

Sustainability and Biblical Creation Care
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Abstract

Sustainability in most of its forms and definitions is an elaborate commentary on material trends in economy and nature, and human responses to it. Sustainability dominates discussions in several fields of the natural and social sciences. Why should Christians participate in questions on sustainability *as Christians* within our communities? Two guidelines steer the response, namely (i) care for God's creation must arise from the core of the Christian faith and (ii) Christians cannot act as if there is any part of creation or human action that falls outside the scope of the gospel as revealed in Scripture. Yet, arguments from 'experience' or from 'life' all too often serve as the basis for our most important decisions – also those related to dealing with creation - without really considering what Scripture teaches us. The purpose of this talk is to share results of a book project on the exegesis of selected biblical texts that provides insights into mankind's relation to God's creation. No evidence is found in Scripture that supports the claim that Christian piety counteracts the care for creation, but it is argued that a correction may be necessary on certain views of God and His creation, mankind's place in it and how expectations about the future affects living on this earth. No evidence, however, is found for the claim that the biblical text is essentially obsessed with human well-being at the expense of other creatures.

1. What is sustainability? It has become a 'container' word for the ability of an economy, a society, and the environment to keep going, or for the care about posterity, or the ability of economic and ecosystems to function over time. When I started my own consulting firm 'Sustainable Options' many years ago, someone tauntingly, but rightfully asked: so, what are you going to sustain? Indeed, sustainability, in its various permutations is an elaborate commentary on **material trends and human responses** to it. In short, sustainability is the science to make the earth endure.¹
2. How should Christians position themselves in this debate? Why should Christians participate in the preservation of the earth *as Christians* from within Christian communities? What is our deepest motivation, the source of our inspiration and vision that pushes us forward?² The answer is not that straightforward. Several studies confirm that Christians have diverse ideas about how to respond to issues such as the environmental crisis, climate change, the importance of biodiversity and nature conservation, ranging from a deep sense of stewardship and care to fierce hostility.³
3. An answer to these question appear to lie much deeper than just a few differences in opinion. The South African eco-theologian Ernst Conradie identified **four critical**

¹ In the environmental and economic realms, the dominant terms referred to has changed over the years from 'species and habitat protection', 'stewardship of land, water and air', the 'environment', 'sustainable development', 'ecosystems', 'sustainability' to 'planetary boundaries'. What binds these developments together is (i) that a more sustainable world is desired and (ii) that the scale of what is referred to as the 'environmental problem' has expanded from species and habitats to global change on a planetary level.

² Ernst Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping. In Search of an Inspiring Vision* Resources in Religion and Theology 16 (Stellenbosch: SUNMedia, 2011), 1

³ See J. Curry, "Christians and Climate Change: A Social Framework of Analysis," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60, no. 3 (2008): 156-164; K.S. van Houtan and S.L. Pimm, "The various Christian ethics of species conservation," in *Religion and the New Ecology: Environmental Prudence in a World in Flux*, ed. D. Lodge and C. Hamlin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); L. Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 1 (1996): 55-70 en David M. Konisky, "The greening of Christianity? A study of environmental attitudes over time," *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 2 (2018): 267-291.

areas where so-called Christian piety is said to counteract the care for creation, namely:

- a. a limited view of the **relationship between God and the world**,
 - b. a limited view of **mankind where the body, the earthly and the material are considered of less value than the spiritual**,
 - c. a limited view of **salvation that is only directed at human beings** and their welfare, and
 - d. a wrong view of **human destiny which is directed towards a future escape to heaven**.
4. There is a way to discern the truth-value of these claims. The Christian philosopher and Regent College Professor Loren Wilkinson and co-authors wrote that **the revealed gospel of Christ offers a much surer guideline for action** than what the modern world can provide with centuries of conflicting philosophical and religious ideas.⁴ Wilkinson admits that in practice it is often difficult to distinguish Christian principles from other truths, half-truths, and errors by which Christians guide their actions. That may include Christian piety. We have 'this treasure...in clay pots' (Col 4:7) he writes, but nevertheless he continues to show valuable principles and guidelines in the Christian treatment of creation:
- a. The first guideline is to be careful that the gospel is only used as a tool for an environmental ideology or environmental program that has already been decided for other reasons. Any **care for God's creation must arise from the core of the Christian's faith**, not from the extent of environmental problems or from other ideologies for environmental conservation.
 - b. The second guideline is that **Christians cannot act as if there is any part of creation or human action that falls outside the scope of the gospel** (Col 1:15-23). Both principles are also considered as guidelines in my own work. They both presuppose a **reverent listening to the full gospel as written down in God's revealed Word**.
5. Unfortunately, the **sound principles proposed by Wilkinson have not set the main agenda for theological reflection on ecological issues** (the field of eco-theology) since then. In response to the critical charge by Lyn White at the end of the 1960s that Christianity is co-responsible for the environmental crisis,⁵ in certain dominant currents of eco-theology an **alternative critical 'ecological hermeneutics'** is proposed. Its' starting point is a **suspicion that the biblical text is essentially obsessed with human well-being at the expense of other creatures**.⁶ The Bible would be too focused on people (anthropocentric), and in this current time with its environmental crisis must thus be read with suspicion and interpreted in a radical different manner.
6. The elephant in the room, the **real underlying problem** (also in the reflection on the environmental crisis and the relationship between mankind and the rest of creation),

⁴ Loren Wilkinson (ed.), *Earthkeeping in the Nineties. Stewardship of Creation*. Revised Edition (William Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1991), 344-345.

⁵ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

⁶ Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

is when the Bible is not read and heard as God's revealed and authoritative word. The way God has revealed himself is 'by telling us about Himself, and what He is doing in His world'.⁷ Followers of Christ need to pay careful attention as it is of Christ that Scriptures testify (Joh 5:39).

7. The almost century-old sigh of the theologian Bonhoeffer that **arguments from 'experience' or from 'life' all too often serve as the basis** for the most important decisions, without consideration of the Scriptures, is just as valid today. God reveals Himself in the 'creation, preservation and government' of the universe, and in this way, one could learn a lot about Him from 'life' to guide our decisions, but it is, as the Belgic Confession states **through His 'holy and divine Word' that we understand Him 'more clearly'**.⁸
8. The most appropriate type of study to address the problem is one of biblical exegesis. **Exegesis can be defined as the 'thorough, analytical study of a biblical passage which is done to arrive at a useful interpretation of the text'**.⁹ A study of the words of the text and the relationship in which they stand to each other and to the larger literary units give meaning to the text.¹⁰ Although the process of exegesis (and reading it) may seem technical, the results can be exciting and have 'real practical value'.¹¹
9. **The fruits of the exegesis need then be brought together in one coherent whole.** *The purpose of this talk is to attempt a synthesis of earlier exegetical work on selected biblical texts on God's creation and our place in it.* This task cannot be done without sharing some highlights of the exegetical work; for this talk, I draw on material from a book on creation care (in vernacular Afrikaans) with an exegesis of 25 texts (By nature of the limitations of chosen texts and time available, also tonight, the synthesis should be seen as provisional).
10. **Let's start with the first area where Christian piety is said to counteract the care for creation, namely that it works on a limited view of the relationship between God and the world.**
 - a. **Let's start in Hebrew 1:1-3.** Why here and not in Gen 1, you may ask? Because this text provides a lynchpin for responsible interpretation of God's revelation. Let's read Heb 1:1:

'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...'
 - b. It is only from this centre that we can confidently work outwards. It is through the Son that the OT can be properly understood. Everything in Scripture needs to be 'harmonistically' understood through what God has spoken

⁷ J.I. Packer, *God has Spoken*. Revised Edition (London etc.: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998 [1965]), 77.

⁸ *Belgic Confession*, Article 2.

⁹ Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis. A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, Fourth Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 2009), 1.

¹⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al., eds., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (London; Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), 203.

¹¹ Stuart, *Exegesis*, 1.

through the Son.¹² This is a **critical hermeneutical insight that guides much of the work** that follows.

- c. The text makes it clear that God's announcement of His will has reached a finality in the revelation by His Son. **Christ is presented as the all-encompassing revelation of God** and His authority over and continuous involvement with creation made clear, Heb 1:2-4 reads:¹³

‘... [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed **heir of all things**, and through whom also he **made the universe**. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the **exact representation** of his being, **sustaining all things** by his powerful word. After he had provided **purification for sins**, he sat down at **the right hand of the Majesty** in heaven’.
- d. Hebrews is unique in using the OT with its consistent and careful citations and allusions. The Son's appointment as heir (Heb 1:2) is an allusion to Ps 2:8: *‘I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession’*. The central theme of Ps 2 is that God anoints the **Messiah as the King** of all. Ps 2:8 is eschatological and ultimately points to **Christ's total rule**.
- e. And then there is Heb 1:3: ‘after he had provided purification for sins...’ Jesus Christ, God’s final and supreme revelation is Creator, King *and* Saviour. He is also God - a **high Christology indeed - and the starting-point for understanding God’s relationship to the world**. An important theological implication is never to think too little of the Son by attributing to Him only certain works such as salvation.
- f. *In summary, a theology of creation care would do well to begin with a high Christology. Anything less is indeed a limited view on the relationship between God and the world. God’s relationship to the whole universe finds its clearest expression through the Son.*
- g. **Col 1 gives us a better insight on God’s relationship to the world through the Kingship of Christ**. Now, often Col 1:15-18 is read as an inserted and adapted hymn on the supremacy of Christ in creation and in sustaining everything (*‘in Him everything holds together’*). However, there is no unanimity in biblical scholarship on where such a song begins and where it ends.¹⁴ Some translations (e.g. AFR20) print Col 1:13-20 in poetic format, a decision that is supported by more recent clausal analysis. A study of the Greek syntax shows that Col 1:13-20 is part of one sentence with different segments that are

¹² For a discussion on what the Reformers called ‘the analogy of faith’ see Packer, *God has Spoken*, 99-100.

¹³ The relationship between God and the world is revealed to work *in* the Son. The relationship of God with His Son as heir of all things is so close that God the Father created everything in Him. In Christ the whole universe, that is everything, was made. Other texts corroborate this claim: through this Son, who is also the image of God, everything was created (Ps 33:6; John 1:3; Rom 11:36). And, by His word all things are maintained (Col 1:16).

