

# Creation, preservation and dominion: part 1—God, humanity and the created order

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Despite its fallen state, God has not abandoned His creation. He constantly sustains and preserves it through His common grace and providence. Although fallen, human beings are still God's image bearers and mankind is still the pinnacle of God's creation. Furthermore, mankind still has dominion over the rest of creation and, as God's stewards, we are still entrusted with the task of caring for, and tending to, the created order. Likewise, our God-given task to '[B]e fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it ...' is still in effect. Contrary to the assertions of many in the modern environmental movement, the earth is not overpopulated and human beings are not parasites destroying the planet.

Despite its fallen state, God has not abandoned His creation. He constantly sustains and preserves it through His common grace and providence. Moreover, humanity still has dominion over the earth and our charge to tend and take care of the earth and its resources still stands.

However, there is a great deal of disagreement among Christians in regard to the scope and extent of this dominion. Some Christians believe development equates to environmental vandalism and pollution. Other Christians believe development should be severely limited due to our limited and ever diminishing natural resources. Still others believe that development can continue indefinitely and that natural resource limits pose no problem for a faithful and generous God and for human beings made in His image.

This paper is the first of a three part series. It examines God's present work in creation and humanity's relationship to the created order. The second part will discuss development and environmentalism from a Christian perspective, and the third part will propose a Christian approach to environmental issues, including the perceived threat of climate change.

## God's present work in Creation

### *Divine immanence*

Erickson defines immanence as 'God's presence and activity within nature, human nature and history.'<sup>1</sup> Scripture makes it clear that the Spirit of God lives among us (Hag. 2:5; John 14–16; Matt. 28:18–20), and, as Job 34:14–15 indicates, humanity would perish if God withdrew His Spirit and breath.<sup>2</sup> His all-pervading presence and power permeates all creation (Psalm 139). In fact, God fills the universe (Jer. 23:24), and thus, He is never far away from any one of us—indeed, it is in Him that 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:27–28). This notion is

echoed by Paul in Colossians 1:17: 'in him all things hold together.'

However, unlike pantheism or panentheism, God is separate from, and not a part of, the natural world. God and the world are not 'one', and neither is God the 'soul' or animating force of the universe.

Therefore, it is clear that God is still actively involved with His creation. He continues to preserve it and interact with it both directly and indirectly.

### *Creation and preservation*

Preservation may be defined as God sovereignly, and by a continuous agency, maintaining in existence all things He has made, together with all their properties and powers.<sup>3</sup> Note, however, that God's acts of preservation are distinct from His acts of creation. God's creative acts ceased on the seventh day of creation week (Gen. 2:3), but He continues to preserve what He has created, including both mankind and animals (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Psalm 36:6).

God controls natural processes including cloud formation, rain and photosynthesis (Psalm 147:8), storms, thunder and lightning, snow, ice (Job 37) and hail (Psalm 147:17). He causes day and night to occur (Amos 5:8), and controls the waves of the sea (Amos 9:6). He provides food for both wild and domesticated animals (Job 38:39–41; Psalms 104:14, 21, 147:9; Matt. 6:26), and physical life, in both humans and animals, is His to give and to take away (Gen. 2:17; 1 Sam. 1:27; Job 1:21, 12:10; Psalms 102:23, 104:29–30; Dan. 5:23). Moreover, His acts of preservation apply to all people whether good or bad (Matt. 5:45).

Note that God's preservation of His creation does not necessarily imply that He acts or intervenes directly into the natural world. Although God has performed many miracles throughout history, His normal *modus operandi* is to employ natural laws and use human persons—including non-Christians—to preserve His creation.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1.** Stacks billowing white ‘smoke’ are often emitting only steam and not polluting the atmosphere with CO<sub>2</sub> or particulate.

### Creation and providence

Thiessen defines providence as ‘the continuous activity of God whereby he makes all the events of the physical, mental, and moral realms work out his purpose, and this purpose is nothing short of the original design of God in creation.’<sup>5</sup> In other words, God’s providence seeks the eventual establishment of His kingdom on Earth and the restoration of His creation. This means that God interacts with His creation in such a way as to ensure that His will is done and His purposes are achieved. As Carl Henry explained, the biblical view of providence ‘unqualifiedly affirms ... that God works out his purposes not merely in life’s generalities but in the details and minutiae of life as well ... nothing falls outside God’s will and concern.’<sup>6</sup> Before we were born, He saw our unformed bodies, and knows whatever we will do before we do it (Psalm 139:16). Indeed, not even a sparrow shall fall to the ground apart from the will of God (Matt. 10:29).

Ultimately, God has supreme dominion over the entire created universe. God can and will do whatever He pleases with His creation (Gen. 6–8, Psalm 135:6), including subjecting it to frustration, bondage and decay so that it may serve His purposes (Rom. 8:19–21).<sup>7</sup>

Although the regularity of the natural world is dependent upon God’s will (Gen. 8:22), the laws of nature, which He established and set in place, are no barrier to His will

(Gen. 18:14). Scripture also teaches that miraculous irregularities may still occasionally occur. These include ‘coincidence miracles’ which constitute a number of events or circumstances, all of which are perfectly natural and plausible, but occur together or in a certain sequence that lead to an extraordinary result or outcome, and which can only ultimately be explained as an act of divine intervention. Examples of such coincidence miracles include the extraordinary catches of fish in Luke 5:4–7 and John 21:6–11, and the presence of the four-drachma coin in the mouth of the first fish Peter caught (Matt. 17:27). Note that the occurrence of miracles not only demonstrates the power of God over all creation, but also reinforce that He is distinct from the natural world and not a part of it or subject to its laws.

Scripture contains many examples of God’s providential interaction with the natural world.

For example, Psalm 148:8 states that lightning and hail, snow and clouds, and stormy winds do his bidding, and indeed, we see an example of this in 1 Samuel 7:10 when God used thunder against the Philistines to ensure that they were routed by the Israelites. Similarly, He caused the sun to stand still for a full day in order to secure victory for Israel against the Amorites (Josh 10:12–14).<sup>8</sup>

Job stated that God ‘moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger’ and ‘shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble’ (Job 9:5–6) which suggests the occurrence of earthquakes such as those referred to in Ezekiel 38:18–19, Matthew 28:2 and Acts 16:26. Job also stated that God could stop the sun and stars from shining (Job 9:7), which is apparently what occurred in Matthew 27:45 when darkness covered the land from the sixth to the ninth hour.<sup>9</sup>

The account of Jonah, where God provided a great fish to swallow Jonah and keep him inside for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17), provides a good example of God employing other creatures to achieve His purposes. God also used a donkey to rebuke Balaam orally (Num. 22:21–33).

What role, then, does God play in the occurrence of natural disasters—especially those that have caused so much death and destruction? Are they part of His providential plan? It is clear from Scripture that some natural disasters are instruments of divine judgment. Floods are repeatedly

used to judge evil-doers, starting with the global Flood at the time of Noah (Gen. 6–9), and elsewhere in the Old Testament (Job 20:28, 22:16; Nah. 1:8). Similarly, most of the plagues that God brought against the Egyptians as a result of their defiant refusal to release the Israelites, included natural disasters (Exod. 5–10).<sup>10</sup> The Israelites were also on the receiving end when their camp became infested with deadly serpents (Num. 21:4–9). Revelation 18:8 predicts that such disasters will also occur in the future.

Nevertheless, many natural disasters occur for no apparent reason, and directly affect God's people. Yet, it must be remembered that we live in a fallen, distorted world that has been subjected to frustration and decay, and natural disasters are manifestations of this frustration and decay.<sup>7</sup> It must also be noted that natural disasters are not mere random events. Many natural disasters (e.g. volcanoes, storms, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, forest fires, earthquakes and tsunamis) serve a natural purpose. Indeed, many catastrophic events occur in order to equalize the buildup of potential energy, extreme pressure or heat imbalance. Moreover, specific kinds of natural disasters only occur under specific natural conditions and circumstances: volcanic eruptions only occur at volcanoes; flooding only occurs on low-lying land near rivers, lakes or on the coast; earthquakes only occur at fault lines in the earth's crust. In addition, some apparent disasters have beneficial consequences. In ancient Egypt, the agricultural economy was dependent on a natural disaster—the annual flooding of the Nile river.

### Humanity's present relationship with creation

#### God's order in creation

In Psalm 103:19, David declares: 'The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.' The kingdom of God is a central element of biblical theology. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes,

'The kingdom of God is a name which is not used in the Bible until much later, but the idea of it immediately comes to mind as we think of creation ... [Genesis 1 and 2] show mankind as the centre of God's attention and the recipient of a unique relationship with him. Thus the focus of the kingdom of God is on the relationship between God and his people. Man is subject to God, while the rest of creation is subject to man and exists for his benefit. The kingdom means God ruling over his people in the material universe. This basic understanding of the kingdom is never changed in Scripture.'<sup>11</sup>

This creative order—God, who rules over mankind, who rules over the rest of creation—is clearly expressed in Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory  
above the heavens.  
From the lips of children and infants  
you have ordained praise  
because of your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.  
When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You made him ruler over the works of  
your hands;  
you put everything under his feet:  
all flocks and herds,  
and the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air,  
and the fish of the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all  
the earth!<sup>12</sup>

Humanity's special relationship with the Creator and position over the rest of creation was set in place at the very beginning:

'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground ... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."<sup>13</sup>

It is clear, then, that not all life is equal. Human life stands above all other life. Human life is more precious to God because it reflects his own image.

Yet, there are many people who believe that *all* life, irrespective of its nature, is intrinsically sacred. Moreover, many Christians deny that human life is superior or more precious to God than non-human life. For example, Calvin DeWitt claims,

'... if we read the Bible with ourselves in mind, we naturally see this blessing as ours. And it is. But it is not ours exclusively. It was given before we came. It was first given thus: "And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth ... and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth" (Gen. 1:21–22, KJV). That other creatures are so blessed, and blessed first, is not only humbling for us but also

critically important. The populations of creatures—in their wondrous variety of kinds—are expected by their Creator to bear fruit through God-given means of reproduction; they are expected to develop biological and ecological interrelationships; they are expected to bring fulfillment of the Creator’s intentions for the good creation.<sup>713</sup>

But there is clearly a substantive and qualitative difference between God’s blessing of marine life and birds, and His blessing of mankind. God commanded the marine life He had created to ‘fill the waters in the seas’. Similarly, He commanded the birds He had created to ‘multiply on the earth’. However, God blessed Adam and Eve and commanded them to ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’ Thus, DeWitt’s view of mankind’s relationship with the rest of creation is explicitly rejected by Scripture. Human beings are not equal with fish, birds or any other created life forms. Human beings are God’s greatest creative achievement because they reflect His own image, and have been given dominion over the rest of creation.

Pope and Edgar, on the other hand, hold to a heretical view of God’s relationship with His creation. With respect to dealing with climate change, they write on a rabidly anticreationist website:

‘We must not forget that God’s creation (the world that is being affected by climate change) is important not only because it is made by God, but because through his existence as the incarnate Jesus Christ, God is actually *a part of the world* ... Humanity is the high point of creation only because Jesus is the New Adam, the perfect human, the one who lives in us. The incarnation is the only real reason for understanding humanity as uniquely important. *It is not for our own sake that we value the world or humanity but because of Jesus Christ who became part of creation by becoming human.*’<sup>714</sup>

