

What has faith to do with the environment?

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A moral and spiritual issue

“I used to think that the top global environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address these problems, but I was wrong. **The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy, and to deal with these we need a spiritual and cultural transformation.** And we scientists don’t know how to do that.”

(Gus Speth, 2006, meeting of NAE and Harvard scientists)

Theological and Biblical Perspectives

Creation

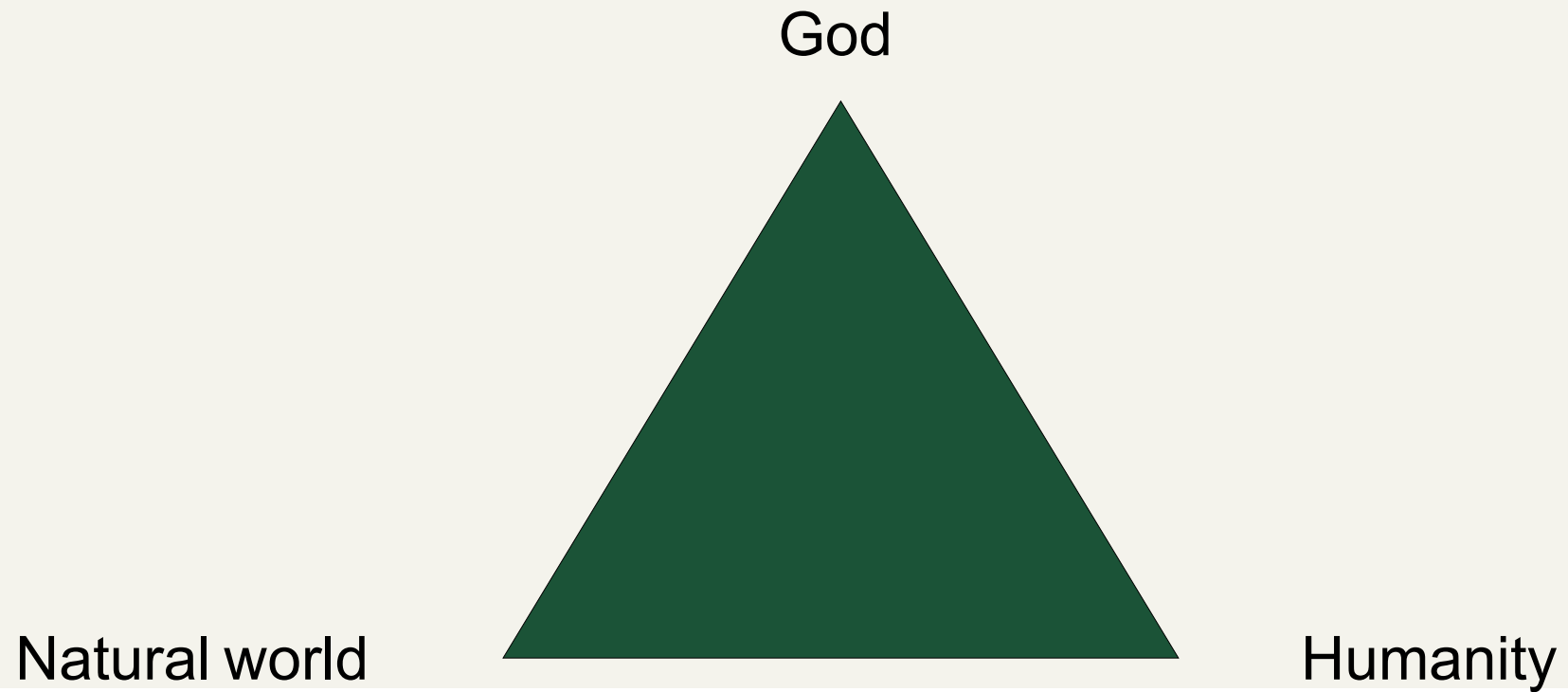
Covenant

Christ

Completion



Made for relationship



Creation

God creates:

- Everything in heaven and earth (Isa 45:18, Acts 4:24)
- God's world: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps 24:1)
- A world fit for purpose: "God saw everything that he had made, and ...it was very good" (Gen 1:31)
- "In wisdom you have made them all" (Ps 104:24)

Creation's purpose

- Reflecting God's glory: "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge." (Ps 19:1-3)
- Praising God (Ps 148)
- Lamenting human sinfulness (Hos 4:1-3)
- Crying out against injustice (Amos 8:4-8)

Humanity

- Shared creatureliness: "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, ... and out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air" (Gen 2:7, 15-19)
- Part of creation: "You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use...these all look to you to give them their food in due season" (Ps 104:10-23)
- Unique responsibilities: made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28)

Pause for thought 1...

