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YOUNG SEOK CHA

## THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CREATION CARE

**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to provide a theological and ethical basis for creation care and to look for an area to which Christians may contribute in this matter. First, three issues on the Christian responsibility for creation care were selected and discussed within the framework of theology of creation, eschatology, and redemption. Creation theology identifies the ontological position of human beings in the created world, while the tension existing between the present and the eschatological future suggests an existential status of human beings in connecting the present life with the life to come. The fact that God's redemption, in a diachronic and synchronic sense, involves a restoration of the creation order ensures Christians that there is a need to broaden their ministerial objectives. With regard to ethical challenges, the issue of Christian worldviews, the moral status of nature and nonhuman entities, and intra- and inter-generational equity were addressed. As an alternative of ecocentrism and anthropocentrism, a theocentric perspective was suggested. In response to the valuing theory of non-anthropocentrism and non-anthropogenicism, how God generates the intrinsic value of nature was discussed. Finally, as materialism is regarded as one of the most serious dysfunctional values for the ecosystem, the author suggest how Christians are called to reorient their relationship with the material properties.

**Keywords:** *Creation care, environmental ethics, environmental theology, environmental stewardship, Christian worldview, materialism*

### Introduction

The environmental issues confronting the world today require immediate attention and effective action. The rapidly changing environmental systems and depleting resources are causing substantial concern to government and business leaders around the world. There is no doubt that critical decisions are warranted and radical changes are required. Fortunately, concern for the mounting environmental crisis has stimulated individuals and human communities to take more seriously their environmental attitudes.

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## **Theological Basis for Creation Care**

Christian awareness of environmental responsibility was aroused when historian Lynn White (1967) published a paper entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” In this paper, White laid blame for much of the ongoing environmental crisis on the anthropocentric worldview of Judeo-Christianity that conceives man as superior to all the rest of creation, which exists merely for his use. His argument regarding the exploitative attitude of Christians toward nature is mainly based on his interpretation of the Genesis mandate for humans to “have dominion” over the rest of living things.

## **Ontological Implication of Creation Care**

In order to respond to White’s indictment, the human position in the created world needs to be defined. What does it mean to be human, or what is the position of humanity in the created world? Are men and women a part of nature or the “crown of creation,” or both?

Humans share a common identity with the rest of the creatures (Gen. 2:7, 19; 3:19) and their fate is bound to the fate of creation (Gen. 3:17-18; 4:11-12). Nevertheless, the Bible says that humans are exceptional in creation. The high point of the creation narrative is the creation of human beings. They alone are made in the image of God and are given dominion over the natural world, and thus are distinct from all other creatures (Gen. 1:26-27). Jesus affirms that humans are much more valuable than the rest of the creatures (Matt. 6:26). In her narrative on the Creation story, E. G. White (2005) observes that “among all the creatures that God had made on the earth, there was not one equal to man” (p. 46). With regard to their unique position, a Psalmist amplifies the Genesis narrative as follows:

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, and the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. (Ps. 8:4-8, NIV, 1984)

Based on the above two parallel passages, we can infer two concepts that make humans different from the rest of the creation: “image/likeness of God” (relation with God) and “subdue/dominion” (relation with creation). So, our main argument will be focused on the terminology of these two words.

What is meant by the image and the likeness? Contrary to the early

theologians who have taken the image and likeness as separate components of created human nature, scholars since about the time of the Reformation have recognized that “in the image” and “after the likeness” refer to the same thing based on the facts that there is no “and” joining these two phrases and these phrases are used interchangeably between Genesis 1:27, 5:1, and 9:6 (Collins, 2006). Traditional theologians have thought that the image of God is a property of human nature that is like God in some way. Collins calls this traditional view the “resemblance view.” According to Collins, this traditional view was rejected by the theologians in the 20th century who thought that the Bible focused on function rather than ontology. This function-based perspective was divided into two views: (1) the representative view, in which man was made to represent God in his activity of ruling the world in God’s behalf, and (2) the relational view, which regards man as fully man when in relationship with God and the human community. If the former defines the image on the basis of the human relationship with the created world (Gen. 1:26), the latter lays their foundation on the relationship structure of God/man and male/female in Genesis 1:27.

