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# CREATION CARE AND THE GOSPEL

RECONSIDERING  
THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

**EDITED BY COLIN BELL AND ROBERT S WHITE**

FOREWORD BY LASCELLES G NEWMAN

INTRODUCTION BY EDWARD R BROWN

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## **Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church**

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## Associated titles from the Lausanne Library

- *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action*
- *The Cape Town Commitment Study Edition* by Rose Dowsett
- *The Cape Town Call: A Call to Action* (book/DVD for small groups) by Sara Singleton and Matt Ristuccia
- *The Cape Town Commitment: Bibliographic Resources* ed Darrell Bock
- *Christ our Reconciler: Gospel/Church/World* ed J E M Cameron (formal published record of The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization)

# Foreword

Las G Newman

After the historic Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2010, each of the Lausanne global regions was invited to host a Global Consultation on one of the major issues arising from the Congress. I immediately signed up my region, the Caribbean, to host a consultation on Creation Care.

The Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel took place in Jamaica from 29 October–2 November 2012, the first such Global Consultation following the Congress. And what an amazing experience it was! We had over 50 participants from 23 countries as diverse as Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, and Canada gathering for five days to pray, talk, and reflect on the state of the planet, the home in which we live, and on the role and ministry of the church in caring for God's creation.

As if to underscore the importance and the urgency of what we had gathered to discuss, a ferocious hurricane arrived exactly a week before the consultation, and threatened to derail it. Hurricane Sandy was one of the deadliest and most destructive hurricanes in the Atlantic region for a long time. Sandy killed at least 285 people in seven countries, destroyed 305,000 homes, and cost some \$75 billion in damage. Sandy travelled all the way from the Caribbean, up the Atlantic coast to Canada. It was a brutal reminder that all over the world we are witnessing extreme weather conditions that are causing havoc to many lives, especially among the poor and disempowered. Climate change is a reality.

We had some remarkable presentations, demonstrating how God's people around the world are being moved by their faith in Christ to undertake big and small projects to conserve, steward, and nurture the environment in ways that enhance the sustainability of life on earth. One of these presentations was the green desert project in Mongolia (see Case Study 6) led by Lawrence Ko. With a remarkable team of young Singaporeans across church denominations, they are engaged in a concerted anti-desertification project in the Mongolian desert that could have a major impact on China. This is an exciting project, and captures the vision and energetic imagination of youth in the creative responses needed to address ecological crises.

## Caribbean perspective

My own contribution to the consultation was a plenary response from a Caribbean perspective to the presentations of Sir John Houghton and Prof Bob White. Both spoke about the human impact on the environment and made the case for human agency in the changes to the Earth's atmosphere, land surface, marine environment and climate over time. Both presenters emphasized human responsibility to mitigate the effects of disasters that occur as a consequence. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS), such as those in the Caribbean, this is an urgent issue. Even as visitors and locals delight in the breath-taking beauty and magnificence of the Caribbean, this region is known for its vulnerability to catastrophic disasters. They range from tropical storms, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, droughts, floods, earthquakes, and extreme weather effects, to the rampant poverty and violence which have impacted natural, physical, marine, and social environments.

## Christian spirituality

The emphasis on prayer and Christian fellowship at the Jamaica Consultation was a great reminder of the integral place of worship of our creator God—it added the important ingredient of Christian spirituality, based on God's self-revelation in word and deed. This helped tremendously in the reflective exercises on the state of God's creation as we find it in the world today.

In a spirit of prayer and fellowship, participants worked hard and left with a strong *Call to Action* (see page xx). This is an important statement for the global church. Among other things, it calls particular attention to the need for leadership from the church in the Global South to help set the agenda for the advance of the gospel and the care of creation. It also highlights the need to mobilize the whole church and all of society in the task. We need to utilize the gifts of men, women, children, youth, and indigenous people as well as professionals and others who possess experience and expertise; we also need to engage with responsible leadership in government, business, civil society, and academia. It is the Global South—the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean—that bears the brunt and the burden of the ecological crisis. Thankfully, the church of the Global South has begun to embrace this call to action.

## Ecological responsibility

As the Jamaica Consultation passionately affirmed: 'urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility' is needed by the whole church.<sup>1</sup> It is the

whole church, the united body of Christ, which is called upon and commissioned by our Lord to proclaim the whole gospel to the whole world. The Christian gospel is a gospel of hope for the life of *the world to come*—a hope that should inform our present reality. The brokenness of our world is set against the background of the truth of God's sovereignty over it and his ultimate plans for redeeming it.

I urge everyone to wake up to the challenge. I pray that you will be inspired and enabled by this book to communicate the urgency of the global task of caring for God's creation.

# Introduction

Colin Bell, Robert S White, and Edward R Brown

‘Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.’

*Cape Town Commitment*

These words from the *Cape Town Commitment* sum up the motivation behind this book. They are why 31 authors from 6 continents, coming from a variety of academic perspectives and different kinds of personal experience, are able to write with such a similar passion and unity of voice. And they are the reason you need to read this book.

There have been dozens of ‘statements’ about creation care in the last 20 years, but few that are as important as the creation care affirmations found in the *Cape Town Commitment*. It is a deceptively simple conclusion: What could be more obvious than that ‘creation care is a gospel issue’? But it is one that echoes with implications and ramifications for the global evangelical community. This is not an environmental agency, like Care of Creation or A Rocha, saying to the church, ‘This is what you *should* believe.’ This is the church saying to itself, ‘This is what we *do* believe.’

Saying we believe something, and living out that belief with appropriate action, are two different things. The writer of Ecclesiastes famously noted that ‘of the writing of books there is no end’; we could say the same for conferences and consultations in our day. Which is why, when the leaders of the Lausanne Movement decided to sponsor a series of Global Consultations to explore themes in the *Cape Town Commitment*, one of the first topics chosen was creation care, a consultation which could produce tangible and meaningful results. And it has.

The first product of our work was the *Jamaica Call to Action*, a document that you will find referred to frequently in the chapters that follow. The second outcome is this book, containing some of the best evangelical thinking on the issues. It is divided into the following sections:

- God’s Word—what do the Bible and biblical theology have to say?
- God’s World—what does scientific research have to tell us about what is happening in God’s creation?

- God’s Work—which is really *our work* in response to these two: ‘What shall we then do?’

The third outcome from the Jamaica Consultation is a Global Campaign for Creation Care and the Gospel that has been running since 2014.

The *Call to Action* document contains a remarkably comprehensive list of action points, beginning with ‘simple lifestyle’ and ending with ‘prophetic advocacy and healing reconciliation.’ Its most important features, however, are its two simple convictions near the beginning and an eloquent call to prayer at the end.

## A gospel issue

The first conviction is a restatement of the phrase from the *Cape Town Commitment*: ‘Creation care is indeed “a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ”.’<sup>1</sup> We wanted to affirm for ourselves and for our evangelical sisters and brothers around the world that our exploration of this topic has made us even more convinced that creation care is central to our faith. It is ‘an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship of God.’ And, importantly, this is ‘a matter of great joy and hope, and we would care for creation *even if it were not in crisis*.’

We emphasize that last phrase, for here we have one of the most important things that Christians can bring to the wider (secular) environmental movement. Our motivation is not guilt, though there is enough of that to go around. It is not born out of panic, though those who study these things are the first to admit that there are plenty of reasons to panic. And it is not self-interest, enlightened or otherwise. No—we care for God’s creation because it is something we ought to be doing in joy and in obedience.

This first conviction undergirds Part 1 of this book, and we trust you can feel some of that hope and joy in these chapters.

David Bookless, Jonathan Moo, and Lowell Bliss open with an exploration of the startling statement cited above, explaining how the gospel connects with creation care, and importantly, why creation care finds a home within the Lausanne Movement. Edward Brown’s chapter is a study of Psalm 8 and confronts head-on the question of human dominion over creation. Often blamed as part of the problem, what if it turns out to be the solution? In Chapter 2, Jonathan Moo takes us deep into creation care theology, helping us to discover ‘what sort of orientation towards the world is expected of us if we take seriously both what science reveals to us about the state of the planet, and what Scripture reveals about God, ourselves, and the world of his creation.’ Richard Bauckham discusses a word desperately needed

when we confront the state of God's creation—*hope*—and he makes a vital distinction between 'proximate' and 'ultimate' hope.

In the following three chapters, Lowell Bliss, Craig Sorley and Dave Bookless make connections between creation care and missions. The mission of the church has been commonly understood to be the evangelization of the world; how does creation care fit into, and inform, that understanding? Bliss introduces environmental missions as a new category 'akin to medical missions.' Sorley shows from personal experience how creation care can be a vehicle for discipleship and can transform lives, landscapes, and society itself. And Bookless explains how an evangelical missiology can not only invigorate missionary efforts but also has the potential to transform the wider secular environmental movement.

Finally, Sam Berry brings an important summary of how God's people have viewed and wrestled throughout history with some of the same questions we are facing today. Moving from Origen in the second century to Lynn White, Joseph Sittler and the *Earth Charter*, Berry provides an historical framework for all of these discussions. Of particular importance is his review of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, noting how that document, critical for Roman Catholic thinking, also contains common themes for the evangelical community.

## **An urgent crisis**

Alas, creation is, in fact, in crisis—a fact that informs the *Call to Action's* second conviction: 'We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation.' It is important to understand the connection between these two affirmations: if we had fulfilled our obligations under the first conviction, we would not even have to state the second one. But we did not heed the first and, because of that, we now have to deal with the devastating consequences that are at work in the world: 'Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways.'

One of the mysteries we wrestle with is how this crisis could become so serious without anyone noticing. Those of us who work in the field of creation care or environmental science or even international development have no doubts about the urgency of the task ahead—this is one area where the more you know, the more fearful you are about the future. Many of the rest of us have blithely gone about our business, like cars on a highway driving into a fog bank at top speed, unaware or unconvinced that there are hazards ahead, and that they should have been slowing down long before.

Part 2, 'God's World,' should be read like a set of flashing warning signs on that fogbound highway. Like road workers who know what lies ahead, these authors have spent their lives studying what is happening to God's creation, and we need to heed what they have to tell us.

Climate change is not our only challenge, but it is a big one, so it is appropriate that Sir John Houghton, formerly of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, leads off this section with a summary of the basic science behind climate change headlines. This will be important reading for those new to this area. Dorothy Boorse begins where Houghton leaves off, exploring the human effects of climate change on the poor. 'As Christians, we are called to care for the poor and promote justice,' and we cannot do that without tackling the climate change problem. Getting even closer to those who are affected, Juliana Morillo Horne reports from the highlands of Peru, showing that climate change is not a future possibility but a present reality among her people. 'The high Andean populations of Cusco are telling us in a silent and long-suffering way that we are following a terrible path of creation abuse—and they challenge us, as believers, to be part of the solution rather than the problem.'

John McKeown takes a subject not often addressed directly, even in secular environmental circles: human population. The mathematics of our present mismatch between birth and death rates (at this time we have twice the number of births as deaths every year) mean that the increasing numbers of people are jeopardizing all our efforts to respond to the environmental crisis. It is a controversial discussion, but one we must have.

Robert White has a different perspective on disasters. What we often call disasters (hurricanes, floods, volcanoes, earthquakes) are in fact natural processes in God's world that are necessary and beneficial. These 'disasters' make life possible; the fact that they so often result in human tragedy is not 'God's fault': 'it is when humans interact badly with them that an otherwise beneficial natural process can turn into a disaster.'

The chapters by Martin Hodson and by Meric Srokosz and Bob Sluka discuss biodiversity loss and the crisis in 'the other 71% of God's creation,' the oceans. Hodson shows us that God's creatures are being lost at an alarming rate—and that an appropriate, God-centred view of non-human creation is needed. Srokosz and Sluka show how many biblical references there are to the seas, and also remind us that 'the ocean is . . . a shadow of its former self. Research suggests that fish are less abundant, waters polluted, ecosystems lost or changed beyond recognition; that seas of trash float around, and physical and chemical changes threaten some species' survival.'

