

Creation Care

A STUDY AND PRACTICE FOR LENT (*and beyond*)



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

How to use this guide

There is a growing movement all across the spectrum of Christianity from Roman Catholics to mainline Protestants to the Evangelical Churches. Whatever we may disagree on, at the opening of the 21st century, we agree that caring for God's Creation is a crucial mission rooted in our biblical heritage.

Over the last 10-15 years a flood of articles, books, and websites has rolled over the Christian landscape and it seems every denomination has organizations devoted to the issue. This guide is meant to assist Christians in reflection, dialogue and action in carrying forward this mission.

Lent is traditionally a time of reflection, a turning inward that we may then turn outward with greater efficacy in our lives as Christians. This guide is an opportunity to explore our lives as a part of God's Creation and to develop a fuller understanding of our opportunities and obligations to be good stewards of this great gift. It is our hope and prayer that it will lead to action, to changed behavior. After all, as the great Thomas, bishop of Kempis in the 14th century reminded us. "At the day of judgment, we will not be examined as to what we have read, but as to what we have done."

This project was inspired by the Rev. Art Hancock, Vicar, Ascension Episcopal Church, Hayward, Wis., and carried out under the auspices of the Very Rev. Robert Rodgers, Dean of the Northern Convocation of the Diocese of Eau Claire." The text was written and compiled by Dr. Kent Shifferd and with graphic design and layout by Claire Fliess. It is to be used by small parish groups or by individuals on their own. It requires no expertise, no expert leader.

It is a compilation of scripture, prayers, brief readings, pictures and exercises. It invites you to keep a Creation Care Journal which you may share or not as you wish. It calls for us to reflect on the miracle of God's Creation, the ways in which we humans are degrading it, and what we can do as churches and as individuals to repent, that is, to turn around and honor, respect, revere and conserve the Creation.

The study begins with gratitude and appreciation for this rare gift on which our very being depends and from which it flows. It ends with opportunities to plan for whatever action you deem appropriate upon completing the study. Because we are caring people, some of this

material is disheartening, but we are believers in the grace of God so we are never without hope.

There is a Hebrew Midrash that says: "You are not required to complete the task, but neither may you lay it down." Seems like wise counsel. And too, we need to remember that there are tens of thousands of other brothers and sisters around the globe who are carrying the task. We are not isolated and alone but part of a great movement to restore the earth and make way for the Kingdom. Naturally, as we discuss these matters there will be differing opinions. Of course we respect one another, but often we are not skilled in the kind of conversation that stimulates ideas and discussion.

So here are a couple of reminders.

- None of us has all of the truth; so it's important to listen to others.
- Never, ever interrupt anyone who is speaking.
- Keep the focus on yourself; use "I" statements as in "I believe," or "I see it this way." (Rather than, "You're wrong!")
- Everyone has a right to talk, but no obligation. Go around the circle giving each person an opportunity to talk or to pass.
- Judge not, that ye be not judged.

Calendar

The suggested calendar is one session per week through to the end, but do it however you wish. You might want to appoint a different moderator for each session, someone who will keep it moving and who will make sure all have a chance to talk of they wish.

Creation Care Journal

We suggest that you keep a Creation Care Journal as you go along as a way of furthering the dialogue with yourself. You could assign yourself a discipline of writing in it every day, or just when the Spirit moves you. It is not to be a great literary masterpiece (although, who knows? . . .), just your notes, your jottings. Also, you will have thoughts during the week that you may wish to raise at the next meeting.

*Yours in Christ,
Kent Shifferd, Claire Fliess and
Fathers Art Hancock and Bob Rodgers*



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INTRODUCTION

For the beauty of the Earth

Hymns, Poems, Memories, Prayers & Pictures



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide



Beginning with prayer. . .

“For the good earth which God has given us, and for the wisdom and will to conserve it, Let us pray to the Lord.” (Prayers of the People, Book of Common Prayer)

“O heavenly King, O Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art in all places and fillest all things; Treasury of good things and Giver of life: Come and dwell in us and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O gracious Lord.” (from the morning prayer service of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in America)

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“Why People Of Faith Care For Creation”

This article is reprinted from the website of EarthMinistry, <http://earthministry.org/why-do-people-of-faith-care>) at <http://earthministry.org>. (Used with permission.)

Caring for the Earth is a fundamental part of religious faith. Nearly every major faith tradition and Christian denomination has a statement about the need to respect, enjoy, and protect God’s gift of the world around us. Underlying these statements are a set of core values that speak to the heart of religious morals and ethics: spirituality, stewardship, sustainability, and justice.

Spirituality

Creation itself inspires us and calls us to care. Many people have had their most profound spiritual experience in nature. As we behold the power and love of God in a mountain range, a sunset, or in the timelessness of the ocean, we can’t help but be moved. But creation also includes humans – our families, communities, and created landscapes. God created all things of Heaven and Earth and God is our inspiration to care for both wild places and our own cities and backyards.

Stewardship

Psalm 24 states that “the Earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” Humans simply hold the Earth in trust for God. We are tenants here, called to care for the creation on behalf of future generations and all species. The Bible calls us to “till and keep the garden” and names human beings as the

trustees of creation. Because God created all the Earth and all of us, creation is beautiful and good and sacred. We are called by our devotion to God and our love for God’s works to protect it.

Sustainability

At the heart of sustainability is the goal of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In a world of finite resources, those among us who have more than enough must address patterns of consumption so that we can provide for all. Acquiring more “stuff” has a direct effect on the sustainability of the planet and on the quality of life for people around the globe. The good news is that more and more people are realizing that spiritual emptiness can’t be filled by consumption. What makes us happy is intimacy – intimacy with self, with others, and with God. In the end, sustainability means seeing ourselves and our neighbors as children of God, not as consumers or competitors for Earth’s resources.

Justice

Justice means that in addition to providing aid to our neighbors, we are called to change societal systems that cause poverty, injustice, and environmental damage in the first place. It goes beyond helping to meet physical

needs to creating a society with laws and policies that allow the needs of all Earth's inhabitants to be met. Care and responsibility for the "least of these among us" is a central tenant of Christianity and has a direct connection to environment issues. The impact of environmental degradation falls most heavily on the people

around the world who are least able to mitigate these impacts — poor and vulnerable populations. It also disproportionately affects fragile plants, animals and ecosystems. Working for justice calls us to channel our faith into power, to call for social and environmental justice at the local, state and national level.



Hymns, Poems, Memories, Prayers and Pictures

Read, or better, sing and then contemplate these hymns

For The Beauty of The Earth

by Folliot S. Pierpoint, 1864

For the beauty of the earth,
For the glory of the skies;
For the love which from our birth,
Over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour,
Of the day and of the night;
Hill and vale and tree and flow'r,
Sun and moon, and stars of light;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight;
For the mystic harmony,
Linking sense to sound and sight;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child;
Friends on Earth and friends above,
For all gentle thoughts and mild;
Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This, our hymn of grateful praise.

- What words strike you as especially relevant to you?
- What does "the love" mean in the Hymn "For the Beauty of the Earth"?
- Read or sing "This Is My Father's World" and "Morning Has Broken."
Note how these hymns integrate God, the natural world, and humanity in to a single whole to be revered and rejoiced in.

This Is My Father's World

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
His hand the wonders wrought.

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.

This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world: the battle is not done:
Jesus Who died shall be satisfied,
And earth and Heav'n be one.

This is my Father's world, dreaming, I see His face.
I open my eyes, and in glad surprise cry, "The Lord is
in this place."
This is my Father's world, from the shining courts
above,

The Beloved One, His Only Son,
Came—a pledge of deathless love.

This is my Father’s world, should my heart be ever
sad?

The lord is King—let the heavens ring. God reigns—let
the earth be glad.

This is my Father’s world. Now closer to Heaven
bound,

For dear to God is the earth Christ trod.

No place but is holy ground.

This is my Father’s world. I walk a desert lone.
In a bush ablaze to my wondering gaze God makes His
glory known.

This is my Father’s world, a wanderer I may roam
Whate’er my lot, it matters not,
My heart is still at home.

Words: Maltbie D. Babcock, 1901, alt. While a pas-
tor in Lockport, New York, Babcock liked to hike in an
area called “the escarpment,” an ancient upthrust ledge
near Lockport. It has a marvelous view of farms, or-

chards, and Lake Ontario, about 15 miles distant. It is
said those walks in the woods inspired these lyrics. The
title recalls an expression Babcock used when starting a
walk: “I’m going out to see my Father’s world.”

Morning Has Broken

By Eleanor Fargeon

Morning has broken, like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning
Praise for them springing, fresh from the Word

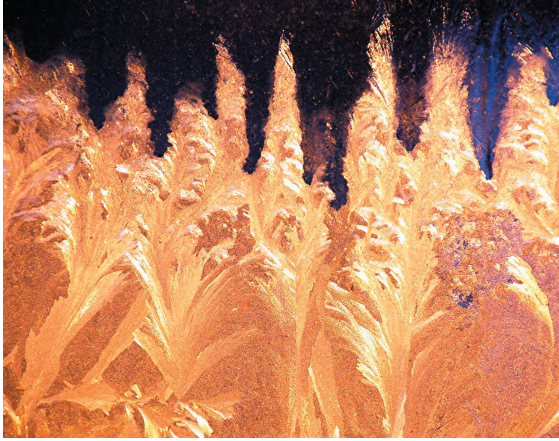
Sweet the rain’s new fall, sunlit from heaven
Like the first dewfall, on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where his feet pass

Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning
Born of the one light, Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God’s recreation of the new day

- What other hymns or secular songs or poems come to your mind that celebrate the miracle of creation?



Photos by Jeff Peters, Mellen, WI



Photos by Jeff Peters, Mellen, WI



Creation Care Journal

Memories: What were some sublime moments you had out of doors when you were a child? Who took you there? What do you owe to those who took you there? What have been sublime moments as you have grown older? For what about creation are you grateful to God? What is your favorite thing about the natural world? Is it the birds, the sunsets, the great ocean, or what? Share these thoughts and feelings and record them in your Creation Care Journal for next time.

