



WORD & WORLD
HOPE FOR CREATION
ISSUE 8 • JANUARY 2020

ifesworld.org/journal

CONTENTS

HOPE FOR CREATION

ISSUE 8 · JANUARY 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE	3
ROBERT W. HEIMBURGER	
A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORD & WORLD	4
ROBERT W. HEIMBURGER	
IS THERE HOPE FOR CREATION?	6
LAS G NEWMAN	
GOOD NEWS FOR THE WHOLE CREATION	13
RUTH HICKS DE OLMEDO	
CREATURELY THEOLOGY	17
ANDREW SHEPHERD	
PESSIMISTIC THEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD TODAY	23
PABLO PISTILLI	
FEEDING THE POOR	26
E. DANIEL CÁRDENAS-VÁSQUEZ	

Scripture quotations are drawn from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.®](#) Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Word & World is published by IFES: a movement of students sharing and living out the good news of Jesus. Locally. Nationally. Globally.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Robert W Heimburger, Editor
Cathy Ross, Consulting Editor
Tim Adams, IFES Associate General Secretary

IFES THEOLOGICAL ADVISORY GROUP

Robert W Heimburger, Chair
Femi B Adeleye
Augustin Ahoga
Charlie Hadjiev
Riad Kassis
Anne-Marie Kool
Las G Newman
Vinoth Ramachandra
Cathy Ross
Daniel Salinas
Chris Wright

Contact: wordandworld@ifesworld.org

ifesworld.org/journal

Word & World is published under a Creative Commons (Attributions - No Derivatives) licence.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>

We encourage you to share and distribute this content, but you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the licence, and indicate if any changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. If you change, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

EDITOR'S NOTE

In a time when God's world is being degraded and damaged, is there room for hope? When even conservative estimates of climate change forecast disastrous alterations of neighbourhoods and ecosystems, who can we hope in, and what can we hope for?

Environmental sustainability is a hot topic at many universities, named as a major goal of my new university. What are Christians at universities to think? The latest issue of *IFES Word & World* explores Hope for Creation.

Las Newman from Jamaica writes that faith in Christ means hope for creation and caring for creation as a way to cherish God's gifts.

Ruth Hicks de Olmedo presents how the students of CECE, the IFES movement in Ecuador, are presenting good news for the whole creation through the Genesis Project.

Andrew Shepherd from New Zealand invites us to recognize non-human animals as our fellow creatures, breathed into life by God as his agents and our fellow-worshippers.

Pablo Pistilli from Argentina invites readers to move beyond a pessimistic theology to caring for God's creation.

E. Daniel Cárdenas-Vásquez from Peru and the United States proposes that genetically engineered foods are a way to feed those in most need and proclaim good news to the poor.

It will be clear in this issue that *IFES Word & World* is meant to spark conversation and not present a consensus. Readers may not agree about whether 'pessimistic theology' should be condemned or whether genetically modified foods are good. Readers may not think there is as much hope for the renewal of creation as these authors say there is. But parallel discussions are going on in universities around the world, and IFES staff and students are already taking part in those discussions. I hope that this issue feeds discussion and action about creation and environment with a fitting hope in the liberation of the whole creation through Jesus Christ.

Since I have taken up a new position as Research Fellow in Theological Ethics at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, this will be my last issue as Editor. To mark the end of four years, I have written a brief history of *IFES Word & World*.

I am sad to leave, but I will stay in touch with the IFES community as a member of the developing Theological Advisory Group. I hope that *IFES Word & World* will continue to serve IFES staff and any from around the fellowship and beyond who want to reflect theologically about the world students live in.



Robert W Heimburger, Editor
robert.heimburger@ifesworld.org

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORD & WORLD

Robert W. Heimbürger

IFES Word & World began with a dream. That dream was to equip those involved in student ministry to listen more attentively to God's Word and God's World. This would happen through responding to contemporary issues in today's universities, asking theologians and scholars to comment on what the Christian faith has to say.¹

This dream came out of the IFES Living Stones vision from more than a decade ago with its encouragement to speak good news in the midst of university communities. That vision called for equipping students to integrate faith and daily life and for resources to inform dialogue and discussion within universities.

Hoping to serve the IFES fellowship in this way, Tim Adams, Associate General Secretary, and Daniel Bourdagné, then IFES General Secretary, with the encouragement of the IFES Board, invited me to start a publication. Together with the emerging IFES Theological Advisory Group and Cathy Ross as Consulting Editor, we started *IFES Word & World* in 2016.

The goal was not to provide simple answers but rather to promote discussion and seek truth together. The goal was also not to provide an official IFES position on the issues at hand. Instead we hoped to facilitate discussion – and at times disagreement – on questions like [violence against women in the university](#), [migration through the eyes of faith](#), or [the purpose of the university](#). The issues we took came out of the context of Christian mission in the world's universities, and these were primarily topical and applied questions like [living under persecution](#), [rethinking leadership](#), [being witnesses](#), or [reading the Bible in context](#), rather than central theological questions.

In bringing Christian wisdom to bear on issues at contemporary universities, we sought to avoid replacing the excellent work already done by national movements to create resources. We also did not want to create a sense that national movements should look to IFES internationally to do the work they could do best, speaking good news in their national and regional contexts. But we listened to national movements who signalled at World Assemblies that while they saw equipping their members to interact on current issues at universities as central to their mission, they did not have capacity to create materials at a sufficiently high level. And what resulted was something that national movements would have difficulty doing, drawing authors from many countries to speak on one issue.

It has been a joy to see *IFES Word & World* grow and encourage many over the last four years, despite its limitations and failings. In eight issues, we have had new authors contribute along with long-time contributors to IFES like Samuel Escobar and Chris Wright. While many of the authors have said that IFES movements played a significant role in their coming to faith or growing as Christians, I invited a number of authors with no previous involvement with IFES to write for the publication. Along with theologians and academics, we have heard from students, IFES staff workers, and professionals from places like [Gabon](#), [Greece](#), [Israel/Palestine](#), [Australia](#), the [United States](#), and [Colombia](#), benefiting from the wonderfully international network that is IFES. A team of translators have made it possible to publish simultaneously as *IFES Word & World* in English, *IFES Palabra y Mundo* in Spanish, and *Parole et Monde de l'IFES* in French. A host of illustrators and designers have produced a beautiful publication. In two years alone, the publication's website received over 23,000 unique page visits, with an unusually high proportion of readership in Spanish, and delegates at World Assembly in 2019 took home more than eight hundred hard copies.