Concluding this section, Paul Cook introduces the concept of planetary boundaries—a relatively new area of research suggesting that earth's capacity to support life can be measured in a number of specific *boundar-*

ies, and that when we violate those boundaries, we threaten the collapse of the entire system that supports us and all other living things. Cook concludes with an appeal to the church, which provides a beautiful transition to the final section: “The church is probably the world’s largest civic society organization—present in virtually every nation and every community, and having an immense impact on how people think. If the church can harness this influence to inspire people to care more for creation and to act upon this care, then the world will be a very different place.”

## The task ahead

Part 3, ‘God’s Work,’ is a reminder to us that what God wants to do in the world, he usually chooses to do through his people. Thus, *God’s work is our work*—in this case, our response both to the call to obedience in Part 1 and to the urgency of our crisis in Part 2. This section also could be viewed in the light of the specific ‘action calls,’ showing ways in which God’s people all over the world are already caring for creation creatively and practically.

We begin with East Africa and Serah Wambua’s case study of two communities and a church-driven, ‘holistic environmental stewardship model.’ Coming from a different part of the world, and very different society, David Gould examines the challenges of working in some of the world’s largest cities, showing the practical application of Richard Bauckham’s proximate and future hope concept (see Chapter 3, ‘Ecological Hope in Crisis?’).

One of the effects of environmental challenges is how groups of people can be torn apart by anger and hostility when they face the social and economic consequences caused by ecological damage. We learn of Susan Emmerich’s pioneering work in the Chesapeake Bay region of the United States to bring the reconciliation of the gospel to communities of crab fishermen who faced the loss of a way of life that had sustained them for generations. This is a beautiful example of how the reconciliation of the gospel can heal human relationships, and heal a community’s relationship with that part of creation that sustains it.

Throughout the book, you will find a number of case studies—encouraging and diverse examples of creation care in action—from Argentina to Inner Mongolia, from supporting those at risk of flooding to educating and inspiring the next generation.

## Conclusion

Ken Gnanakan as much as anyone helped to shape the original programme of the Jamaica Consultation, so it is appropriate that his thoughts

conclude the book. Ken is known as the consummate integrative thinker, and he brings us full-circle, back to the question of theology, reminding us that just as God's created world is an integrated whole, our theological framework needs to be equally integrated: 'what we need to be driving towards is not just holistic mission, but a holistic theology . . . This will lead us to becoming better stewards, caring for creation, "having tasted of the grace and mercies of God in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, and with hope in the fullness of our redemption" and serving responsibly.'

And with these words, Ken also points us to the final piece of the *Call to Action*, which is a beautiful call to prayer. The final message of that document and of this book should be that it is not enough to understand the biblical command and theological principles, or to be passionate about the urgency of our mission. It is not even enough to devote our lives, our talents and our wealth to this cause sacrificially. The task is too big for us. Rather, 'each of our calls to action rest on an even more urgent call to prayer, intentional and fervent, soberly aware that this is a spiritual struggle.' We dare not forget that the destruction and devastation we see all over God's good creation today is not only the fruit of our sin, but is also evidence of the active work of God's enemy in the world. That this enemy will ultimately be defeated, and in fact has already been defeated by Jesus on the cross, is not a reason to rest, but rather to redouble our efforts in prayer as well as in practical ways.

In the final words of the *Call to Action*, then 'having tasted of the grace and mercies of God in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, and with hope in the fullness of our redemption, we pray with confidence that the Triune God can and will heal our land and all who dwell in it, for the glory of his matchless name.'

May it be so.

# Call to Action and Exposition

We include the text of the *Jamaica Call to Action* below, followed by a theological exposition of the claim ‘creation care is . . . a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.’<sup>1</sup> This exposition was written by Jonathan Moo, Dave Bookless, and Lowell Bliss at the request of the Consultation. As well as backing up the *Call to Action*, it also acts as a summary of the theology in this book.

## Jamaica Call to Action

### Introduction

The *Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel* met from 29 Oct—2 Nov 2012 in St. Ann, Jamaica to build on the creation care components of the *Cape Town Commitment*. We were a gathering of theologians, church leaders, scientists and creation care practitioners, fifty-seven men and women from twenty-six countries from the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, Latin America, Oceania, North America and Europe. We met under the auspices of the Lausanne Movement in collaboration with the World Evangelical Alliance, hosted by a country and region of outstanding natural beauty, where we enjoyed, celebrated and reflected on the wonder of God’s good creation. Many biblical passages, including reflections on Genesis 1–3, Psalm 8 and Romans 8, informed our prayers, discussions and deliberations on the themes of God’s World, God’s Word and God’s Work. Our consultation immediately followed Hurricane Sandy’s devastation of the Caribbean and coincided with that storm’s arrival in North America; the destruction and loss of life was a startling reminder as to the urgency, timeliness and importance of this Consultation.

### Two major convictions

Our discussion, study, and prayer together led us to two primary conclusions:

Creation Care is indeed a “gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ” (CTCI.7.A). Informed and inspired by our study of the Scripture—the original intent, plan and command to care for creation, the resurrection narratives and the profound truth that in Christ all things have been reconciled to God—we reaffirm that creation care is an issue that must be included in our

response to the gospel, proclaiming and acting upon the good news of what God has done and will complete for the salvation of the world. This is not only biblically justified, but an integral part of our mission and an expression of our worship to God for his wonderful plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. Therefore, our ministry of reconciliation is a matter of great joy and hope and we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis.

We are faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation. Many of the world's poorest people, ecosystems, and species of flora and fauna are being devastated by violence against the environment in multiple ways, of which global climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, water stress, and pollution are but a part. We can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbours and the wider creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to "urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility" (CTC I.7.A).

### **Our call to action**

Based on these two convictions, we therefore call the whole church, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, to respond radically and faithfully to care for God's creation, demonstrating our belief and hope in the transforming power of Christ. We call on the Lausanne Movement, evangelical leaders, national evangelical organizations, and all local churches to respond urgently at the personal, community, national and international levels.

