anthropocentrism is, as we have explored, a particular hurdle for Christians, and it is the chief criticism of Lynn White's classic work that has set more than one Christian environmentalist on a mission of understanding.<sup>236</sup> For example, in a chapter entitled, "Is Christianity to Blame?" Steven Bouma-Prediger cites the standard argument:

Having created God in man's own image, Western religion has adopted an anthropocentric mythology that separates God from Creation, soul from body, and man from Earth. It is this dualism that prevents us from relating not only to the natural world, but to ourselves.<sup>237</sup>

In the same section of the book, Bouma-Prediger then goes on to address White by name:

In short, White claims that "modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology." More precisely, it was the "Judeo-Christian dogma of creation" that gave the impetus to modern Western science... and since science and technology have given us unprecedented and uncontrolled power over nature—power the misuse of which Christianity has sanctioned—Christianity is responsible for the current plight of the earth.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> *The Woman's Study Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), Logos electronic edition, np.

<sup>235</sup> Gaia was the primordial earth goddess in Greek mythology and the name has quickly been embraced to signify what some view as the sacred and sentient nature of the biosphere. A quick search of Amazon's book section uncovered more than 3500 books—including over 1100 in the "Religion & Spirituality" section—that reference "Gaia" in the title.

<sup>236</sup> White.

<sup>237</sup> Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 67.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 72. Indeed, Bouma-Prediger's entire third chapter is largely a response to White.

Faithful “green” Evangelicals must address Christianity’s anthropocentrism at both the levels of theology and praxis. Speaking of what he calls “theology” and “faithful theology,” i.e., practice, Jonathan Wilson says:

... theological analysis is important, because conservative Christianity is most deeply formed by a commitment to biblical faithfulness. If we are able to identify a more faithful theology, then we may be able to find ways of forging a theological consensus on care for creation that crosses other boundaries.<sup>239</sup>

*A Greener Theology: Moltmann*

When addressing Evangelical theological concerns, someone like Jürgen Moltmann can point the way forward:

God is not merely the Creator of the world. He is also the Spirit of the universe.... it is one-sided to view creation only as the work of 'God's hands' and, as his 'work', something that has simply and solely to be distinguished from God himself. Creation is also the differentiated presence of God the Spirit, the presence of the One in the many.<sup>240</sup>

What Moltmann develops in his body of work is “the Trinitarian doctrine of creation” that starts:

... from an immanent tension in God himself: God creates the world, and at the same time enters into it. He calls it into existence, and at the same time manifests himself through its being. It lives from his creative power, and yet he lives in it.... The God who is transcendent in relation to the world, and the God who is immanent in that world are one and the same God.<sup>241</sup>

Moltmann incorporates what Christians have often outlined as three aspects of the Trinity: Father-Creator, Spirit and the incarnational aspects of the ministry of the Son.

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<sup>239</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, "The Peace of Creation: Recovering a Theological Balance," *Crux* XL, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>240</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation : A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 1st Fortress Press ed., The Gifford Lectures (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 14.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.



This interpersonal community that is the Trinity likewise embraces all of creation, and manages to be both outside (transcendent) and inside it (immanent) at the same time:

God's trinitarian life is more than a model for the symbiotic life of his creation: it is also the form of God's own relationship with his creation. Since The Crucified God, Moltmann has emphasized the Trinity's openness to the world. The relationships of the three divine Persons do not form a closed circle in heaven, but an open community in which the life of the creation may participate. God has a trinitarian history with the world, a history of mutual relationships, in which God not only acts on the world but is affected by the world and the trinitarian relationships themselves change as human history is taken within them. Moreover, this trinitarian history has as its goal the kingdom of God, which Moltmann has long conceived as an eschatological panentheism, in which 'God will be all in all': creation will be glorified through its participation in the divine life and God will be glorified in his indwelling of his creation.<sup>242</sup>

This point is critical and essential for understanding the unique contribution of Moltmann:

The metaphysics of panentheism sets the stage for the drama that will unfold: the history of God in the world. This understanding of the God-world relationship is critical to the overall success of Moltmann's narrative, because it provides not only the philosophical foundation for the project but also the narrative fulfillment of the project.<sup>243</sup>

Panentheism is simply defined as “the belief that God is in, but is not to be equated with, everything that exists. By contrast, pantheism is the belief that God is all and all is God.”<sup>244</sup> But this is, in and of itself, an inadequate and unfulfilling view of what Moltmann is describing. Noted Moltmann scholar, Richard Bauckham, works mightily to discern Moltmann's meaning:

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<sup>242</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), MOBI ebook, loc 3035.

<sup>243</sup> Bob Zurinsky, “The Metaphysical Narrative of Creation in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann” (Regent College, 2007), 58.

<sup>244</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), Logos electronic edition, np.

[P]anentheism means that it 'is possible to experience God in, with and beneath each everyday experience of the world' .... Another way of describing the implications of panentheism, which Moltmann uses in *The Spirit of Life*, is the phrase 'immanent transcendence.' The concept is an integrating, holistic one, which does not divide reality but finds the presence of God in all things and sees all things being taken up into the new creation which God will indwell in glory.<sup>245</sup>

In his carefully nuanced panentheism, Moltmann certainly offers much to consider for Evangelicals interested in developing a theological motivation for environmentalism.

### *A Greener Practice: Environmental Justice*

The most threatened beings in creation: the poor.

—Leonardo Boff<sup>246</sup>

So Boff, cited above, pithily and effectively summarized the case for environmental justice in his classic book, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*.

We see this same dynamic at both the macro- and micro- levels of human society. Ghana and Nigeria, for example—as well as nations outside Africa including India, Pakistan, Indonesia and China—are essentially “downstream” from the vast mountains of US e-waste that includes our old outdated PCs, monitors, iPods and digital cameras.<sup>247</sup>

It is “environmental racism” practiced on a global scale:

Environmental racism refers to those institutional rules, regulations and policies of government or corporate decisions that deliberately target certain communities for least desirable land uses, resulting in the disproportionate exposure of toxic and hazardous waste on communities based upon certain prescribed biological characteristics. Environmental racism is the unequal protection against toxic and

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<sup>245</sup> Bauckham, loc 3937.

<sup>246</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, Ecology and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 110.

<sup>247</sup> PBS Frontline, *Ghana: Digital Dumping Ground*.

hazardous waste exposure and systemic exclusion of people of color from environmental decisions affecting their communities.<sup>248</sup>

At the 2012 AASHE (The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) conference, Dr. Sandra Steingraber, author of the book *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*<sup>249</sup> and herself a cancer survivor, spoke of an “environmental human rights movement” closer to home, and publicly committed herself to the war against “fracking,” the recently-developed strategy by the natural gas industry to capture underground deposits by injecting highly-pressurized (and highly-toxic) fluids to break up sedimentation layers.

“Not In My Backyard” is a rallying cry that has come to mean, again and again, that toxic, hazardous projects wind up being sited in communities without a voice or a place at the table—both locally and globally.

James Martin-Schramm and Robert Stivers develop four norms of what they call “ecological justice”:

1. ***Sustainability*** may be defined as the long-range supply of sufficient resources to meet basic human needs and the preservation of intact natural communities.
2. ***Sufficiency*** emphasizes that all forms of life are entitled to share in the goods of creation ... (which) does not mean unlimited consumption, hoarding or inequitable distribution of the earth’s goods.
3. ***Participation*** is concerned with empowerment and seeks to remove the obstacles to participating in decisions that affect lives.

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<sup>248</sup> Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*, Religions of the World and Ecology (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed by Harvard University Press for the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), 560.

<sup>249</sup> Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream : A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

4. ***Solidarity*** emphasizes the kinship and interdependence of all forms of life and encourages support and assistance for those who suffer.<sup>250</sup>

The authors then go on to apply their norms to specific “environmental justice” cases, from old-growth forests and Snake River salmon to the use of genetically-modified seeds in sub-Saharan Africa.

Why is this important? Consider this statement on environmental justice by a college of US Catholic Bishops:

Above all, we seek to explore the links between concern for the person and for the earth ... avoiding false choices between the people and the planet. It is the poor, here and in developing countries, who suffer first and most from damage to the environment; they are the prime victims of a global system that degrades them and the rest of God’s creation.”<sup>251</sup>

As Evangelicals find ways to temper their extreme anthropocentrism and as environmentalists temper their biocentrism, we may first find common ground in our “theology.” Again, Moltmann:

Even without human beings, the heavens declare the glory of God. This theocentric biblical world picture gives the human being, with his special position in the cosmos, the chance to understand himself as a member of the community of creation. So if Christian theology wants to find the wisdom in dealing with creation which accords with belief in creation, it must free that belief from the modern anthropocentric view of the world.<sup>252</sup>

We may also find common ground in our praxis, with our shirtsleeves rolled up, working toward environmental justice for all.

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<sup>250</sup> J.B. Martin-Schramm and R.L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Orbis Books, 2003), 37-45.

<sup>251</sup> Walter Grazer, citing a statement by Catholic bishops in Hessel and Ruether, 586.

<sup>252</sup> Moltmann, *God in Creation : A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 31.

Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.<sup>253</sup>

That sounds like something anyone might get behind from an environmentalist to an Occupy Wall Street participant and from a Tea Party member to an Evangelical. It is fundamentally humane, and thoroughly Christian.

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<sup>253</sup> C.H. Foreman, *The Promise and Peril of Environmental Justice* (Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 146.

## CHAPTER 13:

### THE HOPES AND FEARS OF ALL THE YEARS

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.

—Aldo Leopold<sup>254</sup>

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

—Phillips Brooks, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

### Texts and Traditions

The Christian tradition is rich, deep and wide, with its own 2,000-year old history and significant strands of development in virtually every inhabited region of the planet. Moreover, it builds upon the foundation of the Hebrew Scriptures, moving still further back toward the misty edges of recorded human history. There are countless biblical references that demonstrate an agrarian, earth-friendly inclination, from Sabbath-keeping to animal rights and its emphasis on “earth, sky and sea.” The psalmist boldly proclaims, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”<sup>255</sup> Job, as we have noted, makes plain God’s love and care for all of creation in a manner that extends far beyond humankind. The first miracle of Jesus involved wine and earthen vessels.

But here we identify three passages that are, in a sense, contrarian; that is, they suggest both agony and the ecstasy of the Christian tradition. These three passages are

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<sup>254</sup> Curt Meine and Richard L. Knight, *The Essential Aldo Leopold : Quotations and Commentaries* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 179.

<sup>255</sup> Psalm 19:1.

often taken to read one way, but can legitimately be read from an earth-friendly perspective.

*Genesis 1:27-28*

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Right from the beginning—literally—the oft-called “creation mandate” highlights two potential trouble-spots within Christianity’s earthkeeping ethic we have recognized earlier: anthropocentrism and utilitarianism. It is humankind that is the “crown of creation,” called to “subdue” and exercise “dominion” over the earth. Of course, as many scholars have noted,<sup>256</sup> this ethic has a “kinder, gentler” interpretation if one focuses on care and stewardship rather than strong-handed authoritarianism. Read this way, these verses emphasize humanity’s responsibility to creation and accountability before God.

*Revelation 8:13*

“Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth....”

There is, in fact, throughout John’s Revelation, the dark-and-difficult-to-understand final book in the Christian canon, a series of apocalyptic “woes,” that many have taken to suggest God’s curse on the earth. But there is another legitimate view:

The terrifying exclamations of “woe” throughout Revelation’s middle chapters have led some interpreters to think that God has consigned the earth to suffer plagues of ecological disaster and destruction .... However, in these so-called

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<sup>256</sup> As examples, Calvin DeWitt, Will Jenkins, Larry Rasmussen and Steven Bouma-Prediger come readily to mind.

“woes” of Revelation, God is not pronouncing a curse but rather offering a lament, bemoaning earth’s suffering and abuse.<sup>257</sup>

Whatever appears to be happening to earth in this apocalyptic text often presumed to describe earth’s “final” days, God is not the agent of destruction, but the loving Creator lamenting earth’s fate at the hands of humanity.