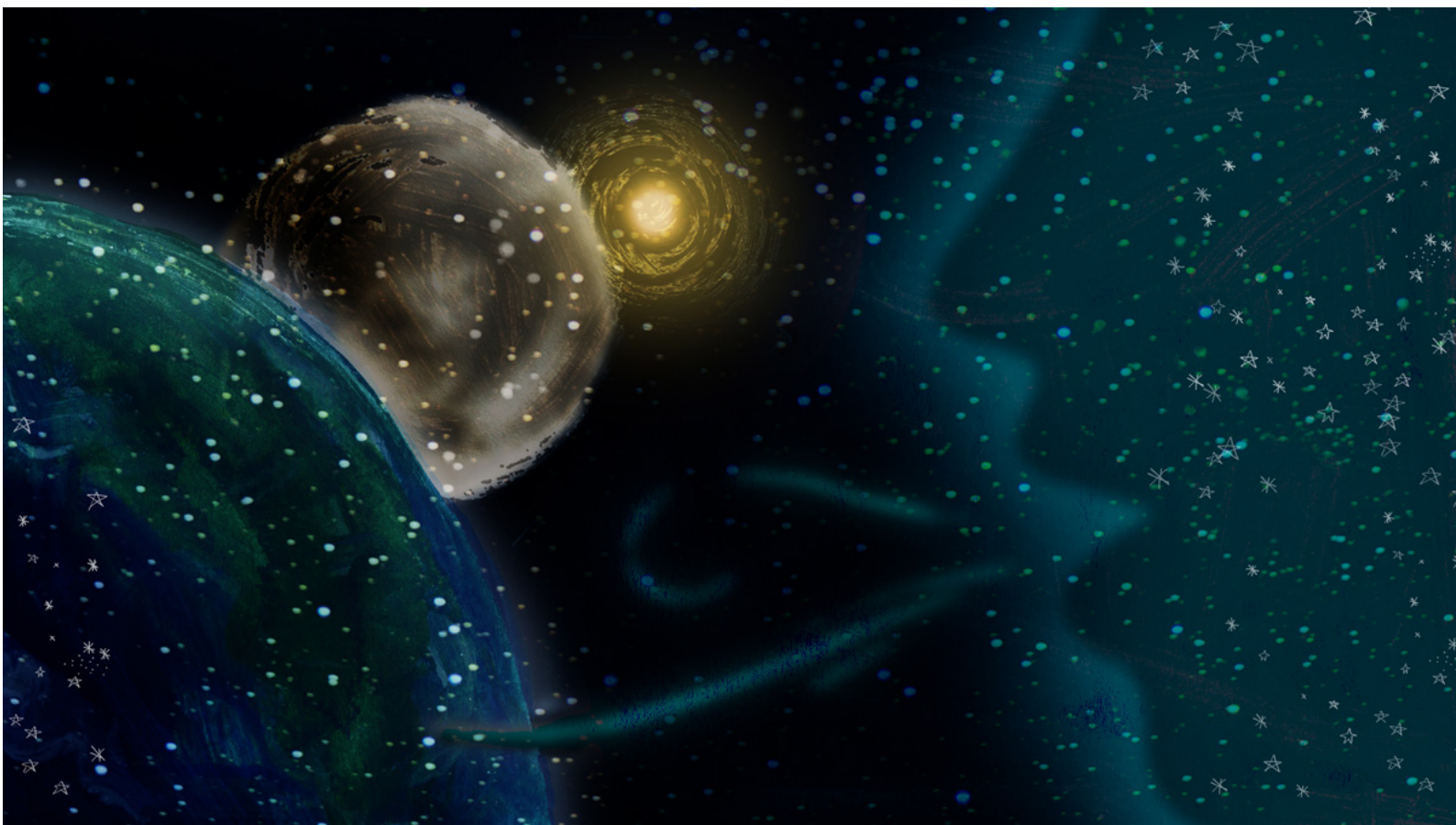
¹ See my comments from the May 2016 issue, <https://ifesworld.org/en/journal/word-and-world-whats-in-the-name/>.

A highlight for *IFES Word & World* came when [the issue on violence against women in the university](#) was released. Psychiatrist and UESI India graduate [Jamila Koshy's article](#) examining this theme through the Tamar story in 2 Samuel 13 was especially popular in the Spanish translation. From Chile, Dany Berdía P. wrote this on Instagram:

This edition came with perfect timing to @gbu_chile! Just the day before there was a large protest against rape culture, where a few of us also went to protest. A large number of faculties and universities here are on strike demanding non-sexist education and the end of sexual abuse on campus. This is great material to getting us talking about what we can do. Please pray for Chile!

As I step down as Editor of *IFES Word & World*, I hope in years to come the publication will grow in its service of the IFES fellowship, promoting theological reflection about the world students live in.

Robert W. Heimburger DPhil edited *IFES Word & World* from 2016 to 2020, and he serves as Chair of the IFES Theological Advisory Group. He is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Previously, he served as Associate Chaplain to postgraduate students with the Oxford Pastorate. As an undergraduate, he was involved with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, the IFES movement in the United States. His writing explores Christian ethics and migration as well as forgiveness after conflict. He can be contacted at robert.heimburger@abdn.ac.uk, and you can follow him on Twitter [@robheimburger](#).



IS THERE HOPE FOR CREATION?

Las G Newman

In 2010, a learned professor at the Institute for Law and Economics at the University of Pennsylvania cross-examined the case for global warming argued by what he called ‘the climate establishment’ led by the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He charged that the IPCC and ‘the climate establishment’ showed ‘a systematic tendency ... to oversell what is actually known about climate change while concealing fundamental uncertainties and open questions regarding many of the key processes involved in climate change’.¹ He seemed to argue that ‘virtually every claim advanced by global warming proponents fail[s] to stand up to scrutiny’.²

Such views were not isolated. Just ahead of the UN conference on climate change in Cancun, Mexico 2010, a special report, the so-called ‘Consensus Buster’, claimed that ‘More than 1000 international scientists dissent over man-made global warming claims’. The 321-page special report was supposed to ‘further chill UN Climate Summit in Cancun’. Climate skeptics and deniers who

¹ Jason Johnston, ‘Global Warming Advocacy Science: A Cross Examination’, *Faculty Scholarship at Penn Law* 315 (2010): 1, https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/315.

² Lawrence Solomon, ‘Legal Verdict: Manmade Global Warming Science Doesn’t Withstand Scrutiny’, *Financial Post*, 6 June 2010, <https://business.financialpost.com/opinion/legal-verdict-manmade-global-warming-science-doesnt-withstand-scrutiny>.

produced the report argued that the IPCC reports have (a) distorted the scientific evidence, (b) induced 'climate fear', and (c) caused a scandal in the climate science community referred to as 'Climategate'.³

OVERWHELMING SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

Now, a decade later, the world is alarmed by the overwhelming scientific evidence and existential realities of global warming. A 'climate emergency' has been declared. Evidence of significant environmental disruptions is everywhere.

- 97% of the world scientists now agree that the planet earth, its land, skies, and oceans, is rapidly and dangerously warming at a faster rate than normal.
- Current realities like extreme weather events are occurring more frequently with more intensity, resulting in more destructive floods, prolonged droughts, massive wildfires, etc.
- Increased environmental impacts from population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation, energy consumption, and carbon emissions, affect air quality, increased risks of public health pandemics, and threaten losses in biodiversity.
- Vanishing rain forests and decreases in global agricultural output have increased fears of global food shortages and increasing flows of climate refugees. No community is out the reach of climate change.

SHOULD WE DESPAIR?

As I see it, the debate over the state of the earth and the future of the environment is causing some despair. Questions abound. Is the current vulnerability of the earth caused by natural or anthropogenic forces? Is the global ecological crisis cyclical, irreversible, and beyond repair? Is our civilization, as we know it, on the verge of extinction?⁴ Is there enough political and moral will to combat the impending and inevitable disaster that is before us? Is there hope for creation?

From the perspective of Scripture and the biblical worldview, the answer is emphatically yes, there is hope. Christian hope is rooted in the God who is the owner of the planet and the biblical mandate for creation care and human responsibility. This perspective helps us avoid Christian fatalism that suggests we can do nothing to avert or overcome the overwhelming challenge posed by global warming and climate change.

WHAT IS CREATION CARE?

In my view, creation care is **Awareness, Analysis, and Action** (Triple A) towards everything in the world around us. That includes the air we breathe, the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the home we live in, the transportation we use, etc. We should be paying attention to everything in our space that supports life and health. Jesus called attention to creation as an object lesson about life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. "Look at the birds of the air and the flowers of the field", he said, "they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you

³ 'More than 1000 International Scientists Dissent over Man-Made Global Warming Claims: Scientists Continue to Debunk Fading "Consensus" in 2008 & 2009 & 2010' (Climate Depot, 8 December 2010), <https://www.climatedepot.com/2010/12/08/special-report-more-than-1000-international-scientists-dissent-over-manmade-global-warming-claims-challenge-un-ipcc-gore-2/>.