### **Specifically, we call for:**

1. **A new commitment to a simple lifestyle.** Recognizing that much of our crisis is due to billions of lives lived carelessly, we reaffirm the Lausanne Commitment to simple lifestyle (*Lausanne Occasional Paper 20*), and call on the global evangelical community to take steps, personally and collectively, to live within the proper boundaries of God's good gift in creation, to engage further in its restoration and conservation, and to equitably share its bounty with each other.

2. **New and robust theological work.** In particular, we need guidance in four areas:

An integrated theology of creation care that can engage seminaries, Bible colleges and others to equip pastors to disciple their congregations.

A theology that examines humanity's identity as both embedded in creation and yet possessing a special role toward creation.

A theology that challenges current prevailing economic ideologies in relation to our biblical stewardship of creation.

A theology of hope in Christ and his Second Coming that properly informs and inspires creation care.

**3. Leadership from the church in the Global South.** As the Global South represents those most affected in the current ecological crisis, it possesses a particular need to speak up, engage issues of creation care, and act upon them. We the members of the Consultation further request that the church of the Global South exercise leadership among us, helping to set the agenda for the advance of the gospel and the care of creation.

**4. Mobilization of the whole church and engagement of all of society.** Mobilization must occur at the congregational level and include those who are often overlooked, utilizing the gifts of women, children, youth, and indigenous people as well as professionals and other resource people who possess experience and expertise. Engagement must be equally widespread, including formal, urgent and creative conversations with responsible leaders in government, business, civil society, and academia.

**5. Environmental missions among unreached people groups.** We participate in Lausanne's historic call to world evangelization, and believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches among unreached and unengaged people groups in our generation (*CTC II.D.1.B*). We encourage the church to promote "environmental missions" as a new category within mission work (akin in function to medical missions).

**6. Radical action to confront climate change.** Affirming the *Cape Town Commitment's* declaration of the "serious and urgent challenge of climate change" which will "disproportionately affect those in poorer countries" (*CTC II.B.6*), we call for action in radically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and building resilient communities. We understand these actions to be an application of the command to deny ourselves, take up the cross and follow Christ.

**7. Sustainable principles in food production.** In gratitude to God who provides sustenance, and flowing from our conviction to become excellent stewards of creation, we urge the application of environmentally and generationally sustainable principles in agriculture (field crops and livestock, fisheries and all other forms of food production), with particular attention to the use of methodologies such as conservation agriculture.

**8. An economy that works in harmony with God's creation.** We call for an approach to economic well-being and development, energy production, natural resource management (including mining and forestry), water management and use, transportation, health care, rural and urban design and living, and personal and corporate consumption patterns that maintain the ecological integrity of creation.

**9. Local expressions of creation care,** which preserve and enhance biodiversity. We commend such projects, along with any action that might

be characterized as the “small step” or the “symbolic act,” to the worldwide church as ways to powerfully witness to Christ’s Lordship over all creation.

**10. Prophetic advocacy and healing reconciliation.** We call for individual Christians and the church as a whole to prophetically “speak the truth to power” through advocacy and legal action so that public policies and private practice may change to better promote the care of creation and better support devastated communities and habitats. Additionally, we call on the church to “speak the peace of Christ” into communities torn apart by environmental disputes, mobilizing those who are skilled at conflict resolution, and maintaining our own convictions with humility.

### **Our call to prayer**

Each of our calls to action rest on an even more urgent call to prayer, intentional and fervent, soberly aware that this is a spiritual struggle. Many of us must begin our praying with lamentation and repentance for our failure to care for creation, and for our failure to lead in transformation at a personal and corporate level. And then, having tasted of the grace and mercies of God in Christ Jesus and through the Holy Spirit, and with hope in the fullness of our redemption, we pray with confidence that the Triune God can and will heal our land and all who dwell in it, for the glory of his matchless name.

We, the participants of the 2012 Jamaica Creation Care Consultation, invite Christians and Christian organizations everywhere to signify your agreement with and commitment to this Call to Action by signing this document *as an individual or on behalf of your organization, institution or other church body*. Individuals may sign by going to <http://www.lausanne.org/creationcare> and following the directions given to add their names. Organizational signatories should send a letter or email signed by their leader, board chair, or authorized representative to [creationcare@lausanne.org](mailto:creationcare@lausanne.org) (Questions about this procedure may be sent to the same address.)

Agreed together by the participants of the Lausanne Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, St. Ann, Jamaica, 9 November 2012.<sup>2</sup>

## **Exposition**

The first major conclusion of the Global Consultation reaffirms one of the key claims of the *Cape Town Commitment*—that ‘Creation care is . . . a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ’ (CTC 1–7-A). In the following exposition, we aim to explain briefly the theology underlying this conviction.

The gospel message may take many forms across cultures and circumstances, but the gospel itself is located in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that creation care is included in the gospel because the gospel is the gospel of Jesus, whom the *Cape Town Commitment* calls ‘the creator, owner, sustainer, redeemer and heir of all creation’ (CTC II-B-6). On behalf of the participants of the Global Consultation on Creation Care and the Gospel, we propose the following explanation for creation care being a ‘gospel issue.’

## The gospel is the gospel of Jesus, the creator and Lord

‘The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him’ (Col 1:15–16). We affirm that creation is good, and that creation exists firstly for God in Christ (Ps 24:1), and is only ours to enjoy, to care for, and to rule within under the Lordship of Christ, its true owner and sustainer. The Lordship of Christ is also the context for creation care in the *Cape Town Commitment*: ‘If Jesus is Lord of all the Earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the Earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says “Jesus is Lord” is to proclaim the gospel that includes the Earth, since Christ’s Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ’ (CTC I-7-A-24).

## The gospel of Jesus addresses the problem of evil and sin

The effects of sin and evil have caused incalculable misery for humanity and led to the groaning of God’s creation (Rom 8; CTC 1-8-A). In many cases, creation’s suffering is caused directly by human evil and injustice. There are sins which should rightly be called *environmental sins*, because they are sins against our stewardship of the earth, violations of love for our creator and our neighbours. We call upon Christians to join with us in repentance for our carelessness, greed, and selfishness that contribute to the destruction of the earth and are rightly deserving of God’s judgement (Rev 11:18).

## The gospel is the gospel of the incarnate Christ Jesus

‘In Jesus, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, God took our human flesh and lived among us, fully God and fully human’ (CTC I-4-1). The incarnation of God’s only Son provides an affirmation of the value of this material creation to God, and a challenge to any dualism

that would denigrate material creation, since God in human flesh reveals what it is to be truly human.

## The gospel is the gospel of Jesus, who inaugurates the kingdom of God

Jesus brings in the restored rule of God over his creation as its king. In proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus announces that his *gospel* (good news) is for the poor (Luke 4). Within the kingdom of God, preferential treatment is due to the poor. In today's world, the poor more than any suffer the consequences of resource depletion, deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, and, as the *Cape Town Commitment* affirms, 'Probably the most serious and urgent challenge faced by the physical world now is the threat of climate change' (CTC II-II-5). Issues of environmental degradation and issues of social justice cannot be separated. Neither do we believe one can separate Christ's love and his justice. And so we pray, 'for God's kingdom to come, that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven, in the establishment of justice, the stewardship and care of creation, and the blessing of God's peace in our communities' (CTC II-D-6-4).

## The gospel is the gospel of Jesus, the saviour

'In his death on the cross, Jesus took our sin upon himself in our place, bearing its full cost, penalty and shame, defeated death and the powers of evil, and accomplished the reconciliation and redemption of all creation' (CTC I-4-4). The gospel of Jesus is good news both for humanity and for the whole of creation, because creation is set free from its bondage to decay and shares in the glory of the freedom of God's children (Rom 8). 'The Bible declares God's redemptive purpose for *creation* itself, bringing hope for the earth that is rooted in God's grace rather than dependent on human activity (CTC I-7-A).

## The gospel is the gospel of Jesus, the risen and ascended one

The resurrection of Christ is proof that Jesus came to redeem us as whole persons including our physical bodies, and is also the key to understanding the continuity and discontinuity that applies to the relationship between this creation and the new heavens and new earth. 'In his bodily resurrection, Jesus was vindicated and exalted by God, completed and demonstrated the full victory of the cross, and became the forerunner of redeemed humanity and restored creation' (CTC I-4-5).

## The gospel is the gospel of Jesus, who is coming again

Jesus is reigning as Lord over history and creation, and will come again, restoring all things, and we will dwell with him, not in some disembodied existence, but in an imperishable new creation. Hope in the restoration of all things in and through Christ Jesus is one of the most important, and distinctly Christian, contributions that the church can give to environmental movements. This ultimate hope sheds light back into our current context, so often characterized by disappointment, apathy and despair, and sustains us in perseverance and faithful action.

## The gospel of Jesus drives us to mission

The Great Commission tells us that making disciples of all nations includes teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded. The summary that Jesus himself offers of the Law and the Prophets is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbour as ourselves. It is abundantly clear today that we cannot love and care for our neighbours without caring for the creation of which they and we are a part. If we love God, we will value what he values, which, as the whole of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation reveal to us, includes his entire good creation. Christ also shows us what it is to rule as God's 'image bearers' within creation (Heb 2 and Col 3). He did not grasp what was his, but humbled himself as a servant (Phil 2), revealing in his life and death the sacrificial rule on behalf of others to which we too are called. We have discovered that creation care is a *ministry of reconciliation*, requiring not only the restoration of right relationships between God and humanity, but also between each other, and between us and the rest of creation. 'Integral mission means discerning, proclaiming, and living out, the biblical truth that the gospel is God's good news, through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, for individual persons, *and* for society, *and* for creation. All three are broken and suffering because of sin; all three are included in the redeeming love and mission of God; all three must be part of the comprehensive mission of God's people' (CTC I-7-A).

In addition to these theological convictions, we offer the following observations about the place of creation care within the Lausanne Movement:

- Creation care has a home in the Lausanne Movement, which is historically a movement of *world evangelization*. The first direct mention of creation care is in fact in the *Manila Manifesto* (A-1).<sup>3</sup>
- Creation care has a home in the *whole gospel* framework of the Lausanne Movement—what the *Cape Town Commitment* calls 'integral mission' (CTC I-10-B).

- Creation care has a home in Lausanne's historic call to make disciples among all peoples, especially among the least-reached. In fact, we believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and to plant churches among least-reached people groups in our generation. We encourage the church to promote *environmental missions* as a new category within mission work (akin in function to medical missions). We pursue this, not only for its intrinsic value, but also because of the opportunity it provides for gospel proclamation.
- The Lausanne Creation Care Consultation wholeheartedly affirms the centrality of evangelism and disciple-making. Along with other Lausanne Consultations, 'we are united by our experience of the grace of God in the gospel and by our motivation to make that gospel of grace known to the ends of the earth by every possible means' (CTC I-8).
- We have discovered that we could not talk about creation care without also talking about many other worthy topics concerned with the gospel and mission. We ask all others involved in Christian mission in its many forms, in turn, to consider seriously how the backdrop of ecological crisis affects the fulfilment of their particular callings in Christ Jesus.

In summary, we join with all the Lausanne Movement in declaring, 'we share God's passion for his world, loving all that God has made, rejoicing in God's providence and justice throughout his creation, proclaiming the good news [gospel] to all creation and all nations, and longing for the day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea' (CTC I-7).

## **PART 1—GOD’S WORD**

## CHAPTER 1

# Ruling God's World God's Way: Dominion in Psalm 8

Edward R Brown

'Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?'

*St Augustine of Hippo, City of God Book 16*

Anyone who wants to explore creation care or the environmental crisis will have to come to grips with the fundamental question of where we human beings fit in the overall scheme of things. Are we just one of many thousands of species who happen to have hit an evolutionary jackpot in intelligence, with no more *rights* than any other creature? Or are we divinely appointed dictators, having ability and divine right to determine the fate of anything that is not us? Or something in between? It is a question that cannot be avoided. We human beings are the single biggest force in nature at this time in history, and our own future depends, humanly speaking at least, on how we answer this question.