¹⁴ The printed NA26 shows Col 1:15–18a in poetic format, while the NA27 and NA28, as well as several modern translations, print Col 1:15–20 in poetic format (Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 412).

introduced with the words 'With joy...' at the end of Col 1:11 (or at the start 1:12).¹⁵

- h. It is important to note that Col 1:18 contains a textual variant, which may make it **more difficult to discern** that **Christ is referred to here as the origin of the church which is the firstborn from among the dead**, and not in general the One with whom the process of the universe has started.¹⁶ Literally, this verse says:

'And he is the head of the body, the church who is ('essentially') the origin and firstborn among the dead...'.¹⁷
- i. *The important implication is that Col 1:18-20, with reference to the reconciliation to himself of all things, whether on earth or on heaven, needs to be read within the context of the announcement in Col 1:18a that Christ is Head of the body, that is the church.*
- j. When Col 1:12-20 is read as one unit, it becomes clear that it is the Father who has **made the saints fit for the Son's kingdom**.¹⁸ The hymn of Col 1:13-20 stands in the context of abundant gratitude for this happening.
- k. The content of the hymn is that the **Son is the supreme King over all, as manifested in the church, and with cosmic implications**. The Son is an extremely competent King,¹⁹ the saints are qualified to share in the kingdom,²⁰ and the consequences are to be freed from all accusations.²¹
- l. Despite the universal reach of the Kingdom, only the saints are qualified for the kingdom (Col 1:12). This is corroborated in the **Gospel of John** where Jesus said: 'My Kingdom is not of this world' (Joh 18:36)²² The 'world' means a hostile *cosmos*, not the earth as such. The Kingdom can only be seen by those who believe (John 3:16; 8:14), and as Nicodemus had to learn are those who are 'born from above' (John 3:3).

¹⁵ Lukaszewski, Albert L., Mark Dubis, and Ted Blakley, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament, SBL Edition: Sentence Analysis* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Philip W. Comfort, [New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2008), 622.

¹⁷ Gr: 'ὅς ἐστιν ἡ ἀρχή'

¹⁸ The church father Chrysostom wrote about Col 1:13 that it is a '[g]reat thing...to be...delivered from darkness; but to be also brought into a kingdom is ... far greater' (John Chrysostom, "[Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Colossians](#)," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. Ashworth and John Albert Broadus, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 266).

¹⁹ In Col 1:14-17 we read that the Son-King is exalted above all and extremely competent because He brings salvation, He is the real image of God, He has considerable status because he existed from before creation, and because in Him '*all things have been created through him and for him*', that is things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible and all forms of dominion. The kingship, creation and sustenance of everything falls under the Son's supremacy. God's relationship to the world is known through the Son-King's royal government, which is truly all-encompassing.

²⁰ In Col 1:18-20 we get to see how the saints are qualified to share in the kingdom. The Son's kingdom is already manifesting itself in the universal church. He precedes the saints in the church in the resurrection that brings new life. It is in the church where all fullness is to be found, it is in the church where there is reconciliation, it is in the church where there is peace.

²¹ Col 1: 21-23 expound on the consequences for those who hear the gospel and continue in faith, namely to be reconciled by Christ and presented holy in God's sight, without 'blemish and free from accusation'.

²² See also Joh 3:12; 8:23; 17:16.

- m. *Let's pause at this thought for a moment.* To read John 3:16 as if God loved his whole world and we likewise should do so, is a popular reading in some circles, but unfortunately **does not sufficiently take the immediate literary context and the need for a harmonistal reading of Scripture into account.** Note that this does **not mean that the cosmos is intrinsically evil**, but that the **cosmos is enslaved** by the prince of this world (Joh 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and **eagerly awaits its liberation** (Rom 8:21).
- n. *In summary, the kingship of the Son has great theological importance: Christ is the beloved Son, who forgave man's sin, in whom everything is created, who sustains and rules over all of creation, who is the perfect image of God (in the place of Adam), and who is a temple as head of the universal church where God wants to live. The Son's kingdom and creation goes hand in hand.*
- o. Care for creation, therefore, is to be made fit for His rule, from the temple where God lives - that is in the universal church and through the individual believer – and under witness of the Spirit. God's entire creation is in the safest hands possible. God's children are not passively excluded from this government. The Father *makes the saints fit* (or 'has qualified' you (Col 1:12)) for the Son's kingdom. The saints in Christ therefore primarily take care of creation because God himself takes care of creation.
- p. **Now let us look at an OT text where God makes a covenant with all creatures, Gen 9:7-11.** The text reads as follows:
⁷ As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."
⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹ "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you
¹⁰ and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.
¹¹ I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."
- q. Note that the text starts with a repetition of Gods original blessing at creation – be fruitful and multiply (Gen 9:7, cf. Gen 1:28).²³ This happens right after God has vowed: ' Never again will I curse the ground because of humans...' (Gen 8:21), in acceptance of Noah's sacrificial offering.
- r. The secret intention of God is openly validated in the establishment of an everlasting covenant with Noah, his family, his descendants and all living creatures. Despite the sin of man and the curse on the ground, **God did not break His relationship with creation.** His relationship with the natural order in creation will not stop as long as the earth is still there (Gen 8:22; Jer 5:24).

²³ Douglas Mangum, Miles Custis, and Wendy Widder, [Genesis 1–11](#), Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Ge 8:20–9:28.

- s. An important point to note is that the **validity of the covenant is not dependent on the ability of humans or animals to accept the covenant.**²⁴ How God can make a covenant with creatures without reason or spirit, has raised many questions over the ages. But, this is not the main point here. Rather, mankind's sublimity as image of God does not mean independence from creation. There is an **interdependence between animals and the human race. We are allies with other living creatures in a covenant with God.** Therefore, completely in line with this realization is the wisdom of the righteous to take care of his or her animals (Prov 8:10).
- t. This **covenant with creation also carries forward in the New Covenant.** The New Covenant is an extension of the Old, and was **inaugurated by Jesus Christ. He is the only high priest** who offered the **perfect sacrifice and is Mediator of a more excellent covenant** (Heb 8:6), and the only King who reigns on the throne of David.²⁵ Jeremiah prophesied that the New Covenant with Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31-34) will come as **surely as the covenant with creation** ('my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night') (Jer 33:20, 25).
- u. *By implication, creation care is aimed at the continuation and maintenance of life for humans and animals. If God shows His commitment to creation and animals by making a covenant, how will mankind dare to focus only on the self?*²⁶

11. With an everlasting covenantal relationship between God and creation in His Son-King Jesus Christ, everything else on the view of mankind, the cosmic reach of salvation, and the eschaton, will have to be exposed in the light of God's revelation in the last days as spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1:2).