⁴ Guardian Launches New Series 'The Age of Extinction', *The Guardian*, 18 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2019/sep/18/guardian-launches-new-series-the-age-of-extinction>.

not much more valuable than they?" (Mathew 6:26). God cares about everything in his creation, human and non-human.

A reminder of God's care for creation is in the hymn that sings,

*This is my Father's world,
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their maker's praise.
This is my Father's world,
He shines in all that's fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.⁵*

The psalmist also drew attention to creation as an object of awareness, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3-4).

Awareness of creation involves not just curiosity. It is taking an interest in environmental standards set by the community in which we live. Each citizen should know what is expected of them as they inhabit and share common space. Do we know what the anti-litter laws are, how to manage our garbage, how to take care of common spaces, our recreational parks, beaches, nature trails, mountain slopes, and specially protected areas? Awareness extends to global policy agreements that aim to protect planet earth, our common home. For example, do you know what the Paris Agreement in 2015 is, agreed by 194 member-countries of the UN?⁶

It is one thing to be observant, to be aware. It is another to know the facts, to analyze. Climate sceptics and deniers profess to be agnostic about the facts agreed by the majority of climate scientists. 'Nobody really knows', they say.⁷

We cannot ignore the brutal facts of global warming and climate change. If we do, it is to our peril. The realities demand immediate action, adaptation, mitigation, conservation, preservation, and prevention of environmental abuse and degradation. The integrity of the earth demands justice. Doing justice requires action, including advocacy for environmental care and protection and prosecution for environmental crimes such as the wanton and extensive destruction of the Amazon rainforest.⁸

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Christians care about the environment for three major reasons:

OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

Jesus said, "if you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15, NIV). Obedience to Christ is foundational to our Christian ethic. As Chris Wright points out, 'trashing someone else's property is

⁵ Maltbie Davenport Babcock, 1901.

⁶ 'The Paris Agreement' (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015), <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

⁷ Carline Kenny, 'Trump: 'Nobody really knows' if climate change is real,' CNN.com, December 12, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/11/politics/donald-trump-climate-change-interview/>.

⁸ Tom Phillips, 'Chaos, Chaos, Chaos: a journey through Bolsonaro's Amazon Inferno'. The Guardian, September 9, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/09/amazon-fires-brazil-rainforest>.

incompatible with any claim to love that other person'.⁹ As the Cape Town Commitment says, 'We care for the earth, most simply, because it belongs to the One whom we call Lord' who created it and loves it.¹⁰

A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

The gospel is for the whole creation, human and non-human. The whole creation 'groans' and longs for redemption (Rom. 8:18-22). In Christ, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

A GIFT TO CHERISH

The Lausanne Movement's Cape Town Commitment offers clear guidance on what Christian responsibility is toward the environment. 'Such love for God's creation demands that we repent of our part in the destruction, waste and pollution of the earth's resources and our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism. Instead, we commit ourselves to urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility'.¹¹ 'Urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility' means taking bold and decisive action to safeguard the well-being of the environment without regard to vested interests and countervailing forces. Bold, prophetic actions in the current global ecological crisis reveal how much we cherish and honor the Lord of creation.

DOES CREATION CARE FIT WITH EVANGELICAL MISSION?

Creation care fits squarely in the mission of God. As Creator of heaven and earth, God establishes his creation to reveal who he is, to offer avenues of praise to him, and to declare his glory to the 'ends of the earth', so that the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord 'as the waters cover the sea' (Habakkuk 2:14).

Evangelical missions have a critical role to play in creation care. Like medical missions or Missionary Aviation Fellowship, creation care is crucial. The scale of the global environmental crisis is enormous and multi-dimensional. It affects the world's population that now exceeds seven billion people. That is why when over 4,200 global evangelical leaders from 198 countries gathered in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010 for the Third Lausanne Congress, creation care was high on the agenda. Lausanne's first post-Cape Town global consultation was on 'Creation Care and the Gospel', and I was among its senior leaders. That consultation, held in Jamaica in 2012, drew 57 global participants from 26 countries as diverse as India, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Kenya, Uganda, Singapore, the UK, the USA, and Canada. Their collective resolutions, known as the 'Jamaica Call to Action',¹² spawned a very active global Creation Care Network that is leading a global campaign for creation care.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As individual students, faculty, staff, and graduates, and collectively in our fellowships and organizations, there are many things that we can do to affect directly the present and future ecological challenge that confronts us. Actions include:

⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 414.

¹⁰ 'The Cape Town Commitment' (The Lausanne Movement, 2011), Part 1, 7a, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

¹¹ 'The Cape Town Commitment', Part 1, 7a.

¹² 'Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to Action' (St. Ann, Jamaica: The Lausanne Movement, 2012), <https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>.

1. Paying attention to the trees around you. At every opportunity, plant a tree.
2. Start or join an environmental club in your neighborhood, college or congregation.
3. Become a conservationist (if you are not one already). Conserve energy, water, food waste, forests, and more.
4. Reduce your energy bill. Seek alternative energy sources. Apply technology innovation for new fuels, electricity, etc. Eliminate dependence on fossil fuels.
5. Stop littering the community with garbage. Plan your garbage disposal carefully. Join the plastic ban.
6. Fight against deforestation. Advocate for protection and preservations of our mountains, rivers, watersheds, wetlands, coral reefs, coastlands, and green spaces.
7. Mobilize neighborhood education and action campaigns (eg. tree planting, banning of bush fires, better garbage disposal, and protection of wildlife).
8. Be concerned about food security and the poor. The UNFAO warns of severe food shortages caused by fuel prices, droughts, floods, new extreme and severe weather patterns.
9. Advocate for proper human settlements and better shelter policy. (Avoid watersheds, river courses, swamp lands, and vulnerable and fragile environments.)
10. Support and ensure appropriate public transportation policies to cut emissions, improve efficiency, improve air quality, and create a healthier public.
11. Support poverty alleviation projects like potable water, micro-enterprise, and job creation.
12. Make sure your own environment, your household, your church, your workplace, your lived community, is green, energy-efficient, healthy, and life-affirming.
13. Engage in the debate on economic development vs. environmental protection that came to the fore in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Try to understand the issues.
14. Make sure that your local planners and policy makers also understand the issues.
15. Make sure everyone understands the urgent need for a low carbon economy and a healthier society by reducing CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse gases.

CONCLUSION

In this time of climate emergency, everyone must take heed and act. We must not reject science, especially climate science, without careful assessment of big, peer-reviewed global scientific data. Let us reject so-called 'alternative facts' of dubious scientific opinion that are disguised forms of political ideology or economic expediency. Too much is at stake. Humanity is suffering. Hope is needed.

Let us read Scripture through an environmental lens. Scripture teaches so much about environmental care and human responsibility. Join the creation care movement. As God works through us, let us help save our planet and save lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Pray or sing through Psalm 8. What attitude toward God and God's creation does this psalm suggest to you?
2. Read the Jamaica Call to Action. What appeals most to you? What actions can you support?
3. Look at the list under the heading 'What can we do?' What will you do – as believers and as students – to care for creation?