If you have time, read over the scripture passages in unit 1 and pick out one or two that strike you as important, copy them into your journal and then at the meeting, ask the others what passages they found meaningful and share your choice. Share with the others or record in your Journal.

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Closing: A Prayer of Awareness

Today we know of the energy that moves all things: the oneness of existence, the diversity and uniqueness of every moment of creation, every shape and form, the attraction, the allurements, the fascination that all things have for one another.

Humbled by our knowledge, chastened by surprising revelations, with awe and reverence we come before the mystery of life. (From the Web of Creation website)

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PREFACE

God's mind flashed and roared!

Before there was before, in the impenetrable darkness, in the eternally forever before forever, in the unfathomable depths, in the silence before there was sound, in the infinite void of infinite extent, in the nothing before the nothing that presumes something, in the formlessness, in the motionlessness, before reality, there was God. And God focused His fearsome, awful, benign, omnipotent mind for ageless eons. And He planned. Carefully. All the laws and the complicated structures were perfectly crafted in His mind. And then He concentrated the energy of His thoughts, shrinking them into an ever denser mass of pure idea, shrinking them down to pea size, to molecule size, to quark size, to a speck of pure concentrated energy, the All of Everything, so dense it would rocket through a thousand miles of lead if He had chosen to drop it through a thousand miles of lead. He held it thus in the time before time, making certain it was perfect. AND THEN GOD'S MIND FLASHED AND ROARED!



He released it in the primal thunderclap of the universe, dwarfing all sound that would be heard ever after. And light – blinding white LIGHT brighter than all suns altogether. For this deafening sound was the source of all sound to come, this light progenitor of all light to come, reverberating and shining down through the ages endlessly. In an instant God's thoughts flashed and roared out into a universe: suns, planets, all the atoms that would ever be, galaxies, comets, all spinning and revolving and wheeling with God's precise mathematical precision.

And God said to Himself, **"I AM THAT I AM."**

– Kent Shifferd

SECTION 1

The theological bases for Creation Care



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

UNIT 1: SCRIPTURE



Beginning with prayer . . . aloud together.

(From the Web of Creation site, <http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/liturgy/prayers.htm#earthday>)

Good God, Creator of the world, draw us into prayer and celebration as we gather to remember the gifts of your earth and the stewardship you have entrusted to us as tillers and tenders in your image.

We know that in the gathering of the people, power is present among us; your Holy Spirit stirs and moves and gives us courage to remember that all good gifts come first from you. We praise you for this creation in the words of the Psalmist, sung by our ancestors in faith for generations:

“God speaks: the heavens are made;

God breathes: the stars shine.

God bottles the waters of the sea
and stores them in the deep

All earth, be astounded,
stand in awe of God.”

Keep us faithful to this gathering in faith and “bless this vine your right hand has planted.”

Now and forever, Amen.

Taken from liturgy materials used on Earth Day 1997 at Seattle University; Provided by Earth Ministry

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What in your Journal would you like to share?

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Scripture

Suggested Activity: Take a few minutes to read over the Genesis passages. Discuss what parts speak to you. Look at John 1. How does it connect Christ with Genesis? How are we honoring, or not honoring, this particular scriptural injunction?

Genesis

Genesis 1:1-31 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ^{1:2}Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep. God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters.

^{1:3}God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

^{1:4}God saw the light, and saw that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness. ^{1:5}God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. There was evening and there was morning, one day.



^{1:6}God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."

^{1:7}God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse, and it was so. ^{1:8}God

called the expanse sky. There was evening and there was morning, a second day.

^{1:9}God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear," and it was so. ^{1:10}God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas. God saw that it was good. ^{1:11}God said, "Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth," and it was so. ^{1:12}The earth brought forth grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with its seed in it, after their kind: and God saw that it was good.

^{1:13}There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

^{1:14}God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; ^{1:15}and let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth," and it was so. ^{1:16}God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He also made the stars. ^{1:17}God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth, ^{1:18}and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good.

^{1:19}There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

^{1:20}God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky." ^{1:21}God created the large sea crea-

tures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good. ^{1:22}God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ^{1:23}There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

^{1:24}God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind, cattle, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind," and it was so. ^{1:25}God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good.

^{1:26}God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ^{1:27}God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. ^{1:28}God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ^{1:29}God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. ^{1:30}To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food." And it was so.

^{1:31}God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

^{2:1}The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ^{2:2}On the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. ^{2:3}God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because he rested in it from all his work which he had created and made.

Psalm 95:1-7, John 1: 1-5

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God from Whom all things were made and without Whom

nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of all people, and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it.” How does the word “Word” take you back to the Hymn, “Morning Has Broken?” What is the Logos Doctrine?

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Discussion: Look at the ten themes below. Choose one or two and read the scripture and discuss. (*The remaining themes could be used for further discussion at another time.*)

CREATION CARE THEMES THROUGHOUT

SCRIPTURE (adapted from Blessed Earth website, www.blessedearth.org)

The Bible is the foundational narrative for Christian faith and practice. It tells the story of God’s creating the heavens and the earth and of God’s loving care in redeeming a fallen people and restoring creation to its pristine beauty so that it can once again glorify the Creator. As such it is replete with references to the creation and to the interconnected relations among God, humans, and the creation. The following selections are taken from the NIV and NRSV versions of the Bible.

1. God created the universe.

“You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.” (Nehemiah 9:6)

“He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing. He wraps up the waters in his clouds, yet the clouds do not burst under their weight. He covers the face of the full moon, spreading his clouds over it. The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke. By his power he churned up the sea.... By his breath the skies become fair.... And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! How then can we understand the thunder of his power?” (Job 26:7-9, 11-14)

“How many are your works, O Lord! In wis-

dom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small. (Psalm 104:24-25)

“Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” (John 1:3)

Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” (Colossians 1:15-16)

“In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (Hebrews 1:2)

2. God owns the creation.

“To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.” (Deuteronomy 10:14)

“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.” (1 Chronicles 29:11)

“Everything under heaven belongs to me.” (Job 41:11)

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.” (Psalm 24:1-2; cf. Psalm 89:11; 1 Corinthians 10:26)

“For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” (Psalm 95:3-5)

3. God loves the creation.

“He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD. By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth.” (Psalm 33:5-6)

“The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.... The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.” (Psalm 145:9, 13; cf. Psalm 145:17)

4. God loves animals.

“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth.” (Genesis 9:9-10)

“In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety.” (Hosea 2:18)

5. Creation reveals the Creator.

“Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.” (Job 12:7-10)

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4; cf. Psalm 97:6)

“Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)

6. Creation praises the Creator.

“Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad, let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord.” (Psalm 96:11-13)

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them

praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.” (Psalm 148:1-6)

“Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds.” (Psalm 148:7-10)

“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.” (Isaiah 55:12)

7. God sustains the creation.

“In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.” (Job 12:10)

“You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing.” (Psalm 65:9-13)

“He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth.” (Psalm 104:10-14)

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:17)

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:3)

8. Humanity is responsible for stewarding creation.

“The Lord God took the man and put him in

the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Genesis 2:15)

“You must keep my decrees and my laws.... And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.” (Leviticus 18:26, 28)

“The land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and garner their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord.... The land is to have a year of rest.” (Leviticus 25:2-5; cf. Exodus 23:10-11)

“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.” (Leviticus 25:23-24)

“If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.” (Leviticus 26:3-4)

“You shall not pollute the land in which you live.... You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the Israelites.” (Numbers 35:33-34)

“If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?” (Deuteronomy 20:19)

9. Humanity should not defile the land.

“I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.” (Jeremiah 2:7)

How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished.” (Jeremiah 12:4)

“It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares.” (Jeremiah 12:11)

“Is it not enough for you to feed on the good

pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?” (Ezekiel 34:17-18)

“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.” (Hosea 4:1-3)

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:22)

“He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a saltwaste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there.” (Psalm 107:33-34)

“Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land. The LORD almighty has declared in my hearing: ‘Surely the great houses will become desolate, the fine mansions left without occupants. A ten-acre vineyard will produce only a bath of wine, a homer of seed only an ephah of grain.’” (Isaiah 5:8-10)

“The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth; its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.” (Isaiah 24:4-6)

“You have polluted the land with your whoring and wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come.” (Jeremiah 3:2-3)

“The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” (Revelation 11:18)

10. God redeems the creation.

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my

face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

“When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.” (Psalm 104:29-

“The Lord will surely comfort Zion and look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.” (Isaiah 51:3; cf. Isaiah 41:18-20; Ezekiel 36:35)

“He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” (Acts 3:21)

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (Romans 8:19-21)

“Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:20; cf. Ephesians 1:10)

Adapted from “Bible Verses on Creation Care,” by Earth-Care, Inc. (<http://www.earthcareonline.org>)

(Blessed Earth is an educational nonprofit that inspires and equips Christians to become better stewards of the earth. Through church, campus, and media outreach, we build bridges that promote measurable environmental change and meaningful spiritual growth. www.BLESSEDEARTH.org)

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Closing Prayer Litany of Commitment

(From the Web of Creation, <http://www.webofcreation.org/Worship/liturgy/litany.htm>)

Leader: As we seek to relax our grip so that the earth, our fragile sister, might rest from our labors, help us to see our world more vividly than we have done in the past.

People: Grant us vision for the challenges of this age and give us hearts full of courage for the future.

Leader: As we seek to be wise stewards of the gifts of the earth in timber and oil, coal, and gas, help us to know your world more humanely than we have in the past.

People: Make us learn that wisdom which we see among those wise and humble people of the earth, that we might walk with care and reverence so as to caress our fair sister.

