

Mother Earth or Father God? A Christian Response to Secular Environmentalism

By adminlen On January 22, 2013 · Add Comment

Foundations: The Adamic Covenant

Besides the New Covenant, no historic, biblical covenant has more importance for our faith than does the covenant God made with Adam (recorded in Genesis 1-3). God's dealings with Adam had eternal implications for the destiny of Adam's progeny. Here we find the pattern set for the administration of God's grace through all time and eternity future. It may seem strange to begin our discussion of a Christian ecology with a little covenant theology, but I think you will see that it really is the only place to properly begin.

[Genesis 1:26](#) reads, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (ESV) See also [Genesis 2:15-16, 18](#).

Second, God instructs Adam to subdue the earth through what is usually called the "creation mandate" found in [Genesis 1:28-30](#) and [2:18-24](#). This facet of the covenant establishes the pattern that God expects man to act authoritatively in the creation as God's agent for good, and is the foundation of a Christian ecological perspective.

Enter Mother Earth

Sadly, Adam abused his leadership and that sin affected every relationship he had. Even his wife, though still a helper fit for him, began the shift to being an adversary (or, at least, a fit helper not fulfilling her role). I don't think it is any accident that a world that doesn't want to acknowledge the authority of the Father goes looking for a substitute in the more tender (as it seems) arms of a mother. Let's look a little at the history of "Mother Earth." We'll start with a useful summary of various articles on the subject found on wikipedia.com (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Nature):

Mother Nature is a common anthropomorphized representation of nature that focuses on the life-giving and nurturing features of nature by embodying it in the form of the mother. Images of women representing mother earth, and mother nature, are timeless. In prehistoric times, goddesses were worshipped for their association with fertility, fecundity, and agricultural bounty. ... Priestesses have held dominion over aspects of religions for millennia on every continent. ... Algonquin legend says that "beneath the clouds lives the Earth-Mother from whom is derived the Water of Life, who at her bosom feeds plants, animals and men" (Larousse 428). The word "nature" comes from the Latin word, *natura*, meaning birth or character. In English its first recorded use, in the sense of the entirety of the phenomena of the world, was very late in history in 1662; however *natura*, and the personification of Mother Nature, was widely popular in the Middle Ages and can be traced to Ancient Greece in origin.

In short, “in ancient and modern non-literate religions, Mother Earth is an eternally fruitful source of everything” (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9031727/Earth-Mother>). Nothing is seen as separate from her. All things supposedly come from her, return to her, and are bound together by her. Sounds a lot like the description of Christ in [Colossians 1:17](#), doesn't it?

When Mankind Reverses God's Order of Things

I would be delighted to tell you that such thinking is the stuff of legend and the grist of long dead religions, but such is not the case. [Romans 1:21-23](#) is still a true statement: “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” Outright worship of Mother Earth (“Pachamama”) continues in the remnants of the old Inca religions in the countries that straddle the Andes mountains. Wiccan practitioners continue the tradition of witchcraft seeking to tie in to the earth's alleged mystical and intrinsic powers. Many native peoples continue their worship of the creation in various ways, some doing so for cultural preservation, others out of absolute faith that these things are so, still others for material gains through tourist dollars or land acquisition/reclamation. More subtle worship continues in the near deification of the earth by environmentalists, political leaders, ecological activists, scientists, and others, who all pursue their agendas for varying individual, political, and social purposes. Filmmakers present the assumption of a mother earth and mystical power in creation as fact, basing entertainment for the masses upon such assumptions. It makes for great storytelling, but for many viewers the line between fact and fiction has long been obscured. Some believers are well-meaning, others opportunistic, all sadly missing the point.

According to the prevailing “wisdom,” any or all of the following are not only looming over us threatening to utterly destroy us, but they also are all man's fault!