FURTHER READING

- Bell, Colin. *Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2016.
- Bloomberg, Michael, and Carl Pope. *Climate of Hope: How Cities, Businesses, and Citizens Can Save the Planet*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2018.
- Brown, Edward R. *Our Father's World: Mobilizing the Church to Care for Creation*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2008.
- "Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to Action." St. Ann, Jamaica: The Lausanne Movement, 2012. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/statement/creation-care-call-to-action>.
- "El Cuidado de la Creación y el Evangelio: Llamado a la Acción." Santa Ana, Jamaica: El Movimiento de Lausana, 2012. <https://www.lausanne.org/es/declaracion-de-la-consulta/cuidado-de-la-creacion-llamado-a-la-accion>.
- "Évangile et Protection de l'environnement : Appel à l'Action." St. Ann, Jamaïque: Le Mouvement de Lausanne, 2012. <https://www.lausanne.org/fr/mediatheque/compte-rendu-de-consultation/evangile-et-protection-de-lenvironnement-appel-a-laction>.
- "Global Warming of 1.5°C." United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2018. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.
- Hescox, Mitch, and Paul Douglas. *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016.
- "The Cape Town Commitment." The Lausanne Movement, 2011. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

- A Rocha: <http://www.arocha.org/en/>
- Lausanne/World Evangelical Alliance Creation Care Network: <http://lwccn.com>
- John Ray Initiative/Churches Together UK: <http://www.jri.org.uk>
- 100 Cities: <http://www.sustainablecitiescollective.com/david-thorpe/1006481/100-cities-sign-climate-change-adaptation-program>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Las G Newman is the former Associate General Secretary for IFES. He now serves as Global Associate Director for Regions for the Lausanne Movement. He lives in Jamaica, and he can be contacted at lasnwmn@gmail.com.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.



GOOD NEWS FOR THE WHOLE CREATION

Creation Care at University Campuses in Ecuador

Ruth Hicks de Olmedo

With an area of just 283,560 square kilometres, Ecuador contains two unique areas full of beauty and with amazing biodiversity: the Galapagos Islands and the Amazon rainforest. But most of the flora and fauna is threatened because of the increasing impact of sea pollution¹ and aggressive deforestation².

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2 we see God's presence turning chaos into order, separating light from darkness and creating a vast range of plants and animals, and humans. Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." And 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

¹ "Un monstruo en el paraíso: el plástico amenaza la vida en Galápagos", *El Comercio*, 22 de marzo de 2019, <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/plastico-contaminacion-especies-galapagos-desechos.html>.

² Teresa Romero, "La deforestación del Amazonas", *El Orden Mundial*, 20 de enero de 2019, <https://elordenmundial.com/la-deforestacion-amazonica/>.

The fact that we have been created in the image of an incredibly creative God means that we have been made to create. We have also been entrusted with the responsibility of caring for creation and cultivating the land. We can see that humans have two main roles: to be co-creators with God, and co-carers of EVERY created being, including the land, animals and humans. According to the biblical narrative we know that sin breaks up that harmonious relationship between humans and God, causes division between humans (Genesis 3:12) and creates a rift that affects creation (Genesis 3:18). Throughout the Bible we see that the reconciliation brought about by Jesus on the cross offers not only hope for humans as individuals, but also reconciliation for the cosmos (Romans 8:19-24 and Colossians 1:20). The gospel gives hope to all individuals and also to every created being.

We know that the gospel is good news for all creation, but how can we help university students to connect such a deep text like Genesis with their understanding of being co-carers and co-creators with God? And how should this have an impact on their daily lives in terms of caring for creation?

Every year students and staff of CECE (Comunidad de Estudiantes Cristianos de Ecuador) choose a book from the Bible to study together throughout the year. In 2018 we chose the book of Genesis. When the opportunity came up to request funds from IFES for inspiring evangelism, we created the Genesis Project.

Thanks to our readings of Genesis as a group, we were encouraged to reflect upon, teach about and act on the issue of creation care in the university context of Ecuador.

The Genesis Project was made up of three complementary parts. First, the student groups used a series of Bible studies exploring the topic of creation care and stewardship based on the book of Genesis. Second, we came up with several ideas and a small fund so that the students in the group could carry out a specific project to serve in their campuses, focusing on creation care. Third, we created a [PROXI](#) (a visual outreach tool) on the topic of the environment, which was used to engage in conversation with their fellow students.

At the end of the year we estimated that around 700 students had interacted with at least one of the parts of the Genesis Project, together with our 16 student groups. It was amazing to see the impact on the lives of CECE students, and the conversations on faith and creation care that they held with their friends. Valery, an architecture student from Guayaquil, shared:

The Bible studies on Genesis have enabled us to discover a side of God's character that we didn't know about previously. We were made to live in a community, not only in a vertical relationship with God but also engaging with our peers and with creation as a whole.

What impact did it have? For many students it was the first time they discovered that the Bible has a lot to say about the responsibility and privilege of caring for creation as humans, as part of God's invitation to take part in the project to reconcile creation as a whole. It is essential for Jesus' disciples to understand that the gospel calls us to be agents of reconciliation for the *entire* creation.

The serving project was different in each university and met needs that students observed in their campuses. Some of the projects included recycling clothes and planting a new garden in an abandoned courtyard in one of the buildings, building and installing containers to recycle plastic in the dining halls, and collecting cigarette stubs from the university lake. Thanks to these serving projects, some of the students' non-Christian friends got involved and came to the Bible studies.

The PROXI tool helped us to engage in conversation with many students, who were actually surprised that Christians were concerned about the environment. Thanks to the interest that the project stimulated, there were many talks about the chance to work with other student associations and the environmental clubs on several campuses.

When the Genesis Project ended, each CECE student received a reusable eco cloth bag, and they made the commitment to teach their families about the importance of reducing the use of plastic, and to implement other ideas to care for creation in their local contexts.

Is the gospel good news for all creation? Yes, indeed! The Genesis Project helped CECE students understand that God invites us to be involved in his reconciliation project on all levels – humans with God and with one another – and to promote caring for and restoring the entire creation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Thinking about your field of study or profession, which part of creation needs to experience reconciliation?
2. How should our commitment to the gospel affect our actions and care for creation?
3. How could your student group or church respond to the obvious need to care for creation?

FURTHER READING

- “Creation Care and the Gospel: Jamaica Call to Action” (St. Ann, Jamaica: the Lausanne Movement, 2012), <https://www.lausanne.org/es/declaracion-de-la-consulta/cuidado-de-la-creacion-llamado-a-la-accion>.
- Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Sarum Theological Lectures (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).
- R. J. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).
- Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984).
- Henri Blocher, *Révélation des origines: le début de la Genèse*, 2e éd. revue et augmentée (Charols: Excelsis; Paris: GBU, 2018).
- Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010).
- Oscar González, “Nature Conservation According to the Biblical Principle of Responsible Stewardship”, *Ecología* 1, no. 1 (1998), https://www.academia.edu/1579895/La_conservaci%C3%B3n_de_la_Naturaleza_seg%C3%BA_n_el_principio_b%C3%ADblico_de_la_mayordom%C3%ADa_responsable.
- Harris, Peter. *Kingfisher's Fire: A Story of Hope for God's Earth*. Oxford: Monarch, 2008.
- Donald Smith Kennedy, “El hombre y su medio ambiente: una reflexión teológica,” visited on 5 October 2019, <https://www.arocha.pe/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2015/06/El-hombre-y-su-medio-ambiente-una-reflexi%C3%B3n-teol%C3%B3gica.pdf>.