What does the way we treat the earth say about our own relationship with God?

What are the consequences when parts of God's creation are destroyed by human activity or neglect?

Covenant: God's commitment to his world

After the flood God said to Noah:

"This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you ...

I will remember the everlasting covenant that is between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." (Gen 9:12, 16)

Broken covenant

Isa 24:5-6

“The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindled, and few people are left.”

Pause for thought 2...

How does the relationship between God, society and the natural world break down in our own society and for what reasons?

Christ

- Creator and sustainer of all that exists (Col 1:15- 17)
- Incarnation: becomes part of his creation (John 1:14)
- Saviour of the whole world: 'God so loved the *kosmos*' (John 3:16-17)
- Reconciles all creation to God: *ta panta* 6 x (Col 1:19-20)

Pause for thought 3...

If Christ has redeemed all creation by his death, how then should we live in that creation now?

Completion

- Ultimate hope of “a new earth”, God dwelling on earth (Rev 21:1)
- Reversal of brokenness and suffering (Rev 21:3-4)
- God’s judgement will “destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:18)

Hope now

- Proximate hope – our present reality: “The kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:21)
- The present challenge: “the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains...”as it waits for redemption (Rom 8:19-22)

Your kingdom come... on earth

“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10)

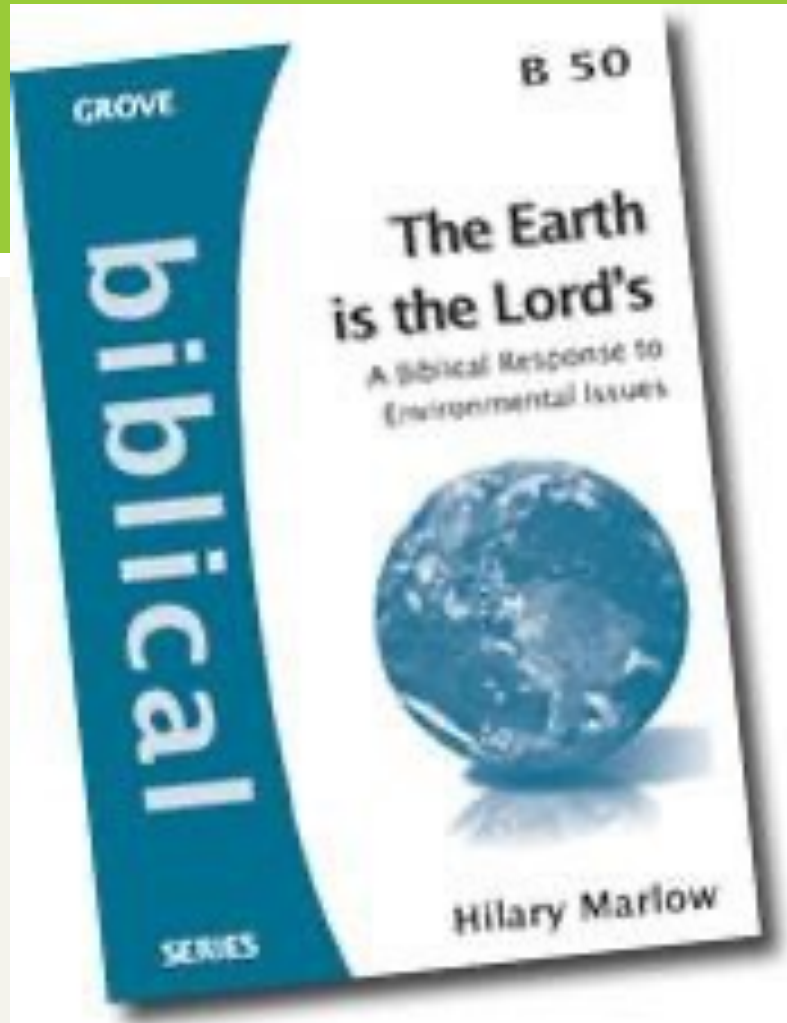
“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.” (Matt 6:26)

“The second [commandment] is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)

Hearing “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*)

Pause for thought 4...

When we consider environmental issues, what does it mean in practice for us to pray “Your kingdom come... on earth”?



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Last words

“To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skilfully and reverently it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily and destructively it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual moral loneliness and others to want.”

(Wendell Berry *The Gift of Good Land* 1981)

“He has told you O mortal what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic 6:8)

