

12-2014

Christians and Creation Care

Jo Ann Davidson

Andrews University, jad@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs>

 Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Davidson, Jo Ann, "Christians and Creation Care" (2014). *Lake Union Herald*. 155.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/luh-pubs/155>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lake Union Herald at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Lake Union Herald by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

CHRISTIANS AND CREATION CARE

BY JO ANN DAVIDSON



It seems curious, even ironic, that Christians who believe in the Divine creation of this planet, and who maintain the importance of good stewardship of money, such as tithing, have been mostly silent about stewardship of anything else, even as critical issues concerning the environment gather more and more attention. Though Seventh-day Adventists believe the world has exalted standing from its divinely-created status, we rarely have acknowledged that the biblical parameters of stewardship involve more than money. Our definition of stewardship needs to become more comprehensive. From the first chapter of Scripture to the end of the book of Revelation, one finds a robust doctrine of life. God loves this place!

Scripture begins with God declaring *good* and *very good* in multiple repetitions of his personal joy over his handiworks. Both animals and humans are created with God getting his hands in the soil. *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground ... Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air....* (Genesis 2:7, 19 KJV).

Both humans and animals are given the breath of life. Both are given identical blessings; however, birds and fish received their blessing on day five, before any humans were around to listen. And God blessed them, saying, *Be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 1:22 NASB). The next day, God places the new humans in a world, teeming with living creatures, and tells Adam and Eve the same thing in verse 28, *Be fruitful and multiply*, and then adds, *and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*

Adam and Eve are to rule the Earth with rulership already defined on day four: *the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night*, giving and sustaining life (see Genesis 1:16 KJV). Humans are told to care for their divinely-bestowed niche, which includes all other creatures who have been given life by God. Indeed, the new earthlings are set apart from the rest of the creatures in that they are created in the image of God (verse 26). The Creator declares he is a Shepherd in both the Old and New Testaments — a Shepherd that gives his life for the sheep, caring tenderly for them. Human beings, created in the image of God, should be like him in how they rule, care, serve and protect his creation.

Both humans and animals also are given the violence-free, plant-based, vegetarian diet (see Genesis 1:29–31). Flesh meat was not on the menu. Animals and humans are together given seeds, fruits and green plants to eat — not each other! (see Genesis 1:30)

The Sabbath comes as a generous environmental gift from the Creator. There are more verbs connected with the creation of this day (see Genesis 2:1–3) than any of the preceding six, with God blessing, resting and sanctifying it. Six days God created tangible matter. On the seventh day, he creates holy

time. The first thing God makes holy is time! Six days work and one day rest become the rhythm of life. This weekly cycle is still embedded in our calendars, and it honors and protects all life. God even blesses the land by giving it a “sabbatical” every seven years. No other god of any other world religion does this — granting a unique gift of time! Abraham Heschel, a Jewish writer, recognizing this specialness, calls the Sabbath a “palace in time!” Rather than a negative prohibition or restriction, the Sabbath is a gift, a blessing.

With modern technology, humans have begun to think that they control time and progress. The Sabbath liberates us from this bondage and delusion of materialism. We are freed to appreciate creation and to worship and praise the Creator!

Some educators wonder if the computers and electronic technology that have emptied playgrounds and kept children from enjoying the outdoors is part of the reason for so many serious problems in schools.¹

Sometime after Creation Week, Adam and Eve fall, which changes everything — including the environment, climate and the land itself (see Genesis 3). The problem is human. God’s affection for this place never waivers.

Later, a global flood is necessitated by vile human wickedness. In mercy, God commands Noah to build an ark — to spare human and animal life, *to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth* (Genesis 7:3 NKJV). At the height of the deluge the text states, *God remembered Noah ... and all the animals ... with him in the ark* (Genesis 8:1 NKJV). After the Flood, the animals are explicitly included in the Divine covenant: *I establish my covenant with you, and with your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the livestock, and every animal of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ship, even every animal of the earth. ... This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be a sign of a covenant between me and the earth* (Genesis 9:9–13 WEB).

The historical books instruct how sin affects creation: the LORD appeared to Solomon by night and said to him: *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek*

Scripture begins with God declaring *good* and *very good* in multiple repetitions of his personal joy over his handiworks. Both animals and humans are created with God getting his hands in the soil. *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground ... Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air....* (Genesis 2:7, 19 KJV).