SHORT FILMS

Suggested documentaries to see and/or use at a university video forum

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=335VwdErDjA> No Impact Man
- <https://vimeo.com/36522029> An Inconvenient Truth
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo3V6bGFCYc> CRUDO
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RI-sIqxmmz0&feature=youtu.be> Minimalism
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6FE_xpvPTA Cuidemos la Creación
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wNf-BPcK8Lc> Pilas con el agua
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15tHQ-ZfQHU> Ten Tips from Pope Francis
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo3V6bGFCYc> Sustainable World

BIBLE STUDIES

- "The Genesis Project: Eight Bible Studies on Creation Care". CECE Ecuador, 2019. <http://www.somoslacece.com/category/recursos/>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Hicks de Olmedo is from New Zealand but has been serving with CECE (Comunidad de Estudiantes Cristianos del Ecuador), the IFES movement in Ecuador, for 16 years. She is soon going to start serving as CECE National Director. Ruth and her husband, Josué Olmedo, have two daughters. She has studied in the fields of health, development and theology. Her email address is ruth.hicks@somoslacece.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®



CREATURELY THEOLOGY

Sharing life and worship with other species

Dr Andrew Shepherd

It is now impossible to avoid the daily news reports detailing the negative impacts human activity is having on the planet. From the highest mountains to the depths of the ocean, nowhere on Earth appears unsullied by human activity.¹ Throughout our short history as a species, we have modified and transformed the environment around us – whether through hunting mega-fauna to extinction, the emergence of settled agriculture 12-15,000 years ago, or the development of mega-cities during the last fifty years. But now, whether naked to the human eye – such as the rapidly increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere – or clearly visible – such as the ubiquitous plastic in our waterways, oceans, and along coastlines – it is glaringly obvious that our relationship with the rest of the created order is badly awry. Our actions of destroying habitats and polluting soil, waterways, oceans, and the atmosphere is directly contributing to a dramatic decline

¹ A.J. Jamieson et al. "Microplastics and synthetic particles ingested by deep-sea amphipods in six of the deepest marine ecosystems on Earth," *R. Soc. open sci.* 6: 180667, <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/pdf/10.1098/rsos.180667>; Heather Saul, "Human waste left by climbers on Mount Everest is causing pollution and could spread diseases," *Independent*, 3 March 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/human-waste-left-by-climbers-on-mount-everest-is-causing-pollution-and-could-spread-diseases-10081562.html>.

in population sizes of other species.² *Homo sapiens* are destroying the very fabric of life: we are the primary cause of the sixth great mass extinction currently unfolding.³

What does the God we profess to worship think about this ecological cataclysm taking place? What should our response as followers of Jesus be to this enormous loss of biodiversity?

Faced with this existential threat, much of the theology one hears nowadays is often thoroughly anthropocentric. We have developed “otherworldly” theologies in which other species and the created order are viewed merely as a backdrop for what is conceived as the key event – God’s relationship with *H. sapiens*. But is our species really the centre of the still unfolding story of God’s relationship with all of creation? Digging deeper into Scripture and the Christian tradition and engaging with the discoveries of contemporary science, we become aware that we may have arrogantly overestimated ourselves and downplayed the significance of other creatures.

CREATURES LIKE US

That God has a deep love for *all* of creation is evident from the opening creation account which contains the seven-times repeated affirmation by the Creator of the “goodness” of creation (Genesis 1:2-23a). Later, in the Flood narrative (Gen 6-9), Noah obeys the LORD and builds an ark to ensure the preservation of biodiversity in the face of the ensuing “blotting out of life” (7:23). While the Creator’s love for *all* that has been created is clear, to what extent do God’s creatures *respond* to this love? What is the nature of the relationship the myriad of creatures have with their Creator?

Through recent advancements in science we now know that we share between 96-99% of the same DNA as our closest relatives, chimpanzees, bonobos, and gorillas. As well as this genetic similarity the research of animal behaviouralists is also breaking down the conceptual wall we have erected between ourselves and other creatures. Far from being machines, *automata* acting purely on instinct and incapable of experiencing pain, as infamously expressed by René Descartes, we are progressively discovering the depth of the interior life of many creatures. Evidence that creatures experience a range of emotions – pain, joy, grief, contentment, anger, depression, and loneliness – continues to grow. Many of the actions that we attribute uniquely to humans – planning and co-operation, deception, altruism, mourning, forgiveness, holding grudges, making peace, humour – are also apparent in other species.⁴

² WWF. 2018. *Living Planet Report – 2018: Aiming Higher*. Grooten, M. and Almond, R.E.A. (Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland, https://c402277.ssl.cf1.rackcdn.com/publications/1187/files/original/LPR2018_Full_Report_Spreads.pdf?1540487589.

³ While the human population of 7.6 billion represents only 0.01% of all living things, since the emergence of *Homo sapiens* our actions have led to the extinction of 83% of all wild mammals; 80% of marine mammals; 50% of plants; and 15% of fish. See: Yinon M. Bar-On, Rob Phillips, and Ron Milo (2018), “The Biomass Distribution on Earth,” *Proceedings of the National Academic of Sciences* 115 (25): 6506-11. While extinction is a normal part of the evolutionary process scientists estimate that the current rates of species extinction is 100-10,000 times higher than the background extinction rate.

⁴ See the work of Dutch primatologist and ethologist, Frans de Waal, particularly: *Our Inner Ape* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005) and *Mama’s Last Hug: Animal Emotions and What They Tell Us About Ourselves* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2019).

CREATURES BREATHED INTO LIFE BY GOD

Scripture too views other creatures not as automatons nor as flat cardboard-like figures, but rather as dynamic created beings with distinct identity, agency, and the capacity for relationship with their Creator. The powerful imagery used in Genesis 2:7 of the LORD God breathing life into the nostrils of 'ādām, the Earth creature, is repeated throughout the Old Testament.⁵ The Psalmist, observing *all* the creatures made through God's wisdom, draws on the imagery of the breath/Spirit⁶ of God hovering over the waters of creation (Gen 1:2), writing:

*When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground. (Ps 104:29-30)*

Scripture testifies that the life of *all* creatures is dependent upon this life-giving breath (*ruach*) of God. Qohelet, the author of Ecclesiastes, understood that human life and destiny is inextricably tied up with the lives of other creatures. Faced with the fragility and transitory nature of human life, Qohelet stressed that we should not think too highly of ourselves, reminding us that we too are animals.

¹⁸I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. ¹⁹For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. ²⁰All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to the earth? (Eccl 3:18-21).

CREATURES AS GOD'S AGENTS

Not only do creatures share the same life-animating breath/Spirit as ourselves, but Scripture also portrays creatures as both agents of God's grace and messengers of God's judgement. In 1 Kings 17:1-7 the prophet Elijah dutifully announces to the idolatrous King Ahab the onset of a drought. Faithful in speaking God's judgement, Elijah still personally faces the consequences of this drought. Remarkably, it is the ceremonially unclean ravens who become agents of God's grace, providing Elijah with a morning and evening meal. Likewise, another of God's prophets becomes the recipient of the saving actions of a fellow creature. Israel, a land-based non-sea-faring people, had a deep antipathy for the seas. Nevertheless, Jonah, faced with what he perceives as a certain death-sentence in heading to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, to speak truth to power, chooses the terror of the sea. Tossed overboard, it is a creature of the feared deep that swallows Jonah, thus saving him from drowning. In contrast to Jonah the large fish is then obedient to God, returning Jonah to his terrestrial life to receive again the LORD's instruction.

In another comical episode it is a faithful donkey which saves its owner – the soothsayer Balaam – from the angel of the LORD brandishing a sword. Summoned by Balak to curse the Israelites, Balaam beats his donkey, unaware that the animal's sudden changing of direction is saving him from the unseen danger of the LORD's judgement. Given speech, the donkey pleads his innocence. His testimony is upheld by the angel of the LORD who announces that was it not for his donkey's intervention Balaam would have been struck down. Dismounted from his elevated position Balaam is made to stand alongside his fellow-creature, and stationary and silent, is required to listen again to the instruction he thus far has failed to fully heed (Numbers 22:1-35). It is worth reflecting how

⁵ Genesis 6:17; Genesis 7:21-22; Job 12:10, 27:3 32:8,33:4, 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29-30, Isaiah 42:5, 57:16.

