

A CHRISTIAN ETHIC OF ECOLOGY:
Week 2: Assorted Questions

I. INTRODUCTION

This evening I want to address some additional issues and questions related to ecology. The specific issues I've been asked to address are marked with a carrot (>).

II. SOME QUESTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN

A. > The Christian Ecology And Predictions Of Destruction

- Some people imagine, since many Christians expect Christ to return soon and the earth to be destroyed in favor of a new heavens and earth, that a Christian has no motivation to preserve the environment. This view is shortsighted in several respects.

1. A Deontological vs. Teleological Ethic

- This assumption forgets that a Christian's ethic is deontological (obedience oriented) rather than teleological (utilitarian). In love for his Savior, the Christian obeys God's command to care for our environment regardless of what might appear to the efficacy of such obedience.

2. Theistic Intrinsic Value

- As I stated in my first presentation, God made the creation and declared it to be good. Thus it possesses theistic intrinsic value. That which is valuable to God I must also cherish and preserve regardless of its ultimate end.

3. The Principle Of Faithfulness

- The doctrine of the imminent return of Christ actually ought to enhance one's stewardship of the creation. In Jesus' teaching on the coming of the Son of Man, the slave who is faithful in his stewardship until the Lord's return will be given even greater stewardship in the Kingdom.¹

4. The Millennial Reign

- In Christian eschatology, the premillennialist view expects Jesus to set up His kingdom on the present earth for a thousand years.² Since the earth must continue for at least another millennia, and since it will be the home of our Savior, we have motivation to care for it with diligence.

B. > Why Should We Seek To Keep The Environment Clean?

1. The Sanitation Laws

- As I argued in my previous presentation, the Mosaic sanitation laws reveal God's concern that we keep our place clean. The sanitation laws focused chiefly on the well being of man, which is, of course, ample reason for a clean environment.

2. Dominion Stewardship

- Additionally, however, as regents over all life, we are responsible to preserve the cleanliness of the environment not only for ourselves, but also for all created life.

C. The Imago Dei And Human Inventiveness

- > The common expression, "necessity is the mother of invention," actually reflects a theological reality. An aspect of the Christian ecological ethic maintains that pristine environment is not God's ideal, but that He expects us to employ the creative aspect of the Imago Dei to enhance our environment and remove natural impediments to our greater well being.
- This has a practical application in addressing the ecological dilemmas and challenges we face as a society. Our God-given creative nature enables us, when confronted with a "nature vs. human" conundrum, to come up with "inventions" that help resolve our dilemma. (e.g. cleaner burning of coal, the snail darter solution, hybrid automobiles)

III. SOME ELEMENTS OF MODERN ENVIROMENTALISM

A. > Ecological Education: Has It Helped Or Hurt?

- The environmental issues we face today are presented to the culture through a host of educational vehicles, such as public education curriculum, books, web sites, movies, television, activist organizations, and government, etc.
- Environmental education is crucial in equipping society to address matters in an informed, compassionate, and timely manner. But education can be either helpful or detrimental. For example, it can openly present all the available information and encourage critical thinking to discern the validity of various options. On the other hand, it can easily become little more than propaganda, urging uncritical acceptance of one position or another.
- Unfortunately, much that passes for environmental education reflects more of the latter than the former. A classic example of this is the Academy Award winning movie *An Inconvenient Truth* (see Supplement for details). Aggravating matters has been the inclusion of this movie in public school curriculums that already make little or no effort to present contraindications of the anthropogenic (man caused) theory of climate change that the film asserts.³
- Those seeking to educate the public on matters of the environment should focus largely on real and well-understood problems rather than imagined or poorly understood problems.⁴

B. > PETA (People For The Ethical Treatment Of Animals)

- One organization that seeks to educate the public ecologically is People For The Ethical Treatment Of Animals (PETA). On the positive side, PETA has been instrumental in calling attention to the treatment of animals that any humane person would consider grotesque.
- On the flip side, PETA's radical ideology regarding animals shares the flaws of a pantheistic view of nature. Coupled with this debasing of man to the level of animals are its extreme publicity measures, such as their "Naked Campaign," and its links to violence and vandalism.⁵