Leader: Sharing God, draw us to contemplation and silence so that we might see, in wonder, our lives intertwined with the squirrels and the cardinal, the creatures great and small, the beauty of each season. Help us to see the birth, growth, death, and rebirth so as to give us courage in the ongoing creation of our Creator.

People: Deepen our faith and enliven our thinking, nourish our bodies and strengthen our souls, that we may be your message in the world, your servants for the common wellness of the earth. Make us weavers of a new order, crafters of a new earth.

Leader: Grant us grace through the Christ of the Cosmos. Call us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, in the love with earth, and with our brothers, and sisters.

People: Give us a measure of the Spirit that these commitments we make before you might make our work holy.

Leader: Let us go forth from this sacred ark with steady hand up lifted heart, with clear eye and alert mind, with firm step, and willing hands. May we arrive at fresh springs of renewal through God’s holy Word, in our communities of faith, and in deep solidarity with all creation.

People: Amen. Let all the creation hear and bear witness. Amen

SECTION 1

The theological bases for Creation Care



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

UNIT 2: SOME THEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

(Question as you read: “How do you understand the relationship between God and the world and what does your understanding impel you to do?)



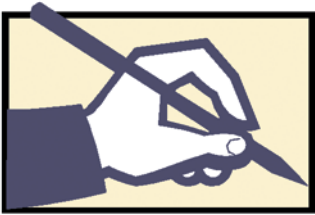
Beginning with prayer . . . aloud together.

This world
Your creation
Rolled into a sphere
Packaged in sunshine
Gift-wrapped in love
Given to us
Thank you

John Birch

http://www.faithandworship.com/creation_prayers.htm#ixzz1kgE7FjI0

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Journal: What would you like to share from this past week’s Journal?
What did others write about?



Global Stewardship: The Christian Mandate ¹

By Dick Wright and John Wood

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1, 2 NIV)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For 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

. . . *This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Colossians 1:15-20, 23 NIV)*

Stewardship begins with the understanding that God in Jesus Christ has created and now sustains the world, and that humans, who were created in God's image, have been charged to serve and keep the creation. At the same time we are creatures, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures. Although it is appropriate to use the creation to meet our needs, Scripture teaches that the chief purpose of creation is to glorify God. Stewardly care is therefore a trust from God. This care includes all creation and the human culture built from it. Stewardship especially implies promoting just relationships among humans, and between humans and the rest of creation. This concern for justice is crucial for the developing world, where unjust relationships often leave people without land, food or health.

A Biblical ethic for stewardship includes, among others, the following conserving elements:

- **Sufficiency** – we need to be grateful to God for earth's bounty and also be content with what he has provided.
- **Justice** – we must ensure that all human kind – future as well as present – enjoy the gifts of creation and are not impoverished by unjust or unwise use of those gifts.
- **Fruitfulness** – while using the fruit of creation, we should never destroy creation's ability to be replenished.
- **Restoration/Sabbath** – we should provide for the restoration of the ecosystems we have used or misused.

There are many ways in which stewardship has been practiced around the world; human creativity often enhances the fruitfulness of the earth and eases human suffering. It is also evident, however, we have not always been faithful to our stewardly calling. The creation has been degraded by our misuse of the environment and our failure to treat all people justly. It is good news for humans and all of creation that God in Christ continues to care for his creation and is reconciling all things to himself. The atoning work of Christ on the cross has opened the door to reconciliation with God, and we are privileged to be ministers of

that reconciliation. Stewardly care, therefore, involves participating with Christ in sharing this good news and in bringing healing to both human and non-human creation, foreshadowing that future time when the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness, and all creation is whole.

Global stewardship today entails addressing the intricate relationships between environmental degradation, resource consumption, population growth and the means of production of goods and their use. Because small, local or regional activities, when multiplied, potentially impact the biosphere, most human activities relate to global stewardship. Christians are glad to unite with all those who share a concern for creation in bringing stewardly care to human culture and the natural systems on which we depend. In particular, those people and institutions which are explicitly Christian have a special responsibility to promote learning, research and living – our spiritual service – that will lead to faithful stewardly care of the creation, as they honor God who has entrusted the gift of creation to humankind.

¹ “Global Stewardship: The Christian Mandate” was a group effort principally authored by Dick Wright (Gordon College) and John Wood (The King's University College). It was produced during the Global Stewardship Initiative (GSI) program and signed by members of the GSI. It was formally endorsed by the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) board of directors at its 1997 Annual President's Conference.

Marcus Borg on “God And The World”

from Marcus Borg, *Reading The Bible Again For The First Time* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).

For millennia there has been a debate about God's relationship to the world. Borg writes: “. . .there are two models for thinking about the God-world relationship” One he calls the “production model.” “Namely, like an artisan or artist, God makes the universe as something separate from God's self. Once created, the universe exists separate from God. . . .” This is also known as “Supernatural theism” and portrays God as “another being separate from the universe.” God is wholly transcendent. The other way of thinking about God, Borg writes, is “procreative” or “emanationist.” God “brings forth the universe from God's being. . . .it is in some sense ‘God stuff.’” This is not the same as pantheism, which sees the universe and God as one in the same. “”This model does not identify the universe

with God, for God is *more* than the universe; rather, it sees the universe as being ‘of God’ and ‘in God.’ This is what Borg calls “*panentheism*.” This way of looking at the God-world relationship, Borg writes “leads to a much more intimate sense of the closeness of God to the world—indeed, of the presence of God in the world.” (All quotes p. 74.)

In other words, God is both over and above, before and after, within and without, transcendent and immanent.

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A Review of Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth

by Ilia Delio, Keith Douglas Warner and Pamela Wood (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1999)

By Kent Shifferd

St. Francis saw no tension between loving God and loving all His creatures. Many modern Christians profess the first and yet tear apart the fabric of Creation. Why?

This is a book whose authors are totally aware of our complete dependence on earth’s ecosystems and of their impending crash which is already under way. What is even more important is that the authors reach into Franciscan theology and draw out a powerful Christian earth ethic and practical measures we individuals and churches can take to wade in and stand against the flood and reverse its course. This is an “engaged spirituality” that combines love for the earth with love for people, all rising out of God’s overflowing love.

The authors brilliantly dispense with the controversy over evolution or “creationism” saying: “Rather than quarrel over the exact process by which the world was created, religious and scientific leaders are tackling the moral problem of the destruction of creation.” They also explain away the commonly received belief in “dominion,” that is that God made the earth for us and gave it to us. In ancient times, “God’s dominion over all creation, and our human dominion over the Earth is to echo the love, care and responsibility that God has toward the created world. God’s dominion is founded upon love and justice; it could not be exploitative or abusive.”

Both Francis and St. Bonaventure, the great Franciscan theologian, saw creation as the book of God, show-

ing not only His magnificent power but also His infinite love for us and for all creatures. The authors ask: “Do we confront creation as a sacred book? If so, why are the pages torn and the imprints of God’s words erased?” Of course, seeing creation as the book in which God reveals Himself goes back to the first century but, relying on Francis, Bonaventure and another medieval Franciscan, the philosopher Duns Scotus, the authors take us into a deeper understanding of the Christian mystery of the incarnation where an earth ethic is truly grounded in community. The community is the Body of Christ, which does not merely include all other Christians but all being. It is the community of life. Echoing the Gospel of John (“In the beginning was the Word. . .”), Franciscan theology maintains that “The Word who is made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ is the same Word through whom all things are made. Fish, water, trees, birds, air, wind, fire—are all created through the Word of God. . . . And God is profoundly present to all things and God is expressed in all things, so that each creature is a symbol and a sacrament of God’s presence and Trinitarian life.”

Modern people (and this includes way too many Christians), have a secular view of Creation. For them it is just “nature.” And nature is a dead “other.” It is no more than a mine of raw materials over which we compete, often violently, to take as much as possible for ourselves with no thought for other humans on the planet, future humans, or God’s other creatures. We have shrunk ourselves down to nothing more than “homo economicus, orienting our lives around consumption. They point out that the utilitarian, capitalist economic philosophy that seems to govern all things these days is consistent neither with a biblical or Franciscan view of creation, nor an ecologically informed understanding of our planet. In it, there is no community. No one or thing is our brother or sister. We are not kin with the rest of Creation. But while realistic about our situation, this is not a pessimistic book. Francis rejected both the utilitarian and stewardship way—he was not a steward, in his humility “he was a brother to creation.” He lived in community with it—a profound truth that is both spiritual and ecological. We too can become kin through a conversion of the heart and in so doing inaugurate the next great historical shift, the “sustainability revolution.”

The book is divided into four parts. The first “describes the relationship between the earth as God’s Creation and Jesus as the Incarnation of God.” The second describes the “Implications of Francis’ Canticle

of Creation for our time. It describes the diversity of life, analyzes the biodiversity and raises troubling questions about how and why humans are tearing at the fabric of life. The third part examines the role of contemplative prayer in creation in light of global climate change.” The final part examines the process of conversion. Each of the four is divided into three chapters: “one each on ecology, theology and reflective action,” including practical, group exercises.

In our minds we moderns have moved ourselves out of the web of life and believe we preside over it and can do as we please even though it is patently untrue, a denial of reality, and to so believe is the essence of sin. In fact, we live wholly within the web of life which is the gift of God’s overflowing love, and just as Francis did, “we are called to live in this luminous web of love.”

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Three Sermons On Creation Care Summarized

from Greening Congregations Handbook, Ed. Tanya Marcovna Barnett (Earth Ministry: 6512 23rd Ave. NW, Seattle WA 98117), 2002.

- **“In Love With All Creation,”**

Rodney Romney

“The bible begins and ends on a note of conservation.” “We are guests and stewards here, not owners.” All things were made by God, not just that of which we approve. “For God so loved the *world*. . .” Christianity has too long made peace with a violent and destructive civilization. Most people encountering God in the bible are doing so out of doors, not in churches.