- Global warming (or, as it was claimed a generation ago, the next ice age!)
- Loss of rain forest acreage (causing global warming, above)
- The extinction of animal species (humanity, for some, is the only creature earth worshippers wouldn't mind seeing go extinct)
- Massive earthquakes (while talking with one fork of the tongue about the millions of years it took for the earth's supercontinent to break up and drift into its current positions, they talk with the other fork about the need to make huge changes politically and socially *now* before the earth is sent into oblivion in the next generation or two, blaming the shifting of the earth's crust on all of our drilling for fossil fuels, warheads, global warming – so much for uniformitarianism! I guess that a cataclysmic view of history isn't so far-fetched after all.)
- Depletion of the ozone layer (haven't heard that one lately, as it lost its selling power when all the dire predictions didn't take place),
- Air pollution (not fun, but the earth recovers nicely given time.)
- Ground water pollution (ever watched a herd of cows getting a drink?)
- Radiation from nuclear power (the sun's rays are far more destructive)
- An asteroid impact (not sure how, but we're to blame for this, too, maybe just because we deserve it for being so cruel to the rest of creation)

The astonishing thing is that these same people also believe in the religion of evolution and uniformitarianism, yet somehow manage to suspend that belief when it comes to what man is able to do in a shorter amount of time. What makes this even more ridiculous is that these same people are the ones who look to the earth as the mother and healer of everything, the object they consciously or unconsciously revere, and yet is somehow inexplicably helpless in the face of man's activities. Man, then, is the ultimate god over creation. [Romans 8:1-23](#) makes it plain that man's

misplaced devotion has had disastrous consequences upon the environment in which many people live. Verses 19-22 read,

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Error never gets very far unless there is an element of truth in it, and so we need to face up to man's guilt in failing to live up to our covenantal responsibilities. "Smog," especially in urban areas, can make breathing difficult and seeing into the distance impossible. There are many causes of air pollution, though; some are man-made, some naturally occur. (Trees are the worst culprits!) Irresponsible mining techniques during the gold rush days denuded entire hillsides of forest in central California, altering watersheds and destroying habitat for wildlife. The mining companies of the day did not usually give any thought to their actions beyond what they could take from the land. Today, the forests have returned and recovered the landscape for the most part, and the land is beautiful again. Still, such practices as strip mining are controversial for the scars they can leave on the land. Nuclear waste can be mishandled and improperly stored or buried, and neighborhoods built on top of the landfills. Sickness and birth defects abound in such areas for years to come. Heavy use of DDT as an herbicide, and other chemicals used as pesticides can certainly taint a water supply if mishandled. However, since the banning of many such substances, the growth of the insect population (and with it, the multiplication and distribution of life-threatening disease) has been staggering. The old logging practice of stripping a piece of land completely of every stick that was growing made the vast old-growth forests of yesterday a memory and caused a lot of problems for habitat, land management, more frequent fires, etc., in the world's forests. However, many of those problems have now been corrected, and man is learning that he doesn't know everything there is to know about forest management yet. The raging wildfires in Yellowstone National Park a number of years ago are a typical example of how man's brilliant ideas of fire suppression were really a huge mistake. Fires are a part of God's design for keeping forests clean and healthy. But nobody likes to see a burned-over landscape, or an apparently lifeless dirt hill, and so we are faced with a dilemma: how do we properly care for the earth?

Options

I see the following general options facing us as human beings:

1. Return to a purely agrarian lifestyle, minimizing cities and industry as much and as quickly as possible. The push for the United Nations' Agenda 21 initiative in recent years is the embodiment of this thinking. Be vegetarians as a matter of "ethical" principle, limit human reproduction, let "natural" forces take the world wherever it wants to and adjust as necessary. No religion (except, of course, worshipping the earth itself and its "gods" or "force"), no government, no "society," no interference in the natural order. Only existence with as light a footprint as possible so that those coming after us (not many, due to limiting reproduction) will not even know we were here.

Problems: take a look at any agrarian society *anywhere*, and it doesn't take long to see that (1) the impact upon the whole land is much greater, as erosion-preventing vegetation disappears under the plow (perhaps you remember reading about the "dust bowl" of the 1930s in the American Midwest)(2) disease is more prevalent and life expectancy is shorter (evolutionists call this "natural selection" and are not concerned about it – or shouldn't be if they are consistent); (3) ground water pollution can be just as great or greater than in mixed economies; (4) famine and water shortages are much more devastating to all living things than in mixed economies; (5) population explosion of other animal species, natural selection or not, leads to less healthy populations overall; and (6) does not prevent the wickedness of human hearts from abusing others and the land anyway.

2. Allow government (preferably, world government) absolute control of all means of food production, human population growth, industry, and land management. Did I mention Agenda 21? This is also part of the world governance plan. No private property, no opportunity for individuals to gain any advantage or wealth over another (except for the government officials who run the whole show). Universal controls to prevent abuses of the land and use all for the “good” of the state.

Problems: the worst polluters in the history of mankind have been governments, especially godless Marxist states. Such is still the case, as China amply demonstrates. This doesn't work, for so many reasons. Governments don't know how to manage natural disasters in prevention, prediction, or preparation (think of the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, or Hurricane Katrina in the United States). Governments can't control population growth (again, China is a prime example), especially in any ethical way. Some governments, like Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, Mao Tse-Tung's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Hussein's Iraq, the Russians invading eastern Poland, not to mention legalized abortion in countries around the world, have tried to eliminate competing populations, but have to do so through murder and unimaginable destruction. There is no remedy in civil government guided only by its own principles. Governments, as George Washington once said, are dangerous servants, and fearful masters. To make their negative impact smaller, we must make government smaller, not larger.

3. Covenantal faithfulness to the terms of Adamic covenant, with all of the implications of that covenant for government and civilian life, is the third option. Let's turn our thinking again to the covenant made with Adam and pay a little more attention to the terms of the covenant, especially as they impact the question of how we are care for the earth God has given his creatures in which to live.

A Christian Ecology

Adam was given specific duties to fulfill as he demonstrated his faith in his Creator. First, he was responsible to “fill the earth” with offspring ([Genesis 1:28](#); compare 9:1-7). “Fill” means to *fill up* or *satisfy* (compare 2:5) the earth. God's command stands in stark contrast to the world's current depopulation trends of birth control, abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and homosexuality. Instead of being “satisfied,” the earth groans under man's rebellion ([Romans 8:19-22](#)).

Second, Adam and his progeny were to rule the earth as God's image ([Genesis 1:26-28](#); [2:15](#)). The word “image” means a *representative* or *likeness* (compare 9:6), and has nothing to do with physical appearance. Paul uses the term *ambassador* in 1 Corinthians 5 to describe the relationship between God and His minister, and the analogy is appropriate in Eden as well. Adam was to fulfill his ambassadorship in two ways: “subdue” and “work” the earth.

The word “subdue” (1:28; 2:19, 20) literally means to *tread upon*, but its usual connotation is to *impose rule upon*. This means that Man, as God's representative, is to know his Master's mind concerning what the flora and fauna should be producing and take steps to ensure that the Master's will is carried out. Man is to act as the divinely appointed authority in the earth. He is not to allow nature itself to dictate a course of action. The role of science is not to seek to erect another god in Yahweh's place (man's reason), but to seek out what Yahweh has done so that we can more fully glorify and praise him and be better stewards of the “garden” we have been commissioned to tend. A simple example of what I mean by stewardship is the practice of crop rotation. Once it was realized that planting the same crop on the same field season after season depleted the land of its nutrients, the very sensible practice of rotating carefully planned crops which would replenish the land was begun. Another example is thinking about how a building project will impact the flora and fauna in the midst of which it will sit, and trying to make it complementary to the surrounding environment. Doing so is good stewardship.

Adam was also commanded to work or cultivate the earth in [Genesis 2:5, 15](#). “Work” comes from the Hebrew for *serve*, which puts a check upon man’s methods of subjugation. Authority does not equal license; mankind is to view himself as God’s servant laboring for the benefit of creation, nurturing it to bring about the Master’s will. The Hebrew terms for *dress* and *keep* found in [Genesis 2:15](#) (“And the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to **work** it and to **keep** it”), are used together in the Scriptures more than forty times. They seem to make up two parts of a whole idea. The idea of the two words together seems to be diligent, humble service through guarding and nurturing. Here is the foundation for [biblical](#) environmentalism.

Third, the most familiar condition put upon Adam was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ([Genesis 2:16, 17](#)). This covenant term is the specific test of Adam’s faithful obedience. Adam’s trouble was that he really didn’t believe God. This test has been failed every single day by every single human being ever to walk this earth, and we can see the scars on the earth to prove it. Man ravages the environment around him according to his own wisdom, never seeking what God would have him to do, thinking only of what he will gain out of it. Man is essentially like the spoiled child who is given a room full of wonderful toys to play with, only to destroy the toys in a rage that is determined to show the giver who really is in charge. How foolish can we be? So in the fall of Man the seeds were laid for mankind to look to some other authority than what was ordained. This is where government steps in; why man is willing to surrender his liberties on the basis of pseudo-science and fear; and where the Church must challenge the wisdom of the world’s rebellious rulers (themselves stewards of delegated authority – Romans 13) to return to acting as God’s servants, not competitors. It is time to repent of this wickedness and submit to do things God’s way in the world.

Finally, God provides a mediator as part of this covenant ([Genesis 3:15](#); compare [Hebrews 9:16ff](#) and [Genesis 3:21](#)), the Lord Jesus Christ. This provision, of course, was no afterthought, but part of God’s eternal plan for His creation ([Ephesians 1:4](#)). God is operating in and through His grace from beginning to end in this federal covenant with Adam. This indeed is man’s only hope for survival in this life and the next, so badly has he failed in his stewardship of the earth.

Conclusion

Thankfully, the Creator designed the earth to self-heal over time, and the earth is much more resilient than the fear mongers pretend. A prime example is what happened in the years following the Mt. St. Helens volcanic eruption in the state of Washington in the US back in 1980. In the visitors center perched on a ridge 5 miles away from the open gash on the north side of the mountain, you may read there the dire predictions of the leading scientists of the day regarding how long it would take the land to recover. Many conclusions were that it would never recover completely. The nearby lakes, filled with volcanic matter, would be dead for a hundred years or more. Forests would take equally as long to come back (if they ever did), and as for wildlife, there would be none of any size for a generation or more. As I read those signs, only a few years after the eruption, I could not help marvel at the reality that only season later, *less than a year*, the lake waters were clear again and fish were flourishing in them (signs in the next display area described how it happened!). I could look out the window and see the trees growing again, and green sprouting up everywhere. With binoculars, you could look across the mudflow areas and see birds, deer, elk, and other large wildlife moving across at leisure. In short, though it was happening before their eyes, atheist man was determined not to see it, so sure they were of their evolutionary principles. Those principles were being shown a lie even before they posted their signs!

Heating and cooling are cyclical, no matter how red in the face Mother Nature worshippers get when they shout that there’s no science to prove it. The glaciers will return, the sea is not going to drown the coastlines of the world, and California is not going to slide off into the ocean – yet. That the earth’s ecosystem has within it the latent power to do all of these things, there is no doubt. However, this power is held in check (Hebrews 1) until the day when the Lord brings his final judgment to bear upon his fallen creation. Then, the elements will melt with fervent heat, the oceans will swim with blood and death, and the old creation will be made new. [2 Peter 3:10-13](#) reads:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

God the Father decides when that will be, not an impersonal, non-existent “mother” concept which is at the mercy of her wayward “children.”

God made Adam to be His representative in the earth. Adam was to govern the earth and its creatures, walking in obedience to God’s commands. Adam’s obedience would secure God’s blessings eternally for himself, his posterity (compare [James 2:18](#)), and upon the earth; disobedience would result in God’s curse being poured out on everything man touches. We have seen the curse when mankind abandons the compassionate rule of the living Father God for the terrible arms of a fictional “Mother Earth.” Let us be better, faithful stewards, and know God’s blessings.

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