

IV. A Future Trust

Most of the prophetic books end in one way or another with a vision of a new heaven and new earth, a lovely world of peace and fullness for our descendants: explicitly in Isaiah 65-66; but see also Joel 3 (4):17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 14. In Ezekiel 47, water flows from the altar of the temple to transform even the Dead Sea into living water. Lame and outcast people belong to this new heaven and new earth in Zephaniah 3:14-20. All these prophetic passages allow us to see at least a partial vision of the mystery of our resurrected body, as it is strongly affirmed in Romans 6:5 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. What we do now in caring for the earth somehow or other touches even the degree of happiness that will be ours for all eternity.

In light of the Scriptures, how should I as a Christian, church member and citizen fulfill my responsibility toward future generations with respect to the earth and the atmosphere, in view of such challenges as the following?

1. The diminishing resources on planet earth?
2. The "now" mentality with its instant gratification?
3. The pattern of unrestrained development/consumption?

My answer: _____

Suggested Reading

Austin, Richard Cartwright. *Hope for the Land*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988. A comprehensive examination of biblical theology as it addresses modern environmental concerns.

Bergant, Dianne. *The World Is a Prayerful Place*. Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987. Reflections on a spirituality informed by the creation theology of the biblical wisdom tradition.

Eschweiler, Edward. *Celebrating God's Good Earth*. Milwaukee: HI-TIME Publishing, 1991. A booklet for Catholic high school students treating nine environmental topics containing ideas for prayer, discussion and action.

Granberg-Michaelson, Wesley. *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Take Care of the Earth*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984. A holistic Christian theology that integrates sociological, political and economic insights with critical biblical, theological and ethical thinking.

Hessel, Dieter T., ed. *For Creation's Sake*. Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1985. A series of essays that treat the connections between preaching, ecology and justice.

Land, Richard D. and Moore, Louis A. eds. *The Earth Is the Lord's*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985, Chapter 2.

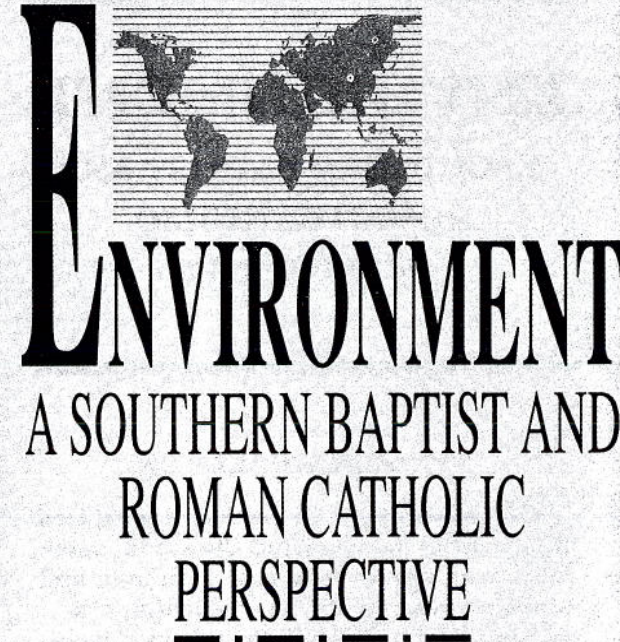
Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching. Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1991. A Pastoral Statement by the Catholic bishops.

Wilkinson, Loren, ed. *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1980. Revised 1991.

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ENVIRONMENT

A SOUTHERN BAPTIST AND ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

THE BIBLE CALLS US

The Bible opens in Genesis 1 with God creating the heavens and the earth, carefully, even wondrously, and with man and woman meant to live as a peaceful, productive family. The Bible ends in Revelation 20-22 with men and women by God's grace entering a new and transformed heaven and earth. Creation, therefore, provides the setting for the entire Bible story of redemption. Throughout their lives on earth, men and women are to care for the earth, so that it always reflects the glory and goodness of God (See Gen. 1:28-30; Ps. 8).