### *Revelation 22:1-2*

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 8 leaves earth’s fate up in the air. The book ends with John’s final vision of earth restored. In this vision, there is water, ever and always the source of life. It flows through the habitation of humanity, the city. And then there is the “tree of life,” that first appeared in Genesis and now appears again. While Christianity has often been obsessed with an ethereal “salvation,” here the leaves of the tree become a literal salve “for the healing of the nations.”

## **Christian Teachings**

### *Hope.*

After what seemed like real progress and the beginnings of serious conversation in the middle of the last decade, more Evangelicals have moved farther from embracing climate change and any sort of green agenda. Journalist Molly Redden, writing in November, 2011, points to the ouster of Richard Cizik, who spearheaded the

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<sup>257</sup> Barbara Rossing, "God Laments with Us: Climate Change, Apocalypse and the Urgent Kairos Moment," *The Ecumenical Review* 62, no. 2 (2010): 119-130.



controversial Evangelical Climate Initiative through the National Association of Evangelicals in 2008, as a landmark shift. She laments, “At the time, Cizik’s departure was regarded as a mere hiccup. But, in fact, it was a sign of a backlash that would be bolstered by the rise of the Tea Party, increased scientific skepticism, and the faltering economy.”<sup>258</sup>

Those who decry the Evangelical position in particular, and Christianity’s environmental insensitivity in general, speak often of the dark apocalypticism centered in a dispensationalism that swept middle America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, popularized over the past several years by the *Left Behind* series. In this conception, it seems the “blessed hope” described by the Apostle Paul<sup>259</sup> is the not-so-blessed “Nope!” of God to the earth and the vast majority of its inhabitants.

Strangely, the dispensationalist vision of evil horsemen announcing famine, death, disease and environmental devastation is not so different from the view espoused by many environmentalists. They paint a picture of millions of climate refugees unable to find food on a planet that has finally turned on the parasite that is, in this vision, humanity itself. It is earth against humans in a plot straight out of *Avatar*.

German social psychologist, Harald Welzer, for example, paints a bleak picture of life as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses in his grim analysis, *Climate Wars*:

In some cases, the connection between climate and violence is direct, as in the case of the massacres in Sudan. From the west of Sudan, the desert spreads out to the south and surrounds the living space of peasants and shepherds. The fight for land and water cancels out the already weak mechanisms to resolve conflict and leads to uncontrollable spirals of violence. The war in Sudan is the first ever

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<sup>258</sup> Molly Redden, “Whatever Happened to the Evangelical-Environmental Alliance?,” *The New Republic*, November 3 2011.

<sup>259</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4.

"climate war" that Welzer predicts in the 21st century. In the Western media however, it is still as before interpreted as ethnically inspired. In other cases, the connection between climate and violence is more indirect. This is especially the case with illegal immigration, flows of refugees, armed border conflicts, and terror. Some believe mass migrations will have increased tenfold by the turn of the next century. It is highly possible that Europe and North America will have sealed themselves off further. The downside of this protection of external borders is the permanent tightening of security measures towards the inside, which broadens the state's monopoly on violence and wears away the constitutional state.<sup>260</sup>

As a green Evangelical, I am a convert away from dispensationalism and dualism that focuses on the "sweet by and by" at the expense of the earth, that is the Lord's, "with all of its fullness thereof." And so, I cannot instead embrace environmental apocalypticism. Hence, while this lonely, fragile planet clearly and desperately needs our time, attention and tender-loving care, I yet believe the Blessed Hope can be redeemed, that the "Good News" is good news for all of creation. There is an eternal purpose to this planet, and it is, in some fashion yet to be determined, the eternal habitation of God and humankind, marked by fecundity and goodness.

### *Creation Care.*

There is, I believe, a balanced perspective within the Christian tradition that tempers rampant anthropocentrism with appropriate responsibility and accountability. While humanity appears to be given "dominion" over the earth, *Adam* is also a full partner with all of creation that springs from the *adamah*. In harmony with the Golden Rule, "dominion" is intended to be implemented in service to creation. In addition, there

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<sup>260</sup> Atlantic Community Editorial Team, "Climate Change Brings Forth a Century of Violence: Harald Welzer and "Climate Wars", in *Atlantic-Community.org*, ed. Atlantic Community Editorial Team (Washington, DC: Atlantic Initiative U.S., 2008) Atlantic Initiative U.S. [http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/Global\\_Must\\_Read\\_Article/Climate\\_Change\\_Brings\\_Forth\\_a\\_Century\\_of\\_Violence](http://www.atlantic-community.org/index/Global_Must_Read_Article/Climate_Change_Brings_Forth_a_Century_of_Violence) (2012), accessed September 9, 2012. Accessed September 9, 2012

is a mutuality of humans as co-creators with The Creator, responsible to the Creator for our role in serving creation well.

## CHAPTER 14:

### CONCLUSION

I am not ashamed to own that I believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures, be full of images of divine things, as full as a language is of words; and that the multitude of those things that I have mentioned are but a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified by these things: but that there is room for persons to be learning more and more of this language and seeing more of that which is declared in it to the end of the world without discovering all.

—Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*<sup>261</sup>

Framing the conversation with and about Evangelicals in relation to environmentalism as “The Beginning, the End and Everything in Between” offers a means to “get behind” the resistance within conservative elements of the Evangelical movement, to address these issues at their roots and on their own terms, as a kind of prelude to full engagement with environmental issues. We began with the worldview that lies beneath many of our Evangelical assumptions—dualism—and we discovered that, if we are indeed on the cusp of a postmodern era, considering its outlines gives shape to our old modern blind spots. We concluded the section by identifying one of those spots: a gospel message that has been reduced and packaged for a modern, consumer age.

In the second section, we addressed the relationship between our cosmogony and our cosmology, and we used that discussion as a launching point to consider the relationship of Evangelicals to science, eventually focusing on resistance to evolution that can be embraced without adopting either secular humanism or atheism. This led us to our reconsideration of myth as a fitting category for Evangelical hermeneutic endeavor, and

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<sup>261</sup> Jonathan Edwards and Perry Miller, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 152.

we described an appropriate and scriptural understanding of humanity's role in creation by reviewing the book of Job.

