IV. A Future Trust

Most of the prophetic books end in one way or another with a vision of a new heaven and new earth, a lovely world of peace and fullness for our descendants: explicitly in Isaiah 65:17-25; but see also Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 14. In Ezekiel 47, water flows from the altar of the temple to transform even the Dead Sea into living water. Lame and outcast people belong to this new heaven and new earth in Zephaniah 3:14-20. All of these prophetic passages allow us to see at least a partial vision of the mystery of our resurrected body, as it is strongly affirmed in Romans 6:5 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. What do we do now in caring for the earth somehow or other touches even the degree of happiness that will be ours for all eternity.

In light of the Scriptures, how should I as a Christian, church member and citizen fulfill my responsibility toward future generations with respect to the earth and the atmosphere, in view of such challenges as the following?

1. The diminishing resources on planet earth?
2. The "now" mentality with its instant gratification?
3. The pattern of unrestrained development/consumption?

My answer:

Suggested Reading


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ENVIRONMENT
A SOUTHERN BAPTIST AND
ROMAN CATHOLIC
PERSPECTIVE

THE BIBLE CALLS US
The Bible opens in Genesis 1 with God creating the heavens and the earth, carefully, even wondrously, and with man and woman meant to live as a peaceful, productive family. The Bible ends in Revelation 20-22 with men and women by God's grace entering a new and transformed heaven and earth. Creation, therefore, provides the setting for the entire Bible story of redemption. Throughout their lives on earth, men and women are to care for the earth, so that it always reflects the glory and goodness of God (See Gen. 1:28-30; Ps. 8).

Yet men and women sinned, abusing and even destroying the earth (See Gen. 6-9; Isa. 1). While the earth groans under the weight of sin, as Paul writes in Romans 8:22-25, God holds out hope of sending the Holy Spirit to create again a peaceful earth, according to Psalm 104:30.

Please read again the biblical references in the previous paragraphs. Reconstruct for yourself the steps in creation, in sin and the destruction of creation, in grace and the new creation of the universe.

1. A Godly Lifestyle
   God told the Israelites: "The land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). All of us rent our life and our place on earth from God. In return we are called upon to care for the earth and to share its produce with our neighbor. Deuteronomy 26 prescribes that when God's people celebrate the harvest, they are to come to the sanctuary and recant their faith about the ways God has always cared for them. They are to share the harvest with "aliens, orphans and widows" (26:12).

   Amos, the prophet of social justice, points out in 4:6-13 how God not only regulates the seasons of the year but also turns rain into drought, a plentiful harvest into famine, peace into war, yet not simply as punishment but as a way toward repentance and a new creation for Israel. Notice how the passage ends in praise of God the Creator.

   If Israel stops trampling upon the needy and forcing poor people into slavery—actions that cause the land to tremble and all who dwell on it to mourn (Amos 8:4-8)—then the vision of the prophet Isaiah (11:6, 8b) will come true: the wolf shall be the guest of the lamb, the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. . . .

   The baby shall play by the cobra's den.

   We return to the peaceful story of paradise in Genesis 1-2.

   In the light of the Scriptures, how ought my lifestyle as a Christian to impact:
   1. The greed in our consumer culture?
   2. The prevalent desire for our comfort and pleasure at the expense of other human beings?
   3. The litter and waste that clog our communities?

2. The prevailing trends in the American culture?
   My answer:

3. The need for economic justice and opportunity for all human beings?
   My answer:

4. The prevalence of various forms of addiction?

III. A Conserving Stewardship
   Scripture places us on a mountain top, not necessarily to be tempted, but to view the wonder of the universe. Read again Psalm 104 and Job 38-41. God, in divine wisdom, carefully established laws for the waters of the sea and the seasons of the year, as we are told in Proverbs 8:22-31. The prophet Jeremiah, in chapter 31, associates the new covenant, inscribed on the heart, with God's way of governing the universe.

   In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of God's concern for the birds in the sky, wild flowers in the woods and the grass in the field (Matt. 6:25-34).

   When we look out at our polluted and devastated earth, we hear a groaning and agony, like that heard by Paul in Romans 8.

   In light of the Scriptures, how should I, both as a Christian and as a citizen, contribute to the proper care of the earth and the atmosphere rather than abuse the earth and its resources, as may be true with the following?

   1. The depletion of agricultural lands?
   2. The spread of industrially produced acid rain?
   3. The destruction of forests?
   4. The pollution of rivers and lakes?

   My answer: