

Creation Care Founded on the Biblical Narrative (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration)

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ABSTRACT

In 2006, Harvard biologist and secular humanist E. O. Wilson appealed to evangelical Christians for help in the arena of ecological stewardship. In *The Creation*, he writes, ‘Let us see, then, if we can, and if you are willing, to meet on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real world we share.’ Against Wilson, however, many intellectuals have argued that Christian doctrine is inherently adversarial toward nature in general and ecological stewardship in particular. This article takes up Wilson’s challenge by providing a concise biblical-theological answer to the most pointed and recurrent ecological critiques of Christianity.

This article’s contribution is found in (1) articulating a biblical-theological framework for understanding the issues; (2) applying that framework to three of the four prominent recurring accusations against Christianity; and (3) doing so in a concise and lucid manner, easily accessible to non-specialists.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, Harvard biologist and secular humanist E. O. Wilson published *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*, in which he appealed to evangelical Christians for help in the arena of ecological stewardship. Wilson’s book is written in the form of an impassioned letter to a Southern Baptist pastor, arguing that religion and science are two of the most powerful forces in the world today, that both secular scientists and Christian pastors have motivation to care for creation, and that the two ought to be united on the grounds of biological conservation. He writes, ‘Let us see, then, if we can, and if you are willing, to meet on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real world we share.’¹

Numerous critics, however, have argued that Christian doctrine is inherently adversarial toward nature in general and ecological stewardship in particular. Ludwig Feuerbach and Arnold Toynbee are prime examples. Feuerbach argued that Christians should have no interest in nature because they are taught to care only for themselves and the salvation of their souls.² Likewise, Arnold Toynbee argued that Christians harm the environment precisely because they are carrying out the logical implications of their belief system.³ These and many others have laid the blame for ecological degradation squarely at the feet of Christianity.

¹ E. O. Wilson, *Creation Care: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), 4.

² Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 287.

³ Arnold Toynbee, “The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis,” in *Ecology and Religion in History*, eds. David and Eileen Spring (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 145-6.

Against the cultured ecological despisers of Christianity, we argue that Wilson is right—Christians do indeed have reason to care about the creation. In order to demonstrate the rectitude of his argument, this article recognizes four prominent charges against Christianity: (1) that the Christian doctrine of creation promotes a dualism of matter and spirit,⁴ (2) that the Christian doctrine of human dominion implies exploitation,⁵ (3) that the Christian doctrine of the end times removes any motivation for Christians to be concerned with ecological matters,⁶ and (4) that Christianity fostered the rise of modern science which, in turn, fostered the development of technologies which harm the environment.⁷ This paper will argue that the first three arguments are misguided (leaving aside the fourth argument which falls outside of the scope of this paper) and that Christians do indeed have reason to care about ecological issues.

The Biblical Narrative

In order to build a biblical theology of ecological stewardship, this paper relies upon four Christian doctrines—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. These doctrines are central to the Christian faith and indeed can be seen as the four major plot movements in the Christian narrative.⁸ In the biblical narrative, the first movement is Creation, in which we find a *created* world shaped and formed by the uncreated Triune God; further, it is a *good* world that God has filled with his image bearers, who are to be stewards of it. The second movement is the Fall, in which God's image bearers rebelled against him, alienating themselves from him, each other, and the entire created order. As a result, God's good and beautiful creation was marred by the ugliness of sin, sin which has deeper and more pervasive consequences than we might typically imagine. The third movement is Redemption, in which God speaks of One through whom he will redeem his image-bearers and indeed the whole creation. The entirety of the biblical drama points to this One, the Messiah, and the salvation that he will accomplish. The fourth and final movement is Restoration, in which God restores his good creation, establishing a new heavens

⁴ Wendell Berry, "A Secular Pilgrimage," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 135; "Last Words," *Sierra* (May-June 1993): 112.

⁵ Feuerbach makes this argument in *The Essence*, 146-48. Also, see Ian McHaig, *Design with Nature* (Garden City, NY: The National History Press, 1969), 26.