Thus, Pope and Edgar appear to believe that the incarnate Christ is, in fact, a part of creation. This is theological heresy, and goes against the early creeds and the teaching of Scripture.<sup>715</sup>

### Human dominion

In Genesis 1:28, God commands Adam and Eve to ‘Be fruitful and

increase in number, fill the Earth and *subdue* it, [and] *rule* over [every creature].’ This implies an active role for mankind to take charge of the resources God has provided us in the natural world, and to use them for their benefit. The Hebrew verb כָּבַשׁ (*kēbāš*, ‘to subdue, to subjugate’) stresses the act of dominance by force. In Numbers 32:20–22, 32:29, Joshua 18:1 and 1 Chronicles 22:17–19, *kēbāš* is used in reference to subduing the Promised Land, including the hostile tribes that were occupying it at that time. In 2 Chronicles 28:9–10, Nehemiah 5:5 and Jeremiah 34:11, 16, it refers to subjugation in the form of slavery. In Esther 7:8, it refers to subduing or forcing a woman, and in Zechariah 9:15, it speaks of subduing enemies in warfare. There is also an overlap in the meaning of *kēbāš* and of רָדָה (*rādāh*, ‘to rule, to have dominion’). In Leviticus 25:39, 43, 46, the Israelites are forbidden to rule fellow Israelite bondslaves harshly or ruthlessly. In Numbers 24:19, Psalm 72:8 and 110:2, *rādāh* is used in reference to the dominion of the Messiah. In 1 Kings 4:24, it refers to Solomon’s dominion over the land and kings from Tiphshah to Azzah. In 1 Kings 5:16, 9:23, and 2 Chronicles 8:10, *rādāh* refers to officers ruling over workers. In Isaiah 41:2, God subdues kings before the ruler from the east, and in Ezekiel 34:4, it refers to the shepherds of Israel ruling over the people with cruelty.<sup>716</sup> Thus, Calvin Beisner rightly concludes that the nature of the command to subdue and to rule in Genesis 1:28 involves ‘subduing and ruling something whose spontaneous tendency is to resist dominion.’<sup>717</sup>



**Figure 2.** The Hoover Dam. Damming the Colorado River has provided drinking water and ‘clean’ power to literally millions of people in the western United States.

Note also that there is no reason to think that the Fall has diminished or cancelled God's charge 'to fill the earth and subdue it ... Rule over [every creature].' Rather, the Fall simply made humanity's task immensely more difficult. Genesis 3:17–19 implies that in the post-Fall world, nature has become even more hostile to humanity's efforts to cultivate and develop it further. Many wild animals now pose a threat to human beings and their cultivating efforts, and the ground is now cursed:

'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken' (Gen. 3:17–19).

As noted above, mankind stands above the rest of creation, and it all ultimately exists for the benefit of humanity. Indeed, the Garden of Eden was clearly for the benefit of Adam and Eve and they had total dominion over it, apart from one tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The fruit of all the other trees in the garden, as well as the seeded fruit from every other tree on the earth were theirs for food. Note also that God's command to 'fill the earth and subdue it' stands against the common view that the present rate of population growth is unsustainable and that overpopulation is a serious environmental problem and will ultimately destroy the earth (see below).

Of course, dominion does not mean or imply that humans have a license to do whatever they wish, raping and pillaging the land and sea, to the detriment of God's creation. As Schaeffer pointed out,

'By creation man has dominion, but as a fallen creature he has used that dominion wrongly. Because he is fallen, he exploits created things as though they were nothing in themselves, and as though he has an autonomous right to them ... The Christian is called upon to exhibit this dominion, but exhibit it rightly: treating the thing as having value in itself, exercising dominion without being destructive.'<sup>18</sup>

Humanity has dominion over the rest of creation, but with that power also comes the responsibility to use it wisely.

### **Human stewardship**

Moses proclaimed in Deuteronomy 10:14 that 'the heavens, even the highest heavens' and 'the earth and everything in it' belong to God. Again, these ideas are echoed by David (Psalm 24:1) and Paul (1 Cor. 10:26). Yet, Psalm 115:16 also states that although the highest heavens belong to God, the earth has been given by God to mankind. Creation still belongs to God, but mankind has been given dominion over it. However, this dominion is not without

limitation or constraints. In Genesis 2:15, God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to work it (Heb. עָבַד, *ābād*) and take care of it (Heb. שָׁמַר, *šāmār*). The Hebrew word *ābād* communicates the idea of serving another by doing (usually physical) work,<sup>19</sup> whereas *šāmār* communicates the general idea of 'paying close attention' but more specifically, is used to refer to ensuring conformity to a law, code or covenant, and to the responsibility one has for another person or thing (cf. Gen. 30:31; 1 Sam. 26:16; Isa. 21:11).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the reason why God's 'pleasant field' will be made 'into a desolate wasteland ... parched and desolate' is because 'there is no one who cares' (Jer. 12:10–11). Thus, mankind has the active responsibility to care about the world, look after it, and ensure that the natural resources God has supplied us with are not misused or abused, or that they are not used in a way that is detrimental to other humans. In short, God has appointed mankind to act as stewards of His creation.

In the context of the natural world, human stewardship comprises the active management and utilization of the earth's natural resources for the common benefit of human society in a sustainable way. Natural resources include land and water resources; fish, livestock and other animals and animal products; forests and other vegetation that could be used for food, clothing or building materials; minerals, precious metals and gems, as well as fossil fuels and any other naturally occurring substances of potential value or use. By 'active management', we mean human intervention, investment, development, farming and the application of science and technology. By 'utilization', we mean the process of determining which of the various possible uses of a resource amount to the best or most efficient application. Utilization of resources should also be directed to the common benefit of human society such that one society or community should not benefit at the expense of another (e.g. mining materials for the benefit of one community but polluting or destroying the water resources of another community), and should be sustainable in the sense that it can be maintained over a substantial period of time because the resource is abundant or self-replenishing, and the source of the resource is not destroyed and does not suffer from any lasting detrimental effects. Much of this should be common sense: there is clearly no future in burning your own house down, poisoning the well you drink from, or destroying your own food supply!

Unfortunately, there have been many people and companies who have indeed wrongly exploited natural resources and caused lasting and significant damage to the environment. Jeremiah 12:4 indicates that the animals and birds have perished because the people who live in the land are wicked. Nevertheless, those who do so will not go unpunished. God will judge those who damage and destroy the earth. When Christ returns to judge people for their sin, this includes judging 'those who destroy the earth'



**Figure 3.** Genetically modified crops are more disease resistant, use less water and can produce more grain per acre.

(Rev 11:18). As Ian Hore-Lacy rightly notes, '[stewardship] can never be allowed to mean that we, made in God's image, treat God's creation with any less respect than he does,'<sup>21</sup> but adds that it 'also means that meeting the needs of all humans, made in God's image, must be a very high priority.' And that 'Environmental concern must not displace our mediation of God's provision.'<sup>22</sup> As stewards, it is surely our responsibility to ensure that several billion more people—all made in God's image—have better access to food, water, basic materials and energy.

### Overpopulation?

That the earth is overpopulated and that this excess of human beings has caused mass destruction to the environment via overconsumption and pollution is a common view among both Christians and non-Christians. But this is by no means a recent idea. Around AD 200, Tertullian wrote:

'Everything has been visited, everything known, everything exploited. Now pleasant estates obliterate the famous wilderness areas of the past. Plowed fields have replaced forests, domesticated animals have dispersed wild life. Beaches are plowed, mountains smoothed and swamps drained. There are as many cities as, in former years, there were dwellings. Islands do not frighten, nor cliffs deter. Everywhere there are buildings, everywhere people, everywhere communities, everywhere life ... Proof [of this crowding] is the density of human beings. We weigh upon the world; its resources hardly suffice to support us. As our needs grow larger, so do our protests, that already nature does not sustain us. In truth, plague, famine, wars and earthquakes must be regarded as a blessing to civilization, since they prune away the luxuriant growth of the human race.'<sup>23</sup>

In 1973, Catholic scholar Arthur McCormack wrote that 'The population explosion of the second half of the twentieth century gives rise to one of the most serious and crucial problems of our day.'<sup>24</sup> McCormack asserted that many Christians are interested in the 'population explosion', because they rely on a 'false notion of Providence' and 'think—or perhaps "feel"—...—that God will provide, that we should not look too far into the future, that population projections may turn out to be as wrong in the future as they have been in the past.'<sup>24</sup> McCormack was convinced the earth's population would soon become unsustainable and that the introduction of either voluntary or forced population restriction measures was inevitable.<sup>25</sup>

In more recent times, David Francis, columnist with the *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote that unless the soaring population growth is not reversed, it 'will have huge economic, environmental, and political impacts on most people alive today.'<sup>26</sup>

The stimulus behind such visions appears to be an acceptance of the view that human beings are no different to the rest of creation, and that all of creation is equally blessed by God. In other words, human beings have no more rights than any other animal, nor do they have any special relationship with God. Calvin DeWitt's explanation is typical of those who hold to this view:

'God's blessed expectation for the populations of other creatures helps put our human population into context. We, and they, are blessed. We, and they, are to reproduce, develop our kinds, and fulfill the earth to its God-intended completeness ... Our own population joins with the populations of the other creatures God has made, participating one with another in the blessed expectation of reproducing and increasing our kinds, biologically and ecologically developing our kinds, and fulfilling the earth to its God-intended completeness, and ... our own human kind enjoys this blessed expectation not only ourselves but also for the populations of all God's creatures. It is here that we come to our present profound difficulty. Increasingly we people are occupying the land to the exclusion and extinction of the other creatures. This leads us to ask, "Does our God-given blessing of stewardship of creation grant us license to deny creatures God's blessing of fruitfulness and fulfillment? May we take this blessing of reflective rule to negate God's blessing to the fish of the sea and the birds of the air?" We have come to a time when the impact of humankind—our exploding number multiplied by the power each wields and the defilement each brings—not only denies the creatures fruitfulness and fulfillment but also extinguishes increasing numbers of them from the face of earth.'<sup>27</sup>

Note the very negative view of humanity that DeWitt presents in this passage: human beings wield unchecked power, defile the environment, and cause mass extinction.

But, as Beisner has pointed out, ‘to fear population growth and its impact on resources and the environment is [to] think more like Lot than like Abram.’ Lot chose the best land, while Abram took what was left (Gen. 13:10–18). ‘Lot’s eyes focused on material circumstances, Abram’s on the ability of God to bless his servant regardless of circumstances. Lot’s decision was driven by his thoughts about the capacity of the land; Abram’s by his faith in God.’<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Abram and Lot parted ways precisely because they thought the land could not support their households and livestock. After Abram was left with the less fertile land rejected by Lot, God promised him that his offspring would be ‘like the dust of the earth’—virtually uncountable. Despite Abram’s and Lot’s present circumstances, this promise to significantly increase the world’s population is explicitly identified by God as a blessing and goes against the belief that unchecked population increases are somehow a violation of God’s plan.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, DeWitt’s argument ‘commits the fallacy of false choice, treating man’s filling up the earth as if it were exclusive of other creatures’ doing so.’ This does not logically follow. In fact, the idea that human population growth has been detrimental to the flourishing of other creatures is not supported by the empirical evidence. Furthermore, to assume ‘that continued human population growth must result in more species extinctions, and then to argue on that basis that continued human population growth is therefore not consistent with God’s blessing/command for other creatures to multiply is to assume the conclusion to prove the conclusion—to argue in a circle.’<sup>29</sup> In reality, there is no reason why continued human population growth cannot go hand in hand with the continued growth of other creatures. In fact, history has shown that people have not only been able to preserve various species from extinction, but also multiply their numbers far beyond what would naturally occur.<sup>30</sup> This is the case with any of the animal breeds that humans have chosen to domesticate or to use for commercial purposes. Indeed, no one worries, for example, about chickens going extinct, even though Americans alone now slaughter over six billion of them each year. Therefore, it appears that the best way to ensure the survival of any particular species is to find a commercial use for it.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, the notion of a population explosion is grossly exaggerated and the earth is nowhere near becoming full. Most countries in the developed world have birth rates well below the replacement rate. As Mark Steyn has pointed out, ‘the developed world’s population is shrinking faster than any human society not in the grip of war or disease has ever shrunk.’<sup>30</sup> In failing to have enough children developed countries are not only disobeying God’s command to ‘fill the