None of these three views, as Collins (2006) suggested, should be mutually exclusive in the process of coming to a firm conclusion. However, given the context of the Genesis narration itself, the representative view seems to be predominant over the other two. As Anderson (1994) points out, “the statement about the image of God is appropriately followed immediately by the further announcement that God confers a special blessing on human beings and commands them to exercise dominion over the earth” (pp. 14-15). This implies that the human position in the created world should be identified based on the particular role humans play between God and creation.

A conceptual linkage between “the image of God” and “dominion over creation” denotes that caring for creation was the first and lofty task which was endowed to humans to represent God. In other words, humans were supposed to reflect God’s love and justice in taking care of creation (Gen. 2:15). No implication is suggested here that “dominion over creation” refers to exploitation of the created world for selfish purposes. Rather, the phrase emphasizes the divine origin of the task.

In truth, the Hebrew word for “dominion,” *radah*, is said to be much harsher than the English translation. It means “to trample” or “to press.” In the light of some biblical usages, we assume that this word carries the connotation of kingly power and authority over the subjects (cf. Ps. 19:13; 72:8; 119:113; Num. 24:19; Judg. 14:4; 1 Kgs. 4:24; Neh.

9:28). Given that God is the Lord of creation, dominion belongs only to God, who rules the world with ultimate and absolute authority over His creation (cf. Job 25:2; Ps. 22:28). Therefore, humanity doesn't have any intrinsic authority over creation. There is no absolute authority in relation to humanity but a "delegated authority" with limitations and boundaries (Gnanakan, 1999, pp. 51-52).

## Eschatological Implication of Creation Care

Another environmental argument in the context of Christian ministry is how to overcome the discontinuity between present earth and eschatological earth. Christian responsibility for environmental conservation is frequently challenged with a question from those who are waiting for the Kingdom of God from the premillennialist perspective: "Why preserve the present earth when it is headed for collapse and a new heaven and new earth will replace it?" (DeWitt, 1991, p. 74). The dichotomy of present and future, temporal and eternal, and physical and spiritual world has weakened the necessity of any endeavor to restore the environment. Some bridging concepts for this dichotomy need to be discussed in the eschatological context.

Bridger (1990) describes our present position:

We and the world lie between the two decisive acts of God in the affairs of the world, namely, "His past act in Jesus Christ and His future act when the final theophany will usher in the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment." (p. 295)

This dynamic relationship between the past and the future event is often expressed in phrases such as the kingdom of "already and not yet" or "kingdom then" of the future and "kingdom now" of the present (Moore, 2004, pp. 25-30). What is inferred from these phrases is continuity of Kingdom. This continuity motivates Christians to look both back and forward.

German theologian Moltmann (cited in Neff, 2008) wrote in *Theology of Hope* that "Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present" (p. 36). This implies that one's way of living in the present life will be shaped according to his or her perspective on the future. That is, even though Christians live in the present world, which is moving toward destruction, their life should reflect the value of future Kingdom. Peter wrote the following concerning the future influence on the present hope:

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 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. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Pet. 3:11-13, NIV, 1984)

Here Peter uses very strong apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic language in our present context sometimes denotes urgency, a sense of crisis, a need to do something in order to avert the End. However, as Bridger (1990) noted, we should not make the mistake of “see(ing) the function of apocalyptic language only in terms of the dynamic relationship between fear for the future and action in the present” (p. 294). Attention must be given to the fact that what Peter asks the reader to look forward to is not that the heavens and earth are to be destroyed by fire but that a new heaven and a new earth will be given to those who live holy and godly lives. Peter’s admonition suggests how to connect our present life appropriately with the future event.