⁶ Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 33-34; Roderick Nash, *Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989), 91-92.

⁷ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Ian Barbour (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 43-54.

⁸ More than a few recent theological proposals have argued that Scripture contains one basic and overarching narrative within which Christian doctrine finds its home. These proposals are written by a diverse array of scholars, including theologians N. T. Wright, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Michael Goheen, philosophers Albert Wolters and Craig Bartholomew, and biblical scholar Christopher Wright. However, this essay differs from those theologians in two respects. First, whereas Wolters tells the story in terms of three acts, Wright in terms of five acts, and Goheen/Bartholomew in terms of six, this paper offers the biblical drama in four acts: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 139-43; Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006). Second, of the authors above, only Christopher Wright makes extended application to ecological matters.

and earth, inhabited by his image-bearers redeemed from among every tribe, language, and nation, who will dwell eternally with their God. This narrative provides the framework for a Christian theology of ecological stewardship. We now turn to focus on the first plot movement.

Creation

In the Scriptures, we learn that the Triune God created the heavens and the earth and sustains them by his providence. Each of the three persons of the Godhead is portrayed as taking part in the act of creation. God the Father is the fountainhead and planner of this world (Gen. 1:1; 1 Cor. 8:6), while God the Son is the agent of creation (John 1:3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), and God the Spirit is he who hovers over it, giving it shape and beauty (Gen. 1:2).⁹ Further, the Triune God holds all of his creation together (Col. 1:17), sustaining it by his powerful word (Heb. 1:3), providentially caring for plants and animals and even the soil (Ps. 104:10-14).

Because he is creator, God is the possessor of the heavens and earth. Such language pervades the Christian Scriptures. We learn that 'The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein' (Ps. 24:1), that everything under heaven belongs to him (Job 41:11), and that even the animals of the forest are his (Ps. 50:10-12). Millard Erickson writes, 'The Bible depicts God as still the owner of all this, since He gave everything existence, which it otherwise would not have had. While He has lent or entrusted these resources to His creatures to watch over, develop, and maximize, it is a case of *lending* it, not *giving* it. He is still the rightful owner.'¹⁰ God the creator is God the possessor.

Further, God's creation is good and reflects his glory. Six times in Genesis 1 the author writes, 'God saw that it was good' (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and a seventh time he affirms 'Behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). The creation is good because it was created by God who is himself good: 'The heavens are telling the glory of God: and the firmament proclaims his handiwork' (Ps. 19:1). In fact, the biblical doctrine of creation is often misinterpreted because of a failure to appreciate the inherent goodness of God's creation. This goodness is a fundamental teaching of the Christian Scriptures. It is repeatedly affirmed in the first chapter of Genesis and throughout the Hebrew canon. 'In the Old Testament', writes Christopher Wright, 'the natural order is fundamentally and in origin good, as the work of the single good God, YHWH... Our treatment of the earth reflects our attitude to its Maker and the seriousness (or otherwise) with which we take what he has said about it.'¹¹ Further, it is affirmed in the New Testament canon as Paul, for example, writes that 'everything created by God is good' (1 Tim. 4:4). The goodness of

⁹ Baptist theologian David Dockery begins his theology of environmental stewardship with an acknowledgement of the active involvement of the persons of the Trinity. David Dockery, 'The Environment, Ethics, and Exposition,' in *The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment*, eds. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 113-125.

¹⁰ Millard Erickson, 'Biblical Theology of Ecology,' in Land and Moore, *The Earth is the Lord's*, 39.