12. The second claim is that Christian piety counteracts the care for creation through a limited view of mankind where the body, the earthly and the material are considered of less value than the spiritual.

- a. What does Scripture tell us about mankind? The answer is a lot, for brevity I will have to focus on **one aspect – the Image of God.** We have already alluded

²⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis. Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 316.

²⁵ Jesus refers to nature in His own teachings. For example, He admonishes us to very carefully consider the ravens and the wild flowers (Luk 12:24, 27). The obligation to pay attention to nature is a call from Jesus Christ himself. Crows do not sow and reap, lilies do not toil and spin. Certain truths are simply the way they are and Jesus' reference to nature is one of them. By paying close attention to the flowers we can already see something of how the real kingdom is taking shape and will one day look like in full. Grass and flowers are often seen as images of impermanence that scorch with the arrival of summer. Just like the incredible splendor with which Solomon was clothed, is suddenly gone like a wild flower in the scorching Mediterranean sun. Solomon with all his splendour - wisdom, possessions and overflowing tables with food and drink is subordinated to a short-lived lily. How much more will God clothe his disciples, those that seek His Kingdom which the Father is pleased to give (Luk 12:28, 31). Jesus also points to the dignified treatment animals deserve, even those that need attention on the Sabbath (Mat 12:11-12). Animals have an intrinsic value to God that goes beyond their value to mankind.

²⁶ In Jesus Christ everything is created, He is Creator, Saviour, and King. God established an everlasting covenant with every living creature. Jesus Christ inaugurated the New Covenant, which includes a place for all living creatures in His creation. His kingship is truly all-encompassing and manifests itself in the universal church. The cosmos is still enslaved to the prince of the world which wages war against the believers and the church, which we can expect will include distorting the truth about God's relationship to His creation and our place in it. Care for creation forms part of a Christian life, that is of being made fit, to be qualified for the Son-King's rule over everything, as manifested in the body of Christ, the church.

to Christ as the perfect image of God, which gives an indication of how mankind's image need to be interpreted. But let's proceed by joining the dots.

- b. Gen 1:26-27 speaks of humans created in the image and likeness of God. The lemma²⁷ for 'image' (Heb: **צֶלֶם**, *ṣeḏem*) occurs only 15 times in the Hebrew Bible and refers to an 'image, likeness or similarity',²⁸ or 'that which is a pattern, model or example of something'.²⁹ The lemma for 'image' or 'likeness' (Heb: **דְּמוּת**, *dēmût*), occurs 25 times in the Hebrew Bible, the vast majority of which are in Ezekiel. The meaning refers to 'that which has a similarity or comparison'.³⁰ The word 'likeness' indicates that God can be distinguished from people, in contrast to the Ancient Near East where the image of a god is equated with the god himself.
- c. **In Hebrew anthropology, mankind is considered a psychosomatic unit. Body and mind cannot be separated from each other.** A better understanding of the image and likeness of God against the background of the biblical text rather looks in the direction of the entire human nature, not only in certain capacities of mankind, such as reason, intelligence, or emotions.³¹ For example animals also show intelligence, have emotions, and can communicate, but are not created in the image of God.
- d. In the Ancient Near East, kings were seen as the image of their gods; they were their god's representative and ruled the earth on their behalf. However, the great contrast with God's creation is that **every person - man and woman included - is the image of God, not just the kings.**³² In God's eyes, people were created to be kings.³³
- e. Yet, with the failure of man to rule over the serpent arising from disobedience (Gen 2:16-17, 3:1-7), they are **no longer God's representatives and substitutes on earth.** The cultural mandate to be fruitful and subdue the land can, after the Fall, only be carried out with great difficulty. Real kingship can only be fulfilled in and through Christ. He goes before mankind in what is truly human. **Only Jesus Christ is the one who reigns as God's true image.**³⁴

²⁷ A lemma is a form of a word that represents all its possible forms in a dictionary.

²⁸ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 853–854.

²⁹ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 515–516.

³² Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, eds. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 39.

³³ Gerard van Groningen, *From Creation to Consummation* (Sioux Centre: Dordt College Press, 1996), 37-45.

³⁴ Most church fathers saw the image of God as the Son himself, with man as a derived image of God, as recreated in the image of the Son. With Augustine, a revolution came in the teaching about the image of God:

'the idea of the Son as the Image was dismissed as subordinate and the human soul was regarded as a direct image of the Holy Trinity, which manifested in a threefold structure of memory, understanding and will (memoria, intelligentia, voluntas)' (F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 825.

