



Creation and the modern environmental movement

God's creation of the environment

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 1:26-28

In any discussion of man's proper relationship to the earth, these verses ought to be at the forefront of our minds. Here we see God's "vision statement" for man. This is what man is supposed to be in relation to the creation that he was put into.

In God's creative act, we see an important application of the idea that some of God's attributes are communicable (meaning that we share in some sense in those attributes) and some are incommunicable. God's attributes of love, knowledge, justice, and others are ones that we share in some sense, though we never equal God in any of those attributes. Other attributes such as God's omnipotence and infinity are not attributes we share in any sense. So too in creation, we see two basic activities undertaken by God. One is the creation *ex nihilo*, creation from nothing, the bringing into existence of something which did not exist before. This act is something which man cannot do in any sense. The other aspect, though, of what God did in the creation is to bring order to chaos. Before the creation, the earth (everything that was), according to verse 2, was without form and void. That means it was empty (void), and chaotic. God brought substance into that void, and then He ordered it. He made distinctions, separating the day from the night and the water from the land. He set the stars and planets in their courses to distinguish between different seasons and times, and He gave names to what He had created.

Man in God's image

His final act of creation was to create man. And man was created after His own image. One would think that the creation of one after God's own image would include engaging in the very same acts in which God Himself engaged, in some fashion, and one would be right. God's very first command to Adam is that Adam continue and finish the work of creation. Adam was to go into the world and subdue it. To subdue something is to rule it, to bring it under one's control. And just like God, part of this work was naming. Adam was given the work of naming the animals.

What we see in Genesis 1-2 is that God, in His creative act, deliberately left His creation unfinished. He created man, in His image, to finish it. This is no diminishing of His glory; rather, it amplifies it. Not satisfied with simply creating rocks and birds and trees and stars, as if that were not enough, He also created a being that was like God, a representative of God, to finish the work of ordering the chaotic creation.

All useful work that man does is essentially bringing order out of chaos. A farmer orders a field, tills it, fertilizes it, works it, to bring it out of its natural chaotic state and into a state where it can be

more useful. A construction worker shapes chaotic natural materials into ordered structures that are more useful for man. A lawyer or a policeman works with the chaotic materials of human relationships and shapes them into something that can fit more usefully into a properly ordered human society. In all of this work, man bears testimony to the image of God within him, and glorifies God who made him.

But fallen man hates God and therefore hates the image of God. He rebels against that image in a million different ways. We are seeing one particular instance of that rebellion in the modern environmentalist movement.

The earth is the Lord's, not man's

Of course, nobody needs to tell a Christian to take care of the earth. We know it's a fundamental principle that the earth is the Lord's, and anything that the Lord has given us we are to use to His glory, not for our own selfish purposes. God told the ancient Israelites to let even their land rest one year in seven, which we know serves an important purpose for the health of the land. But the modern environmentalist movement goes much farther than that. To see how far this bias has shaped us, just think of the automatic assumption that something that is natural must be better. "All-natural" food must be healthier for you, we think. Yet, why should that necessarily be so? The world is under a curse, and we have to do a great many things to overcome the effects of sin on creation. And indeed, even in the garden of Eden, creation in its untouched state was not in its ideal state. Man was given the job of "subduing" nature, which means that nature needed order and rule. If that was true even before the curse, how much more so after?

The oft-stated aims of the modern environmentalist movement is to reduce as much as possible the "footprint" or "environmental impact" that man has on nature. If a particular species of plant or animal is harmed by the activity of man, that is automatically assumed to be evil, with any possible benefit to man being simply irrelevant. The word "evil" is appropriate, since if it were simply a practical negative, one might think of practical positives that could outweigh it. But we all know examples of cases where the survival of one tiny variant of mouse, snail or owl has been weighed to be more important than the livelihoods of thousands of people. That's not a weighing of practical benefits. That's the application of a religious principle. And the religious principle that drives the modern environmentalist movement is that nature is perfect, and any alteration of nature is therefore evil. No evidence is produced or needed to support this idea. No cataloging of statistics showing how industry and economic development has improved the lives of millions, and even improved the health of the environment, will ever change this principle in the minds of those who hold it. It is a matter of faith.

The idea that nature is perfect and must be altered as little as possible might not sound so terrible. But what makes this religious principle so pernicious is that it directly attacks the image of God. The idea that man's job is to rule and subdue the earth is an absolute heresy to the mind of the modern environmentalist.

Modern environmentalism

How else does one explain the irrational hatred of power plants, strip malls, commercial farming, and the like that permeate this movement? These things are all absolutely necessary for the modern environmentalist to live the way he does. None of them actually practice what they preach. If they did, they would kill themselves, or at least go live in a cave and eat roots and berries. We are told that carbon dioxide is a pollutant, leading to the warming of the earth. Yet carbon dioxide is a natural byproduct of every single human activity. The only way for you to truly become carbon neutral is for you to die. But God commanded man to "*be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.*" The idea that we must reduce our carbon footprint is tantamount to saying that God made a mistake.

The Christian and the environment

Genesis 8:21-22 fundamentally contradicts the tenets of the modern environmentalist movement:

“...Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.’”

It is fashionable these days for Christians to jump on this bandwagon, with many in the evangelical world echoing the same kinds of things we hear from very godless elements in our society. There is a great deal of contrary science disproving the theory of man-made global warming, but the Scriptures ought to be all we need to recognize its pagan roots. Just as with the question of the earth’s origins, science must always support our understanding of Scripture. Science never determines our understanding of Scripture.

The well-grounded Christian ought not put away his Bible when wondering about a question like this, and the Bible clearly defines man’s role in the earth. He is to fill and subdue it. He is to finish God’s work of creation by continuing to bring order out of chaos. He is to be a good steward of that with which God has entrusted him. The creative, organizing, industrial, economic impulse in man is not an evil impingement on pure and perfect nature, but is in fact the fulfillment of just what God created man to be. The belief that any industrial or economic activity of man is an evil to be suppressed as much as possible is driven by the hatred of God and the hatred of the image of God within man.

As my father has frequently pointed out to me, the story of God’s redemption begins in a garden, but it ends in a city. Let us remember always to worship the Creator, and not the creature. Let us worship Jehovah rather than the world which Jehovah made.

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