¹¹ Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 398. Von Rad, in commenting on Gen. 1:31, makes the point with even more force: 'When faith speaks of creation, and in so doing directs its eye toward God, then it can only say that God created the world perfect.' Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, rev. ed. The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1992), 61.

the material world paves the way for the Incarnation, in which the Son assumes flesh in order to redeem the world.¹²

The biblical teaching concerning creation's goodness avoids the twin dangers of Gnostic dualism and idolatrous monism. On the one hand, Gnostic dualism makes a distinction between the material and spiritual aspects of God's creation, according to which the material creation is 'bad' while the immaterial is 'good.' According to this flawed view, our bodies and indeed the earth itself are essentially bad, while our souls are essentially good. The early church, however, refuted the Gnostics, on grounds that the Gnostics refused to recognize the inherent goodness of God's creation, thereby undermining the biblical depiction of creation as well as the Incarnation and therefore the gospel itself. On the other hand, earth-lovers sometimes identify God with nature, in effect worshipping the creation along with, or instead of, the Creator. This, however, is also a clear departure from Christian doctrine. Wright argues that Christian Scripture, 'while it certainly teaches respect and care for the non-human creation, resists and reverses the human tendency to divinize or personalize the natural order, or to imbue it with any power independent of its personal Creator.'¹³ So the world is not bad, but neither is it God. It is God's good world.

The Christian doctrine of creation further informs us that God entrusts humanity with stewardship over his creation. In the Genesis account, we are told that God created man and woman in his image and likeness, bestowing upon humans a great dignity (Gen. 1:26-28). Further, God tells humanity to subdue (*kabash*) and rule (*radah*) the created order (Gen. 1:26-28), as well as to till (*abad*) and care (*shamar*) for it (Gen. 2:15-24). Taken together, these commands imply that humans are both to be the 'kings over' nature, but also at the same time the 'servants of' nature. In other words, humans are to be vice-regents of a sort, exercising cooperative dominion over nature along with God, managing the earth for his glory, alongside of his providential preservation.¹⁴ 'For it is only members of the human species who are given the awesome freedom and responsibility to be God's representatives within creation. And it is therefore, only we humans who can be held morally blameworthy when we fail to do this, and morally praiseworthy when we succeed.'¹⁵

In conclusion, the Christian doctrine of creation teaches that the Triune God created the earth, possesses it, and sustains it by his providence. He loves his creation, which is essentially good and reflects his glory. For this reason, he entrusts humans to have dominion and stewardship

¹² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 1.b in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4; Series 2 (ed. Philip Schaff; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 38-67.

¹³ Wright, *Mission of God*, 400. This is the danger inherent in Jurgen Moltmann's attempts to re-think the relation between God, humans, and the created order. He seeks to build a theology of immanence in which God's Spirit energizes the cosmos, thereby overcoming what he thinks a too-sharp distinction between God and his world. The problem is that Moltmann's approach flies in the face of the biblical testimony, as Brevard Childs has pointed out. Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 409-11.

¹⁴ See Wildeberger and Dempster for a treatment of dominion in relation to vice-regency. H. Wildeberger, "Das Abbild Gottes, Gen. 1:26-30," in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21:245-59. Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 56-62. I owe the phrase "cooperative dominion" to David Dockery, "The Environment," 119.

¹⁵ Tom Regan, 'Christianity and Animal Rights,' in *Liberating Life*, eds. Charles Birch, William Eakin, and Jay McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 80.

over his good creation. The ecological implications of this doctrine are two-fold. First, the Christian doctrine of creation answers the charge that Christianity promotes a dualism of spirit and matter, which denigrates the material and elevates the spiritual. Instead, Christian doctrine teaches clearly that God's creation is essentially good, that he loves his creation, and that we should take care of it for his glory. Second, it answers the charge that 'dominion' in the Genesis account implies 'domination' or 'degradation.' Rather, 'dominion' implies cooperative stewardship over God's good creation. Erickson writes, 'This means that animals, plants, and minerals are not merely means to ends. They are ends in themselves. They are not merely to be utilized and exploited, but rather, cared for. The human, the caretaker of God's kingdom, is responsible for their welfare, their fulfillment of God's highest and best intention for them.'¹⁶ Human motivation, therefore, is rooted not only in our dependence upon the earth, but more primarily in the glory-giving value of the earth to God its creator.