The reality of mankind's mandate to rule over the earth has already been inaugurated in Christ, but its consummation is yet to come.³⁵

- f. **A few more words on Ps 8 to emphasise this point.** The question in Ps 8:4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

does not refer to the worthily created Adam, but to post-Fall mortals. The glorious Creator, as Calvin observed on this text, 'whose majesty shines brilliantly in the heavens, graciously condescends to adorn a creature as wretched and vile as man with the greatest glory'.³⁶

- g. **But a tension looms: how will this wretched creature be portrayed as ruling the earth? Ps 8:6:**

You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet

- h. A short drill-down in some technicalities is helpful here. The Hebrew grammar and word usage is informative. The most common stem (*Qal* stem) of the verb 'rule' (Heb: מָשַׁל, *mā·šāl*) means to rule and to be in charge, but the stem used in Ps 8:6 (*Hiphil* stem) indicates pertinently **the status of a subordinate** and is correctly translated as '*let him rule*' (Heb: תַּמְשִׁילֵהוּ, *tamšīlēhû*).³⁷ **The choice of words is clearly different from what is meant by the much more powerful 'rule'** (Heb: אָרַד, *ârādû*) in Gen 1:28.³⁸
- i. Not only words and grammar, but **also the setting of the Book of the Psalms in history is illuminating here.** The anointed King **David**, as author of almost all Psalms in Book I is intensely personally involved in the **cosmic confrontation with his enemies 'to establish the messianic kingdom of justice and peace'**.³⁹ The background is that God made a covenant with David as messianic king, with the promise of an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7). As a messianic king, David was pre-eminently appointed as **vice-regent, but he also cannot escape the fact that he himself cannot create an empire of peace.** The **tension between the fallen, mortal man and the glory of the dignified, ruling Adam** remains relevant for the messianic king David on an existential level and on a corporate level for the entire nation – **a tension that is only resolved in Christ as witnessed in Heb 2:6-8.**
- j. **Heb 2:6-8's** quote from Ps 8 indicates that '**the divine assignment of Adam as king over God's creation was finally fulfilled in Christ, the eschatological last**

³⁵ See George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 946–947 for a discussion of Ps 8 and Christ's kingship as an echo of Gen 1:26-28.

³⁶ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 99–101.

³⁷ 'The *hif'il* stem indicates the causative sense of verbs. That is, the subject of the verb in the *hif'il* stem causes the object of the verb to participate in the action of the verb as a sort of 'undersubject' or 'secondary subject'. In the sentence "Bob caused the car to crash", the direct object [car] participates in the action that the subject [Bob] caused.' (Michael S. Heiser and Vincent M. Setterholm, *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Lexham Press, 2013)).

³⁸ Meaning to 'rule over, dominate, direct, lead, control, subject, i.e. manage or rule an entity, people, or government with considerable or powerful authority' (Swanson, *Dictionary Hebrew*.)

³⁹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 65.

Adam'. To Him all things are now submitted (Heb 2:8). He is crowned with 'glory and honour' after being made 'a little lower than the angels' (Heb 2:9). Through His **incarnation, Jesus became one with the lowly status of 'son of man'**. The OT concept of 'corporate representation' is further assumed. Just **like Adam, Christ represents His people** (see 1 Cor 15:24-27 for further elaboration). The glorious view in Ps 8 to be **crowned with glory and honour as rulers over creation**, does not refer to fallen, mortal man as such, but to the **dignity of the Adam-man, as finally fulfilled by Jesus Christ.**⁴⁰

- k. *By implication, there is no indication in Ps 8 that to 'rule' means to subjugate and control creation in a powerful way. The good care of God's gifts of creation, a deep respect for all creatures in heaven and on earth that indicate God's omnipotence and glory, and gratitude for all the good that God bestows on man in creation, is an attitude which befits rulers in Christ.*
- l. *In summary, a dualistic view of man between the earthly and the spiritual is not supported by the exegesis on the Image of God. The whole person was created in the image of God, the whole person lost it almost completely at the Fall, and the whole person is fully restored for those who believe in Christ. Any real dualism there might be is between a fallen, mortal man and the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ who holds the only means of the mortal man's transformation to a new life.*

13. The third claim is that Christian piety counteracts the care for creation through a limited view of salvation that is only directed at human beings and their welfare.

a. Let's turn to Romans 8:20-21:

²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

- b. When taking textual variants into account, several translations (like the NIV above)⁴¹ connect the last two words in Rom 8:20 more clearly with the beginning of Rom 8:21. By the placement of the punctuation marks at the end of Rom 8:20 before the phrase 'in hope' it shows more clearly that it is **God who subjected creation to futility** (Gen 3:17), and that there will come a time when **He will free creation from its slavery**, that is when He will also free His children from mortality.
- c. The subjection of creation by God to decay because of mankind's sin already contains the **seeds of hope for liberation**. The obedience of creation was born of hope. Creation therefore does not groan without hope; it is not just a senseless hardship, but like birth pains that look forward to new life.

⁴⁰ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "[1 Corinthians](#)," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 745–746.

⁴¹ The break before the words 'in hope' is chosen based on the older textual evidence - a reading that is followed by several translations (Afrikaans: AFR33/53, English: NRSV, ESV, NASB, NIV and others).