Our third section turned to eschatology, with a particular focus first on premillennial dispensationalism and then on the "new heavens and the new earth." Finally, we suggested that Evangelicals can bring their unique gifts to bear in taking up the mantle of environmental justice, and we addressed hope as a particular gift the Evangelical church has to offer everyone who is part of the environmental conversation.

"The Beginning, the End and Everything in Between" offers a way forward by suggesting a step backward into Evangelical history, finding our moorings once again in a theological environment more conducive to stewarding earth's environment.

## ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

## Query Letter

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November 7, 2012

Dear Publisher:

Many of the Evangelical academics who proudly coined the term “Fundamentalist”—including B.B. Warfield, the “father of biblical inerrancy”—embraced evolution. Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, John Wesley and nearly all of the earliest Evangelicals had no conception of our *Left Behind* theology as postmillennialists. So what do these facts have to do with environmentalism?

*A New Kind of Creation* is a 60,000 word book intended to start a conversation. It offers tools of understanding to thoughtful people on both sides of what has become a polarizing divide with social, political, economic—and biblical—implications. This book, subtitled *Why Green is Good News for Evangelicals (and Why Evangelicals are Good News for the Green Movement)*, suggests a way forward through sticky theology and uncertain praxis. When it comes to the environmental questions of our time, what *would* Jesus do? *A New Kind of Creation* gets at what lies beneath the fear, the rhetoric and the theological knots that keep Evangelicals on the sidelines of the environmental conversation.

I am a DMin candidate (ABD) at the first American Evangelical seminary with a graduate concentration in earthkeeping, and a “green-certified” professional working at one of the nation’s best-known community colleges. Thank you for your valuable time.

Sincerely,

Russ Pierson

## Track 02 Artifact: Book Proposal—Non-Fiction

**Title:** *A New Kind of Creation: Why Green is Good News for Evangelicals (and Why Evangelicals are Good News for the Green Movement)*

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**Overview:** “The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual.” I have asked several Evangelical audiences to select from among the following possible authors of this citation—Billy Graham, Desmond Tutu or Rick Warren. Not once have I had anyone object to the sentiment or to the author ... until I reveal the actual source: former Vice-President Al Gore’s 1992 book, *Earth in the Balance*. How can we as Evangelicals move past partisan politics to participate in the environmental conversation? What lies beneath the public conception that Evangelicals don’t want to participate in care for our planet? When it comes to the environment, what *would* Jesus do?

**Purpose:** Although conservative American Evangelicals have embraced several theological roadblocks to an “earth-friendly” view of scripture—including cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology, among others—I draw from our global, historic

tradition demonstrate a way forward toward embracing an earthkeeping ethic in our Evangelical theology and praxis. Along the way, readers will discover:

- Early Evangelicals often had very different theological perspectives from present-day Evangelicals on issues that influence the “green” debate. B.B. Warfield, for example, one of the founders of the Fundamentalist movement, embraced evolution. And Jonathan Edwards was a postmillennial with no conception of a premillennial, dispensational rapture.
- Historic, orthodox Christianity and the global church of today likewise provide a multitude of examples that challenge us to embrace earthkeeping, from Origen to Francis of Assisi, and from Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai of Kenya and the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- Key scriptures that have historically had a variety of interpretations within broader Evangelicalism.

**Promotion and Marketing:** Russ belongs to several groups that would have an immediate interest, from AASHE (the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) to the AAR (American Academy of Religion), the greater George Fox University community, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Lane Community College community (with more than 40,000 students annually) and the New Hope community (Wayne Cordeiro’s ministry in Hawaii, Oregon and the Pacific Rim). He is active in social media, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Flickr, etc. He has a background in radio and for years he did voiceover work for local ad agencies and businesses. For nearly a decade Russ served as Associate Pastor at a large Foursquare church with a portfolio that included marketing and communications.

**Competition:** These are recent books with an environmental focus that are intended for a similar audience:

- Merritt, Jonathan. *Green Like God: Unlocking the Divine Plan for Our Planet*. New York: FaithWords, 2010. Currently ranked #630,796 on Amazon.
- Lowe, Ben. *Green Revolution: Coming Together to Care for Creation*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2009. Currently ranked #926,631.



- Hayhoe, Katharine, and Andrew Farley. *A Climate for Change : Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*. New York: FaithWords, 2009. Ranked #630,900.

While all three of these recent texts touch on similar topics, none challenges the reader to go beyond recycling. *A New Kind of Creation* gets at “what lies beneath,” the lens through which we view our present Evangelical world. I will keep the tone “popular,” but with the depth and meaning indicative of serious academic work tempered by real-world environmental practice.

**Uniqueness:** Russ Pierson has traveled widely and studied Church history in many of its earliest contexts. He is well aware of the weaknesses of his own worldview, rooted as it is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century American Evangelicalism in which he grew up. *A New Kind of Creation* offers a friendly challenge to that worldview, introducing Evangelical and other orthodox Christian voices from other times and places. Russ is also a practitioner as a professional in sustainability in the context of higher education, with serious academic credentials.

**Endorsements:** The author knows the following authors personally and intends to approach them for their endorsement:

- Wayne Jacobsen, pastor, speaker and co-author of *The Shack*.
- Jack Hayford, pastor, speaker, author and radio-television personality.
- Wayne Cordeiro, pastor, speaker, church planter, author and educator.

**Book Format:** TBD.

**Chapter Outline:** In the Introduction of the book, I present the problem, context, definitions, thesis and the framing device for the conversation that is used throughout the balance of the text—“The Beginning, the End and Everything in Between.”

- Chapter One begins with ... “Everything in Between,” and suggests that the greatest danger to a biblical earthkeeping ethic is a dualism that minimizes our own “embodiedness,” nature and the earth itself.
- Chapter Two describes the value of seeing postmodernism as a tool to uncover the worldview of many Evangelicals—one that is often more “modern” than “Christian.”
- Chapter three addresses the common conception of the American Evangelical “gospel” as one mere facet of the rich, full biblical concept of soteriology.
- Chapter four moves to “The Beginning” and introduces the significant relationship between our Evangelical creation story and the way we see the universe.
- Chapter five highlights the historic links between religion and science and offers an understanding of the value of science for Evangelicals.
- Chapter six builds on this groundwork to discuss ways Evangelicals might approach evolution without adopting secular humanism.
- Chapter seven focuses on the critical importance of sound hermeneutics and revisits the long-abandoned concept of myth in the Evangelical interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative.
- Chapter eight moves to the relationship of humanity to creation, finding a model for proper understanding in the book of Job.
- Chapter nine begins “The End,” introducing eschatology and its implications for humanity, earth and the individual.
- Chapter ten hones in on premillennial dispensationalism and offers an alternative biblical vision to the *Left Behind* novels.
- Chapter eleven discusses the specific destiny of planet Earth, since popular Evangelical descriptions of its end generally include its final and complete destruction, replaced by the “new heavens and new earth.”
- Chapter twelve introduces the takeaway as an afterword. In the following two chapters, we focus on peculiar and significant contributions of Evangelicals willing to engage in the environmental conversation. We find common ground for Evangelicals and environmentalists in the realm of environmental justice that seeks to aid “the least of these” impacted by toxins and climate disasters of all kinds.
- Chapter thirteen contends that hope is the singular and great gift Evangelicals can offer what many environmentalists view as a dying planet, and ends with a call to give ourselves in the service of hope.

### **Intended Readers:**

- My readers are American Evangelicals who are interested in a challenging scriptural and historical discussion regarding environmentalism and the Christian impulse for earthkeeping.
- The book will have special appeal to pastors and other church leaders and influencers.
- *A New Kind of Creation* will also find an audience among educators, interested in how these issues are playing out in the academy.
- The book will also appeal to environmentalists of any and every faith—or no faith at all—interested in how to engage in conversation with their Evangelicals friends and colleagues on environmental issues.

**Manuscript:** The completed manuscript will be approximately 60,000 words, and it will be completed six months from contract.

**Author Bio:** Russ Pierson has impeccable Evangelical credentials as a Bible college graduate and active pastor for more than a quarter century. He also has the serious academic capacity of a man with a Masters degree in Leadership in addition to his doctoral candidate status (ABD) at George Fox University in Portland, Oregon (DMin, Leadership and Global Perspectives). Russ is widely-traveled, is a GreenFaith Fellow, and he is an active environmental practitioner as a Certified Sustainable Building Advisor on staff at one of the nation's premier green community colleges.

**Publishing Credits:** For examples and links to current writing projects, please see website, <http://blog.russpierson.com/>.

**Future Projects:** As a follow-up book with an audience intended to stretch well beyond the Evangelical market, I am researching “Pragmatic Ecology: Getting as Many as Possible to Do as Much as They Can as Often as They Will.” Many environmentalists have become frustrated with the “easy green tips” that the press feeds a public caught up in the latest enviro-fad. But this book suggests recycling and other easily-adopted practices as a kind of “gateway drug” to an increasingly authentic, environmentally-sensitive lifestyle.

A third, related book project is “The Organic Economy: A Uniquely and Thoroughly Evangelical Perspective on A Global and Sustainable Economy.”

## POSTSCRIPT

### A Summary

A repeated and oft-stated goal of the Leadership and Global Perspectives Doctor of Ministry program at George Fox University is that the student might become a “reflective practitioner.” As a product of a singularly *Christian* approach to higher education, with a BA from a small Bible college, early graduate work at a seminary with Wesleyan-Holiness leanings, and now my later academic career spent at George Fox, this DMin program managed to take me beyond my own place and era—from an Ethiopian holiday service that seemed somehow frozen in time, much closer to the apostolic era than my own; to an achingly hip and futuristic youth church in Nuremberg; to a bastion of Anglicanism; and to an early morning prayer service in a South Korean megachurch that attracts multiple thousands of remarkably committed and faithful believers.

I found myself likewise transported in the realm of ideas, reading African scholars discussing postcolonialism, listening to Germans finding their way in a post-Holocaust era, or to Brits finding their way through post-Christendom, and seeing “environmental justice” in action in Ethiopia where the poorest of the poor—at a children’s orphanage—were downstream along a river that was so toxic by the time it reached them that the children couldn’t even play in or near the water, let alone drink it.

### The Approach

It is this “reflective practice” that I used to craft my approach to this dissertation. I thought long and hard about my personal journey, about how I have moved from someone who dragged my feet as my family pulled me in the direction of recycling to

being a person who has become passionate about all things environmental (even as I recognize my own, frequent hypocrisy). I have gauged my own responses and wondered how I found my way out of dispensationalism and literalism. I have found solace in the stories of countless women and men in other times—the earliest Evangelicals who were inspired to make a difference in society because of their postmillennial views, for example—who managed to conceive of the outlines of their faith in often surprising ways.

In this journey from faith to faith—with both conceptions of faith thoroughly Evangelical yet remarkably different—I have found some safe places to have dangerous conversations, to engage with ideas just beyond my comfort zone and the *zeitgeist* of my peers. “Cultural cognition,” mentioned in the Yale study I referenced in the introduction of *The Problem*, seems to apply particularly well to conservative Evangelicals, since we fear not only the opinions of others but also a loss of faith, the “backsliding” that we have very nearly trademarked. It is a frightening journey to enter this dissociative tunnel of new and foreign influences hoping against hope there is a light somewhere ahead in the distance.

I have read widely and deeply in my subject area—not only in association with the DMin program, but also as a part of the initial Christian Earthkeeping cohort at Fox, and later as a GreenFaith fellow. While Earthkeeping rooted me in the broad Christian tradition, GreenFaith extended my tent pegs further still, offering models for how other faith communities land on an environmental ethic.

There can be no environmental ethic without an environmental ethos.

That is, in essence, the contention of this dissertation. Countless books have been written to explore green theology; countless more offer ways we can integrate green

practices into our lives as believers. But for many conservative Evangelicals, neither the theology nor the practice will change unless and until we have changed the course of the conversation, provided a mirror whereby thoughtful Evangelicals can see themselves as others see them—for good and for bad—and likewise offered a compass that these Evangelicals might find their way back home, rooted in earth, rooted in the creation and the Christ, “in whom all things hold together.”