- **“Reflections On the Creation and religion,”**

Max Oelsjlaeger

It’s an “ecospiritual crisis.” “failed secular answers of more technology, more science, more market-based solutions.” Read bible texts in interpretive light of the current crisis, e.g., Psalm 104. “What is missing from ecological science is any sense of what is of ultimate value. . .of the claims the wondrous ecologies of Creation make upon us.” “What human agency has done slowly yet inexorable is to nibble away at the Creation so that the basic integrity, the ecological or systematic integrity, the Ultimate Agency, God’s Creation, is being destroyed.” Construct a moral map of stewardship out of the bible, move into the secular world to confront the powers of materialism and “Progress.”

- **“Jews, Jewish Texts, and Nature: a Brief History”**, Rabbi Daniel J. Swartz

“Once upon a time. . .we knew less about the natural world than we do today. . .But we understood that world better. . .for we lived ever so much closer to its rhythms.” Examine the old texts to see what we have lost and gained and how we can marry our modern understanding to the ancient ways to “move from our discord with nature to an informed harmony with this, God’s universe.” “. . . the bible is a story of people who cared about and knew intimately the land around them.” “. . . they understood as well the limits to their mastery—for they knew God as Sovereign of the Land, and, through such institutions as the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee. . .they acknowledged God’s ownership. It followed that they had to treat the land well. . .and they understood. . .the connection. . .between environment and justice; since the land was God’s, not only should it be protected but its rich produce should be shared with the poorest of God’s children.” “They developed the principle of *bal tash-chit*, do not destroy.” (Deut. 20:19)

Closing Thoughts And Prayers



Prayer of George Fox

(Founder of the Society of Friends or Quakers, 1624-1691)

“I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings. . . .”

[What great openings are ours as we contemplate restoring our proper relationship to God’s creation?]

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Two Closing Meditations

YOU

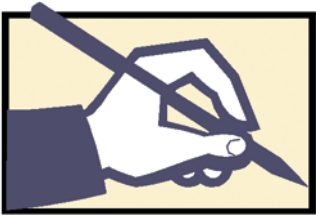
In the sweetness of the morning rain,
You.
You in the wind-dance of the pine.
What is there we do not owe to You?

Kent Shifferd

FLAT ON MY FACE

God, Hurler of fiery suns!
You scatter the galaxies to the outer-
most reaches of time,
yet You deign to care for us!
What can I possibly do but fall flat on my
face
and offer my life for your service?

Kent Shifferd



Assignment for next session:

Read the next section, "Understanding the biosphere."

Do you find any new information here?

Write any questions or observations you have about this in your Journal.

SECTION 2

We have erred and strayed from Thy ways



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

UNIT 3: The Biosphere



A Prayer of Gratitude for Creation

God of the universe, We thank You for Your many good gifts -

For the beauty of Creation and its rich and varied fruits,

For clean water and fresh air, for food and shelter, animals and plants.

Forgive us for the times we have taken the earth's resources for granted

And wasted what You have given us.

Transform our hearts and minds

So that we would learn to care and share,

To touch the earth with gentleness and with love,

Respecting all living things.

We pray for all those who suffer as a result of our waste, greed and indifference,

And we pray that the day would come when everyone has enough food and clean water.

Help us to respect the rights of all people and all species

And help us to willingly share your gifts Today and always. Amen.

- Fiona Murdoch, Eco-Congregation Ireland Praying Nature With St. Francis of Assisi

http://praying-nature.com/site_pages.php?section=Eco-Prayers&category_ref=63



What in your Journal would you like to share?

Understanding The Biosphere

By Kent D. Shifferd

We live and can only live in this thin zone of water, air and soil called the biosphere that envelops the planet.

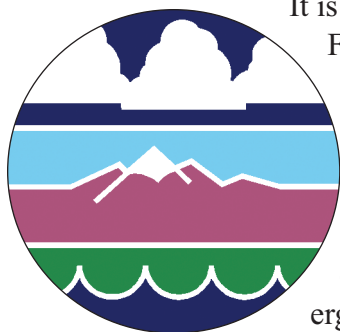
A biosphere is an extremely rare thing in the universe.

It is a miracle on a dead rock.

For all we know this is the only one. It is incredibly complicated – even more so than we yet know. It is more a process than a thing, with myriad parts exchanging materials and energy with each other along the

subtle pathways that make up the fantastically complicated web of life. No part stands alone. It is the zone of life. Its prime mover is 93 million miles away, providing the energy that must be maintained in a delicate balance if life is to continue to flourish.

The biosphere is only a few miles deep. For terrestrial plants and animals the natural limits are up around six or 7,000 meters above sea level. And while some very primitive creatures live at a depth of 6,000 meters below the surface of the sea, the overwhelming portion of sea life lives in comparatively shallow areas along the continental shelves.



A cross section of the globe would show that the entire biosphere occupies only the thinnest, outermost skin comprising less than one percent of the whole diameter, like the skin of an apple. But like all the interrelated creatures and species within it, it too is linked into a vaster system.

It evolved over eons, going through stages that are unrepeatable to get here. We are our history, or as Thomas Gold said: "Things are as they are because they were as they were." If we undo it, we can't go back and start over. We are the product of the past and must conform to its patterns and laws. We are not free. There is no other way, unless of course we mean to kill ourselves off along with most of the rest of life. We do have that choice. As William Howels has pointed out, there would be no starting over if, "supposing in a moment of idiot progress, we killed ourselves off."

Cycles, pyramids and fundamental laws

The biosphere is linked into the larger environment that extends deep into the earth and outward to the fringes of the atmosphere and beyond all the way to the sun. It is supplied from this larger environment and influenced by forces operating at great distances. The cyclic events of the solar system provide the seasons and sun spot cycles govern some of the well-known mysterious rhythms of life.

The abstract language of descriptive science is able to capture only a portion of this reality and to complete our understanding of the tangible vitality of the world we must turn to the concrete language of poetry, as in Gwen Frostic's *The Enduring Cosmos*.

The wings of moths begin to flutter - -
The life of the night is stirring
in the meadows - - the ponds - -
 across the mystic dunes - - -
in the solitudes of the woods
 - - - and swamplands;
each following an inherent rhythm of its own
 - as those of the day follow theirs -
 attuned to the great synchronous rhythms
 that make up the universe -
 - - -and will endure forever.

Rhythms that cause the tides to rise - -
 produce night and day - - -
 mountains and running brooks -
 spider webs and dew -
 determine what life shall live - -
 - - - and where.

Rhythms that sustain the equilibrium of the universe -
 the cyclical phenomena - and the continual melding
of life - -

 create the harmonious unity and beauty
of the entirety. . . .

 Old as time - - - -
 continuous as life - - - - -
the dominant influence in the universe.

There is not a leaf upon a tree - -
 no blade of grass - -
 or drop of dew - - -
 that escapes the reign of the rhythms.

These rhythms explain, for example, why as baby sea turtles hatch and look for the dim light reflected off the night time sea, they get turned around by artificial lights along the shore and, heading the wrong way, never make it to the ocean and die.

The whole complex, magnificent, highly evolved web of life is the daughter of the sun. Solar energy is the pump driving nearly all the cyclic reactions necessary to life and to the defining of ecosystems. For practical purposes, all the energy in the system comes from the sun and is equaled by the same amount of energy leaving the earth. If this balance did not occur, of course, earth would either heat up to a cinder or cool off to an ice ball. Certain gases, most prominently carbon dioxide, can trap some of the heat that would otherwise be reflected into space, and cause the earth's atmosphere and oceans to warm. Of the total incoming radiation, approximately 30% is reflected directly into space by the upper atmosphere, the clouds and the earth's surface. 50% of the total is absorbed by the surface and distributed via climatic and weather mechanisms. The remaining 20% is absorbed in the upper atmosphere including the one to three percent that is the deadly ultraviolet energy absorbed by the ozone layer.

The half that gets through powers the biosphere.

Although the overall energy exchange balances, it is not in balance in local areas. Some get more sunlight than do others due to the tilt of the earth on its axis. Moreover, portions are alternately heated and cooled during the daily rotation of the planet and during the annual revolution about the sun (the orbit being elliptical and not circular). If equilibrium were to exist at all latitudes, most earthly climates would be extremely harsh. The equator would heat up drastically; the North Pole in January would drop to nearly absolute zero. The atmospheric and ocean currents prevent this and thus nurture

abundant life by distributing the heat pole wards. The ocean currents themselves are driven by wind, which is of course nothing more than air molecules being circulated by solar energy.

A similar moderating impact is set in motion by the upward transfer of solar energy from the surface, compensating for the radiative cooling of the upper atmosphere. The result of all this in recent geological time is fairly moderate climates with seasonal variations (away from the equator) and local weather patterns. Heat and moisture are distributed around the world making life possible and turning the sphere into a biosphere.

The moisture is critical for three reasons.

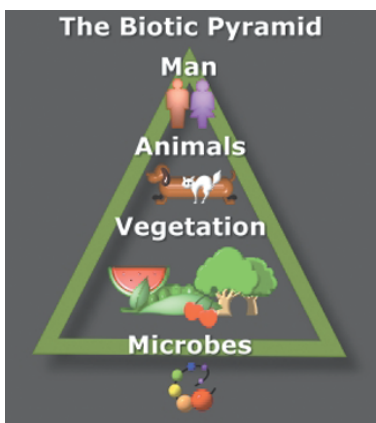
First it constitutes the bulk of biotic matter. Most living forms could be squeezed dry and there would not be much left of them.

Second, it is the carrier of other vital materials, the nutrients, moving them from where they are produced to consuming organs in consuming organisms, and moving the wastes off to where they will not poison the organism.