- d. It is in this eschatological context that reference can be made to the so-called **'meaninglessness' of creation** (Rom 8:20; Ecclesiastes 1:2), which is **never a cynical fatalism** without perspective. The **subjection of creation was done by God himself and the curse was never final. This is good news**, because His **covenant promises to creation** (Gen 9:10, 15) leave an unshakable hope.
- e. The Greek word used several times in this passage for creation (Gr: κτίσις, 'ktisis') refers to '...the universe as the product of God's activity in creation'. It denotes the **total physical universe**. The same word is used in 2 Cor 5:17 and Gal 6:15 to indicate that someone **in Christ is a new creation**. The text in Rom 8:18-27 implies that the **scope of a new creation is not limited to individual believers or their communities, but that it extends to the entire universe** (Is 65:17; Rev 21-22).
- f. The more or less 60 quotations from the OT in Romans - more concentrated than in any other book of Paul - are only overshadowed by the number of allusions to the OT. **Paul rewrites and reinterprets God's story with His children and with all creation in the light of Christ.**⁴² Christ, the Son of God, is presented as both Creator and Redeemer.
- a. The affirmation that the **scope of a new creation extends to the entire universe, was alluded to in certain OT prophecies as well. Joel 2:21-27** specifically describes the **physical restoration of the land** after the damage from a locust infestation - the biggest ecological disaster of that time. The whole environment is affected - people as well as animals.⁴³ **A call to true repentance preceded the reversal of judgment to salvation, which here also included the land.** Based on the people's confession and repentance, God promises to restore what was lost in the locust plague and much more. The blessings of the covenant are restored to the people's entire land (Deut 11:13-15).
- b. The NT picks up on these OT themes and transforms them. For example, a safe land with 'new wine' (Joel 2:19) is a sign of fertility and a blessing of the covenant. In the **New Covenant, the 'new wine' of a Messianic era** was symbolically ushered in by Jesus turning sterile water into wine at Cana (Mark 2:22). **Not only the trees on the territory of Israel will be fruitful** (Joel 2:22), **but the whole earth will one day become new with trees that bear fruit every month** (Rev 22:2).
- c. The prophet **Joel's answer to the environmental crisis of that day contributes in a unique way to a vision of the integrity of creation.** Human life is closely linked to what happens on earth (Joel 1:9-12, 19-20) and its **restoration applies to land, animals, and people alike** (Joel 2:18, 21, 22).

⁴² The announcement of the gospel is related to the announcement by creation itself (Rom 1:20; 10:18 as a reference to Ps 19:4).

⁴³ Shawn C. Madden, "[Joel](#)," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, eds. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1373.

Note how the earth and living animals are already acting according to God's will, while people are slow to convert.⁴⁴

- d. By implication, any **environmental crisis is under God's complete control** and is tolerated by Him. **From confession and repentance**, the sovereign God gives **blessings that extend over the fertility of the whole earth. Creation care involves seeing the interdependence** with nature and to act accordingly. **Human behaviour has an impact on nature. Mankind and nature** mourn and shrivel together but can also **recover together again in God's mercy** and grace, now only in parts, but **one day overflowing** with fertility and yield.
- e. *In summary, a limited view on salvation that is only directed to human beings and their welfare is not supported by what Scripture teaches on covenant blessings, the integrated view on human beings and land in OT prophecy, and the apostolic witness that the scope of the new creation extends to the entire universe.*

14. The fourth claim is that Christian piety counteracts the care for creation through a wrong view of human destiny which is directed towards a future escape to heaven.

- a. **Let's turn to Rev 21:1-3:**

21 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.
- b. Revelations contains apocalyptic literature, but is not limited to it as genre. Despite persecution and oppression, there is hope for God's children. That **hope remains established in God's promises and action in history to purify and renew the existing order, and not in an apocalyptic 'cosmic dualism' between a present evil time and a heavenly good time yet to come.**⁴⁵
- c. Rev 21:1 depicts the future **fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies about the creation of a new heaven and new earth** (Isa 65:17; 66:22). The new heaven and earth are qualitatively completely different than the old and will continue to exist forever.
- d. **God confirms the earthiness and humanity that He created good**, and will not abandon the work of His hands. The **unholy trinity of the rulers of the earth, the false prophets and the dragon**, as well as **all those who are not written in the scroll of life - they are the ones who will be destroyed**. Not the existing order, but the **false order will be destroyed**.

⁴⁴ Brenda Heyink, "[Joel, Book of](#)," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Myers, *Dictionary*, 64.

- e. When the earth is sanctified after the final judgment by Jesus Christ, heaven descends so that **God makes His dwelling place with the people** (Rev 21:1-3).⁴⁶ **The final hearing of the prayer to let His kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven (Mat 6:10), will then take place.** The holy city of Jerusalem is the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:9-10), **adorned with the incredible splendour of the new cosmos** (Rev 21:9-27), where a **river of life and the tree of healing life for the nations occurs** (Rev 22:1-5).
- f. *In summary, mankind's history reaches a climax in the place where it also began, namely here on earth. The theology that there is an entirely new world coming without any connection with the old, or that eternity is a heaven without an earth, deserves no support in the textual data. That He makes all things new (Rev 1:5) means salvation of a totally new nature.*
- g. *This view implies, at the very least, that Christians must **respect the present creation** because God is the Creator and Re-Creator.⁴⁷ There is also a **stark warning** leading up to this text. **Babylon's merchants' wanton lust for wanton luxury, and the destruction of creation** that undoubtedly accompanies it, will be judged. The warnings addressed to the seven churches earlier in the book make it clear **that Christ also judges within the visible church. Christians must be on guard not to be carried away by the powers of the earth, the false prophets and the dragon - among other things by the wanton destruction of God's good creation; as John's vision made clear 'the time will come 'for destroying those who destroy the earth' (Rev 11:18).***
- h. **But, how do we understand natural disasters in our time and what does that say on humanity's place on earth, rather than supporting a longing to escape to heaven? Let's turn to Rev 8:7-13.**

⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

⁸ The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

¹⁰ The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— ¹¹ the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

¹² The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

⁴⁶ While the earthly tabernacle in the OT was once an image and shadow of the true, heavenly dwelling place (Heb 8:5), this true tabernacle now comes down to the people; God will come to live with them (Rev 21:3). It is not the archetype of an eternal heavenly city, but a continuation of God's promises fulfilled. Rev 21:3 echoes the promise in Ezekiel 43:7 that God will dwell among his people forever. The covenant with all of creation is also everlasting. The last part of the New Covenant is the new heaven and new earth that is yet to come (See Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, [Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 344).