More specifically, the tension between the present and the eschatological future can be depicted in terms of continuity and discontinuity. Innes (2009) states that there is continuity and discontinuity between the present and the eschatological future and human motivation for ecological responsibility that largely depends on a proper balance between this continuity and discontinuity, as follows:

The continuity is important, because unless my future self, after the resurrection, is in some sense continuous with my present self, the future life cannot form the completion of my salvation through Christ. Also, unless the new heaven and earth somehow preserve the identity of the present creation, they will not constitute redemption from that creation’s futility, loss and tragedy. Thus some continuity would seem to be essential. But an element of discontinuity is equally important. The replacement of a life or a world irrevocably scarred by sin and spoiled by evil, by a new creation in which salvation and righteousness reign, involves a distinct break with the past. (p. 127-128)

The implication is that over-exaggeration regarding the discontinuity would result in a boycott of environmental care while overemphasis on continuity would cause humanistic “green utopianism” that characterizes much of the environmental movement. If the perspective on continuity will encourage Christianity to align its present values and behaviors with its hope for the future, then the perspective on discontinuity will motivate it to depend on the sovereignty of God. As Peter admonishes in his epistle, it is essential to recognize the reality of discontinuity between the present earth and future earth and at the same time to look forward to the things God eventually will restore and recreate.

## **Soteriological Implication of Creation Care**

The relationship between saving souls and caring for creation is the

practical issue in the evangelical context. The ultimate purpose of the church is evangelism which is based on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Acts 1:8). As Cress (2008), the late Ministerial Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, noted, “Our concern for the planet must never surpass our concern for people and bringing the good news of Jesus to them” (p. 30). Then can neglect of ecological responsibility be excused if we are busy enough in the work of saving souls? Is there any continuity between caring for creation and saving souls?

The redemptive story of the Bible suggests that the ministry of God is broad enough to include human responsibility for creation synchronically and diachronically as well. Synchronically, the fact that God’s redemptive plan includes the ultimate restoration of the original creation order ensures us that there is a need to broaden our ministerial objectives. When it comes to the matter of redemption, at times the Bible only reads from the perspective of personal salvation. In fact, there has been a glaring neglect of any concern for an ecological interpretation of God’s plan for the world. All the emphasis appears to be on human salvation and a fleeing from the flesh, serving only to stress spiritual rather than material dimensions of God’s work. However, when the Bible is explored from an ecological dimension, numerous passages witness to the cosmic dimension of salvation and call for a stewardship commitment to God’s creation.

Paul in his Epistle to the Romans deals with the concept of redemption exhaustively. Human sinfulness and the absence of self-righteousness are addressed to introduce righteousness that comes from God and is valid to all who believe in Jesus Christ. The main argument is exclusively focused on human salvation. However, there is a broader implication at the climax of the narration. Paul describes here how the entire creation (*ktisis*) is eagerly expecting “the sons of God to be revealed,” drastically implicated in the sin of humanity and “subjected to frustration” and in “bondage to decay” (8:19-22).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul pointed out that the purpose of redemption through the blood of Jesus is “to bring all things (*ta panta*) in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (1:10). The term *ta panta* embraces all components of the cosmos, physical and spiritual. This summing up of all things in Christ ultimately implies that this intrinsic worth extends to all creatures; therefore, those who know the Cosmic Christ need to reflect the same attitude toward creation, working with Christ to redeem “all things” (Habel & Balabanski, 2002).

In the parallel passages in Colossians, Paul depicts Jesus' concern for cosmic reconciliation within God's ultimate redemptive plan based on the centrality of Christ in relation to God's creation: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (1:16, NIV, 1984). This inclusiveness of all creation in the creative work of Jesus lays the foundation for His redemption to be so far-reaching that it encompasses all of heaven and all of earth: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (1:19-20, NIV, 1984).

Gnanakan (1999) shows how early Christians gradually changed from exclusiveness to a more inclusive attitude that recognized God's plan for the whole world. Their redemption scope was expanded from the Jews to the Gentiles and eventually to the point where they were ready to "recognize not only God's sovereignty over all people, but also over the universe, the entirety of God's creation" (p. 101). Gnanakan asserts that individualistic approaches to Christianity prevent us from accepting the cosmic dimension of redemption. God is revealed in the form of a triune relationship. The same is true with humans whose image was not individual but expressed communally in the relationship of a man and woman. So redemption is understood from the perspective of an overall relationship encompassing the entire universe. The implication is clear that if saving souls is the prime ministry of the church, then creation care also should be part of its ministry.

In a diachronic sense, covenant theology clearly shows how the first ministry of humanity in Genesis has continuity not only with the ministry of Jesus but also with the eschatological event itself. The evangelistic ministry of the church is rooted in the redemptive ministry of God, which began before creation and culminated in the person and life of Jesus, and will be fully completed in the new heaven and the new earth (Eph. 1:4; John 19:30; Rev. 21-22). In this historical narrative of redemption, we may find continuity of human responsibility for maintaining creation order not only between the Old Testament and New Testament but also between the Cross and eschatological event.

As mentioned earlier, the first covenant that God made with Adam and Eve included creation order and human responsibility for the created world. As a result of sin, however, the overall creation order was disrupted and human relationship with the created world was marred (Gen. 3:17-18; 4:11-12). To restore this disrupted creation order, God entered a covenant with Noah, who remained faithful to God. It is remarkable that



the contents of the Noachian covenant are closely linked to the Adamic covenant (Gen. 9:1-17; cf. 1:28-29). In this covenant, God put everything back in the right and proper order originally intended (Gen. 9:1-3; cf. 1:28-30). God's covenant with Adam is also reflected in His following covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15; cf. 13:14-17, 1:28). The Sinai Covenant with the Israelites also succeeds the basic principles of the first covenants. As Jewish theologian Martin Buber (cited in LaRondelle, 2005) states, "the Sinaitic covenant was not an innovation, but rather a reaffirmation of an already existing relationship which had previously been in existence" (p. 29). The vision of Isaiah depicts the new world where the original creation order is restored. There will not be any relational conflicts between humans and the nonhuman world (Isa. 11:6-9). Isaiah's narration foreshadows the new heaven and earth, which will be ultimately restored by the Second Adam— Jesus—and will be inherited by those who are born of Jesus instead of Adam's offspring (Matt. 5:5; cf. Rom. 6:14-15).

The ongoing process of establishing a covenant provides a rationale for the church that succeeded the ministry of the Old Testament church—the church of Jesus—to be involved in creation care. LaRondelle (2005) states that God's covenant after the Fall intended to restore the original covenant relationship of Paradise; thus the redemptive purpose of the gospel of Jesus should be to restore people to their original covenant relationship. The mandate of God to restore the original creation order is not limited to the first pair or the redeemed people in heaven. As it is clearly indicated in each stage of covenant building, people who are living in the "Kingdom of Grace" are also obliged to align their lives with the "Kingdom of Glory." God will not cease His care for creation until He restores His created world through His only begotten Son.

## **Ethical Issues in Environmental Care**

There are some challenges in adopting environmental values or even adapting them into the framework of Christianity. First, modern environmentalism tends to change its shift from anthropocentric worldviews to ecocentricism. This trend must be diagnosed to identify the biblical position of humans in relationship to the nonhuman world. Secondly, the moral status of nonhumans emerged as the most polemic issue among environmentalists. It is essential to explore various ethical perspectives in relation to the environment in order to improve our ability to comprehend the ethical judgment we face and to have a more balanced per-

spective with respect to human attitudes toward the natural world.

Thirdly, environmental care involves an issue of intra- and inter-generational equity.

### **Anthropocentric or Ecocentric**

In 1973, Naess (1973) wrote his view that the mainstream ecological movement of those days was a shallow ecology in the sense that its central objective is just the health and affluence of people in the developed world, and fought against pollution and resource depletion. In reaction to such an anthropocentric and technocentric attitudes of shallow ecology, where nature is simply seen as something to be mastered and controlled, deep ecologists hold ecocentric ideas as a deeper and more fundamental solution to environmental problems. Thus, at the heart of deep ecology, as Partridge (2005, p. 58) discoursed, is the belief that all forms of life have intrinsic value, moral worth, and the right to self-realization and that humans are just a part of the “web of life” equal with many other aspects of creation. Based on this biospherical egalitarianism, Naess sought to set out a philosophical system that relates self to nature, which he called an “ecosophy,” a personal philosophy or a code of values and a view of the world that guides personal decisions about relations with the natural world (Adams, 2001; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993).