1. Some biblical counterpoints to PETA's over regard for animals

- PETA's position that man is of no greater value than animals and that therefore animals should not be used for food or clothing runs directly counter to God's revelation in Scripture. For example:
 - a. Adam/Eve—animals used for clothing**
 - The very first clothing presented to man by God consisted of the skins of a slain animal.⁶
 - b. Animals as sacrifices and food**
 - Immediately following the flood, Noah worshipped God by sacrificing some of the animals he has just rescued from the flood. God then mandated that animals were henceforth to be used as food for man.⁷
 - Under God's Levitical Law, millions of animals were sacrificed in various types of offerings, and the meat was given to the priests for food.⁸
 - c. > Jesus casting out demons**
 - In the New Testament, Jesus clearly demonstrated the place of animals in relationship to man when he delivered the Demonic of Gerasene of a legion of demons sending them into a nearby swineherd. Jesus clearly valued one human being more than the entire herd of swine.⁹

2. > Do animals have souls?

- This last point brings to mind a question often asked by people as to whether or not animals have souls.
 - a. Two definitions of soul**
 - The Hebrew and Greek words that are often translated as *soul* in our English bibles actually have several meanings. Sometimes they are used to mean simply life. In this sense, clearly, animals have souls.¹⁰
 - On the other hand, *soul* is also used in Scripture to refer to the nonmaterial aspect of mankind that is said to live on after death. Man's soul, in this sense, is eternal, and is capable of communion with God.¹¹

b. In the sense the question is asked: no

- Typically when it is asked whether or not animals have souls, what is being asked is whether or not they possess the equivalent of the human soul in this second sense. Scripture never suggests animals as having an enduring nonmaterial aspect like the human soul. The association of a nonmaterial spiritual dimension in animals is associated in Scripture with the practice of pagan idolatry. Clearly animals do not have souls in second sense I've described, and upon physical death they cease to exist as distinct creatures.¹²

C. > Sierra Club

- Another organization seeking to educate the public on environmental matters is the Sierra Club. This organization has a long and significant history of environmental activism. Millions of Americans have benefitted by the enjoyment of our National Parks and preserved wildernesses, which the Club helped to make possible. I have personally benefitted by reading of material and books published by the Club.
- However, the Sierra Club's record of activism is not unmixed. For example, during the 1970's the Club was involved in efforts to stop the construction of Tennessee's Tellico Dam, in part to preserve a small fish called the snail darter, at a cost of economic growth and the attendant impact on the well being and lives of thousands of people. When efforts by the Sierra Club and other environmentalists to stop the dam's completion failed, the snail darter was relocated to Tennessee's Hiwassee River where it thrived, and within a few years was removed from the Endangered Species List.¹³
- In another case, the Sierra Club has been fighting to preserve the Northern Spotted Owl by shutting down much of the logging industry in the Pacific Northwest. At the cost of thousands of logging jobs and the concurrent suffering and dislocation that causes for men, women, and children, the Club prefers to try to preserve what it considers to be the only viable habitat for the Spotted Owl. As it turns out, the Owl's greatest threat may not be habitat loss at all, but the closely related barred owls (which may likely be of the same species).¹⁴
- At a more extreme level, the Club's first Executive Director, David Brower, equated the loggers of the Northwest with the operators of the furnaces at Dachau. He also called for the criminalization of childbirth without a government license.¹⁵
- Currently the Sierra Club is focused largely on the questionable goal of reducing what it considers anthropogenic global warming. In encouraging efforts to massively reduce CO₂, the Club is urging policies that will not only be of dubious benefit, but will actually be harmful to mankind, most dramatically countless people still struggling with hunger and poverty in the developing world.

1. Species preservation vs. human economic growth

- > The cases of the snail darter and the spotted owl bring to light a vital question. To what extent should the preservation of species habitat be allowed to impede human economic growth?

- Many environmentalists have dramatically exaggerated the problem of species extinction.¹⁶ Actual quantifiable species loss has turned out to be a tiny fraction of such extravagant claims.¹⁷ The problem of identifying the actual threat to species has been exacerbated by their redefining of *species* and *extinction* in ways that mislead the public as to the actual risks.¹⁸
- Nevertheless, when a given species actually is threatened by economic development, measures can and should be undertaken to protect it, so long as significant impediments to economic growth and human well being are not imposed. However, given the fact that the suppression of economic growth quantifiably results in premature human deaths, not to mention the impact on quality of life, if a choice must be made between humans and animals, the Christian ethic would favor humans.¹⁹

IV. CONCLUSION

Within much of today's modern environmental movement one discovers a pantheistic worldview that lowers man to the same value as the rest of nature. Hence the tendency toward policies and measures that would diminish the quality of life for billions, and even cost human lives.