Fall and Redemption

The second movement is the Fall, in which God's image bearers rebelled against him, alienating themselves from him, from each other, and from the entire created order (Gen. 3). As a result, God's good and beautiful creation was marred by sin's ugliness and its pervasively deleterious consequences. Therefore, while the first plot movement, Creation, portrays the ideal arrangement, the second plot movement, the Fall, portrays the world as we know it today. The universal flourishing and mutual interdependence of God's original creation was broken as humanity's sin introduced disarray and disorder.

In response to the rebellion of his image-bearers, God spoke of the redemption he would bring. Heforetold of One through whom he would redeem his image-bearers and indeed the whole creation. Although Adam was given a promise of death as a result of his rebellion (Gen. 2:17), he was also given a promise of life (Gen. 3:15). In the narrative, God tells Adam that the woman will bear 'offspring' by which he will be saved. The apostle Paul understands these promises to point ultimately to Christ (Gal. 3:16), who is God's Son, 'born of a woman' (Gal. 4:4). The New Testament account ties this Son to the salvation of the world in both its human (John 3:16) and cosmic (Rom. 8:20-22) dimensions. Furthermore, the narrative unfolds in a covenantal structure which itself demonstrates God's redemptive purposes. The covenant with man is effected through Eve's offspring (Gen. 3:15), who will bless the nations (Gen. 12:1-3) specifically through the line of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) in a land for his people. As mentioned above, the promise concerning Eve's offspring was fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:16), born of the woman (Gal. 4:4). Within this covenant structure, and preceding the promises to Abraham and David, God's promises to Noah and his offspring clearly include all the earth (Gen. 9:9-17). Therefore, the biblical narrative is a redemptive story, the story of God redeeming both his image-bearers and the rest of the created order.

It is no secret that at the center of God's redemptive purposes is the salvation of humanity, the creatures made in his image and likeness. God does not, however, limit redemption to his image-

¹⁶ Erickson, 'Biblical Theology,' 48. This is a key counter-argument because the terms 'dominion' and 'domination' both sound imperialistic to democratic ears, especially when some would be eager to blame Christian doctrine for ecological mismanagement.

bearers. In the end, he will also redeem the world he made, forming what the Scriptures call ‘a new heavens and a new earth’ (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1). God’s redemptive work through Christ extends through God’s people to God’s cosmos, so that in the end ‘creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21). The good end of God’s redemptive purpose is the restoration of his creation, the formation of a new heavens and earth, a world ‘in which righteousness dwells’ (2 Pet. 3:13).¹⁷

Many passages of Scripture speak of God’s creation, post-Fall, already praising him (Pss. 145:10, 21; 148; 150:6), while others speak of the way in which the whole creation will one day praise him (Pss. 96:10-13; Ps 98:7-9). Several texts link the glory of God to the fullness of the earth, or as Wright puts it, to the ‘magnificently diverse abundance of the whole biosphere—land, sea, and sky’ (Pss. 24:1; 50:12).¹⁸ Paul even argues that the whole universe bears the insignia of God’s handiwork (Rom. 1:19-20).¹⁹ ‘We may not be able to explain *how* it is that creation praises its Maker’ Wright argues. ‘[W]e should not therefore deny *that* creation praises God—since it is affirmed throughout the Bible with overwhelming conviction.’²⁰

Further, more than a few passages of Scripture speak to the manner in which humans are to be good stewards of God’s creation. These passages show God’s people how to treat his creation in such a way as to point to the new heavens and earth which is to come. There is the general command for us to be ‘good stewards’: ‘It is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful’ (1 Cor. 4:2). In other words, we must not turn God’s beautiful garden into a desolate desert. Further, there are more specific commands, such as directives against ‘land greed’ (Pss. 24:1; 50:12; Job 41:11). Isaiah explains that land-grabbing greed destroys the land’s productivity (Isa. 5:8-10). God, not man, ultimately is the owner of the land and we ought not rob his land of its inherent value, productivity, and beauty.