Third, it is one of the modelers of the earth's surface. Its movement is driven by gravity and by solar energy. The heat of the sun turns liquid water into vapor and then carries it upward and horizontally on the atmospheric currents. As the air cools, it is dropped as rain or snow. Carried far inland, it makes plant life possible. Falling on rock, it helps break it down by alternate thawing and freezing and to dissolve it into constituent minerals. Flowing down hillsides it carries these mineral nutrients into the ground and to the plant roots. Ultimately the water returns to the ocean which is the final sink, into which everything eventually goes. Other critical elements cycle as well including oxygen, carbon, and minerals.

The Biotic Pyramid

This overwhelmingly complex biosphere is organized hierarchically in the shape of a pyramid. At the base of the pyramid of living creatures is the great population of photosynthesizing plants on which all other life rests. They provide the food and the oxygen for the rest of life, constantly recy-



cling these through their biotic systems. Plants are able to use sunlight to split water molecules into hydrogen and oxygen ions. These combine to form gaseous oxygen which is then released to the atmosphere. The hydrogen ions are fed into a complex series of reactions, along with carbon dioxide inhaled from the atmosphere to yield a sugar. The great plant community of the planet acts as a carbon sink, preventing a dangerous build up of carbon that would create a greenhouse effect, warming the planet to the degree that biotic communities would be grossly changed and much of its area desertified. (As we will see, the carbon sink is today being overwhelmed and the planet is warming.) The sugars produced by the plant are then oxidized or burned in an energy-yielding process called respiration or are transported to the roots to supply the energy needed to absorb certain mineral nutrients from the soil. Plants breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. When the plants die, they fall to the soil surface where they would quickly accumulate and smother out their descendants were it not for a vast community of decomposer organisms ranging from earth worms to soil bacteria which turn the dead material into humus which holds the water and provides nutrients for the next generation of plants. These creatures also bring oxygen into the soil.

In the sea much the same processes are occurring in the nutrient-rich sea water on the continental shelves. The billions and billions of tiny phytoplankton form the basis of the entire life community of the oceans. Ever more complex animals then feed on the plant community and on each other in food chains. The smaller populations at the top of the food chain are more vulnerable to crashes either due to natural causes or over harvesting or being poisoned by bioaccumulated toxins as was the case with eagles, ospreys and DDT.

The biosphere is also subject to the first and second laws of thermodynamics.

The first of these is the law of the conservation of matter and energy and says that they are constant and that one can be changed into the other. But even though the total amount of matter-energy is constant, a constant amount is not available to users.

The second law of thermodynamics is the law of entropy which states that all concentrations of energy tend to dissipate and cannot be reconcentrated. This law governs populations in the biosphere. In the food chain made up of grass--deer--wolf, large amounts of

energy are lost in the change from one to the other. While it is true that the deer is in effect a new form of the matter-energy that was the grass, in the change from grass to deer, ninety percent of the energy locked up in the grass was lost. The deer could make use of only about ten percent. When the wolf eats the deer (or when the deer becomes the wolf), another ninety percent is lost. This explains why there are so many more grass plants than deer and so many more deer than wolves. The second law of thermodynamics is what shapes the food chain into a pyramid.

(It also explains bioaccumulation. A small amount of toxins in a single food source will accumulate up the food chain as the larger predators consume so many of them. Lightly infected minnows result in a heavily infected pike.) There is no way to overcome the second law of thermodynamics. The second law is one of the many aspects physical reality that limit the biosphere.

As with any system, all the variables cannot be maximized. At the top of the food chains are the small populations of great predators--eagle, grizzly bear, northern pike, shark and so forth. When the wolf population increases the deer population decreases and eventually brings the wolf population back down to an equilibrium with the plant--deer system. Limit is one of the chief characteristics of the biosphere.

A given ecosystem can only produce so much biomass. And while human intervention may change this, it must do so by drawing on energy and materials from another ecosystem. So while it is possible to increase the biomass in the desert southwest and make golf courses, it can only be done by drawing off the water of the Colorado River (to the point where it no longer reaches the sea radically altering its downstream ecosystems). And the pumps that irrigate the golf courses require electricity, made by burning coal with all that implies. As someone once wisely said, "You can't do just one thing in nature." Everything is in fact connected to everything else. But within the biosphere living creatures do concentrate energy and maintain very low entropy while they are alive.

The biosphere is vastly more complex than can be described even in whole volumes if, in fact, we understood it perfectly, which we do not. It is composed of countless feedback cycles and highly subtle interconnections and being so made, acts as an infinitely complex web through which radiate all manner of effects.

The biosphere that evolved on planet Earth is char-

acterized preeminently by its interconnected complexity. Every ecosystem, every individual, every cell is a through-put point. All boundaries are permeable. What we put into the environment gets into us. Furthermore, it is light, chemically speaking. For example, of the more than one hundred elements in the periodic table, living beings are principally made up of about six: carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, sulphur and phosphorus. These are among the lightest elements. While it is true that living creatures need trace elements of some of the heavier materials, such as iron and calcium, the biosphere is mostly light.

The much heavier elements play havoc with life. Lead, arsenic, mercury, cadmium, uranium and plutonium all have a tendency to depress or destroy living systems. By and large, life was shielded from these substances during nearly all of the evolutionary history until the advent of modern, or hyper-civilization.

Another chief characteristic of the biosphere that evolved on planet Earth is interdependence, and consequently, variety. The more forms of life, the more species that inhabit an area, the more interconnected they are and the more robust is life in that particular biome. What evolved was not merely the miraculous mechanism of life--the cell, not only multi-celled plants and animals, but whole communities of plants and animals interlocked into great ecosystems and these into one huge living system called the biosphere.

While statistically it is possible that there are other planets with biospheres, it must be incredibly rare in the universe. If there is another, it is a very long way away from here. Viewed from space, the other bodies of solar system are lifeless--the dead rock of the moon, overheated Venus, Jupiter locked in ice.

But it is different here. "Out of a single molten planet the hummingbirds and pterodactyls and gray whales were all woven." Earth viewed from space is a blue-green miracle. The earth has continued on through shock and trauma and other "punctuations" in its evolutionary development, but life itself has continued to be in control of the planet, and over the eons it has evolved a vast number of species-- 300,000 species of beetles, for example. Already at three and a half billion years ago, life was on its way toward evolving a plenitude of forms all locked together in intricately connected ecosystems whose synergistic actions balanced Earth's atmospheric and oceanic wombs so that life continued to cycle.

The biosphere is the base on which civilization rests and from which it takes its nourishment. Protecting

the integrity of the cell, the building block of life, and the diversity of ecosystems, is civilization's primary responsibility if we intend to continue and flourish. Over eons earth had become a living planet. Modern humans began to evolve about 200,000 to 150,000 years ago and began altering ecosystems. As we shall see in later chapters, some of their alterations, even as early as several thousand years ago, imperiled their local civilizations. But by and large, humans were an incredibly successful species, adapting to as much as altering the planet, until the last brief moment of time when the degree, scale and speed of change that I call hypercivilization burst upon the earth. ((The foregoing material is by Kent D. Shifferd © and is taken from Hypercivilization: Human Destiny and Ecological Collapse (a manuscript in progress) and may be used with proper citation.))

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Einstein once said, "If you can't explain it to your grandmother, you don't understand it." After reading this section, how would you explain the concept of "biosphere" to you grandmother in less than 15 words? Try it on each other.



Closing Meditation

St. Aelred of Rievaulx
(1110 - 1167)
An English Cistercian monk

God's goodness dwells in every creature If you were to look at every creature from the beginning of creation to the end of time, whether it were the most radiant angel or the tiniest worm, you would see in it signs of God's goodness and His overflowing love.

SECTION 2

We have erred and strayed from Thy ways



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

Unit 4: The impacts of Hypercivilization on the world



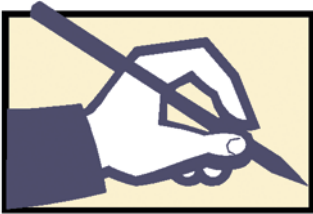
Beginning With Prayer. . . .

A Prayer of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

The high,
the low
all of creation

God gives to humankind to use. If this privilege is misused,
God's Justice permits creation to punish humanity.

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Journal:

What in your Journal would you like to share?

CAUTION

The next readings are full of difficult news and even though we know most of it already, it tends to be discouraging. Before reading, contemplate the following.

When Mother Theresa was told that she could not possibly save all the dying, she replied. “The Lord does not require us to be successful, He requires us to be faithful.” And from the Rabbinic sayings tradition, “The Lord does not require you to complete the task, neither may you lay it down.” And Anton Somlai, who points out “For most people, great schemes stop effort.” So none of us is going to SAVE THE WORLD! What we can do is make a little list of a few things we can change in our own lives and in our churches in order that we, too, may “be faithful.”



Unit 4:

The impacts of Hypercivilization on the world

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Part I.

The Revolution of Hypercivilization

What follows is the merest sketch of the historical and contemporary situation. Many studies and books have been written both on the problem and on solutions and these can be found in the bibliography.

We humans have gone through three great overlapping revolutionary shifts in our relationship to the biosphere. Each revolution rests on the previous ones but is a change in kind as well.

For an immensely long time, well over 100,000 years, we were a minor species on the planet and few in number. We humans were hunter-gatherers.

In the first great revolution we developed agriculture as a new way of interacting with nature to create our lives. It was a revolution in land use patterns with some forest giving way to fields; in energy capture (much more energy could be extracted from food crops because we had moved down the food chain); and hence in population levels; in species distribution (new species of plants and animals were bred and pest species that fed on grains multiplied); in social organization (dominator society based on monarchy, slavery and warfare developed); settlement patterns, and in values and attitudes. For almost 10,000 years we farmed, gradually increasing our numbers and our take from the rest of the natural world.

The second great revolution was organized around science including the beginnings of modern chemistry, coal, steam and steel, the industrial revolution beginning around 1750. We greatly increased our energy capture based on coal, increased our technical reach, and began the upward climb of the population explosion. By 1830, the world population had grown to a billion, by 1930 to 2 billion. By 1989 there were 6 billion and in just twelve more years we added another billion. It was a quantum leap in transforming the earth.