Both humans and animals are given the breath of life. Both are given identical blessings; however, birds and fish received their blessing on day five, before any humans were around to listen. And God blessed them, saying, *Be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 1:22 NASB). The next day, God places the new humans in a world, teeming with living creatures, and tells Adam and Eve the same thing in verse 28, *Be fruitful and multiply*, and then adds, *and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.*

Adam and Eve are to rule the Earth with rulership already defined on day four: *the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night*, giving and sustaining life (see Genesis 1:16 KJV). Humans are told to care for their divinely-bestowed niche, which includes all other creatures who have been given life by God. Indeed, the new earthlings are set apart from the rest of the creatures in that they are created in the image of God (verse 26). The Creator declares he is a Shepherd in both the Old and New Testaments — a Shepherd that gives his life for the sheep, caring tenderly for them. Human beings, created in the image of God, should be like him in how they rule, care, serve and protect his creation.

Both humans and animals also are given the violence-free, plant-based, vegetarian diet (see Genesis 1:29–31). Flesh meat was not on the menu. Animals and humans are together given seeds, fruits and green plants to eat — not each other! (see Genesis 1:30)

The Sabbath comes as a generous environmental gift from the Creator. There are more verbs connected with the creation of this day (see Genesis 2:1–3) than any of the preceding six, with God blessing, resting and sanctifying it. Six days God created tangible matter. On the seventh day, he creates holy

time. The first thing God makes holy is time! Six days work and one day rest become the rhythm of life. This weekly cycle is still embedded in our calendars, and it honors and protects all life. God even blesses the land by giving it a “sabbatical” every seven years. No other god of any other world religion does this — granting a unique gift of time! Abraham Heschel, a Jewish writer, recognizing this specialness, calls the Sabbath a “palace in time!” Rather than a negative prohibition or restriction, the Sabbath is a gift, a blessing.

With modern technology, humans have begun to think that they control time and progress. The Sabbath liberates us from this bondage and delusion of materialism. We are freed to appreciate creation and to worship and praise the Creator!

Some educators wonder if the computers and electronic technology that have emptied playgrounds and kept children from enjoying the outdoors is part of the reason for so many serious problems in schools.¹

Sometime after Creation Week, Adam and Eve fall, which changes everything — including the environment, climate and the land itself (see Genesis 3). The problem is human. God’s affection for this place never waivers.

Later, a global flood is necessitated by vile human wickedness. In mercy, God commands Noah to build an ark — to spare human and animal life, *to keep the species alive on the face of all the earth* (Genesis 7:3 NKJV). At the height of the deluge the text states, *God remembered Noah ... and all the animals ... with him in the ark* (Genesis 8:1 NKJV). After the Flood, the animals are explicitly included in the Divine covenant: *I establish my covenant with you, and with your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the livestock, and every animal of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ship, even every animal of the earth. ... This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it will be a sign of a covenant between me and the earth* (Genesis 9:9–13 WEB).

The historical books instruct how sin affects creation: the LORD appeared to Solomon by night and said to him: *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek*



EACH PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. CREATION CARE IS A SIGNIFICANT WAY WE CAN SHOW APPRECIATION TO THE CREATOR FOR THE GIFT OF LIFE.

my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:12–14 NIV).

The created world inspired many of the prayers and hymns in the Psalter. Note the voices in one choir: *Praise the LORD from the earth, You great sea creatures and all the depths, Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; Mountains and all hills, Fruit trees and all cedars; Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and flying fowl; Kings of the earth and all peoples, Princes and all judges of the earth! Both young men and maidens; Old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD...* (Psalm 148:7–13 NKJV).

Most Christians are not sensitive to nature's praise of the Creator, one of the least understood topics in Scripture. One composer did notice, however, and wrote the Christian "Doxology": "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below!"

The prophets are provocative, insisting that human sin causes deterioration and pollution. For example: *The earth mourns and fades away, The world languishes and fades away; The haughty people of the earth languish. The earth also is defiled under its inhabitants; Because they have transgressed the law, Changed the ordinance, Broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore has the curse devoured the earth...* (Isaiah 24:5–6 KJV).

Hosea records God's promise that, ultimately, the original perfection of Creation will be restored — in language remarkably similar to Noah's covenant: *In that day I will make a covenant for*

them With the beasts of the field, And the birds of the air And the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, So that all may lie down in safety (Hosea 2:18 NIV).

Biblical descriptions of the final removal of sin and restoration of Eden perfection include not just the golden streets but, also, the animals! For example: God through Isaiah, *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, ... and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD...* (Isaiah 11:6–9 NIV).