Finally, some passages speak directly to the people of Israel in their historical context. In Exodus, God commands the people to take a rest on the Sabbath day not only for the sake of themselves but also for their oxen and donkeys (Exod. 23:12).²¹ In like manner, he commands

¹⁷ Although theologians most often reference the passages in Isaiah, Romans, 2 Peter, and Revelation, John’s gospel is also significant for treating the renewal of God’s creation. Andreas Köstenberger argues that John’s gospel can be seen as espousing a ‘new creation’ theology that presents Jesus’ incarnation and mission in light of the renewal of creation. He writes, ‘This is most apparent in the introduction to the gospel, which casts the Word’s coming into the world in terms reminiscent of creation, most notably by way of references to “life” and “light,” both of which constitute creation terminology. Also, John’s presentation of Jesus’ early ministry as encompassing a week in keeping with the week of creation is suggestive of a new creation.’ Andreas Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 337.

¹⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 405.

¹⁹ Leon Morris: ‘These words [Ro 1:19-20] mean that the universe has always borne upon it the imprint of God’s handiwork. While many translators refer to *the world*, Paul’s meaning is, of course, “the universe.” Order in the heavens as well as on earth bears witness to God. This whole mighty universe has always reflected its Creator.’ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 81.

²⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 405.

²¹ Brevard Childs writes that this verse ‘seems to stem from a genuine humanitarian feeling of sympathy for the underling and creature alike, which in time received a theological support from the covenant.’ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*. The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 482.

Israel to allow the land to ‘rest’ every seventh year, allowing the animals to get from it whatever they want. In Leviticus, the author writes of the law of jubilee, in which every fifty years land returns to its original owner, preventing land-grabbing monopolies and exploitation (Lev. 25:28). Associated with this is the law of harvesting, in which Israel is told not to reap to the edges of their fields or pick up fallen grapes, so that they can leave some for foreigners, for the poor, and for the animals (Lev. 19:9). At various places in the Pentateuch, Israel is given laws of sanitation, much of which is directed against unhealthy disposal methods which pollute the environment (Lev. 13-14, Deut. 23:13). Even the law concerning warfare includes a restriction on destroying the fruit trees of a conquered city (Deut. 20:19-20). Perhaps the most poignant witness to God’s care for his created order, however, is the fact that Israel was exiled from the land partly because they did not allow it to rest (Lev. 26:34-35).

In summary, the biblical narrative informs us that humanity’s rebellious inclinations alienate him not only from God but also from the created order. The consequences of the fall are more pervasive than we typically imagine, extending not only to the spiritual but the ecological dimensions of life also. In response, God promises a Savior who would redeem not only humans but also the entire creation. ‘During this interim period’, Dockery writes, ‘our responsibility as the redeemed people is to exercise redemptive dominion...we are vice-regents caring for and redeeming the territory in the King’s behalf.’²² Thus as we live in an interim period, we now look forward to the final movement. Similar to the doctrine of creation, therefore, the doctrine of redemption makes clear that human dominion should be equated with stewardship rather than with dominion. Following the Redeemer, we exercise redemptive dominion, acting as vice-regents on his behalf.

Restoration

The fourth and final movement is Restoration, in which God restores his good creation, establishing a new heavens and earth, inhabited by his image-bearers redeemed from among every tribe, language, and nation, who will dwell eternally with their God. The Christian Scriptures, both Old Testament and New, speak of God’s promise of a new heavens and earth. In Isaiah, we read, ‘For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind’ (Isa. 65:17). In 2 Peter, we are told to ‘look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’ (2 Pet. 3:13).²³ In the Revelation, we are told of a new heaven and a new earth, where there will be no more pain or tears (Rev. 21:1-4). This is the doctrine of creation come full circle. The good God who called us to be stewards of his good creation, who promised redemption in light of man’s sin, is the same God who will restore his creation, bringing forth a new heavens and earth unblemished by sin and its consequences. This narrative, with creation and restoration as its bookends, provides the framework for a Christian theology of environmental stewardship.

²²Dockery, ‘The Environment,’ 121.