⁴⁷ The vision of the sovereign God on His throne in glory, who will create a new heaven and a new earth and who will descend to dwell with man on the new earth, is a timely reminder that He is worthy of our worship and praise - of which caring for His creation is a part.

¹³ As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

- i. The first four trumpets cause **massive devastation in nature**. It seems as if **God's bitter judgment has burst upon the natural order**. Nothing is spared. The earth, trees, grass, the sea, living creatures in the sea, rivers and springs, water sources and the sun, moon and stars are all struck. People only come into view when reference is made to bitter water that is drunk and indirectly to ships that perish.
- j. What is going on? The key to good explanation lies in the larger wholes of the book and of Scripture, and in this case, in the generous use and good understanding of OT symbolism.
- k. To properly understand the place and content of the four trumpets, with its seemingly tremendous impacts on nature, it is important to understand that **the structure and form of the book of Revelation is such that the ultimate focus is on the new creation**.
- l. Furthermore, the **terrifying images of disaster over nature in Rev 8:6-13 cannot be read as literal events that refer directly to the end of the world**. The images presented here are an echo of the **symbolism used in the OT to indicate temporary judgments** about a nation or people.⁴⁸ Images of storms can refer to historical judgments on the nations (Ps 18:11-14; Isa 28:1-3, 30:30-31). Mountains falling into the sea (Rev 8:8) is a symbol of disaster that befalls a nation or kingdom (Ps 46:3-7) - in this case a symbol of the ultimate destruction of Babel (Jer 51: 5-29, 63-64; Rev 18:21). The star that falls from heaven comes from Isa 14:12-20 and also indicates the fall of Babel.⁴⁹ The sun and moon turning into darkness can indicate the conquest by foreign powers (Ezekiel 32:7-8, 11). Darkness describes the taking away of God's blessings if one lives under the curse of sin (Ex 10:21-23; 1 John 1:5).⁵⁰
- m. The fact that **damage is done to only a third part** (reference to a **third part occurs 12 times** in verses Rev 8:7-12) indicates that what we have read is a **partial judgment that warns the world that a much greater and final judgment** is on its way. The majority of humanity is allowed to survive and still get a **chance to repent**. Worse judgments are yet to come. **The eagle in Rev 8:13 announces coming judgements** (catastrophic upheavals in nature (albeit limited in God's providence) warn mankind of the **terrible spiritual consequences of sin**).⁵¹

⁴⁸ Joel R. Beeke, "[Revelation](#)," in *The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 267.

⁴⁹ Tim Chester, "[Revelation for You](#)," in *God's Word for You*, ed. Carl Laferton (Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2019), 70–71.

⁵⁰ Richard D. Phillips, "[Revelation](#)," in *Reformed Expository Commentary*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken and Daniel M. Doriani (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 281.

⁵¹ Phillips, [Revelation](#), 282.

- n. The best example in the OT how **God defeats His enemies through the forces of nature** are the events before the exodus from Egypt.⁵² There are clear parallels between the plagues announced by the trumpets in Op 8 and the **plagues that struck Egypt**, especially the first, seventh and ninth plagues which were accompanied by **blood, hail and darkness**.⁵³ Just as the plagues in Egypt were supposed to convert Pharaoh, it hardened his heart and ultimately sent him to his final destruction. In general, it **goes like this with God's judgments in history, as stated in Rev 9:20**:
- ²⁰ The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.
- o. An important theological point we learn in this text is that **God is sovereign over creation and in history, and that He uses the forces of nature to defeat His enemies**. The trumpets in Rev 8:6-13 describe *natural and political disasters throughout history* indicating that **God is sovereign over His creation, that He has authority over man's idols, that He is angry at sin and that He is patiently giving time for conversion**.
- p. The four trumpets 'show that there are **[strictly speaking] no natural disasters in a world governed by God**'.⁵⁴ The natural disasters we see unfolding are **emblems of the great redemption** as God breaks the will of worldly powers that oppose Christ. **The purpose of natural disasters is to serve as a warning, and is a lasting call to repentance**.
- q. The **forces of nature unleashed** by storms, floods and fires, but also by pollution, pandemics and global climatic change, which are all too often caused by man's own arrogance and mismanagement, serve as a **warning to sinful humanity**. Large parts of humanity may suffer and die as a result of such tragedies. The theological question **why God allows such things to happen are directly addressed in this text: it is the wrath of God that erupts over the sin of humanity, but even in His wrath God remains patient**. Yet, in this world, **God sets limits to even the most terrible judgments**.⁵⁵
- r. *By implication, the fact that this is not the final judgment and that God is patient makes abundant care for creation possible. Creation care is not a counteraction to God's judgment. If God uses the forces of nature as a warning to repent, why would we be justified to use that as an excuse not to look after His good creation? While God subjects a symbolic third part of nature to all kinds of plagues and disasters in order to keep calling humanity to repentance, He still gives believers the privilege to keep taking care of the other symbolic two-thirds of His creation.*

⁵² G. K. Beale and Sean M McDonough, "[Revelation](#)," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI and Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic and Apollos, 2007), 1112–1113.

⁵³ Phillips, [Revelation](#), 277.

⁵⁴ Wilson in Phillips, [Revelation](#), 282–283.

⁵⁵ Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, [Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Re 8:7.

s. **But what about the coming final judgement when ‘The Day of the Lord’ arrives? Let’s now look at the word of God as found in 2 Petr 3:10:**

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.

¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

- t. The larger pericope in which the text is to be found is 2 Pet 3:1-13, in which false prophets and teachers' denial of the second coming and the accompanying judgment are addressed. In sharp contrast, the expectation of the second coming and accompanying judgment is 'firmly established in the existing truth' (2 Pet 1:12) - something that the letter's readers must be constantly reminded of.
- u. As responsible exegetes, we further need to pay attention to the **surrounding texts and to the symbols used**. 2 Petr 3:13 reads: *‘But keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells’*. There is thus a strong sense that the judgment of the Lord will bring 'both **catastrophic judgment and triumphant renewal**'.⁵⁶ This is completely **in line with Isaiah’s prophecy**.⁵⁷
- v. **Concerning symbols**, in the rest of the Bible **'fire' is often mentioned as symbols of God's presence and power** (eg Ex 3:2; Acts 2:3), **of his divine judgment**, and of His **cleansing work**. There is no reason why Peter would not have had all three of these in mind, especially since there are clear allusions in the text to the OT. In all cases, burning, in whatever form, is not where it ends. **God's righteous judgment** opens the way to a **triumphant renewal of creation**. One implication is that **certain physical things can continue to exist to a new heaven and earth, just as our bodies are raised from the dead** in a glorious form. Certain **other physical things will be destroyed** – especially when we look at the context of 2 Pet 3:7 where reference is made to the **destruction of the ungodly, as in the days of the Flood**.
- w. By implication, the **expectation of the second coming and a new heaven and new earth affects how believers live**. To be *'found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him'* (2 Petr 3:14) and to continue to *'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'* (2 Petr 3:18), means **living an expectant life in His good creation** which He will **free from the slavery of sin and corruption**. Growing in grace and knowledge of the truth **cannot be**

⁵⁶ D. A Carson, [“2 Peter,”](#) in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI and Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic and Apollos, 2007), 1060.

⁵⁷ 'See, I will create a new heaven and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered...' (Isa 65:17) and 'as the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me...so will your name and descendants endure' (Is 66:22). The image of a new heaven and new earth is also used in Revelation 21:1, as was pointed out earlier.

separated from how we live on this earth, and what we long for on a new earth.

- x. *In summary, human destiny is not an escape to heaven, but eschatologically fulfilled in a new heaven and new earth. God will come down to dwell with us. Natural disasters and environmental destruction are in God's soeverign hand; it is the wrath of God that erupts over the sin of humanity. Even in His wrath God places bounds on what is destroyed in His good creation, and remains patient for sinners to repent. In God's final and righteous judgment the heavens and earth are cleansed from ungodliness, which opens the way to a triumphant renewal of creation.*

15. In conclusion, the diagnosis of certain currents in eco-theology that the biblical text is essentially obsessed with human well-being at the expense of other creatures, and that the solution is to **read the Bible with suspicion, cannot be supported by the biblical exegesis** presented here.⁵⁸ As Douglas and Jonathan Moo so aptly, albeit somewhat euphemistically, pointed out in their great book 'Creation Care'; such a hermeneutical starting position is vulnerable in that it **creates 'too much space for the authority of the reader'**.⁵⁹

16. A distinction needs to be made between **God's Word and Christian piety. Pious Christians sometimes make onerous judgements**; Christian piety may have indeed forgotten what it means to worship God the Creator, even going so far as counteracting creation care. **A great deal of correction may be needed in the churches and in believers' hearts and lives.** Almost ten years ago I inserted the following opening paragraph in one of my writings:

"The world has forgotten its Creator"⁶⁰ [Prof] James Houston wrote 35 [now 45] years ago amidst an unfolding ecological crisis that has since then grown to a global scale. What is especially heart-gripping for Christians is his observation that "today [that was 1980] in the church there is little understanding of the Creator",⁶¹ a situation that some observers believe is as grave today.⁶² For Houston, the highest ideals of our society, and even in the church, have become to be productive and creative. We are quick to see the utilitarian value in the world around us but have forgotten how sacred it all is. We have forgotten what it means to see God in the common things of life, to enjoy creation and live in it wisely.

17. I am afraid the situation in the global church has become more polarised since then on this issue. Theology is in danger of being captured by or made inferior to worldly philosophies on human-nature relationships that knows no God.⁶³ If Christians go along with this, we bypass the truth of God's revelation to us. Do we have such little

⁵⁸ There is a great deal of attention to the Creator and his creation in several genres across the Scriptures. That I have not said much on the Psalms or the Wisdom literature does not mean there are no notable references to creation; just think of the Psalms that mention how all creatures praise God. Furthermore, the Word of God contains everything that is needed for human salvation, but in doing so it never excludes God's creation, maintenance, and governance of all things. The division Creation-Salvation is an unfortunate by-product of certain forms of biblical scholarship itself, not an integral feature of Scripture.

⁵⁹ Douglas J. Moo and Jonathan A Moo, *Creation Care. A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 33.

⁶⁰ James M. Houston, *I Believe in the Creator* (Grand Rapids, WM. B. Eerdmans, 1980), 205.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶² See for example the chapter "Missing Creation in the Church" by James Wilson, *God's Good World. Reclaiming the Doctrine of Creation* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2013).

⁶³ See De Wit, M.P. Theology and the Economics of Sustainability. Guest lecture at Regent College, Vancouver as part of the Seminar 'Working Sustainably', 26 September 2024.

understanding of the Creator? So much so that the church cannot fruitfully preach and witness into a world that has forgotten its Creator?

18. Once it is accepted that the reliability and authority of God's revelation through His Word is a given (as has been attempted here), the position of the reader and hearer is changed from a mere curiosity or suspicion, to one of being addressed by the Biblical text in 'a way that calls for repentance and renewal' in our relationship to the Creator and the rest of His good creation. Biblical creation care, namely, comes out of the core of the Christian faith and has a universal reach.