So who and what are we? From a biblical perspective, we find ourselves immediately wrestling with *dominion*—the concept that God has given us authority over the rest of his world. Dominion suggests that we have the right, the power—and, with that, the ability—to *rule over* God's creation.

Man's supremacy over creation is explicitly seen in Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 8—but it is woven throughout Scripture. For example, God's covenant with Noah ('The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth,' Gen 9:2 ESV) and Psalm 115:16 ('The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man' ESV).

Dominion can be and has been the excuse for all kinds of selfishness, arrogance, and general abuse of God's world. Scholar Lynn White famously suggested that Christianity itself is to blame for the modern environmental

crisis. Disturbingly, a number of Christians have inadvertently given Lynn White's conclusion support by using dominion as an excuse for their own environmental exploitation and neglect. I am not the only creation care teacher who has had people confront me with 'but the Bible says we can do whatever we want with the world, doesn't it?'

For all these reasons, dominion makes some of us uncomfortable. Given a choice, we would prefer to promote *stewardship* rather than defend such an apparently pernicious doctrine. Genesis 2:15 ('The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it' ESV) feels like a nicer, dare I say, a *greener* concept. Genesis 1 seems to open the door to rulership and seems to sanction actual abuse of creation—but Genesis 2 suggests cooperation, cultivation, and stewardship. Given a choice between them, most would rather build a case for creation care on the latter.

## The solution, not the problem

A misunderstanding of dominion is dangerous; understanding it properly is actually the key to figuring out where we as human beings fit in God's creation and how we can correct our many missteps. The authority and power of dominion in Genesis 1 does not contradict the stewardship of Genesis 2; in fact, it is necessary to it.

Another passage that explores dominion is Psalm 8. This poem's affirmation of human dominion over creation is unavoidable: God has given human beings authority over all of his creation. However, the implications of that message may be different from what we were expecting.

Here is the psalm as a whole:

O LORD, our Lord,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
 You have set your glory  
 above the heavens.  
 Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
 you have established strength because of your foes,  
 to still the enemy and the avenger.  
 When I look at 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,  
 and the son of man that you care for him?  
 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
 and crowned him with glory and honour.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
 you have put all things under his feet,  
 all sheep and oxen,  
 and also the beasts of the field,  
 the birds of the heavens,  
 and the fish of the sea,  
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
 O LORD, our Lord,  
 how majestic is your name in all the earth! (ESV)

## Divine bookends

The missing pieces of the dominion puzzle are at the beginning and end of the poem—an identical pair of bookends, framing the rest of the psalm:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (ESV)

Our poet says a great deal about human beings in the middle, but we can only go there after we understand that he begins and ends with God. More specifically, he begins and ends with *God's name*.

One can miss the significance of the phrase 'O LORD, our Lord' in English. If reading in French or many other languages, you can more easily get the true meaning. In English the repetition of 'Lord' sounds like poetic repetition, but it is not. There are actually two Hebrew words in play here. The first, capitalised, LORD translates the Hebrew *YHWH* or *Yahweh*, the name God gives to himself in the burning bush encounter with Moses (Exod 3:15):

God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The LORD [Yahweh], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.' (ESV)

There is much theology wrapped up in this name. But what is important for us to note here is the simple, astounding fact that God wants Moses, and later David and all of his people, to know his name—and, knowing it, to proclaim it in various ways.

The second occurrence of 'Lord' translates the Hebrew word *Adonai*. This is a functional term, a job title. It can be used for anyone who has authority or control over someone else—a master over his slaves; a foreman on a construction crew. David is acknowledging that his God, Yahweh, is in a position of authority over him.

Thus the beginning and end of Psalm 8 affirm God's control and sovereignty over us, his people. It could be paraphrased like this:

O Yahweh, you who are our absolute master and sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

These bookends are critical to how we read the rest of the psalm: the central message of Psalm 8 may be that God has given human beings authority over his creation, but its message begins and ends with God's authority over us. Whatever human dominion over creation may turn out to mean, it is bookended—limited, constrained, guided, confined—by God's dominion over us.

## A cosmic golden rule

We can go further here. Our dominion is *constrained* by God's authority over us. Therefore, the way we exercise dominion should be guided by the way God exercises his authority over us. We should rule creation as God rules us. We might also consider whether we should rule creation the way God rules creation. In fact, there are some excellent examples of efforts to do just that, as in the Africa-based Farming God's Way program, which my own organization promotes in Kenya and Tanzania (see Chapter 5, 'Creation Care and the Great Commission').

For our purposes, however, the point of interest here in Psalm 8 is the parallel between God's sovereignty over us and our dominion over creation. God's sovereignty is marked by mercy and compassion and love. Our dominion should mirror God's—our dominion should be modeled on his sovereignty. When God exercises his dominion over us, he does so not harshly, vindictively or arbitrarily, but with a goal-driven purpose that rises out of his love for us:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

God rules us in love, always seeking our best. And we should—no, we *must*—do the same in our care of God's creation. As stewards, we must seek his goals for his creation, not our own. We can best do that by looking at the goals God has as he cares for us. We can think of it like a creation-wide version of the golden rule: not just that we should 'do unto others as we want them to do unto us' but that we should care for all of creation as we would want God to care for us—which, in fact, is exactly how he does care for us.

This line of reasoning is actually reinforced by the Christological aspects of Psalm 8. The writer of Hebrews, for example, uses Psalm 8:4–6 in his own argument that Jesus has been given supreme authority over the entire cosmos: 'Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing

ing outside his control' (Heb 2:8 ESV). Jesus, having that supreme authority, used it not for his own purposes but chose instead to go to the cross:

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:9 ESV)

Jesus, exercising his supreme authority by giving himself up to death, is thereby both our saviour, having died for our sins, and our model for how we can and should exercise our own authority in creation.

Two things follow from this discussion.

First, an observation—God's care for us is marked by tenderness, compassion, mercy, and ultimately sacrifice. He is a loving father, a gentle guide, a forgiving saviour. His approach to us is that of the shepherd who searches long for a lost sheep and brings it home rejoicing (Luke 15:3–7). It is that of the lost son's father, waiting by the gate daily to welcome us home (Luke 15:11–32). God's care for us is, in almost every case, the opposite of how we act toward his creation. God gives; we take. God seeks our best, and those God cares for blossom and flourish under his care; we, by contrast, seek from creation what is best for ourselves, while creation withers and dies under our hands. This is not godly dominion.

Second, a question—if we were to apply this principle as a test, how much of the present human enterprise (society, economy, business, government, and everything else) would pass that test? We have a society built on an economic system fuelled by greed, where benefits accrue to those who destroy God's creation more than to those who seek to preserve it. How much of what we do as human beings comes even close to meeting such a standard? If we are honest, not very much.

## What God wants us to want

God's sovereignty over us is goal-driven and guided by his love for us. How can we follow that model with regard to our dominion over creation? We might start by trying to understand what God's goals for us are—we could then translate his goals for *us* into goals for his creation. One place to look is the prayer known as the Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus taught his disciples how to pray. The disciples want to know how to pray, and so they ask Jesus to show them. 'Pray then like this', Jesus says:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts,  
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation,  
 but deliver us from evil. (Matt 6:9–13 ESV)

Keep in mind that Jesus *is* God. In his dictation of this prayer, we have God telling us what we should ask God for. It is a list of what God wants us to want, a summary of God's goals and desires for us.

Some time ago, I was living as a foreigner in Pakistan and I needed an extension to my visa. Granting the extension required the authorities to make an exception for me, something that would not normally be approved. I went to discuss my case with the officer in charge of visa applications. We had a good relationship and he was considerate and sympathetic; he wanted to help me, but he also had rules he had to follow. He explained what I needed to do—in detail—to get my case approved: I needed to write a covering letter explaining why I should be granted this exception. This should be addressed to him as he was the one who would approve it. And then he told me exactly what I should say in the letter I was going to write to him.

The officer who *would* approve my request was telling me how to state my case so that he *could* approve it. I wrote the letter, exactly as I had been told—and my visa was granted. That is what is happening in the Lord's Prayer: God wants to answer prayers which conform to his own goals for us—and he is telling us what to ask for and how to ask, so he can give us our requests.

Based on this prayer, what are God's goals for us? What does God want *for* us and *from* us?

First, *God wants us to know him and to proclaim his name*: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.' God wants his name to be revered, respected, known, proclaimed. God wants to be known as God. This is a knowing that is more than simply acknowledging that God exists. Proclaiming God's name in this way implies having a relationship with him, which is, of course, implied in the term 'Father' and is the greatest benefit any of us can have in life. Recognizing the 'hallowedness' of God's name takes us a step further. This God whose name we proclaim is worthy of worship and praise, for he is not only Father, but also king. This leads us to the next phrase:

*God wants his kingdom to be established*: 'Your kingdom come, your will be done.' The parallel phrasing is important. God's kingdom 'comes' when his will is done. What is reality in heaven is God's goal for us on earth. He desires that we desire for his will to be done. This is the essence of God's kingdom—a life and a society that operates according to what we might call *kingdom values*.

And finally, *God wants to provide for people*: 'Give us this day our daily bread . . . forgive us our debts . . . lead us not into temptation.' God wants

us to be fed, clothed, forgiven—all of the things we normally have on our minds when we think about praying. We would do well, however, to note that this goal comes last in the sequence of requests. The order is important. God desires that we have a relationship with him; that our lives separately and together conform to the values that mark his kingdom; and then that our needs are met.

Looking again at Psalm 8, a close reading shows the same three principles at work.

In verses 1 and 9 (the bookends we looked at earlier), we see *God's name being proclaimed*: 'how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens' (ESV). This is a statement of fact about God's name in creation, that the name is already being proclaimed, even above the heavens, rather than a prayer that God's name would be proclaimed, as in the Lord's Prayer. Even so, the argument remains the same: God is proclaiming his name throughout creation and, by implication, wants us to proclaim it, too.

In verse 2, God's enemies, those who would oppose his rule or his kingdom, will be defeated: 'Out of the mouths of babies and infants, you have established strength . . . to still the enemy and the avenger' (ESV). The corollary of enemies being defeated is that *his kingdom will be established*.

And in verses 3–8, we see how *God is providing for us, his people*: he has created us 'a little lower than the heavenly beings', 'crowned (us) with glory and honour' and 'put all things under (our) feet' (ESV).

These three goals—name, kingdom, people—offer us a framework on which to build a dominion based on God's goals for us and his creation, rather than on our own goals for ourselves.

*Proclaiming God's name* has implications for how we practise our faith. Evangelism, worship, prayer all have to do with proclaiming God's name. But God reveals himself through creation as well as through the Bible, and there are implications for how we care for creation.

*Establishing God's kingdom* follows directly from proclaiming his name: God's kingdom is established where his influence—his values—are visible and operative. Establishing God's kingdom means creating a society that is based on what we have already called *kingdom values*. Today's social justice movement fits into this category, and it is wise to remember that no matter how much we want God's kingdom, we cannot achieve it without God himself. We proclaim his name; *then* we can establish his kingdom.

*Providing for people* is, humanly speaking at least, where we want to end up, in a world in which our needs are taken care of. It is not selfish to admit this—after all, Jesus himself told us we could bring our (self-interested) needs to him in prayer. But we would do well to remember that he also told us to 'seek first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things will be added

to you' (Matt 6:33 ESV). If God's name is proclaimed, if his kingdom is established, it will follow quite naturally that people will be provided for.

Each of these deserves much more attention than these brief paragraphs allow. Here our focus is on proclaiming God's name through caring for his creation.

## Proclamation on two channels

One of the great themes of history as seen through the perspective of the Bible is that God has been, from day one, proclaiming his name. While this proclamation is self-evident through Scripture, it is also true with regard to his creation:

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.  
Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world. (Ps 19:1–4 ESV)

The phrasing of this passage, with creation itself doing the proclaiming, does not contradict our premise that it is God who is actively proclaiming his name through nature. We might think of creation as a loudspeaker, which is transforming electrical impulses into sound waves so an audience can hear a speech. The speaker system produces the sound, but the content comes from the person behind the microphone. In this psalm, all creation transmits the message of God's glory and his name, as we read it in Psalm 8—but God himself is the source of that message.