²³ The 1 Peter passage also speaks of the present heavens and earth being reserved for a fire on the day of judgment. Although some commentators take Peter to mean that the present universe will be consumed by fire, this paper believes that the fire referred to is a ‘purifying fire.’ Richard Bauckham’s interpretation is compelling, in which he argues that the purpose of the fire in these verses is not the obliteration, but the purging of the cosmos. The cosmos will be purged of sin and its consequences, including its ecological consequences. Richard J. Bauckham, *2 Peter and Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 316-22.

As humans we value the earth not only because of its origin, but because of its destiny. ‘The primary argument for ecological responsibility’, writes Francis Bridger, ‘lies in the connection between old and new creation. . . . Ecological ethics are not, therefore, anthropocentric: they testify to the vindicating acts of God in creation and redemption.’²⁴ Likewise Timothy Ware writes, ‘Not only man’s body but the whole of material creation will eventually be transfigured: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away” (Rev. 21:1). Redeemed humanity is not to be snatched away from the rest of creation, but creation is to be saved and glorified along with him.’²⁵ The biblical doctrine of restoration, therefore, answers the Christian eschatology fosters apathy toward ecological matters. Not only does Christian eschatology not contribute to ecological apathy, it actively motivates us to be good stewards of the good world God has given us, in light of God’s care for, and eventual restoration of, his creation.

Conclusion

The Christian doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration provide a robust theological vindication in the face of the challenges of its cultured ecological despisers. The biblical narrative teaches us that the Triune God created the world, loves it and sustains it, and calls it ‘good.’ Therefore, the earth’s inherent worth, dignity, and beauty are not happenstance: ‘The Creator purposefully built them into the creation. Thus, any attack on this inherent goodness is more than an attack against the earth. It is an attack against the Creator and thus is a form of blasphemy.’²⁶ Further, God’s image-bearers are to be stewards of his good creation and therefore ‘human societies which seek to revere God and to mirror his justice, will also produce the fruits of justice and equity in human moral order and harmony in the natural world.’²⁷ To do so is to contribute to the mutual interdependence, the universal flourishing, that God intended for his creation. In being stewards of our environment, we are able to love not only our neighbors (who are affected by our actions), but also the rest of creation (including creatures who can never repay us or thank us). Environmental stewardship arises, therefore, from our love for God, our fellow humans, and the rest of his created order. Finally, Christian stewardship is a way of foreshadowing the new heavens and earth, a place which will be free of sin and its negative consequences, an environment marked by its universal flourishing and unbroken harmony.

This exposé of Christian doctrine cannot, however, provide a practical vindication for the ecological abuses committed by Christians. We recognize that Christians often have trampled upon God’s good creation without love for God, our fellow humans, or the rest of creation. Therefore, we must seek to preserve the integrity, harmony, and beauty of God’s creation; commit ourselves to carefully stewarding earth’s resources in our local contexts, be willing to

²⁴ Francis Bridger, ‘Ecology and Eschatology: A Neglected Dimension,’ *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1990): 301.

²⁵ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1991), 239. I owe this quote to Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 125.

²⁶ Dockery, ‘The Environment,’ 116.

²⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 410.

change our consumption and disposal practices even at inconvenience to ourselves; and determine to speak boldly on a global level about this issue just as in the past we have spoken about other great social issues, such as sexual exploitation and slavery.²⁸ Let us meet E. O. Wilson on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real world which we share.

²⁸ Over the past decade, Christian presses have begun to publish treatises on environmental stewardship, written from a Christian perspective with the intention of motivating churches and Christian groups into action. For academic treatments of theology and ecology, see Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*; Kyle S. van Houtan and Michael Northcott, eds., *Diversity and Dominion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010); Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2006). Chapter 12 of Wright's book is devoted to 'Mission and God's Earth' and is a biblical-theological treatment of Christian motivation for stewardship. For popular treatments of theology and ecology see Calvin B. De Witt, *Earth-Wise*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2007) and Jonathan Merritt, *Green Like God* (New York: FaithWords, 2010).