⁶ The Hebrew word *ruach* can be translated as wind, breath, or Spirit.

often we, like Jonah and Balaam, overlook or are ignorant of the ways in which the creatures that surround us are messengers of grace and agents of deliverance. Moving beyond an anthropocentrism worldview requires us, like Balaam, to be unseated, metaphorically, from our high horse.

CREATURES DEMAND OUR ATTENTION

Within the Christian tradition it has become common to speak of God's two books of revelation: creation and Scripture. However, to hear what the book of creation is saying to us, in particular through the utterances of our fellow creatures, requires a new posture: one of stillness, characterised by humility and teachableness. Job, experiencing tremendous adversity, finds himself surrounded by well-meaning friends who explain that the cause of his woe is unconfessed guilt. Job defends his innocence, calling on his created-kin to defend his righteousness, briefly ending the lectures of his counsellors by summoning them to inquire and learn from their fellow creatures (Job 12:7-10). Later, Job is compelled to take his own advice. A voice from out of a whirlwind: the LORD, interrogates Job, offering a detailed description of the complexity and mystery of creation (Job 38-41). Confronted with the overwhelming wonder of an ecosystem teeming with dynamic life in which he is embedded and cannot exist apart from, Job humbly confesses: "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). It is no coincidence that later, another obedient and righteous individual, Jesus, will issue the same instructions to his disciples, calling them to "consider" (observe, pay attention to) the virtuous behaviour of ravens.⁷

Still, as well as encountering God through contemplation of creation, what might it mean to further tune into the world of other creatures and *commune* directly with them? While it is an everyday occurrence to speak to other creatures – think of your interactions with pets – to what extent do we genuinely listen to their voices? Our failure to do so seems tied up with (1) the Cartesian assumption that only humans possess language and, (2) a misunderstanding about the primary purpose of language. While evidence appears to be growing debunking the notion that only humans communicate through language, we still tend to conceive of language in a self-referential way: language, we believe, gives us the ability to represent and interpret the world around us. While this is true, this is not the primary purpose of language. Thus far I have been following thematic threads noting (a) the breath/Spirit which animates us and the array of life on Earth, and (b) the extent to which language, rather than distinguishing us from other creatures, is a reciprocal activity connecting us to humans, other species, and God. These threads are woven together in a poetic passage by environmental philosopher, David Abram:

Oral language gusts through us – our sounded phrases borne by the same air that nourishes the cedars and swells the cumulus clouds. Laid out and immobilized on the flat surface, our words tend to forget that they are sustained by this windswept earth; they begin to imagine that their primary task is to provide a representation of the world (as though they were outside of, and not really a part of, this world). Nonetheless, the power of language remains, first and foremost, a way of singing oneself into contact with others and with the cosmos – a way of bridging the silence between oneself and another person, or a startled black bear, or the crescent moon soaring like a billowed sail above the roof. Whether sounded on the tongue, printed on the page, or shimmering on the screen, language's primary gift is not to re-present the world around us, but to call ourselves into the vital presence of that world – and into deep and attentive presence with one another.⁸

We share with other creatures varying amounts of the same genetic code, the same life-animating breath, and with many, the capacity for language. While this language summons us into a "deep

⁷ Luke 12:24; see Andrew Shepherd, "Being 'Rich towards God' in the Capitalocene: An Ecological/Economic Reading of Luke 12.13-34," *The Bible Translator* (forthcoming).

⁸ *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 11, italics original.

and attentive presence with one another,” it has an even greater function. Theologically, the primary purpose of the gift of language, is to assist creatures in the praise of their Creator. And, while we may think that only humanity engages in worship, Scripture maintains that this is not the case. Psalm 148 portrays all of creation – angelic beings, sun, moon, stars, sea creatures and oceans, weather systems, landscapes and trees of terrestrial habitats and all the wild and domesticated species that reside in them – alongside humanity, as an enormous choir offering its praise to the LORD. Indeed, the book of Psalms concludes with the exhortation that all creatures offer the breath they have been given back in praise to their Maker: “Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6).

CREATURES AS FELLOW-WORSHIPPERS

Accordingly, most significant of all, Scripture decentres and re-orientates us by asserting that as well as being messengers of grace and judgement, and teachers of virtue, other creatures are also fellow-worshippers. This imagery of all God’s creatures worshipping their Creator and Redeemer reaches its zenith in John’s apocalyptic vision. Four living creatures – symbolic of wild creatures (a lion), domesticated animals (an ox), human beings, and avian life (an eagle) – gather before the throne of God declaring that the life of all creatures stems from God’s initiative (Revelation 4:11). Their reason to exist is to give glory to God. As the Lamb of God, standing beside the throne, opens the scroll which declares just judgement, vindicating God’s reign of love, these four creatures are joined by “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea”, every creature extinct or extant, in offering eternal praise:

*To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honour and glory and might
forever and ever!
(Rev 5:13)*

Faced with the diminishing of biodiversity we are compelled by this same love to protect the life of our fellow choristers that their voices may continue to praise their Creator.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read the Book of Jonah. What role do animals play in God’s work in this book?
2. Read Psalm 148 or Revelation 4-5. What role do animals play in these passages?
3. What experiences have you had in which other creatures have been messengers of God’s grace and/or agents of deliverance?
4. What difference would conceiving of other creatures as God’s agents and as fellow-worshippers make for your life? What difference would it make for your university? Your student movement? Your church

ACTIVITY

This coming week set aside a period of time to be still, silent, and attentive to the life of other creatures around you. Keep a journal of how God speaks to you through the book of creation.

FURTHER READING

- Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010.
- Clough, David L. *On Animals: Theological Ethics*. Vol. 2. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
- Clough, David L. *On Animals: Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1. London: T. & T. Clark, 2012.
- Deane-Drummond, Celia, and David L. Clough. *Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals*. London: SCM Press, 2009.
- Harris, Peter. *Kingfisher's Fire: A Story of Hope for God's Earth*. Oxford: Monarch, 2008.
- Kolbert, Elizabeth. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Andrew Shepherd was on staff with the IFES movement in New Zealand, Tertiary Students Christian Fellowship (TSCF), from 1995-1999. During the last two decades he has worked in the fields of theological, environmental, and international education, and practical conservation. He was involved in the establishment of Christian conservation organisation A Rocha Aotearoa New Zealand, serving as the co-Director until recently. He has held teaching and research roles with a number of tertiary education institutions, and is currently a lecturer in theology and ethics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. Click [here](#) for other material he has authored on creation theology and ethics. He can be contacted at Andrew.shepherd@otago.ac.nz.

Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



PESSIMISTIC THEOLOGY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD TODAY

Pablo Pistilli

During my first years at university I started to read the Bible and explore Christianity. Back then there were two things – possibly a bit extreme – that defined my life: my faith and my hope. I started attending a church and in that context some seeds were inadvertently being planted in my mind and invaded my thoughts. Now, looking back, I realise that they were the seeds of pessimistic theology. These seeds float around the fields of the Protestant evangelical culture and they usually grow when they fall on extremely cold and selfish soil.

One of the things that defines pessimistic theology is its lack of hope for this world. Although it does recognise the glory of eternal life, it has nothing to offer today to a wounded creation. This melancholic way of thinking is one of the main reasons for the current lack of environmental and social awareness in evangelical Christian churches.

