

God's self-restraining order to never again unleash destructive floodwaters upon the earth (Gen 9:8-17). With the rainbow as its sign, God's covenant, like Sabbath, sets an example: it offers a model for human conduct, for only by covenant, by the resolute work of the human community working in consort, can life be sustained amid a new onslaught of destruction, this time wrought by human hands, against the community of creation.

## Word for a Warming World

It is only fitting, then, to conclude our journey with a discussion of humanity's responsibility to creation, as informed by the ancient traditions and by the mounting evidence of environmental degradation. The Bible's multitextured view of creation offers a multifaceted ethical framework for addressing this crisis. I apologize to the reader if this final section sounds too sermonic

or heavy-handed, but this is what I would call the "come-to-the-creator" moment of our journey. In marshaling the biblical resources to address our threat to creation's integrity, I do find it necessary to move from the descriptive and the reflective to the urgently prescriptive. Confronting our growing legacy of environmental destruction with eyes wide open, with faith seeking understanding, challenges us to move toward a new way of living in God's good and groaning world.<sup>17</sup>

Much to Earth's harm, we have culturally evolved within the last two and half centuries into *Homo industrialis*,<sup>18</sup> remaking ourself in the *imago deletoris*, in the "image of the destroyer." Nevertheless, we remain *Homo sapiens*, made in the *imago Dei*, a distinctly wise species uniquely endowed with God-given responsibility. Science provides us the data of danger. It excels in revealing nature's interdependent mechanisms and feedback loops. As science has given fair warning about global

warming and other forms of environmental degradation, it is also developing technologies that can shift our dependence from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. But even with much of the technology in place, or soon to be, the political and economic will is not.

If there is one thing that this grave crisis teaches us about the relationship between science and faith, it is that “man” cannot live by science alone. Science can explain the crisis, identifying its root causes and projecting trends into the future; it can even suggest ways to mitigate it. But science cannot bring about the repentance, indeed conversion, necessary to chart a new way of life. Science alone cannot provide the impetus for changing human conduct. It does not provide a compelling warrant for acknowledging the intrinsic value of life or its sanctity. Even the “anthropic principle” cannot provide the compelling symbols of ultimate meaning and orientation.<sup>19</sup> We may recognize how improbable Earth-based life is in

the universe, with or without God, but <sup>that</sup> ~~we~~ will not prevent us from pushing much of life on Earth to the brink of extinction. If, however, we take our cue from Genesis, damaging creation is tantamount to defacing God’s sanctuary, an act of utter sacrilege.

In his recent book, Richard Dawkins identifies the theory of evolution, specifically Darwinian natural selection, as a “consciousness-raiser.” What he means is that evolution powerfully “explains the whole of life” and demonstrates the “power of science to explain how organized complexity can emerge from simple beginnings without any deliberate guidance.”<sup>20</sup> The stunning simplicity and elegance of evolutionary theory cannot be gainsaid. Rather than one option among many, evolutionary theory is foundational for all the life sciences. “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution,” so Theodosius Dobzhansky famously claimed, a biologist who was also a Russian Orthodox Christian.<sup>21</sup>

Biological evolution demonstrates most fully the power of scientific explanation.<sup>22</sup> And, as we have seen, evolution adds a developmental depth and open-endedness to what the Bible's creation traditions say about nature, including ourselves.

Evolutionary theory also, as Dawkins rightfully points out, exposes the "flaws" of creation and the "cruelty and wastefulness of natural selection," from predation to extinction.<sup>23</sup> Darwin himself noted the "clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horridly cruel works of nature."<sup>24</sup> But again, no biblical tradition ever claimed creation as perfect, not even the magisterial account of Genesis 1. While proclaimed "extremely good" in its God-given capacities to sustain and develop the diversity of life, creation is also granted the freedom to become. The earth and the waters are not preprogrammed machines; they are invited by God to further the process of creation, each according to its own natural and, yes, messy way. Both the sage and the psalmist acknowledge the

intractable presence of suffering. Scientifically speaking, a *perfectly* harmonious creation could never give rise to the emergent complexity that characterizes the world as we know it.<sup>25</sup> The beauty and order that we know rests on the same processes that produce suffering and death. The "weal" depends on the "woe" (cf. Isa 45:7).

But, I ask, can the awareness of evolution, in all its theoretical elegance and empirical power, provide sufficient "consciousness-raising" to inspire new practices, to establish a new orientation toward the environment, that is, toward creation? Yes, global warming could dramatically disrupt the "accumulative power" of natural selection, as Dawkins puts it. But is that enough to motivate significant change in our habits of consumption? A keen awareness of the sanctity of life does not emerge unambiguously from evolution. Rather, reverence for life arises directly from discerning the world as *creation*, as the open-ended product of God's resolve and delight. In the faith spawned by the ancients, the

climate chaos spawned by our imperious practices is nothing less than a breach of covenant, one that threatens a new inundation of destruction. To claim the world as created is to claim God's care for it and our responsibility to care for it. In faith, sacred responsibility meets holy passion.