A small, relatively comfortable, and wealthy number of environmentalists in the developed world are willing to sacrifice the well being and lives of millions of people, especially in the developing world, on the altar of their idealistic and pantheistic worldview.²⁰

As a Christian, I reject such idolatrous and anti-human views, practices, and policies, and embrace instead the careful and compassionate Christian ecological ethic I described in my previous presentation.

¹ Matt. 24:42-47

² Rev. 20:4

³ For example, the Yale Climate Media Forum encourages the media to enter the fray in discouraging the presentation in public schools of scientific evidence countering the anthropogenic global warming theories.

<http://www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org/2010/06/teaching-climate-change-as-edu-news-beat/> (accessed Mar. 2011)

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) has produced a curriculum guide in conjunction with their Project 2061 intended to make today's students "science literate." Their guide promotes the anthropogenic view exclusively, discouraging any consideration of an alternate view. <http://www.project2061.org/publications/guides/climate.pdf> (accessed Mar. 2011)

"They teach students about how the climate is changing. They explain the science behind climate change and how we can change our daily practices to help save the planet. They have a role in preparing students for jobs in the green economy." U. S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. <http://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/75711> (accessed Mar. 2011)

⁴ Cornwall, p. 17; Real problems tend to be "well understood, often localized, of concern to people in developing nations especially; of high and firmly established risk to human life and

health. Unfounded and undue concerns tend to be speculative; global and cataclysmic; of concern mainly to environmentalists in wealthy nations, of very low and largely hypothetical risk, or addressed by solutions that are unjustifiably costly and of dubious benefit.”

⁵ While PETA publicly states that it does not engage in or promote violence, it has nevertheless been linked to organizations such as the Animal Liberation Front, which do, and PETA’s own officers have made statements that can only be construed as sympathetic to violence.

<http://www.animalrights.net/2001/peta-and-animal-rights-violence/>

⁶ Gen. 3:21 (Interestingly, God did not consider the man-made clothing from fig leaves to be adequate or appropriate.)

⁷ Gen. 9:3

⁸ Lev. 7:28-34; 10:14; 22:11-16; Exo. 29:33

⁹ Luke 8:26-34

¹⁰ Gen. 1:20, 24

¹¹ I Kg. 17:21; Matt. 10:28

¹² Ecc. 3:21

¹³ Encyclopedia Britanica, *Snail Darter*,

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/550274/snail-darter> (Apr. 2011)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snail_darter_controversy (Apr. 2011)

¹⁴ Oregon Online, “Make this call in the wild: Should Oregon shoot barred owls to save spotted owls?” Feb. 5, 2011,

http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2011/02/make_this_call_in_the_wild_sho.html (Apr. 2011)

¹⁵ Center For Consumer Freedom, *David Brower Quotes*,

http://activistcash.com/biography_quotes.cfm/b/3507-david-brower (accessed Apr. 2011)

¹⁶ Acton Institute, *Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition: Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Wisdom on the Environment*, (Grand Rapids, MI.) 2007, p. 98, 99; Singer/Avery, pp. 163 ff.

¹⁷ Acton, pp. 96-100. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates, based on actual field research, place extinction rates at .008 percent, or a rate that would take 500 years to eliminate only 4 percent of total species. But even those figures are using what they admit are high predictions of the rate of extinctions.

¹⁸ S. Fred Singer and Dennis T. Avery, *Unstoppable Global Warming*, (Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Inc., New York, NY.) p. 181. Some biologists want to try to preserve every single local population of a given species, and so attempt to define such local populations as distinct species. When a local population ceases to exist, they then term it “locally extinct.”

¹⁹ Acton, p, 93

²⁰ Cornwall Alliance, *A Renewed Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Examination of the Theology, Science, and Economics of Global Warming*; p. 17 <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/a-renewed-call-to-truth-prudence-and-protection-of-the-poor.pdf>, (accessed Apr. 2011)