During World War I some theologians introduced the premillennial theory in churches. Based on that theory they developed ideas that became deeply entrenched, like the view of the current “bad world” that is beyond repair and cannot be improved, and the idea that the world will gradually get worse and worse in terms of ecology, politics, society, economy and moral issues until Jesus returns. So the idea is that if the world continues to deteriorate and only Jesus will restore it when he comes again, what is the point of trying to improve society right now? What is the point of caring for a world that is going to be gradually destroyed until the end comes?

It is amazing how such an utterly absurd theory that goes against the Bible and against Jesus' message of hope can emerge from the church and affect Christian believers so much. It is very worrying that the people who were once known as the "people of hope" have been filled with pessimism, disillusionment and despair. But it is even worse that we actually find ourselves coming up with theology that supports this pessimism.

In ABUA (Asociación Bíblica Universitaria Argentina), the IFES movement in Argentina, for some time now we have been working and giving training on the topic of how Christian students should engage with society. A few years ago, former student Ezequiel Deleu (now an architect) took part in the "Caring for Creation" workshop, and this drastically changed the course of his career. Ezequiel has said many times that studying the theology of hope more in depth gave him the final boost he needed to start up his own company, [Micromundo](#), a successful startup that aims to "bring nature to the city". With green roofs, living frames, vertical gardens and natural pools, he aims to reconnect citizens with nature, because God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made (Romans 1:20). This is simply one example of how continuing to hope that God's Word has the power to transform lives and the reality of the world can give us ideas to serve God's kingdom through our careers, and show us how to resist pessimistic theology. If we stop believing something is possible, we will just stop trying.

Pessimistic theology goes completely against Jesus' message in the synoptic Gospels, because it contradicts the most important theme in his teachings: the kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God. Jesus says, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade" (Mark 4:30-32). He tells us God's kingdom is constantly growing, unstoppable. It is a kingdom that does not start with much but that gradually gets larger until it becomes huge and takes over everything as it expands. That is why he also compares it to yeast – "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about thirty kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough" (Matthew 13:33).

So those of us who believe that the kingdom of God is growing here and now, on earth, instead of preaching pessimism, must live with hope and try to make our world cleaner, fight the extinction of species, and create a society that extracts natural resources sustainably, for everyone's benefit.

When I talk to people who defend pessimistic theology, they usually say, "The Bible says everything will get worse," but when I ask them to show me where the Bible says this exactly, they do not know how to answer. This is very serious and we could almost consider it to be a blasphemy because they are claiming that the Bible says something it does not, just to justify a comfortable and passive way of life.

The history of humanity, however, shows us that in the past 2,000 years, societies have been through cycles of destruction and reconstruction, so today's signs of environmental or moral destruction are not valid prophetic signs. We must not forget how Christians in the past brought about positive change in their societies, like ending slavery, fighting racism and such.

Something else that defenders of pessimistic theology claim, is the idea that "Christ is returning soon and the whole creation will be destroyed." So, why should Christians care for the environment if Jesus is coming soon and will destroy it all? This idea is even more dangerous than the first one because whoever maintains it is a false prophet. I dare to say this because Jesus was very clear: "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matthew 24:36). So if no one knows when he is coming again, how can some Christians claim they do and use this supposed prophetic knowledge to justify their total apathy when it comes to caring for creation? We should not listen to these false prophets of our time, because as children of God we must be prepared and live as if Jesus were to return today, and never use this idea to support our defeatism and laziness.

If Jesus says that no one knows when the end will come, what shall we do if God has determined that the human race should live in this world another 100,000 years? What shall we do as humans

to survive in the meantime? And I wonder, when Jesus asks whether when he comes he will find faith on earth (Luke 18:8), does he mean that when he comes he will find only a handful of people with faith or just no people?

In short, the fact that Jesus is coming again soon must encourage us to lead a godly life that is completely dedicated to caring for his creation and expanding his kingdom. We should not use it as an excuse for neglecting these issues.

We must abandon this pessimistic theology that focuses on the destruction of this world, and instead we should adopt a theology that expects God's perfect redemption, because "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). We must stop looking at the world without hope and start seeing it for what it really is.

Let's promote a theology of hope that talks about justice in economy, politics and society, in harmony with ecology and that fights to free all people and creation. A theology of hope will help us to share a more comprehensive gospel message and make a more radical commitment as Christians. The church will no longer be merely a religious institution and will become a true champion of the kingdom of God. The hope that we have as children of God towards creation is stronger than any pessimistic theology and we must make it a reality in our ministries, jobs and during the handful of years we spend as university students. Let's get rid of pessimistic theologies and fly the flags of hope that citizens of the kingdom of God have flown for so long! God's people have to be once again the hope that creation as a whole needs!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In your church or student group, which theology about creation is more widespread? Is it pessimistic or optimistic?
2. Do you think the Bible is more pessimistic or optimistic regarding creation?
3. How does one theology or another (pessimistic or optimistic) affect your life as a student, professional, family member or church member?

FURTHER READING

- Ian Bradley. *God is Green: Christianity and the Environment*. Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990.
- Padilla DeBorst, Ruth; David Zac Niringiye; and C. René Padilla. *Semillas de nueva creación: pistas bíblicas para una vida ecológicamente justa*. Buenos Aires: Kairos, 2010.
- Stam, Juan B. *Las buenas nuevas de la creación*. Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2003.
- Stott, John. *The Contemporary Christian*. IVP, 1992.
- ———. *Issues facing Christians Today*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. IVP, 2006.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pablo Pistilli is an Information Systems Engineer and lecturer and researcher at the National Technological University, specialising in Artificial Intelligence. He discovered a passion for nature through insect macro photography. He and his wife have their own vegetable garden. He gives training and is a member of the Board of ABUA (Asociación Bíblica Universitaria Argentina), the IFES movement in Argentina. He can be contacted at pabloxor@hotmail.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.®



FEEDING THE POOR

Genetically engineered foods and care for the entire creation

E. Daniel Cárdenas-Vásquez

Today at the supermarket, it's normal to see people looking for non-genetically modified (GM) food products. They are ready to pay a higher price for items like bananas, avocados, or milk that are non-GM (also known as non-GMO). They set out to eat foods that are the most natural, so long as they can pay for it. But how natural are non-GM foods? Are we really getting added value, nutrients, and freshness for a higher price? What about people around the world who live below the poverty line, with an average daily income of US\$1?¹ Would they ever be able to purchase a box of non-GM almond milk? I would like to add to the discussion, considering the possibility of using GM crops to feed the two-thirds impoverished world as an answer to the call to care of the entire creation, not only the people that can buy prohibitively expensive organic asparagus water from upscale supermarkets.²

¹ Martin Ravallion, Shaohua Chen, and Prem Sangraula, "Dollar a Day Revisited," *The World Bank Economic Review* 23, no. 2 (2009): 163–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40282299>.

² "'Asparagus Water' and \$8 Eggs: Whole Foods Proves It Knows Its Customers," accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/aug/05/whole-foods-customers-asparagus-water>.

I still remember when as an undergraduate in Lambayeque, Perú, in a weekly Bible study with the Comunidad Bíblica Universitaria (CBU) we came across the Gospel of Luke chapter 4, where it reads:

¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* (NIV)

The first question we had as a group was what kind of good news should we proclaim to the poor? Coming from one of the poorest regions in Perú, I identified closely with verse 18. Was the good news only related to the salvation of the soul as I was taught in my childhood years at church, or was the prophet Isaiah talking about the entire or *integral* dimension of the person and the gospel? It was then that I came across Peruvian missiologist Samuel Escobar and Ecuadorian theologian René Padilla's seminal work on *Misión Integral* or Integral Mission and the urgency of understanding the person beyond their spiritual needs.³ In larger Christian circles, Peruvian Catholic theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez had been talking about liberation theology for thirty years or so, emphasizing liberation from social, political, and economic oppression as an anticipation of ultimate salvation.⁴

But this time the question is: should we as Christians get to use scientific tools and techniques such as gene editing to bring *good news to the poor* who have empty stomachs and anemia? Do we have an ethical or theological basis to embrace GMO production? I believe we do. This is a case of stewardship, a way that human beings relate with the rest of creation. Now this topic is very controversial. Nevertheless, much of the controversy has been based solely on biased ethical arguments,⁵ especially among people of faith, neglecting scientific perspectives and labelling scientists modern apostates.