The third great revolution was the shift to Hypercivilization. It was an outgrowth of the industrial revolution but the immense changes of scale, the exponential growth of nearly every trend make it a revolution in

kind as well, especially in terms of the extraction and burning of carbon based energy – greatly accelerated use of coal, oil and natural gas.

In a brief geological moment, the last 100 years, our species has radically altered and simplified planetary ecosystems by creating Hypercivilization, a powerfully destructive way of interacting with nature characterized by an unprecedented overreach in population; in energy capture and dispersion; rapid urbanization, and a chemical revolution, all leading to the toxification of the biosphere, massive habitat loss, ground water depletion, extinctions, desertification, environmental diseases, and climate change.

We have changed the conditions in which life evolved and upon which it is dependent. We are in uncharted waters. Neither we humans nor the earth has ever been here before. These changes will entail a major shift in what we have known as “normal life,” whether we want it or not. Altering the natural base of civilization inevitably results in altering the shape of civilization including economic systems that had been taken for granted. We are now on the cusp of these revolutionary changes, having passed peak oil and initiated vast changes in the earth’s weather and climate systems.

Hypercivilization is a greatly exaggerated, globalized and intensified form of civilization. It is without precedent. It represents a radical discontinuity both with the evolutionary and cultural past. It began to emerge first in the mind about 1600 AD and then in its first wave, the new institutions and technologies of industrialization. This revolution was firmly entrenched in Western Europe by 1900 AD and in the 20th century it spread like a tidal wave over the rest of the earth and continues to spread and intensify with the onset of its second wave, the new technologies of nuclear fission and biogenics. We can reach into the heart of the atom and the gene and into the far reaches of outer space.

Hypercivilization is based on the absurd proposition that we can have unlimited economic growth on a finite planet. The Secretary General of the United Nations recently put this in perspective in a speech to world business and government leaders in a meeting at

Davos, Switzerland.

“For most of the past century, economic growth was fueled by what seemed to be a certain truth: the abundance of natural resources. We mined our way to growth. We burned our way to prosperity. We believed in consumption without consequences. These days are gone... Over time, that model is a recipe for national disaster. It is a global suicide pact.” (Reported by The Daly News, The Center for the Advancement of a Steady State Economy.)

It is impossible to exaggerate the degree of discontinuity from the past that the last 100 years represents, either in terms of our power to alter the natural world or in our divorce from direct contact with it in our daily lives. Hypercivilization is a brief historical episode founded on a one-time blowout of fossil fuels. It will not last.

Author Bill McKibben says, "We may live in the strangest, most thoroughly different moment since human beings took up farming, 10,000 years ago, and time more or less commenced."

Its main impact on earth's life support system is destructive. Charles Mann sums up our situation: "In effect, the human race has entered into a great wager. We are, so to speak, betting the planet." (The foregoing material is copywrited © by Kent D. Shifferd and is adapted from Hypercivilization: Human Destiny and Ecological Collapse and may be used with proper citation.)

Exponential growth explained

The peculiar kind of growth Hypercivilization engendered was not understood by more than a few statistically-minded observers. As explained in the introduction, it is called exponential growth and is so counter-intuitive that dramatic examples are necessary for its comprehension.

To review (because this is crucial to understanding Hypercivilization), exponential growth is continual doubling. Unlike linear growth which proceeds in the fashion 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, it proceeds in the fashion 1,2,4,8,16,32,64, 128, 256, 512. The final number after ten exponential growth phases is 512, 50 times or one and one half orders of magnitude larger than that at the end of the linear series and it is soaring astronomically as it goes on from there. After the eleventh phase it is two orders of magnitude larger.

If, for example, we are talking about growth in mineral consumption where one ton is mined per year in the first stage, then after 11 phases in linear growth, or

11 years, 55 tons of material will have been mined. In the exponential growth example, the total is 1,023 tons after 11 years. If weed growth is doubling every day in a pond so that on the 31st day the pond is half choked with weeds, on what day will the pond be completely choked? The answer is, on the 32nd day. The same is true for resource depletion. If you extract resources ever more rapidly, doubling your take every 10 years, then in the last 10 year period you will extract half of what was available in the beginning and, run out.



World Population Growth

(<http://www.vaughns-1-pagers.com/history/world-population-growth.htm>)

At the time of Christ:	200 million
1650	500 million
1830 a doubling	1 billion
1930 another doubling	2 billion
1980 another doubling	4.4+ billion
2011	7 billion

By 2050 we will add another billion. Assuming they each get two meals a day, that means we will need to find 730 billion meals a year for them, requiring more farmland, more wilderness destruction, more pesticides, more fertilizer, more oil to make the pesticides and fertilized. They will also need housing (more timber and concrete), heating (more oil or coal), clothing (more oil and more cotton/land under plantation), more schools, more cars, more health care, etc.” Of course, those in the global north will consume and pollute far more per capita than those in the south.

Number of planets able to supply the above: 1

Time it took to achieve the next billion

1	1830	50,000 years
2	1930	100 years
3	1960	30 years
4	1975	15 years
5	1989	14 years

6 1999 10 years

7 2011 12 years

The recent rate of increase has slowed due to diminishing birth rates.

8 2025 14 years

9 2045 20 years

Exponential growth has occurred in all areas of Hypercivilization.

Fertile topsoil, which requires centuries to build up an inch, has been both toxified by agricultural chemicals and lost to wind and water born erosion at unprecedented rates due both to farming and deforestation.

The destruction of old growth (highly diverse) forests has also occurred at an unprecedented rate.

Water pollution due to agricultural runoff and industrial discharge of bio-depressant chemicals increased radically during the era. The dead zone at the mouth of the Mississippi River is 3,300 square miles and growing. The Pacific Gyre, an area in the ocean completely clogged by plastic debris is the size of Texas.

Species extinction is occurring, mainly due to habitat loss, at a rate not seen in over 100 million years. We are living in the great die-off. Half the earth's species will be gone by 2100. Tigers will disappear from the earth by 2050.

The earth is warming due to the industrial injection of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, trapping solar energy and altering habitats, and melting ice and tundra ecosystems releasing more greenhouse gas in the form of previously frozen methane. Where food can be grown will change radically. This added energy powers the ocean currents and intensifies the frequency and power of storms.

Sea levels are rising. Many coastal areas where a large percentage of the world's people live will be inundated.

Meanwhile glaciers that feed the great rivers of Asia, upon which hundreds of millions of people depend for irrigated agriculture, are melting and will dry up, creating deserts where food is now grown.

Already, most of the major fish stocks in the oceans are seriously depleted by overfishing and habitat destruction of fish nurseries (lagoons, salt marshes, coral reefs, etc.) by pollution and development. Large migrations of people can be ex-

pected.

A complicating factor is peak oil. Everyone knows that the oil supply is finite and will run out "someday." The issue of peak oil is a little different. The point at which we begin to use more than we are discovering while at the same time demand is skyrocketing with the huge economies of China and India coming online will mean sharply rising prices for oil and all that it propels. Some experts believe we have already passed that point. Note that almost every form of transport and almost all goods, even fertilizer for food, rely on oil either as a feedstock or as a fuel. The world we know was built on oil and it will not last, but long before the final drop is pumped from the final deep undersea well, it will have become too expensive to use or even pump because the low hanging fruit was pumped long ago. And if we are going to reduce our carbon emissions we will need wealth to build the wind generators and solar arrays, but that wealth will be sucked up by ever higher oil prices. It's a simple issue of supply and demand. The supply is going down and getting more expensive to get per barrel, while the demand is going up, a pattern for a global economic depression and increased military conflict.

Another complicating factor is war. Modern mechanized armies, navies and air forces use huge amounts of oil and produce huge amounts of greenhouse gases and other toxics. (Many Superfund sites are on military bases.) They consume huge amounts of metals and some scatter radioactive DPU weapons in warfare to say nothing of the destruction to the environment caused by mechanized and chemical combat.

Weaning ourselves from oil will reduce the likelihood of war and all its negative consequences. All of these and many other human induced, deteriorating changes in God's creation impact the world's poor living in the global south even more than they do the more well-off who live in the north, creating issues of environmental justice. The north produced most of the greenhouse gases and reaped the benefits of development. Now those in the south are being told not to imitate us.

All of the above raises profound moral and ethical questions for us Christians. The above picture is bleak, but there are ways forward if we choose to be responsible to our children and grandchildren. They will involve immediate investments in

alternative energies, a partial return to localism, that is making local communities more self-reliant and resilient, conserving energy, less competition and more cooperation, closing the cycles, and simpler lives that concentrate more on family and neighbors than on

making money. Many experts think we are headed for breakdown but by increasing our awareness of how we are using nature and by prompt intelligent action we can transform these trends into a breakthrough to a better, more sustainable civilization.



Plastic waste in ocean.



Strip mining in Hibbing, MN.



Left: Lining up for gas in China.
Above: Gulf oil spill cleanup.



Closing Meditation on the Measure of Success

[George Washington Carver, 1864-1943. Born into slavery, he became a famous scientist whose work rehabilitated the depleted soils of the American South and improved nutrition for farm families. He taught and researched at Tuskegee University.]

Money and possessions meant little to George Carver. Throughout his nearly 50 years at Tuskegee, he earned the same salary of \$125 a month. He turned down every offer for a raise in pay. "It is not the style of clothes one wears, neither the kind of automobile one drives, nor the amount of money one has in the bank that counts. These mean nothing. It is simply service that measures success."

quoted by Suzanne Coil in George Washington Carver, Franklin Watts Publication, New York, 1990, pg. 47.