If science excels in revealing the wonders of creation, then faith excels in responding to such wonders in praise, humility, and gratitude, out of which emerges the holy passion and sacred duty to "serve and preserve" creation and to address anything that would threaten its integrity. Scientifically informed faith raises both consciousness and conviction. According to Psalm 104, damaging habitat and diminishing diversity are tantamount to divesting God of joy and passion for creation. Through deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and overexploitation, we are systematically destroying this basic feature of creation, namely, its habitational integrity for diversity.<sup>26</sup> The insidious nature of

global warming is that it is global; it ~~cannot~~ be confined to the culprits, to the gas-emitting nations. Cutting across all boundaries—economic, national, and ethnic, land and sea—climate chaos knows no limits on Earth. Unlike the waters in Job and Psalm 104, there is no natural or divinely prescribed boundary to stop the spread of greenhouse gases from inundating the earth (cf. Ps 104:9; Job 38:10-11). To be sure, some suffer from it more than others: the poor are bearing the brunt, ever more so. They are our first environmental victims and refugees, their habitats destroyed because of the energy hungry, carbon-emitting habits of developed natic

For God so loved the world that God ~~gave~~ Leviathan and Behemoth, "the first of the great acts of God" (Job 40:19), so that all who would see them will gain everlasting wonder. As the God of the psalmist bursts with joy over the vastness of creation's diversity, so the God of the Joban poet swells with amazement over every wild thing. As Mary Midgley puts it, "We need the vast world, and it must be a world that does

not need us; a world constantly capable of surprising us ... since only such a world is the proper object of wonder."<sup>27</sup> Yes, Leviathan does not need Job; nevertheless, Job needs Leviathan, and so do we all. As the Leviathans, large and small, of land and sea are rapidly being pushed to extinction while we deplete and fight over Earth's nonrenewable resources—all carbon-based and now blood-drenched—we must lift our eyes toward that which truly sustains. As God once called the exiles to live into the new reality of freedom and set a new course of conduct, so today we are called to break the bonds of our consumptive, self-enslaving ways and live anew. As newness can emerge in nature, so it can also emerge in human culture and behavior. A new day can dawn.

And for each new day, so Qoheleth would remind us, the sun rises, the wind blows, and the streams flow into the sea (Eccl 1:5-7). Solar, wind, and water: these renewing resources have been present before the dawn of human history.

As Qoheleth grew weary of them, we have ignored them outright, much to our detriment. Even as the cosmos slowly unwinds and dissipates, the wind, the sun, and the flowing streams remain the closest thing to eternal, inexhaustible sources of energy that we will ever know. Yet the first two remain largely untapped, and the third has been exploited in such a way as to destroy habitats and entire ecosystems.<sup>28</sup> The solutions remain ever before us. Qoheleth warns against the striving for luxury and legacy and commends a life of grateful simplicity, of acceptance and sufficiency, a life of settling for less while living for joy. Qoheleth exposes self-destructive striving for gain, whose environmental consequences we are just beginning to face. Seeking gain, the sage points out, bears its own heavy yoke. Seeking simplicity, however, replaces greed with gratitude, enslavement with freedom, despair with joy. Qoheleth is no hedonist, for he does not seek enjoyment as one strives for gain. Qoheleth,

rather, *receives* pleasure, however momentary, in gratitude to God. In his own small (and cynical) way, this sage of sages acknowledges the giftedness of creation. Creation's delicate gift of sustenance is best received and shared, not grasped and exploited. And it is in the receiving, so claims Qoheleth, that God is encountered.

And it is in the playing, according to Proverbs, that Wisdom encounters us. God so loved the world that God gave daughter Wisdom, so that everyone who plays with her may gain enlightened life. Proverbs boldly claims that human beings exist not for themselves but for Wisdom, specifically for her play and enrichment. Yet, reciprocally, Wisdom's play nurtures and enriches all conscious life. Her play is mutually edifying, and there are no losers, except those who refuse her invitation or simply quit, much to their impoverishment. Wisdom's play, moreover, is no otherworldly, mystical exercise. Both Proverbs and Psalms declare God creating the world *in* and *by* wisdom (Ps 104:24; Prov 3:19). However, more than creation's

intelligibility, more than its orderliness is meant, as science so powerfully demonstrates. Creation in wisdom reflects its *joie de vivre*, a vitality reflected in its interactive, self-regulatory, life-sustaining processes.

Creation according to Proverbs is made for Wisdom's play, and to play is to discover and cherish creation made in wisdom. It is what scientists do best in their quest to understand the wonders of creation. It is what people of faith do best in their quest to cherish and care for creation. Wisdom takes hold of both science and faith to engage in the play of discovery and the exercise of responsibility. Wisdom is Stephen Jay Gould's "beautiful and coherent quilt" that unites the separate "magisteria" of science and religion.<sup>29</sup> But wisdom also calls for action, the wisdom to relinquish destructive habits and to do so joyfully. The world is Wisdom's playfield, not a battlefield, and we are her partners, not her opponents.

The morality play of Genesis 2-3 weds

to creation, bound to it, in fact. Created from the “dust,” we are groundlings to the ground and partners to each other. We are kin to creation. But as this ancient tale unfolds, humanity fails to acknowledge such kinship, the kinship to which evolution also points. We failed in the garden, and we continue to fail to “serve and preserve” creation (Gen 2:15). The “original sin” was and remains the failure to take responsibility. Its “originality” lies in its pervasively persistent force, manifested throughout human history. Had the primal couple openly confessed before God and expressed their willingness to take responsibility for their actions, perhaps God would not have expelled them, and they would have continued to serve the garden. But the story takes a dramatically different turn: it tells of the couple succumbing to fear, blame, and the will to power, which from Cain and Lamech to today continues to engulf the world.

The man and the woman were no longer deemed fit to serve God’s garden. Today, outside the garden, only one thing is different. We have

not only reached for divineline power; we have grasped it and declared it rightfully ours in the name of economic development and freedom. The greenhouse gases we emit, along with the economic and military destruction we wreak, assert our dominant, godlike powers, and the earth becomes increasingly cursed as a consequence. There is no need for divine judgment to turn creation into a curse. We are doing it quite well ourselves.

Finally, we come back to Genesis 1, with the commanding charge: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” (v. 28). The legacy of our destructive *dominion*, coupled with the tale of failure in Genesis 3, sheds a cautionary light on Genesis 1.<sup>30</sup> After two and half centuries of rampant industrialization, the “blessing” of dominion has become a baneful burden. And yet Genesis 1 reminds us that as the human species has become the problem, it is also bears the solution. We remain in charge, for only we can undo the havoc that is undoing creation.

A new model of dominion must emerge, a dominion of self-restraint and natural development.<sup>31</sup> Technology shall remain, to be sure, a crucial part of life-sustaining “dominion,” particularly as we develop ways to harness renewable energy sources efficiently. Nevertheless, in most areas of human “dominion,” restraint rather than expansion and development is in order.

The kind of dominion needed today is a dominion of self-mastery, of self-restraint and respect that acknowledges creation’s kinship, a dominion that points to a peaceable kingdom, or better, “kindom,”<sup>32</sup> and acknowledges that human beings, cast in God’s image, are an integral part of creation. Biblically, dominion can play out in one of two ways, which collide in the character of Cain. For whatever reason, Cain’s sacrifice was rejected by God, while his brother’s was accepted. In response, Cain violently subdues Abel (Gen 4:8). But such an exercise of dominion is actually a capitulation. Before Cain

kills, God issues him a challenge:

YHWH said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do good, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do good, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” (Gen 4:6-7)

God calls upon Cain to master the sin that is coiled up inside him and poised to strike. He is to rule over himself and, in so doing, choose instead of death, kinship over fratricide. **But** Cain succumbs, committing violence. It is his sin; it is also the Bible’s first “sin.”<sup>33</sup> Cain cannot hide it, for the ground itself, the *‘ādāmāh*, bears witness as it cries out for justice (4:10-11). Cain becomes the Bible’s first environmental refugee. His story exemplifies the tragic failure to exercise self-mastery and charts the devastating consequences of his crime. God’s challenge to Cain is also

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What does it mean for us, in the face of mounting catastrophe, to "do good," as God had challenged Cain? It means to muster all the scientific, moral, and, yes, religious resources to change our devastating habits of consumption, which have privileged luxury over livelihood, greed over good. It means to compensate the victims whose blood has already drenched the ground, like Abel's. It means to mobilize ourselves toward peaceful practices, to see ourselves as creatures of the earth, entirely dependent on God and ground. It means to work and play in life-sustaining ways with each other and with all creation. It means to speak the truth, to speak the Word on behalf of a warming world, the Word on behalf of God and of the victims of our imperious practices, to speak on behalf of those that cannot speak, including polar bears

and cedar trees. It is the Word informed by faith and science, the Word of Wonder and Love.

To claim the world as creation is not to denounce evolution and debunk science. To the contrary, it is to join in covenant with science in acknowledging creation's integrity, as well as its giftedness and worth. To see the world as creation is to recommit ourselves to its care, not as the fittest, most powerful creatures on the animal planet but as a species held uniquely responsible for creation's flourishing. It is to celebrate the inalienable beauty and dignity of all living kind and bear witness to God's manifold creation. It is also to bear witness to creation's groaning as the ground suffers from deforestation, mountaintop removal, toxic dumping, and rising temperatures. To see the world as God's intricate, intelligible, surprising, sustainable creation is to return to wonder and to go forth in wisdom, such that "the mountains and the hills . . . shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa 55:12).