GM food derives from microorganisms, plants or animals manipulated at the molecular level to have qualities that farmers or consumers desire. These foods are usually produced by techniques in which foreign genes are inserted into the receiving organism. These foreign genes are taken from sources other than the organism's natural parents and would not have been present had producers only used traditional plant breeding methods.⁶ Controversy around GM food usually arises when governments try to implement policies regarding how or if GM crops should be allowed in their territory. Genetic modification becomes a public issue when farmers protest against the damage GM crops could cause in the country's agricultural diversity.

One of the many examples is the case of GM potatoes and anaemia in Perú. Perú has over 3000 varieties of potatoes, most of them being native and endemic to the Andean region. Potatoes have been part of the country's diet for centuries, even before the Inca empire was born. At the same time, the country has a striking 44% of children and 25% of pregnant women with anaemia.⁷ Iron deficiency anaemia in pregnancy is a risk factor for preterm delivery and possibly for inferior

³ Pedro Arana, Samuel Escobar, and René Padilla, *El Trino Dios y La Misión Integral* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Kairós, 2003).

⁴ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

⁵ Franz-Theo Gottwald, Hans Werner Ingensiep, and Marc Meinhardt, *Food Ethics* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2010).

⁶ Gottwald, Ingensiep, and Meinhardt, *Food Ethics*.

⁷ Colegio Médico del Perú, "La Anemia En El Perú ¿qué Hacer?" (Lima, 2018).

neonatal health,⁸ and anaemia in children could lead to attention problems and poor school performance. Low levels of iron and anaemia are usually caused by low protein intake, either from meat or non-animal sources. Oftentimes, meat sources are expensive or scarce in the areas with a higher index of anaemia.

The Peruvian government has long opposed the import of GMOs, with a ten-year-long ban in place until 2020. However, last year researchers from the Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agraria (INIA – National Institute for Agricultural Innovation), including biologists, genetic engineers, and plant breeders, published their results on a new variety of potato with up to 250% more iron and zinc than the average commercial varieties, as well as exceptional antioxidant capabilities.⁹ Due to its cost-effective way of production, the government saw this as an opportunity to introduce this new variety as part of the diet in school lunch programs and Kaliwarma, a meal program for low income people nationwide. Children are getting more iron and other nutrients, helping them overcome the anaemia barrier. Now, aren't we proclaiming good news to the poor with this GM crop? Isn't hunger and anaemia an example of oppression that people need to be set free from? So far as these products are developed in universities, this is how the mission of God is embedded within universities. Here, genetically modified foods are an aspect of a good human-nonhuman relationship.

At this point, many will say, what about Monsanto? Isn't Monsanto creating dependence on farmers with corn crops that produce kernels which cannot reproduce themselves, thus forcing the farmers to buy again and again from them in a vicious cycle? That is why scientific research must be carried out within an ethical framework. Ethical objections to GM foods are usually centered on the possibility of harm to people or other living organisms. Is the harm they do justified by the outweighing benefits they provide? An example of a university researcher addressing these complex questions is [Gary Comstock](#),¹⁰ a philosopher who has carried out research on food ethics and GMOs for over two decades.

He proposes that we should formulate some questions to evaluate whether harm is justified or not:¹¹ What harm is envisaged? And are those who are at risk of being harmed by the GM crops different from those who may benefit from the GM crops plantation? This is where most conflicts arise, when there's an imbalance of interests among stakeholders. However, it is also very important to ask, what information do we have? Ethical judgements should go hand in hand with a comprehensive understanding of the scientific facts so that we do not just present a sentimental opinion of the matter but a factual one. We should ask ourselves, what information do we need to have before we make the decision?

To conclude, GMOs are an example of stewardship of creation. They could represent good news to the poor and freedom to those oppressed by hunger and other limitations such as anemia and malnutrition. However, when used for the benefit of the few, such as big corporations and agrochemical companies, ethical concerns need to be raised. This example of human-nonhuman interaction points out that scientific research carried out within the domains of the university has tangible effects on those whom we are most urged to love and care for: the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner.

⁸ Lindsay H. Allen, "Anemia and Iron Deficiency: Effects on Pregnancy Outcome," in *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, vol. 71, 2000, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/71.5.1280s>.

⁹ Instituto Nacional de Innovación Agraria, "MINAGRI Presentó Nueva Variedad de Papa Con Alto Contenido En Hierro y Zinc Para Combatir Anemia y Desnutrición En Zonas Altoandinas," 2018, <http://www.inia.gob.pe/2018-nota-207/>.

¹⁰ Gary Comstock is Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at North Carolina State University.

¹¹ Gottwald, Ingensiep, and Meinhardt, *Food Ethics*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read Luke 4:14-28 and discuss the following questions:

1. What do you usually tend to describe as the good news or the gospel?
2. Who do you think Jesus is referring to when he speaks of the 'poor' in this context? Is there only one kind of poverty?
3. If in Luke's Gospel Jesus chose to read this passage to inaugurate his ministry, what does that indicate Jesus' ministry is about?
4. Look at the passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 that Jesus reads. What does the broader context tell you about the kind of good news that Jesus proclaims?
5. How can you "proclaim good news to the poor" in your university, work, family, or other local context?
6. Do you agree that research on genetic modification is a way to proclaim good news to the poor?

FURTHER READING: ENGLISH

- Escobar, Samuel. *Christian Mission and Social Justice*. Missionary Studies 5. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1978.
- ———. *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- López Rodríguez, Darío. *The Liberating Mission of Jesus: The Message of the Gospel of Luke*. Translated by Stefanie E. Israel and Richard E. Waldrop. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2012.
- Padilla, C. René. *Mission Between the Times*. 2nd rev. and expanded ed. Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2010.
- Padilla, C. René, and Tetsunao Yamamori, eds. *The Local Church, Agent of Transformation: An Ecclesiology for Integral Mission*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2004.

FURTHER READING: SPANISH

- López Rodríguez, Darío. *La misión liberadora de Jesús: el mensaje del evangelio de Lucas*. 3rd ed. Lima, Perú: Ediciones Puma, 2017.
- Padilla, C. René, and Tetsunao Yamamori, eds. *La iglesia local como agente de transformación: una eclesiología para la misión integral*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Ediciones Kairós, 2003.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. Daniel Cárdenas-Vásquez was born in Moyobamba, Perú. He holds a Bachelor's in chemical engineering from Universidad Nacional Pedro Ruiz Gallo (UNPRG), in Lambayeque, Perú. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at North Carolina State University (NC State) in Raleigh, USA, where he conducts research about new functional materials using colloids and hydrogels for biomedical applications. Daniel got involved with the student movement as an undergraduate student in Lambayeque, where he led weekly Bible study groups and was the local coordinator of UNPRG's Comunidad Bíblica Universitaria (CBU). From 2013 to 2015, he was president of the national board of the Asociación de Grupos Evangélicos Universitarios del Perú (AGEUP, the IFES movement in Perú), followed by a period as staff worker with AGEUP from 2015 to 2016. Currently, he serves as advisor for the Research Department at AGEUP, and at NC State he participates in the graduate chapter of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF, the IFES movement in the United States). You can contact him at ecarden@ncsu.edu.