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation offers a way forward, both for Evangelicals and for environmentalists, to better understand one another, to identify common ground, and to learn to live in greater harmony with one another and with nature. It hints at the remarkable and powerful secret that perhaps the best Evangelicals are environmentalists, and the best environmentalists are Evangelicals.

Looking ahead, I would like to focus on the two “takeaways” I identified in this work: environmental justice and the incredible gift of hope that Evangelicals have to offer all those who are “weary and heavy-laden” about the plight of God’s good creation. If we can weep with those who weep, there is hope that we will yet rejoice together.

## **APPENDIX**

A New Kind of Creation:

Why Green is Good News for Evangelicals

(and Why Evangelicals are Good News for the Green Movement)

By

Russell J. Pierson

**PROLOGUE:**  
**THE WISDOM OF THE AGES OR THE WISDOM OF THE AGE?**

**Fool's Gold, ca. 1963**

It was a remarkable discovery. My next-door neighbor, Gary Jones,<sup>262</sup> and I both knew we had struck it big.

This was the era of television's *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, when Gemini spacecraft, the precursor to the Apollo missions, traced paths through the sky and across every child's imagination. Everywhere at once—and especially on TV—humanity was pushing boundaries, engaging great adventure, making discoveries. The venerable Western was my favorite genre, and everyone from Daniel Boone, Roy Rogers and the Lone Ranger glorified the California Gold Rush from a full century earlier, a symbol of the times in which we lived.

Imagine our surprise and delight when we found gold in an old can buried in Gary's backyard.

And imagine our disappointment when our parents told us our big discovery was just rust and large flecks ... of lead paint.

\* \* \*

**A Tale of Two Cities**

I am a (young!) grandfather myself, and I was raised by my grandparents, so in certain respects I feel like an old soul. My grandfather was born in 1906, the year

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<sup>262</sup> Throughout the book, I have occasionally changed the names of people I know to, as they say, “protect the innocent.”



cornflakes were invented and two years before Henry Ford's Model T car went into production. My grandmother arrived a few years later in 1913, the year the modern zipper was devised.

We were solidly middle-class, and my grandfather worked as a machine tender and some-time-union-rep at a paper mill. It was a good job with good benefits and a generous company pension.

I still have vivid memories of my great-grandparents and their nearby home. The "laundry room" consisted of two galvanized tubs set low on a utility bench, next to a sink on the enclosed back porch. The wash tub held hot water made soapy by shavings from a Naphtha soap bar. The second tub was the rinse tub. My great-grandmother also made good use of a wash board, where she would scrub away stains on a primitive device that looked a lot like a giant cheese grater. But my favorite part as a young boy was the wringer, a kind of press that wrung water out of the fabric by means of a hand crank. Once the clothes were wrung, they would go in a wooden basket to be placed on the clothesline outside, although in the rainy winter months the porch did double duty as a drying station.

While this wringer was a relatively recent invention, the way my great-grandmother washed and dried her clothes was remarkably similar to the way humanity has cleaned its clothing throughout the vast majority of human history. Indeed, many people groups all across the planet still wash and dry their clothes this same way.

Somewhere, some way, somehow in this last century, things changed dramatically.

My first memorable encounter with "pollution" ebbed, flowed and transformed over several years. The great-grandfather I knew was in fact my great-grandmother's

second husband. My grandmother's father had died long before I came along. He was a well-respected mason in the Puget Sound region who apparently (or so the story goes) had been the project lead for construction of what was in 1917 the world's tallest smokestack, over 570 feet tall, at a copper smelter in northeast Tacoma. This very visible landmark was a point of pride in my early years, and indeed, the photo here is from a 1940s-era postcard that represents the universal gratification the City felt in this industrial icon.<sup>263</sup>

In my teen years, Tacoma's blue-collar image began to take a turn for the worse, along with the smokestack. The billowing smoke had a distinct odor that often mixed with the pulp mills on the tide flats and came to be described as "the aroma of Tacoma."



The smelter closed in 1985, and the severe ground pollution across the 67-acre site became one of the nation's most notorious Superfund sites, laced with arsenic and lead. Finally on January 17, 1993, as many as 100,000 gathered within sight of the smokestack to watch it come down. Eight seconds later, nothing was left but rubble.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Photo of the ASARCO smokestack, Ruston, 1940s, Postcard. In the public domain. HistoryLink.org. Seattle, WA: HistoryLink.org, 2008.

<sup>264</sup> Margaret Riddle, "The Asarco Smokestack -- Once the World's Largest -- Is Demolished" HistoryLink.org, 2008.

The legacy of my great-grandparents reads like Dickens: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness ....”<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Rev. Ed., IA: 1stworld Pub., (Fairfield, IA: 1st World Publications, 2009).

## INTRODUCTION:

### WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

I have been puzzled most of my life by this contradiction: How can one believe deeply in God and yet be so cavalier about God's creation?

—Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*

This is not—repeat—not a book intended to get you to change your mind about “climate change.”<sup>266</sup> There are many good books available if you're interested in that particular little tide pool in the ocean that we will explore together in these pages. But let's be blunt: politics, economics, media, religion and science—all of these come together to form a toxic stew that has resulted in the current state of public discourse around anything that has to do with the subject of environmentalism, particularly in the US and to a lesser degree in other Western countries.<sup>267</sup>

In November of 2009, I posted a simple phrase on Facebook that set off a firestorm in my small circle of Facebook friends—particularly those who are, like me, Evangelical Christians. Let me tell you the phrase, and then I must ask you to humor me while we play a little guessing game before I reveal the source:

The more deeply I search for the roots of the global environmental crisis, the more I am convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> If you do have particular interest in “climate change” and want to know a little from the perspective of a skeptic-turned-believer, see the Appendix of the book.

<sup>267</sup> For a fascinating read that brings these together in a huge Evangelical church in the heart of oil country, see this profile of Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, from the website “Carbon Sabbath:” <http://carbonsabbath.org/uncategorized/mega-houston-joel-osteens-lakewood/>.

<sup>268</sup> Sorry—no cheating! I will reveal the source of the quote in just a moment, but for now, keep reading.

