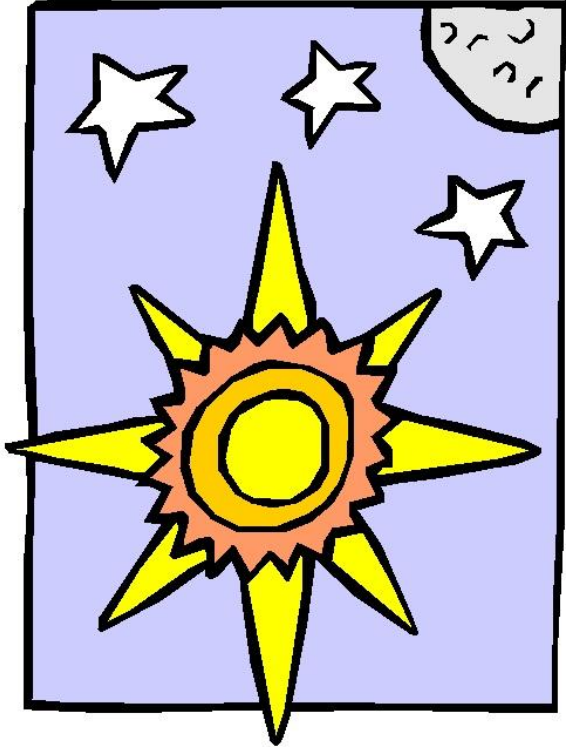


GOD'S GOOD CREATION



Christians affirm that the universe is the good creation of God. The Bible begins with the majestic assertion, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." No less than seven times in the opening narrative of the Bible is the value judgment upon creation, "And God saw that it was good" (Ge. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). In the New Testament, Paul says, "Everything God created is good," and this includes not only mundane things, such as food, but also human relationships, such as marriage (1 Ti. 4:3-5). Nothing which God created is evil in and of itself (Ro. 14:14), though God has granted freedom to his creatures who have abused their privilege and who have turned their wills against God.

Because God brought the entire universe and all that is within it into existence by an act of his sovereign will, it follows that he is the source and the lord of all that exists. It is in this line of thought that the Psalmist exults, "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1).

The Bible does not speculate on how God created the universe, except to say that it came into existence by his word. The New Testament writers personalize this "Word" and explain that it was actually Jesus, our Lord (Jn. 1:1-3). God created the universe through his Son (Col. 1:15-16; He. 1:2). Not only so, he sustains it through his Son as well (Col. 1:17; He. 1:3).

It is a vexing problem for many modern people to accept the biblical assertion that God is the Creator. They assume that the findings of science negate the biblical view of God's creatorship or vice versa. This polarization is unfortunate, for the Bible and science are not in themselves at odds. Rather, it is theologians and scientists who are most often at odds. Theologians may make mistakes in how they understand the Bible, and scientists may make mistakes in how they interpret the data of nature. However, if the world of nature and the word of the Bible both derive from the same source—God—they cannot be in final conflict. Both the scientist and the theologian may distort the truth due to their presuppositions and human limitations. If the theologian and the scientist are careful to stick to their respective duties, to learn carefully from the other side, and to refrain from overstating their cases, the disharmony between them would certainly be lessened and might even disappear. On both sides, some intellectual humility is in order.

The climax of God's good creation was the making of humans, male and female, whom he made in his image and placed in the world as stewards over his good creation (Ge. 1:26-28). He put the first human into a garden and instructed him to care for it (Ge. 2:15). He recognized that it was not good for this person to be alone, and he created a second human from the side of the first, calling them respectively man and woman (Ge. 2:18, 20b-24). Thus, humans were created as relational creatures and placed in the world as caretakers over God's handiwork. This mandate for relationship and stewardship is recalled by the biblical poet, who declared:

*What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?*

*You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor!
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
You put everything under his feet (Ps. 8:4-6).*

Thus, humans have a stake in the world! They are to be responsible for God's good creation and careful for each other as well. If God does not miss the death of even a sparrow (Mt. 10:29), and if he cares for the birds and the flowers (Mt. 6:26-30), surely women and men, as the stewards of God's creation, can be no less concerned for the world. Christians must be more than romantics, who love nature for its beauty and vitality. They must be less than mystics, who worship nature because they think it is divine. They must be different than exploiters, who use God's creation to satisfy their greed. Rather, Christians must be stewards, caring for and overseeing the good world God has made with the same attitude and care God himself showed when he created it.

It is a tragic truth that humans have not lived up to their responsibilities, either socially or ecologically. This was true in the ancient world, about which Paul said, "The creation was subjected to frustration" and is "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Ro. 8:20, 22), but it is even more true in the modern world. With the advance of technology, careless greed is currently wreaking a terrible toll upon our world. Whether one speaks of the encroachment on forestation in the Amazon Basin, the chemical pollution of our waterways, the gradual destruction of the ozone layer, the massive production of non-recyclable refuse, the disruption of the animal world through the extinction of various species, or the threat of nuclear holocaust, the fact remains that humans in general, and often enough Christians in particular, have been woefully neglectful.

Care for the human constituents in our world is equally important, if not more so, than for the non-human elements in our world. Christians must remember that when Scripture says, "God so loved the world," it is the world of people for whom he gave his one and only Son. The reclamation of the human race and the reclamation of the universe are very much tied together, for as Paul says, "The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Ro. 8:21). Christians must look upon other human beings, whether or not they are believers, as part of the good creation of God. While the image of God in humans has been terribly marred by rebellion and disobedience, it has not been cancelled (Ge. 9:6). The human race is certainly estranged from God, but men and women still count (2 Co. 5:18-20). They may be lost, but they are not nothing. The poor, the alien, the widow and the orphan—all those who are penniless, powerless and spiritually without resource—they are also part of God's good creation, and they call us to social responsibility (Am. 2:6-7; 5:10-15; Lk. 6:20-21, 24-25; Ja. 5:1-6). While the present order of things will ultimately be changed (Is. 65:17; 66:22; Re. 21:1, 5), this fact does not exempt us from our mandate to be careful stewards over the wonderful world God has made. One cannot honor God while despising his works. Each one must take seriously his or her responsibility to care for the world of nature and the world of people—for together they make up God's good creation!



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