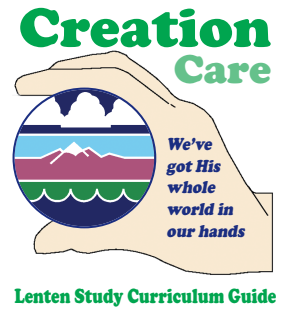
Carver said: **"Our creator is the same and never changes despite the names given Him by people here and in all parts of the world. Even if we gave Him no name at all, He would still be there, within us, waiting to give us good on this earth."**

SECTION 3

Repentance & Rebirth

Unit 5:

Recognizing & confessing our corporate and personal responsibility



Beginning with prayer . . .

(From the Earth Day Service provided by Wartburg Theological Seminary, Center for Theology and Land, http://www.wartburgseminary.edu/template_Centers.asp?id=394 ; used with permission) Merciful God, in your gracious presence we confess our sin and the sin of this world. Although Christ is among us as our peace, we are a people divided against ourselves as we cling to the values of a broken world. The profit and pleasures we pursue lay waste the land and pollute the seas. The fears and jealousies we harbor set neighbor against neighbor and nation against nation. We abuse your good gifts of imagination and freedom, of intellect and reason, and have turned them into bonds of oppression. Lord, have mercy upon us; heal and forgive us. Set us free to serve you in the world as agents of your reconciling love in Jesus Christ. From the Book of Common Worship (PCUSA)

Meditation

What do you think the author means by “cling to the values of a broken world?”

Do the words of Father Merton, below, suggest any answers?

“People who know nothing of God and whose lives are centered on themselves, imagine that they can only find themselves by asserting their own desires and ambitions and appetites in a struggle with the rest of the world. They try to become real by imposing themselves on other people, by appropriating for themselves some share of the limited supply of created goods and

thus emphasizing the difference between themselves and the other men who have less than they, or nothing at all.”

“We have to recognize that a spirit of individualism and confusion has reduced us to an ethic of ‘every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.’ This ethic, unfortunately sometimes consecrated by Christian formulas, is nothing but the secular ethic of the affluent society, based on the false assumption that if everyone is bent on making money for himself the common good will automatically follow, due to the operation of economic laws.”



Journal:

What in your Journal would you like to share?



Recognizing and confessing our corporate and personal responsibility

Fair Shares?

Inequalities in consumption are stark.

Globally, the 20% of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86% of total private consumption expenditures — the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%.

The richest fifth vs. the poorest fifth

- Consume 45% of all meat and fish, the poorest fifth 5%
- Consume 58% of total energy, the poorest fifth less than 4%
- Have 74% of all telephone lines, the poorest fifth 1.5%
- Consume 84% of all paper, the poorest fifth 1.1%
- Own 87% of the world's vehicle fleet, the poorest fifth less than 1%

<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/235/consumption-and-consumerism>

“For many resources, the United States of America is the world's largest consumer in absolute terms. For a list of 20 major traded commodities, it takes the greatest share of 11 of them: corn, coffee, copper, lead, zinc, tin, aluminum, rubber, oil seeds, oil and natural gas. For many more it is the largest per-capita consumer.”

“United States citizen consumes more than three times the global average of 37 kilos per person per year. Africans consume less than half the global average, and South Asians consume the least, at under 6 kilos per person per year.”

“It takes the mining of 6 tons of rock to produce a pair of typical gold rings. Only 2 to 3 percent of the energy produced by burning coal in a power station is eventually used to light a bulb or boil a kettle, because of inefficiencies at every stage of its conversion to electricity, its transmission and ultimate use.”

“The average European uses 130 kilos of paper a year – the equivalent of two trees. The average American uses more than twice as much – a staggering 330 kilos a year. The paper and board industry is the United States' third largest source of pollution, while its products make up 38 percent of municipal waste.”

<http://atlas.aaas.org/index.php?part=2>

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LITANY FOR CREATION

(Choose a leader and say aloud.)

Leader:

Creator God, breathing your own life into our being
You gave us the gift of life.

You placed us on this earth with its minerals and waters,

Flowers and fruits, living creatures of grace and beauty.

You gave us the care of the earth.

Today you call us: Where are you; what have you done? Silent prayer for creation. Leader: We hide in utter shame, for we are naked.

We violate the earth and plunder it.

We refuse to share the earth's resources.

We seek to own what is not ours, but yours. People: Forgive us, Creator God, reconcile us to your creation.

Leader: O God of love, you gave us the gift of peoples-
Of cultures, races and colors-

To love, to care for, to share our lives with.

Today you ask us: Where is your brother, your sister? Silent prayer for others. Leader: We hide ourselves in shame and fear.

Poverty, hunger, hatred and war rule the earth.

The refugees, the oppressed and the voiceless cry out to you.

Forgive us, O God of Love,

And reconcile us to yourself and to one another.

People:

Teach us, O Creator God of Love,
That the earth and all its fullness is yours,
The world and those who dwell in it.

Call us yet again to safeguard the gift of life. Amen.
Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches

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FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE POWERS THAT BE:

(A sermon from a green Lenten service in Scotland)

Commentary on this evening's theme - Confronting the powers that be - the forces dominating our lifestyle Who are the powers that be? [See Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*]

The first is economic power, by which the production and sustenance of human life is organized. We developed from hunter gathers but now we produce, distribute and consume the outputs of agricultural and industrial production. Production is linked to progress so that by producing something we contributed to the common good of providing a better life.

The second is political power, by which we organize ourselves socially, distributing power and responsibilities in civil society. Through politics we create human relations and plan the institutions needed to make society work and to satisfy our material, spiritual and cultural needs.

Finally, there is cultural power through which we express our thoughts and by which we create values and meanings and give validity and expression to our life and what we do.

Since the latter part of the last century, there has been a cultural shift from production to consumption insofar as we may now be defined as a consumer society. We pursue the satisfaction of our desires through the means of constant growth. But we do not seem to have realized that we have become passive players in the new ideology of consumerism and the powers that seek to control us, the producers, advertisers, the media, and the global corporations.

This controlling ideology has for some taken on the characteristics of a religion. The retail park is their new sacred space; the shopping mall their cathedral. The cult of managerialism and the bonus culture that underpins it are the new doctrines. Science and technology has turned human consumption into a production line, disconnecting us from creation.

We have strayed from human need to human greed. Ultimately, we will have to face the inconvenient truth that pursuit of high gross domestic product, rates of return and treating land as a commodity, will not have the cost-benefit outcome that had been imagined. We need to find a new economics that provides prosperity without growth.

As followers of the Lord of Creation we should be deeply concerned by the growing ecological crisis, but

at the moment our efforts in metanoia, or transformation of heart and mind, seem to be superficial. We are aware that undesirable changes are taking place to our environment but so far any sense of foreboding has become muffled by well-meaning but minor lifestyle changes.

Reduce, reuse, recycle is the mantra of mere environmental ethics because we do this only for reasons of utility, aware of the decreasing supply of landfill sites, whereas recycling should be a hymn to the value of everything 'because nothing is to be disregarded as valueless.'



Have we lost the Franciscan sense of the sacredness of material things that are a gratuitous gift from God? Do we need a more vital spiritual response to deal with the ecological crisis we are facing and the restraints on human life that it will impose? If we maintain our disconnectedness and isolation, will we continue to wander in the wilderness?

Prayer God of grace, be patient with us as we offer our shortcomings, and shield us from the influences that try to dominate our lives. Guide us as we seek to follow the example of our Lord in resistance to 'the powers that be.' Amen.

http://www.aberdeen.anglican.org/media/resources/Green_Lent_Week_2_1.pdf

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Reflection on Ash Wednesday

James G. Speer

(Taken from the resources of Earth Ministry.)

Ash Wednesday is the start of the season of Lent. As the Book of Common Worship tells us, we begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance, and for the mercy of forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The marking of ashes is tangible, visible evidence that Christians take seriously the days of Lent. The minister continues the observance of the Lenten Discipline.

We begin our journey to Easter with the sign of ashes. This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life. I invite you therefore in the name of Christ, to observe a holy lent by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

These days we too often respond by giving up some-

thing trivial, like chocolate, smoking, or a favorite food. But Ash Wednesday should signify more than a personal reminder that might impel us to give up something up for Lent, or try and “do better” in our conduct with friends and associates.

In our consumer-oriented, market-driven society, it is very difficult to grasp that we can and must do more, especially as stewards of God’s creation, as followers of Jesus’ gospel promise that he had come that all might have life and have it more abundantly.

As we consider the sanctity of all of God’s abundant creation, poet and essayist Wendell Berry challenges us to be mindful of the way which we humans, especially since the industrial age, “...have been, and are the humans most guilty of desecrating the world and of destroying creation... It seems as though industrial humanity has brought about phase two of original sin. We are all now complicit in the murder of creation... We know how to ‘do better,’ but we don’t know how to extricate ourselves from our complicity.”

Barry asks, “How could we live without degrading our soils, slaughtering our forests, polluting our

streams, poisoning the air and the rain? ...How could we live without the war economy and the holocaust of the fossil fuels? ...To the offer of more abundant life we have responded with choosing the economics of extinction.” So let us consider the ashen mark already placed, no, gashed, on the forehead of this fragile planet. We will see it in the change of our climate, the extinction of species, water and air pollution, toxic waste, the destruction of our forests, and the drying up of our fossil fuels. And then, let us observe a holy Lent, by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by works of love, and by reading and meditating on the Word of God.

Quotations from Wendell Berry taken from the September 20, 2005, issue of *The Christian Century*.®

FROM *Living In Lent Caring For Creation*, Presbyterians For Restoring Creation

<http://earthministry.org/resources/creation-devotions/lent/living-in-lent-caring-for-creation-pdf>

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CLOSING PRAYER

Scripture

The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Psalm 24:1

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Matt. 22:37

Confession and Pledge (All together)

Most mighty and merciful God, You have given us the incomparable gift of a living planet filled with all good things, a community of living creatures, but we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep.

We have despoiled the gift, extinguishing your creatures, fouling the soils, the living waters and the air.