So if you had to guess from among the following three choices, who do you think is responsible for that quote?

- Is it Billy Graham, the evangelist and Christian statesman?
- Or could it be Desmond Tutu, another great Christian statesman and civil rights activist from South Africa?
- Or do you think it is more likely Rick Warren, the *Purpose-Driven* pastor of Saddleback Church in California, who offered the invocation at the inauguration of President Barack Obama in 2009?

I have had the opportunity to ask several people in multiple groups that I have addressed since 2009 to whom they would attribute this quote. No one, taking the words at face value, has ever disagreed with the statement, and in a group setting, each of our three candidates usually scores well.

Unfortunately, when I posted these words on Facebook, I immediately attributed them to their author: Nobel Prize winner, Al Gore, who penned this sentiment shortly before his election as Vice-President in 1992 in his book, *Earth in the Balance*,<sup>269</sup> and well before *An Inconvenient Truth*<sup>270</sup> was released in 2006.

Frankly, this snippet from Gore is, by itself, a thoughtful, insightful, but for the most part innocuous statement. But when I gave full attribution to Gore on Facebook, it immediately polarized my friends. Al Gore, Nobel Prize winner and former Vice-President of these United States is, by the mere mention of his name, a lightning rod in society in general and certainly within the pews and foyers of the Evangelical church. No

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<sup>269</sup> Albert Gore, *Earth in the Balance : Ecology and the Human Spirit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 12.

<sup>270</sup> Albert Gore and Melcher Media., *An Inconvenient Truth : The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It* (Emmaus, Pa.: Rodale Press, 2006).

single cultural icon better represents this nexus of politics, economics, media, religion and science.

How did it come to this? And why does it seem nigh too impossible to enjoy a civil conversation with people who think differently than us? The “Evangelical Right” has been caricatured as a monolithic block always expected to vote a particular way on multiple issues, and to always vote for the “right” candidate. Who decides what the Bible says on some of these incredibly thorny issues, like welfare reform, immigration, military spending—or the environment?

Is it possible to open our eyes to alternative viewpoints, and so to open our hearts to others? I have asked myself these questions, and I have been on a quest to find better answers than I started with. In my search, I have wandered the globe to see how Christianity is lived out in other cultures, and I have combed through history looking for how others—and particularly Evangelicals in other eras—have answered some of the questions we are asking ourselves these days.

We will focus on the environmental conversation, since it’s an area of particular interest and academic pursuit for me. Just so you know, I have a background in three disciplines: construction, sustainability (think “green business,” LEED™-certified buildings and alternative energy), and theology; and I work as a professional in higher education. But I hope you will see how some of the discoveries we make along the way can lead us to new and fruitful engagement with one another and with others on topics beyond environmentalism. No, this is not a book about “climate change” or even “environmentalism.” This is a book about *what lies beneath*.

Let’s get started.

**APPENDIX: “CLIMATE CHANGE:”  
CONFESSIONS OF A FORMER SKEPTIC  
AS A MOVEMENT IN THREE PARTS**

Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain.

—The Wizard, *The Wizard of Oz*

**Act One**

I admit it. I am a baby-boomer and an Evangelical and a product of my times. I graduated from college in 1980, just a few months before Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in Carter’s bid for reelection. Carter, a professed Christian from deep in the Bible belt, was nonetheless a character who generated ambivalence in the pew. It was Jimmy Carter who first put solar panels on the White House (which Reagan unceremoniously removed) and who famously delivered a stoic speech to the American people suggesting an American version of those European “austerity measures” while wearing a sweater, in the midst of an OPEC oil embargo and with the threat of gas rationing looming in the air.

He was a serious president for serious times—and his tenure in office failed to add much levity to my college years.

Reagan, on the other hand, promised an end to the hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Tehran (and indeed, the hostages were dramatically placed on a plane to return home as Reagan delivered his inauguration address), a strong military, and a booming economy based on deregulation and emphasis on the “supply side” of the fiscal balance sheet. Though he had historically been a nominal Presbyterian at best, Reagan described himself as a “born-again Christian,” and actively sought after the Evangelical vote.

These were heady and sunny days to be a Christian in America, as groups like Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and James Dobson's Focus on the Family grew into political powerhouses that could deliver the vote to candidates who aligned themselves just the right way on social and, later, economic issues. Though we surely would not have used the term, the "culture wars" we were fighting through the 80s and beyond were, it seems in retrospect, pointing us toward a kind of theocracy.

During these days, being an Evangelical—or at least a *white* Evangelical—was nearly synonymous with voting Republican. The sentiment of the day is well-represented by a story my pastor sometimes tells about a man he met who introduced himself as "a capitalist, an American and a Christian—in that order!"

## Act Two

Children can really mess with you. And when they seemingly conspire with your mate, you're doomed!

I'm not sure when I first realized my wife was essentially a "hippie," but I am reasonably certain it gradually dawned on me as I began to see there was something not quite right swimming in my children's gene pool—and it wasn't from my side of the family! My daughter, for example, who thankfully looks like her mother, took to gardening, and hiking and ... *drumroll* ... recycling. When it was her turn to pray at the family dinner table, she began to thank God for the animals that gave their lives so we might have sustenance. It was all so disturbing!

But with my eyes at least partially opened by these Communists in my own home, I transitioned out of full-time ministry and into a job in construction. To this day, I am amazed every time I see "nothing" transformed into a living habitation, a home, an office



space, a place for people to gather, all due to a lot of cooperation and hard work on the part of construction professionals. I am not alone, however, in suggesting that the construction industry was unintentionally becoming wasteful and noxious. Lead paint, asbestos, glues and binders in wood products—all these things were leading to toxic reactions. At the same time, getting things done quickly and inexpensively sometimes meant wasting otherwise perfectly good materials. It is, for example, often cheaper to demolish an older, structurally sound building and start over from scratch than it is to make painstaking restoration.

I found myself studying green building practices and more sustainable ways of meeting human needs for shelter and comfort. And this, it turned out, was the “gateway drug” that led me to explore other issues in environmentalism.

### **Act Three**

Finally, we get to “climate change” in this little rock opera!

I have spent most of the past six or seven years now studying aspects of sustainability and environmentalism, and it is the heart of my recent doctoral research. As you might imagine, I have done a lot of reading along the way about climate change, since it seems to be the proverbial “elephant in the room” that colors the rest of the environmental conversation. And this is especially true for Evangelicals.

One of the best books I have run across is a bit dense when it gets to the science, though it is still something a layperson can work through to come to some understanding. But it is absolutely brilliant in framing the difficulties in this conversation.

It turns out that Oxford Press, associated with Oxford University outside London, England, has a series of “Dummies™”-style books for academics, called *A Very Short*

*Introduction.* Dr. Mark Maslin, professor of geography at University College in London, has written the book, *Global Warming: A Very Short Introduction*. The title alone marks the book as one not published for the U.S. market.

In fact, the most astute section in Maslin's book is his discussion of the role the media has played in framing this entire discussion, with real differences in the US as contrasted with other nations:

... in the USA media coverage has been different. First, until recently there has been no pro-global warming media coverage equivalent to that delivered by The Guardian [in the UK]. Second, climate change sceptics have been very strong on using the media in the USA.<sup>271</sup>

This in fact suggests why there is such a polarization around terms like “global warming” and “climate change” in the U.S., as contrasted with the rest of the world.

Maslin clarifies:

There are two possible explanations for this extraordinarily media-facilitated public scientific debate. First, political sceptics who do not want to see political action to address climate change may be using this debate about methods and scientific uncertainty as a convenient hook on which to hang their case for delay.... Second, the media's ethical commitment to balanced reporting may unwittingly provide unwarranted attention to critical views, even if they are marginal and outside the realm of what is normally considered ‘good’ science.... Overall, such exchanges contribute to a public impression that the science of global warming is ‘contested’, despite what many would argue is an overwhelmingly strong scientific case that global warming is occurring and human activity is a main driver of this change.<sup>272</sup>

Please consider this: there is almost no scientist—period—who thinks climate change isn't occurring. The *only* “debated” issue is its cause. As you read through Maslin, you come to understand just how phenomenally complex the climate system is, and there are cyclical changes that appear to repeat in everything from deep ocean

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<sup>271</sup> Maslin, ebook, loc 760.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.,

currents (e.g., the El Nino effect) to the jetstream to global temperature itself, which has certainly moderated within a given range over the course of history. Here Maslin mentions, for example, the “Little Ice Age” in the Middle Ages where we know the River Thames occasionally froze over (though Maslin likewise notes the Port of London hadn’t yet been built so the entire river flowed much slower and was more susceptible to freezing).

Simply-stated, here are two questions to ask yourself that I have asked myself: First of all, if the only issue is whether or not human activity is a significant causative factor, how is it we often speak of the “butterfly effect,” and believe a single moth somewhere in, say, Argentina flaps its wings just so and contributes to a hurricane a couple of weeks later on the Atlantic coast, but we doubt whether or not 9 billion humans ripping up the forests and burning all the oil can have an impact on climate?

Second, if you were about to board a plane for a transatlantic flight, and I told you an overwhelming majority of aeronautic engineers were relatively certain the plane will never make it, would you still roll the dice and head for your seat back in coach?

As Maslin suggests, our media in the States has done us a disservice by suggesting there are two equal sides to climate change story. Naomi Oreskes, professor of history and science studies at the University of California is co-author (with writer Erik Conway) of the *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*.

This book tells the story of the Tobacco Strategy, and how it was used to attack science and scientists, and to confuse us about major, important issues affecting our lives—and the planet we live on.<sup>273</sup>

Oreskes goes on to demonstrate how industry—in this case the Oil Lobby—has intentionally funded benign-sounding foundations and associations to pay off scientists willing to join the chorus of naysayers in order to confuse and divide the public and ultimately prevent action. In many cases, these scientists are the same scientists who supported the tobacco industry in their misinformation campaign, denying a link between cancer and smoking till the very end of litigation that proved how wrong they were. These scientists are often award-winning scientists--*but not in climate science!*

As an example, in September 2011, US media flooded us with the news that, as FoxNews noted, a “Nobel Prize-Winning Physicist Resigns Over Global Warming.”<sup>274</sup> Indeed, Dr. Ivar Giaever did win a Nobel Prize in 1973 in physics--a field certainly related to climatology. But in fact, his professional career and his award is entirely related to superconductivity experiments undertaken in the course of working for General Electric. Does that mean he shouldn’t express his opinion on climate change? Certainly not, but perhaps his opinion on the specifics of climate change is not much better informed than your run-of-the-mill Hollywood celebrity. Figuring out how electrons tunnel through oxide in metal tubes and huge superconductors is an impressive feat, but bears little on climate science.

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<sup>273</sup> Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt : How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>274</sup> FoxNews, 2011. "Nobel Prize-Winning Physicist Resigns over Global Warming," <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2011/09/14/nobel-prize-winning-physicist-resigns-from-top-physics-group-over-global/> (accessed September 15, 2012)., <http://www.foxnews.com/scitech/2011/09/14/nobel-prize-winning-physicist-resigns-from-top-physics-group-over-global/>, accessed September 15, 2012.

What do we have to lose if we move to mitigate against human-exacerbated (if not human-caused) climate change? Very little—particularly if we move soon to transform our energy economy to include an increasing mix of alternative fuels. What do we have to gain? The respect of the impoverished world beyond our borders and—quite possibly—a healthy, renewed, livable planet.<sup>275</sup>

You do the math.

The “man behind the curtain,” flipping all the levers, alternating between benevolence and authoritarianism like some passive-aggressive maniac (but doesn’t want you to know it) is the existing energy sector—Big Oil, Big Coal, etc.—who only stand to gain while we stand still, enchanted by their smokescreen. “Climate change” is here, and whether we have caused it or not, there is no point making it worse.

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<sup>275</sup> According to the UN, 192 states have signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol. The only remaining signatory not to have ratified the protocol is the United States, though Canada’s recent Conservative government has announced plans to withdraw from the treaty effective December 2012. Source: [http://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/status\\_of\\_ratification/items/2613.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/status_of_ratification/items/2613.php).

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