Yet men and women sinned, abusing and even destroying the earth (See Gen. 6-9; Isa. 1). While the earth groans under the weight of sin, as Paul writes in Romans 8:22-25, God holds out hope of sending the Holy Spirit to create again a peaceful earth, according to Psalm 104:30.

Please read again the biblical references in the previous paragraphs. Reconstruct for yourself the steps in creation, in sin and the destruction of creation, in grace and the new creation of the universe.

I. A Godly Lifestyle

God told the Israelites: "The land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). All of us rent our life and our place on earth from God. In return we are called upon to care for the earth and to share its produce with our neighbor. Deuteronomy 26 prescribes that when God's people celebrate the harvest, they are to come to the sanctuary and recount their faith about the ways God has always cared for them. They are to share the harvest with "aliens, orphans and widows" (26:12).

Amos, the prophet of social justice, points out in 4:6-13 how God not only regulates the seasons of the year but also turns rain into drought, a plentiful harvest into famine, peace into war, yet not simply as punishment but as a way toward repentance and a new creation for Israel. Notice how the passage ends in praise of God the Creator.

If Israel stops trampling upon the needy and forcing poor people into slavery—actions that cause the land to tremble and all who dwell on it to mourn (Amos 8:4-8)—then the vision of the prophet Isaiah (11:6, 8b) will come true: the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb, . . . the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. . . . The baby shall play by the cobra's den. We return to the peaceful story of paradise in Genesis 1-2.

In the light of the Scriptures, how ought my lifestyle as a Christian to impact:

1. The greed in our consumer culture?
2. The prevalent desire for our comfort and pleasure at the expense of other human beings?
3. The litter and waste that clog our communities?

4. The prevailing trends in the American culture?

My answer: _____

II. A Responsible Interdependence

The earth, we read in Deuteronomy 6, is always a gift to be shared, not an absolute and selfish possession. When Isaiah speaks of the new creation in chapter 43, the prophet hears God calling His children by name, summoning them from north, south, east, and west. Why? "Because you are precious in my eyes and I love you." God wants the entire human race to be one family. The same Holy Spirit who pours blessings on Israel pours water on thirsty ground and enables people everywhere to say, "I am the Lord's" (Isa. 44:1-5)! Then God's children of faith will become a light to other people, attracting them to Jesus (Isa. 42), so as "to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement." God's servants will help to carry the burden of sick and disabled persons (Isa. 53:4-6). Jesus, as we read in Matthew 8:1-17, fulfills these hopes by healing the sick and curing all who were afflicted. Throughout the Bible, care of the earth, healing for the body and conversion of the soul are all a serious concern for God and, therefore, for every human being because each of the three impacts the others.

In light of the Scriptures, how should I participate responsibly both as a Christian and as a citizen in the common concerns for the well-being of all humankind, such as the following?

1. The widespread occurrence of hunger and malnutrition?

2. The prevalence of various forms of addiction?
3. The need for economic justice and opportunity for all human beings?

My answer: _____

III. A Conserving Stewardship

Scripture places us on a mountain top, not necessarily to be tempted, but to view the wonder of the universe. Read again Psalm 104 and Job 38-41. God, in divine wisdom, carefully established laws for the waters of the sea and the seasons of the year, as we are told in Proverbs 8:22-31. The prophet Jeremiah, in chapter 31, associates the new covenant, inscribed on the heart, with God's way of governing the universe.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of God's concern for the birds in the sky, wild flowers in the woods and the grass in the field (Matt. 6:26-34).

When we look out at our polluted and devastated earth, we hear a groaning and agony, like that heard by Paul in Romans 8.

In light of the Scriptures, how should I, both as a Christian and as a citizen, contribute to the proper care of the earth and the atmosphere rather than abuse the earth and its resources, as may be true with the following?

1. The depletion of agricultural lands?
2. The spread of industrially produced acid rain?
3. The destruction of forests?
4. The pollution of rivers and lakes?

My answer: _____