The ecocentric worldview has undoubtedly been important in encouraging a wider appreciation of the value of nature and of modern humanity’s often destructive relations with it. However, it cannot avoid a criticism that it has disregarded the distinctive human role and humanity’s dignity. To make things worse, monism and pantheism even erase the border line between God and His creatures. On the other hand, the attempt to define nonhuman through the human perspective (anthropocentrism) also has encouraged exploitation of nature by devaluing the nonhuman world. In this regard, anthropocentric and ecocentric worldviews may not be the appropriate criterion to define the human relationship with nature.

In defining the human relationship with the natural world, the first thing to be considered will be the fact that both the human and the nonhuman in the world have been created by God. This justifies our view of the human position in the natural world from the perspective of God’s plan for His creatures rather than from the perspective of anthropocentric or egocentric worldviews. To begin with, the human and nonhuman are both created for the glory of God. That means that, although the

nonhuman contributes to the survival and happiness of humans, its ultimate and final purpose is for God. To put it another way, humans are expected to make their relationship with the natural world a seeking to glorify God.

## **Moral Status of Nonhuman Entities**

The second challenge will be how to identify the moral status of nature and the nonhuman entities in it. One of the most controversial issues related to the moral status of the nonhuman is the intrinsic value of nonhuman entities, and nature in general. Many traditional Western ethical perspectives are anthropocentric in that they either assign intrinsic value to human beings alone or they assign a significantly greater amount of intrinsic value to human beings than to any nonhuman things such that protection or promotion of human interests or well-being at the expense of nonhuman appear to be justified. However, when environmental ethics emerged as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s, it began to investigate the possibility of rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its nonhuman contents.

In reality, the issue of intrinsic value has conceptual, ontological, epistemological, and ethical questions in terms of its application to nature and its entities (Vilkka, 1997). To put it another way, when we are confronted with some proposed list of intrinsic goods, it would be natural to ask such questions as What does the intrinsic value of nature mean? What are the intrinsic values in nature? How do we perceive them in nature? What is their significance to human life?

Basically, the concept of intrinsic value is described as opposed to extrinsic or subjective value, and most generally instrumental value. First, as opposed to extrinsic value, intrinsic value is an inner value of an object in terms of value in itself. Secondly, as the opposite of subjective value, objective intrinsic value is defined as the qualitative property of an object. Finally, intrinsic value is an end-value, referring to what is valuable for its own sake as the opposite of instrumental value (Vilkka, 1997).

Four kinds of intrinsic values will be defined at the most general level when the intrinsic value is to be defined in relation to nonhuman entities: (1) anthropocentric intrinsic value, (2) non-anthropocentric intrinsic value, (3) anthropogenic intrinsic value, and (4) non-anthropogenic intrinsic value (Hargrove, 2003, p. 177; Vilkka, 1997, pp. 32-33). The distinction between the first two values is made based on the question of

whether value in nature is human centered or centered outside the sphere of human welfare (Reed, 2003). The other two values are based on the ontological question of who can generate values. That is, is it human-generated and ascribed intrinsic value, or nonhuman-generated intrinsic value (Vilkkä, 1997, pp. 32-33)?

Ethics may strive to identify universal principles. In the context of an environmental situation, however, ethical standards may vary from person to person and society to society. This is because, as Lein (2003, p. 186) noted, there is no objective moral truth or reality comparable to that which we seem to find in the natural world. However, in the context of Christian belief, these diverse philosophical theories and opinions would find a common ground. The Bible provides some conceptual frameworks in defining the moral status of nature and its nonhuman entities. Based on the above-discussed ethical issues, some biblical standpoints can be addressed, as follows:

First, the Bible introduces God as not only the generator of value but also the giver of consciousness through which humans may conceive God's ascribed values.