NEW TESTAMENT

The same "theology of life" also is found in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of his affection for animals, stressing that even the lowliest of creatures is cherished: *Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God* (Luke 12:6 NIV); *not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it* (Matthew 10:29 NLT).

Jesus demonstrates a fundamental creation care issue when, after miraculously feeding thousands with a small boy's lunch, he commands that all leftovers be carefully gathered up so *that nothing will be lost* (John 6:12 NASB). We, too often, forget that every meal is a "miracle" and waste so much food.

Though promising a glorious kingdom where he will *wipe every tear* from every eye and remove death and crying (see Revelation 21:4), Jesus did not just endure the present. He was constantly healing, even raising the dead (see Matthew 8:16 and John 11:38–44), offering salvation to both body and soul, in a preview of his perfect kingdom. He proves he has the power to accomplish his promises and fulfill the anthem the angels sang at his birth, linking *Glory to God in the highest with peace on earth* (Luke 2:14 NLT).

The Apostle Paul has the same rich theology of life: *For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and ... on earth, visible and invisible and by Him all things hold together* (Colossians. 1:16–17).

Paul also speaks of future environmental renewal, echoing Old Testament sentiments of this present world suffering from human sin: *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.... creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now* (Romans 8:19–22 KJV).

After the seventh trumpet sounds in Revelation 11, the 24 elders cry out against those who have wrecked havoc on creation: *We give You thanks O Lord God Almighty ... because You have taken*

Your great power and reigned.... You should ... destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:17–18 NASB).

The Apocalypse doesn't end there, however, but concludes with the resplendent restoration Old Testament prophets promised earlier, reminding again that redemption involves the renewal of creation with the material world participating! Salvation is never depicted as escaping from the Earth but, rather, reclaiming it! Jesus comes again to restore this damaged planet — not annihilate it. When he destroys sin and evil, the material world, hampered and crippled because of sin, will be reestablished in its original glory!

Environmentalists outside the biblical tradition have not been successful in arguing for such high worth. Seventh-day Adventists believe God created this *very good* world (Genesis 1:31 NIV), and he remains a concerned landlord, active in and through it all, *For in him we live and move and have our being...* (Acts 17:28 NIV). As the ancient Levites chanted, *You alone are the Lord; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and everything on it, ... and You preserve them all...* (Nehemiah 9:6 NKJV). It should not be surprising that creation care is embedded in Scripture!

Seventh-day Adventists could, thereby, be honoring the Creator by recycling, preserving water and composting, etc., and exhibiting the link of the plant-based diet to environmental issues.

If we were to think more biblically about stewardship, we would have a more benevolent attitude toward the created world. We don't even have to resolve the debate on global warming. Biblical motivation for creation care, grounded in thankfulness and appreciation for life, is far advanced of contemporary environmental ethics. Creation care is good stewardship as God's image bearers.

Adventist hope of the future kingdom and concern for stewardship for the present Earth should be natural partners — just like it was for Jesus. Principles for living in both worlds issue from, and are demonstrated by, the Creator. Appreciation for the extraordinary gift of life is our motive because this present life matters.

A reverence for life flows naturally from such an attitude. Though we anticipate the restored world, we, too, can guard the priceless gift of life. Contrary to other religious traditions, the material world is not an illusion. Salvation is Earth-affirming.

From the beginning of Scripture through the last book, one finds an impressive doctrine of life. From the very outset, we find that the scriptural assignment of “dominion” is a stewardship ethic. Though fallen, this present world is still of inestimable value to the Creator.

This “nest” of ours is not, as other origin accounts suggest, the result of some battle among the gods, nor the accidental outcome of impersonal forces. It was made in great joy with the Creator declaring it *very good*. Though never worshiped, it is honored and cherished in Scripture. There is no confusion between the Creator and creation. There is no gnostic slant denigrating the material world and the human body as a prison to be escaped. There is no hierarchy of spirit over matter in Scripture. All life matters. Both body and soul are divinely valued.

Resurrection day will begin to erase all that has been lost because of sin. We await the future kingdom of peace when all creation will be restored with us. In the meantime, thankfully, there are now many helpful resources that can inform our stewardship. Each person can make a difference. Creation care is a significant way we can show appreciation to the Creator for the gift of life. As my understanding increases of God's vast wisdom, displayed in the many interdependent ecosystems and interlinking of all life, my worship of him is filled with more awe.

Jo Ann Davidson is a professor of theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

1. See *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, by Richard Louv (Paperback — April 10, 2008).