Using the loudspeaker analogy to explore a further dimension of this proclamation-through-creation process, imagine the speakers in a television set. This device gives us information on two synchronized channels: audio and video. Both of these channels carry information; both are telling the same story. As the image of a person's lips move on the screen, the voice comes through the speakers. Each gives us part of the story; only when they function together do we get a complete experience and better understanding.

Say the audio channel is equivalent to God's written word, the Bible. The video screen is analogous to God's created word. Both are faithfully proclaiming God's name and glory, and together they give us a more complete understanding of God than either would alone. This is beautifully illustrated in Psalm 19, where we see God using both of these channels to proclaim his name. In the first part (19:1–6), creation is doing the talking;

in the second half (19:7–14), God's Law (Torah) or the Bible is the means by which God speaks:

The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the LORD are right,  
rejoicing the heart. (Ps 19:7–8 ESV)

Two channels, creation and Scripture, the world and the word, join in one psalm. The two are not equivalent—Scripture contains more explicit content about God than creation does—but both are essential to a complete experience of God's proclamation. This is confirmed in Paul's appeal to creation as a source of revelation in Romans 1:

For what can be known about God is plain to them [*ie* sinful mankind], because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Rom 1:19–20 ESV)

If God uses two channels to proclaim his name, who are we to prefer just one? Our proclamation of his name solely with the written word does not fulfil what the written word itself declares.

## Biospherical proclamation

What does proclaiming his name through the world mean? What does it look like?

I would like to introduce a new term—*biospherical proclamation*—the proclamation of God's name through the care and nurturing of his creation, particularly the biosphere (the term used by biologists and ecologists to refer to the world of living creatures). Though there is plenty of wonder and beauty in the non-living world, it is the world of DNA-based life that is of particular interest to these scientists—and to us as well.

If verbal proclamation is the communication of God's name by use of human language, biospherical proclamation is the communication of that name through the vocabulary of the created world, and in particular the *living* created world. Where that world flourishes, God's name is loudly proclaimed. Where it suffers or declines, the sound of God's name fades. All gardeners are proclaimers of God's name, whether or not they recognize it. Every person walking in a forest is immersed in a flood of praise and worship that no human choir can hope to equal.

Seen in this light, the oft-repeated idea that God wants us to *tend the garden* becomes far more than a horticultural task. It is part of our worship, our discipleship, even our evangelism. Biospherical proclamation requires the preservation and flourishing of creation as a central part of the proclamation task, and makes creation care a task for God's people that is a key part of the gospel itself.

## **We don't know our own strength**

Through most of history, proclaiming God's name in creation was a passive concept. It required no effort. Creation was just there, and the creator's name flowed from every corner. It was written across the skies for all to see (Psalms 8 and 19), and was evident in every tree and flower and the great beasts described in the latter chapters of the book of Job. The idea that struggling humanity could wipe out portions of God's creation would have been ludicrous.

Not so today. The stars are still there, but we have to make an effort to see them. (Could David, our psalmist, have even imagined human structures so bright and air so foul that the stars themselves would disappear?) Many of us are not often outside at night anyway, and, when we are, streetlights and shopping malls often obscure our vision. There are still mountains and sunsets, but many of us spend our days in cocoons of artificial light and artificial air, staring at computer screens. When we do glimpse nature, even in worship, it is probably in the form of electronic pixels. When we venture outside and open our eyes, we more often see smog and streetlights than the splendour of God's name splashed across the heavens.

And worse, we are actively destroying large parts of that revelation. Rather than proclaiming God's name in the biosphere, we are busy erasing it. Fields become parking lots. Mountains are reduced to rubble to get at the coal underneath them. Coral reefs are bleached and dying. The list of endangered and extinct species, every one of which proclaims God's name, grows longer and longer.

Can we really say that we are proclaiming God's name in creation when the things we build and the way we live diminish and destroy it?

## **Why this matters**

We started with the doctrine of *dominion*, arguing that it is a biblical concept, but that, to be legitimate, it must be modeled on God's dominion over us. Our goals for God's creation should mirror God's goals for our

part in it. And one of God's goals is that his name should be proclaimed in his creation.

Does our current practice of dominion enhance God's proclamation of his name? In a word: no. Measured in this way, human dominion over creation is an abysmal failure, as is demonstrated throughout this book. This failure is not an accident nor due to incompetence. It is because of disobedience, and an indictment against us.

Our failure to obey is not something hypothetical or theoretical—it has important, immediate consequences. God's world was created to operate in harmony with God's purposes. When we ignore those purposes, we can expect to have big problems.

We have economies that do not work; paralyzed political systems; environmental nightmares; corruption and crime on every level in all of our countries. Should we be surprised at what they cause? It is surely what we should expect from a world built around the pursuit of our own goals rather than God's. All of humanity's problems today—political, economic, societal and environmental—are due to human failure to choose God's goals.

We *ought* to proclaim God's name because he wants us to. More, we *must* do this, if we are to survive and flourish in God's creation. This is apparent in the *Call to Action* which leads with two convictions: (i) 'Creation Care is indeed a "gospel issue"' and 'we would care for creation even if it were not in crisis', and (ii) we are 'faced with a crisis that is pressing, urgent, and that must be resolved in our generation'.

These two convictions are linked theologically and scientifically. If we had heeded the first, we would not be in our current situation. This linkage may point to a new kind of approach. Perhaps we should not focus on 'solving' the environmental crisis as such; rather, we should commit ourselves to proclaiming God's name verbally, through prayer, worship and evangelism; and biospherically, by working toward a flourishing biosphere with all the tools that science can give us. That would fulfil what the environmental scientists, ecologists and climatologists all urge be done: we will be rebuilding the biological foundation which humanity must have to flourish.

It is almost as if that verse from Matthew's gospel were coming true: 'seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you' (Matt 6:33 ESV).