Second, the Bible supports the concept of intrinsic values in nature distinctive from its instrumental values. This concept will be inferred in the proclamation that God made during creation week: "It was good" (Gen. 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). This goodness will be more than aesthetic value when we refer to the number of texts that rephrase it as the "glory" or goodness of God (Ps. 19:1).

Third, the Bible infers the degree of moral significance between entities in nature. In terms of value, as Jesus affirms, humans are much more valuable than the rest of the creatures because they were created in the image of God (Matt. 6:26; Gen. 9:6). At the level of nonhuman entities, God put more value on animals than vegetation on account of the life they have (Gen. 9:3-6). This is similar to what Vilkkä (1997, p. 32) did when he classified nonhuman entities and their value into three sets: animals as sentient beings (zoocentricism), living beings because of the value of life (biocentricism), and the whole planet Earth because of its unique life-support system (ecocentricism). Thus it is important to note that something can have intrinsic but not absolute value.

Fourth, according to the Bible, humans have three-dimensional ethical accountabilities—first to God, then to their neighbors, and finally to the entities in nature. These responsibilities are interconnected with each other to such an extent that it cannot be said, for instance, that humans are supposed to ascribe intrinsic value to nature solely for the sake of nature. In

other words, God regards the human attitude to his or her neighbors or to nonhumans as the attitude toward Himself (Matt. 25:31-46; Gen. 2:15).

Fifth, when God requires ethical responsibilities of humans, His prime concern is preservation and wellbeing of nonhuman beings. As an example, God commanded humans to give rest to livestock in their household on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:10; 23:12). Jesus prioritized saving the life of an animal over the resting of humans (Luke 14:5). This implies that the moral duty of humans to nonhumans is based on respect for their life and wellbeing.

Finally, humans are accountable for their moral judgment in terms of their God-given conscience and God's revelation ministry through the created world and the Word of God (Rom. 1:19-20; 2:14-15). However, human conscience and consciousness have been marred and thwarted by sin. This requires humans to renew their heart and conscience through the ministry of Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2).

### **Intra- and Intergenerational Equity**

Basically, international cooperation for environmental protection has moved forward in the framework of sustainable development. The central principle behind sustainable development is equity and particularly intergenerational equity. The World Commission on Environment and Development (known as the Brundtland Commission), which played such a prominent part in popularizing the notion of "sustainable development," defined it in equity terms as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987a).

Subsequently, the Commission's 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, was endorsed by the United Nations and its definition was adopted by nations all over the world (United Nations, 1987b). Political commitment to sustainable development was drafted in the first Earth Summit (officially called the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In this meeting, world leaders adopted Agenda 21, a blueprint to attain sustainable development in the 21st century (United Nations, 1992). Agenda 21 provides a comprehensive action program to attain sustainable development and address both environmental and developmental issues in an integrated manner at global, national, and local levels.

However, the promise made at Rio was soon proven false, due to lack of cooperation from the developed countries of the North. Thus the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in

Johannesburg to mark the 10th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, was called to reaffirm a commitment to the agreement made at the Rio Summit (United Nations, 2005b, p. 2). The emphasis was placed on the development of action steps.

Sustainable development also puts emphasis on intra-generational equity, which can be applied across communities and nations within one generation. The belief that intra-generational equity is also a key principle of environmental sustainability is based on the assumption that inequities are a cause of environmental degradation (Sunder, 2006, p. 20). For instance, poverty deprives people of the choice of whether to be environmentally sound in their activities.

Such a concern is well embedded in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015 (United Nations, 2000). They include eradicating extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, and fighting disease epidemics, such as AIDS. This denotes a firmly established concept of sustainable development, that is, “efforts to protect nature will fail unless they simultaneously advance the cause of human betterment; efforts to better the lives of people will fail if they fail to conserve, if not enhance, essential resources and life support systems” (Khagram, Clark, & Raad, 2003, p. 289).

In a similar vein, the United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (United Nations, 2005a, p. 12) reaffirmed social development as the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development along with economic development and environmental protection. For this reason, a series of global conferences on sustainable development covered a range of social issues, such as education, children’s concerns, population, human rights, human settlement, and gender issues (Jehan & Umana, 2003, p. 54).