earth’ (Gen. 1:28), they are effectively committing national suicide. According to the 2006 revision of the United Nation’s *World Population Prospects*, total world population is predicted to peak in around 2050 at approximately 9–10 billion, before it is expected to decline.<sup>31</sup> Steyn noted that ‘Birth rates in the so-called ‘overcrowded’ parts of the world are already 2.9 [births per woman] and falling. India has a quickly growing middle class and declining fertility.’<sup>32</sup> China, also, will soon have an aging and declining population as it starts to reap the consequences of its ‘one child’ policy.<sup>33</sup> This led Steyn to conclude that human beings are the real dwindling resource, not oil: ‘We’re the endangered species, not the spotted owl,’<sup>34</sup> and that ‘much of the planet will be uninhabited long before it is uninhabitable.’<sup>35</sup> Indeed, even today, human settlements presently occupy only about two percent of the earth’s land mass, excluding the continent of Antarctica.<sup>35</sup>

Ultimately, attitudes to human population growth are determined by a person’s worldview. Most environmentalists assume that people are principally consumers and polluters. Feminist environmentalist and leftist activist Riane Eisler explains:

‘For behind soil erosion, desertification, air and water pollution, and all the other ecological, social, and political stresses of our time lies the pressure of more and more people on finite land and other resources, of increasing numbers of factories, cars, trucks, and other sources of pollution required to provide all these people with goods, and the worsening tensions that their needs and aspirations fuel.’<sup>36</sup>

In other words, human society is fundamentally destructive! Yet a truly biblical worldview sees people as principally intelligent, well-meaning, creative producers and stewards, because that is the way God created them, and the way they are being transformed through the redeeming work of Christ.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, environmentalists believe that human population growth will strip the earth of its natural resources and smother it with pollution. A truly biblical worldview holds that continued population growth will result in the increased abundance of resources, rather than in their depletion, and in a cleaner, more developed environment better suited to human habitation, rather than a polluted and poisoned Earth.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the Christian worldview leads to a very different prediction to that of the modern environmental movement:

‘... people, because God made them in his image to be creative and productive, because he gave them creative minds like his, can bring order out of chaos, and higher order out of lower order, actually making more resources than we consume. So the biblical view of human beings and the

universe predicts that, as we apply our minds to raw materials, scarcity of resources will decline ... And that is precisely what we find when we look at history.<sup>39</sup>

### Conclusion

Many non-Christians would rather bow before Mother Nature than acknowledge their Father God. They worship creation instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Of course, the same cannot be said of most Christians. They rightly point out that our God given role is to act as God's stewards of creation and to take care of it, not abuse it or destroy it. But in many cases, they fail to acknowledge God's order in creation, and that mankind has dominion over all.

In the second and third parts of this series, the focus is on the Christian view of development and environmentalism, as well as the Christian response to the perceived threat of climate change.

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- Furthermore, Gen. 1:26, John 1:1–3, Col. 1:16 and 1 Cor. 8:6 all indicate that Christ was a participant in creation, not its product.
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