We have neglected each other and imperiled our children’s’ children to come. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

But you are the God whose property always is to have mercy. Therefore, Lord, counting on your grace

for our forgiveness, and on your Holy Spirit for strength – for You are Emanuel – we hereby pledge to re-form our lives and our households, and to join with others to work to re-form our churches and our society, and thereby to free ourselves from the grip of materialism and live in the joy of the beloved community. And if You are with us, nothing can prevail against us.



Arise, rejoice, and sing the following hymns!

Rise Up Ye Saints Of God*

Rise up, ye saints of God!

Have done with lesser things.

Give heart and mind and soul and strength

Rise up, ye saints of God!
The church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task;
Rise up and make her great!
Lift high the cross of Christ!
Tread where His feet have trod.
As brothers of the Son of Man,
Rise up, O men of God!

(William P. Merrill, 1911, words modified slightly to reflect the Episcopal Hymnal version.)

Earth Was Given As A Garden

(Words by Roberta Bard, tune Rowland Hugh Pritchard, "Jesus Christ our Lord," [460] in the Episcopal Hymnal)

Earth was given as a garden,
Cradle for humanity;
Tree of life and tree of knowledge
Placed for our discovery.
Here was home for all your creatures
Born of land and sky and sea;
All created in your image,
All to live in harmony
Show to us again the garden
Where all life flows fresh and free.
Gently guide your sons and daughters
Into full maturity.
Teach us how to trust each other,
Holy Father, life bestowing,
Bid our use for good and power,
How to touch the earth with reverence,
Then once more will Eden flower.

All Creatures Of The Earth And Sky

(Words, adapted from Francis of Assisi, tune Laast Uns Erfreuen, Episcopal Hymn 400, "All Creatures of Our God and King")

All creatures of the earth and sky
Come kindred lift your voices high,
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Bright burning sun with golden beam,
Soft shining moon with silver gleam,
Alleluia, Alleluia! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.
Swift running wind so wild and strong,
Clouds that sail in heaven along,
Alleluia, alleluia!
Fair rising morn in praise rejoice,
High stars of evening find a voice,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.
Cool flowing water pure and clear,
Music for all life to hear,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!
Dance flame of fire so strong and bright,
Bless us with your warmth and light.
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide

SECTION 3

Repentance & Rebirth

Unit 6:

What we can do as individuals and families



Beginning With Prayer. . . .

Now is the time, Lord. I call upon you for wisdom, creativity, discovery, invention and determination as I ponder how I may enter gladly into a new relationship with your gift of Creation that

I may more perfectly live out your will.

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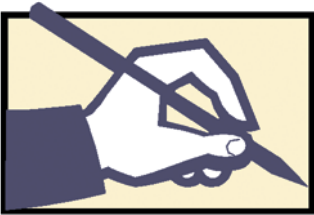
Meditations

Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where rust or moths corrupts or where thieves break in and steal but lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust does not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Matt: 16:19-21

The ordinary arts we practice every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity might suggest. St. Thomas More.

Writing of the great figures of the Axial Age such as the Hebrew prophets, Episcopal scholar William Farina emphasizes: “All concluded, among other things, that true religion consisted of far more than ritual worship. To be legitimate, true religion must be compassionate, forgiving, and practiced with good works. All else came in a distant second.”

(Perpetua of Carthage, McFarland, 2009, p. 71).



Journal:

What can you share from your Journal today?

Thinking about reshaping our Ecological Footprint



Everything we have or use, all energy and material objects, comes through our bodies, through our homes, through our businesses, through our churches. Everything is either on its way in, temporarily residence, or on its way out. Nothing stays. It all comes from somewhere and is going somewhere in one form or another.

If we are to have a viable future, we must ask these five questions.

Looking at what is in my house. . . .

- What is it? (What is it made up of by what processes?)
- How did it get here?
- How can we make the most of it while it's here? (Frugality, no waste)
- Where is it going?
- How is it impacting others (plants, animals, humans) through its life cycle?

We live in an inescapable web of relationships. Our well-being is only possible if we are being responsible for the well-being of the others who make our lives possible.

Simplicity

“Live simply that others may simply live.”

How can I free myself from the load of stuff I have accumulated? Looking at everything I have, what do I really need, as opposed to just want? What can I reuse, recycle, repair, and what can I share? Does everyone on my block need one of everything? What can I substitute that is less harmful? How much is enough?

Stewardship in Action:

Step One – Start Lists

Sit down now and start a list of the material goods that are coming through your personal life including hard goods (electronics, furniture, rugs, tools, etc.), food, water, chemicals, and whatever else. Keep your list open. You will think of more things later.

Start a list of all the energy that comes through your life and home including fossil fuels, electricity. Can you put some numbers here? (How many gallons of

gas per week, how many kilowatt hours per month, how many gallons of fuel oil or cubic feet of gas?)

Start a list of how can you use less, be more efficient, or substitute less harmful kinds of energy (e.g., walking to the store instead of driving). This does not have to be an exhaustive list. Start with an easy change. Keep the list open, though, so you can add to it.

After you have made your lists, you may want to check **Appendix 1: Action Checklists**, to see what other people have come up with and the many ingenious ways they have invented to save materials, energy, time and money. But make your own lists first. (Do you have some old paper used on one side only on which you could make your lists?)

Stewardship in Action:

Step Two – Choose one simple change you can make today.

Discuss it with your family. Then make a pledge before God to set out on a path of gradual reshaping of your use of energy and materials. (We stress starting small and increasing gradually to avoid the pitfalls of zealotry and burn out.)

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Sing or read aloud the famous Shaker Hymn, and ponder the words. Free of what? For what? Where are we when we “come round right?”

Tis The Gift To Be Simple

'Tis the gift to be simple,
'Tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
It will be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained,
to bow and to bend,
we will not be ashamed
To turn, turn, will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning, we come round right.

By Shaker Elder Joseph Bracket, Jr., 1848

A Franciscan Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart. *Amen.*

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace. *Amen.*

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. *Amen.*

May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done. *Amen.*

SECTION 3

Repentance & rebirth

Unit 7: What can we do together as a congregation?



Lenten Study Curriculum Guide



Beginning with prayer . . .

(From the Earth Day Service provided by Wartburg Theological Seminary, Center for Theology Section IV .

Almighty and most merciful God, maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen unseen, inspire us now as we look at our congregation; our building, grounds and practices, to see where we can harmonize them more perfectly with your incomparable gift of Creation.

Amen

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Greening: A New Reformation

“Industrialized cultures are currently on a rapidly accelerating course that undermines the very foundations of life: land, water, air, climate, human communities and other species. When one looks at the long history of this course. . . one discovers a worldview that separates humankind from the rest of creation—a separation that pits humans against everything else that lives. . . .” (Greening Congregations Handbook, ii.)

But all over America and the world churches are “greening,” that is, they are seeing the connections be-

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STEP 1

Make a List of the things your church is already doing to harmonize faith and practice: e.g., flowers on the altar, outdoor events (picnics, worship), singing hymns that include God’s creation, getting rid of Styro-foam, etc. When you are done with the list, applaud yourselves!

STEP 2

Examining our Ecological Footprint

- What materials are coming through here? Food, cleaning materials, etc. Make a list.
- What is our energy footprint: heating, lighting, appliances? Travel? What are the numbers? Can we get an energy audit? Make a list.

tween their spiritual life and their material life and are transforming their buildings and operations to bring the two into harmony. This great movement is witnessed by the many books and videos and organizations one can easily find. (See the Appendix.) Churches are becoming leaders in the movement to protect God’s creation including humans and nonhumans. This final unit, along with the material in the Action Appendix, provides a chance for us to explore how we might be a part of this exciting new reformation.

- What are we doing with the land around the church? Make a list.
- Is creation care visible in our liturgy, bulletin, sermons, and music?
- Is creation care part of our witness to the larger community

STEP 3

Visioning, Dreaming, Inventing, Brainstorming

“Without a vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 29:18
Remember, in brainstorming there is no judging. Don’t say “bad idea,” don’t say “good idea,” don’t say “We tried that once,” don’t say “It’s not practical.” There will be time for sorting out what you can do and want to do later on in the process.

Talk together about this: “What would our church look like if it were a lot more “green?” Or take the answers from Step 2 and work on them.

First come up with your own ideas. You know your church better than anyone.

But then have a look at the Appendix 1: Action Checklist. A lot of Christians have been inventing this wheel for quite a while now.

STEP 4

Judging

Separate your ideas from Step 3 into three categories:

Easily Done	1,	2,	3.
Requires More Investigation	1,	2,	3.
Later (or maybe never)	1,	2,	3.

Now, don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Your first act is probably not going to “save the planet,” but it will make a real difference. So pick one easy thing and agree to start on it.

STEP 5

Develop a plan with your goals, strategy, assignments and a timeline.

You may want to set up an ongoing Creation Care Commission (or some other name) to carry on with implementing the plan over the next year. And plan also to look at one of the resources listed in the Appendix 3: More Resources.

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A Closing Litany

(from the ELCA website, God's Work: Our Hands, at <http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Advocacy/Congregational-Resources/Caring-For-Creation.aspx#Congregations>)

Let us pray:

Lord of all creation, you are a God of amazing and awesome wonders; and your presence reaches to the heights and depths of all creation.

Forgive us, Lord, for our lack of wonder and awe, and for our arrogant ways of relating to your creation and to others.

Gracious Lord, help us to know our role in the ongoing unfolding of creation's story; speak to our hearts and urge us to gentleness, love, and peace in our relationships with others.

Help us to tend and mend our connection to others and with all of creation.

Ever-present God, we give thanks for the many ways you continue to reach out to us – through your Word, through others, and through your creation.

Teach us, shape us, and lead us, now and into your future. May we be guided by your light and your love, and share that light which no darkness can overcome, with all of the dark and broken corners of our world.

All praise and glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.