The concept of intra- and intergenerational equity is embedded in the land distribution system based on the Jubilee (cf. Lev. 25:8-35). In reality, Israelites were aliens and tenants with God in terms of relationship with the land. The ownership of the land only belongs to God: “The land must not be sold permanently; because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants” (Lev. 25:23). This implies that, in relation to land, the Israelites were accountable not only to God, the owner of the land, but also to their descendants who were supposed to inherit the land (cf. Num. 35:34). This double responsibility has a significant implication for human responsibility for land care.

God's ownership of the land, in practice, ensured the equal distribution of the land. When the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, God distributed the land to them according to their tribal divisions, clan by clan (Josh. 13:1-19:51). Equitable allocation was emphasized in the process of distribution. More portions were allotted to the tribes with more people (Num. 26:51-56; Josh. 17:14-18). This equity was supposed to be maintained or at least restored on a fifty-year basis (Deut. 19:14; Lev. 25:8-10, 23-28). The assumption is that not only synchronic equity but also diachronic equity was considered in the land allocation process. That is, God was concerned for the welfare of future generations. As Wright (2006) expounds, "the Jubilee was an attempt to limit its otherwise relentless and endless social consequences by limiting its possible duration" so that "the economic collapse of a family in one generation was not to condemn all future generations to the bondage of perpetual indebtedness" (p. 298).

One of the main points of the Jubilee was that there should be a limit to the use of land. If the sabbatical year limits the extent of land use, the Jubilee limits the duration of land monopolization. Humanity is endowed with the land from God to use it only during the time they live; then it should be handed over to the next generation without decreasing its sustainability. It was imperative to maintain the integrity of the land for generations to come because it was God who owned the land.

## **Reorientation of Relationship With the Material World**

With regard to human impact on the environment, many scholars believe that the overpopulation of humans is the leading cause of environmental degradation (Penn, 2003, p. 276; Swearer, 2009, p. 1). Such a belief is simply based on the assumption that the more people there are, the more resources are consumed and the more waste is created.

However, the relationship between population alone and planetary stress is hardly straightforward. We need to note that "the world's richest 500 million people (roughly 7 percent of the world population) are currently responsible for 50 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emission, while the poorest 3 billion are responsible for just 6 percent" (Assadourian, 2010, p. 6). This highly skewed consumption inequity creates the disproportionate responsibility for the current environmental ills upon the rich, who consume resources excessively and as a result generate a major part of the hazardous waste on the planet. Therefore, managing the level of consumption would be more crucial and urgent than controlling the population growth.

### *Materialism as a Dysfunctional Value of the Environment*

Overconsumption, as Assadourian (2010, p. 3) notes, is a cultural trend that leads people to find meaning, contentment, and acceptance through what they consume. By its nature, consumerism is based on materialistic value. Theoretical suggestions have been made that people who share materialistic values feel happiness when they possess things, so they buy more and more to maintain and increase feelings of happiness. Thus, they are constantly motivated to over-consume due to the law of diminishing returns.

Since the beginning of modernity, materialism has stood both as a vision of the good life and as a cosmological basis underlying epistemology and modern science (Norgaard, 1995, p. 475). However, as materialism drives humanity's environmental crisis, it would be timely for Christians to reorient their relationship with the material world and to create their vision of the good life on the basis of an alternative value system in keeping with God's original plan. To begin with, materialistic value and its relationship with the good life need to be examined to figure out what is the ultimate purpose of life, a purpose that would eventually lead people to happiness.

### *Negative Link Between Material Value and the Good Life*

Much research on materialistic values has demonstrated a negative relationship between materialism and well-being. Garðarsdóttir, Janković, and Dittmar (2008, p. 78), in summarizing research conducted based on Richins and Dawson's MVS (material values scale), say that U.S. adults who strongly endorse materialistic values report that they are less satisfied with some important domains of life, such as satisfaction with family life and socialization with friends; they also report lower overall life satisfaction. Additionally, a study conducted with a sample of both young and older adults in the U.S. reports that highly materialistic participants were less happy, less satisfied with their life, more depressed, more neurotic, more anxious, and reported greater psychological stress, as well as less religious, community, and family-oriented values (Garðarsdóttir et al., 2008, p. 78).

Conversely, another study suggests that such lower levels of life satisfaction in social and family relationships could inversely result in high levels of materialism. According to Alperovitz (2005, p. 320), faced with the loneliness and vulnerability that come with deprivation of a securely encompassing community, people have sought to quell the vulnerability



through their possessions. Therefore, what is often interpreted as materialism is in reality a demonstration of the pathologies of social deprivation.

### *Post-Material Value*

In reaction to such limits of materialism, post-materialism emerged. If materialism is seen as the system of beliefs and attitudes aimed at satisfying one's material needs, post-materialism can be understood as the system of convictions and values that are beyond the materialistic ones. As van der Ven (1996) describes it, post-materialism leads people to strive for fulfilling the needs of belonging together, trust, esteem, dignity, and intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction (p. 106).

A post-materialistic value system is based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Doyle & McEachern, 2008, p. 89). Maslow distinguished five basic needs: physiological, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization. He argued that a lower need has to be satisfied to a certain degree, before higher needs can emerge and express themselves. Van der Ven (1996) describes how Ronald Inglehart, the initiator of sociological post-materialism, reduced Maslow's five needs to a dichotomy (p. 106). He classified the physiological needs and the safety needs as materialistic and the remaining three as post-materialistic. Based on this dichotomy, Inglehart argues, people's concerns are shifted from the materialistic needs to the post-materialistic and spiritual needs which transcend them (van der Ven, 1996, p. 107).

The existence of post-materialistic values is supported by some psychologists. For example, research by Diener has shown that once basic needs are met, additional income does little to raise the individual's sense of satisfaction with life (as cited in Wallis, 2005). In addition, Seligman's research (as cited in Wallis, 2005) clearly suggests that material goods cannot be a factor for happiness. After two decades of research, Seligman has found three components of happiness: pleasure, engagement (the depth of involvement with one's family, work, romance and hobbies) and meaning (using personal strength to serve some larger end). Of these three factors, he insists, pleasure is the least consequential and engagement and meaning are much more important (Wallis, 2005). All of these perspectives suggest that the boundary between basic material needs and the pursuit of material wealth exists without contentment.

### *Envisioning of the Good Life Beyond Materialistic Value*

The attempt to shift the modern value system should begin with the

exploration of what people think truly makes them happy, and how they might, if possible, realign their lives accordingly. As Leiserowitz and Fernandez (2008) note, psycho-social research has revealed that people who voluntarily simplify their lives are happier than others in an affluent society (p. 37). These individuals have shifted their focus from the acquisition of more and more things, to the goals of self-acceptance, strong relationships with friends and family, and community engagement.

Biblical values are based on relational connections. Human beings have been created as relational beings. They are supposed to experience happiness and self-actualization, while they are establishing relationships with God, other humans, and the entities in the natural world. The ultimate purpose of God's message to this world is to invite humans to fellowship with God, which eventually brings them joy and happiness (1 John 1:1-4; Rev. 3:20). Therefore, the ministry and message of church should guide people into being more relational with their family, friends, neighbors, and God. The confession of Habakkuk assures us of the ultimate happiness beyond material possessions:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. (Hab. 3:17-18, NIV, 1984)

## Conclusion

Modern environmentalism challenges Christians to expand the boundary of their care, compassion, love, and responsibility in harmony with the biblical message. Therefore, Christian responsibility for the environment will not be motivated by the ecological crisis but by each person's particular relationship with God and the created world, including mankind. As a channel of God's love, human beings are supposed to take care of the natural world with the same compassion and love that God has shown them.

Caring for the created world is based on love toward God, who created the earth and everything in it. God originally designed human beings to develop their characteristics and intelligence in the process of taking care of His world. There should be no separation between caring for God's world and caring for the people whom God entrusted to us. Both ministries are based on compassion and love.

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