

Avatar and the Longing for Eden

Dr. Patrick Zukeran examines the blockbuster movie from a biblical perspective, identifying reasons for why this movie resonated with so many people despite its false worldview of pantheism.

Introduction

James Cameron's hit movie *Avatar* ranks as a ground-breaking epoch. This movie features new technology and special effects that make it landmark fantasy film, joining the elite group of movies which include *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Star Wars*, and *Lord of the Rings*.



What accounts for the tremendous popularity of this movie? I believe the cutting edge technology, combined with the strong environmental message, stirred the hearts of people throughout the world. I believe the movie also awakened a deep longing in all of us for Eden.

In *Avatar* we are projected into the twenty-second century and enter the alien world of Pandora, a spectacular tropical paradise inhabited by the ten foot tall, blue skinned Na'vi. Through innovative 3-D technology, we are immersed into experiencing this stunning paradise in vivid detail as never before encountered in cinema.

CNN news reported that after the movie, numerous fans experienced depression and even suicidal thoughts as they reflected on the present state of our planet and longed for the paradise of Pandora. Several websites included hundreds of entries from individuals who expressed their sense of loss and regret. In Pandora many saw a paradise that was lost, or one

that can never be attained on this earth.

An individual identified as Ivar Hill wrote on one of the Avatar forum sites: "When I woke up this morning after watching *Avatar* for the first time yesterday, the world seemed . . . gray. It was like my whole life, everything I've done and worked for, lost its meaning," Hill wrote on the forum. "It just seems so . . . meaningless. I still don't really see any reason to keep . . . doing things at all. I live in a dying world."[^{\[1\]}](#)

What accounts for this deep longing that was aroused by this movie? I believe within all people there is a longing for Eden, a pristine paradise where mankind and nature live in perfect harmony. Where does this longing of Eden derive from?

In Genesis God created a perfect world in which sin was not present. Man and woman lived in a beautiful and perfect world free from the effects and decay of sin. After the fall, this paradise was lost and the effects of sin began to tear apart God's good creation. Since then, man has sought to recover what was lost. However, can we ever regain what was lost? How should we view our environment now in this fallen world? Should we resign ourselves to living in a dying world or is there a message of hope? Can we attain Eden or is it forever lost?

In this article I will discuss the pantheist and biblical environmental message and the future hope of Eden restored.

Paradise Lost

In the movie *Avatar*, we are projected into the twenty-second century and arrive on the planet Pandora, a beautiful tropical paradise of glimmering trees and psychedelic colored flowers. There are crystal rivers and breathtaking floating mountains in the clouds. Here the Na'vi live in harmony with the animals and nature.

What made *Avatar* special was that through cutting edge 3-D technology, we could encounter this world in a deeper and richer way. The movie awakened in many the longing for a paradise. I believe this longing is rooted in the Genesis account of creation. Man had a paradise but it was lost through a great tragedy. What was Eden and what was lost in the beginning?

In Genesis 1, God creates the universe out of nothing. The length of time or age of the universe is not the issue in this article. Whichever position you may hold on the age of the earth, we should all agree that the Genesis account explains how the sovereign God brings order out of the chaos and creates a masterpiece. He sets the stars and galaxies in place. He produces plant life and vegetation. He then creates animal life on land and in the oceans. The pinnacle of creation is man and woman whom He creates in His image. At the end of chapter one, God reflects upon His creation and states that “ . . . it was very good.”

In chapter 2:8-9 the text reads, “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” The text reveals that Eden was a beautiful and lush paradise which was untarnished by sin or its effects. Man lived in harmony with nature and the animals in garden.

The text also states that the trees of Eden were pleasing to the eye and good for food. Eden was a place of wonder and tremendous beauty. What was most significant is that man lived in a perfect fellowship with his companion, woman, and they both lived in a perfect relationship with their creator.

In Genesis 3, the greatest tragedy in history takes place. Through man's disobedience, sin enters into the created order. From Genesis 3 on, we witness the effects of sin infiltrate God's good creation. Sin disrupts the harmony in all aspects

of God's creation. The perfect relationship between God and man is disrupted. The perfect relationship between man and woman is broken and now they live in distrust of one another. The harmony between man and the created order also comes to an end. The power of sin and death have taken its toll on creation but will these forces ever be defeated? Will the curse of sin ever be ended?

Stewardship Over the Earth

The appeal of the hit movie *Avatar* was not only its technology but its strong environmentalist message. In the story, the blue skinned Na'vi live in perfect harmony with their environment. This harmony is made possible when the Na'vi become one with Eywa, the "all mother." Eywa is not a personal being but the impersonal force of nature made up of all things. Eywa is ever present in all things and all things are a part of Eywa. At death, the life energy in all things returns to Eywa. Her energy is concentrated in a large sacred tree located in the middle of the forest. The Na'vi attain enlightenment when they attach their ponytails to one of her vines. The Na'vi also achieve oneness with the animals as well when they attach their pony tails to similar features on the creatures they seek to domesticate.

Avatar presents the worldview of pantheism, and the environmentalist message is wrapped up in this worldview. In pantheistic religions, "salvation" and restoration comes when man attains oneness with the universe. This oneness is achieved through meditation and the altering of one's consciousness. Harmony with the environment and healing to mankind will come when mankind attains oneness with Mother Earth. Many have responded to the pantheistic religions such as the New Age movement because of their environmentalist message. Today, there is a heightened awareness and attention being paid to our environment. Pantheists care for the environment because they view man and nature as one, therefore

man is of equal value to the animals and the plants. In pantheism, man worships nature or Mother Earth. Nature is valuable because all the universe and mankind are one in essence.

Does the Christian worldview present an environmentalist message? It certainly does, but very few are aware of or hear the Christian environmentalist message. At a time when so much attention is on the environment, it is unfortunate that the Christian message is not being promoted effectively. The Bible teaches a great deal about the relationship between man and the environment.

Unlike pantheism, the Bible teaches that God created the universe but is independent of it and not dependent on it. He rules and sustains the universe. God created man alone in his image and delegated to man stewardship over the earth. Man is to guard and care for God's creation. Having dominion over the earth does not give us the freedom to misuse the earth's resources or be careless in managing the environment.

We are not to exploit the earth as the humans portrayed in *Avatar* sought to, nor are we to worship the earth as the Na'vi worshipped their "all mother." Instead, the Bible teaches that we rule over the earth, but as wise stewards who exercise care and guardianship over what God has created. The Bible does indeed offer the best environmentalist message.

Paradise Restored

Can paradise be restored? In the movie *Avatar*, the Na'vi lived in a tropical paradise on the planet Pandora. Many who saw the movie were awed by the beauty of the planet Pandora but disgusted when they reflected on the state of our planet today. On an *Avatar* blog site Ivar Hill wrote, "One can say my depression was twofold: I was depressed because I really wanted to live in Pandora, which seemed like such a perfect

place, but I was also depressed and disgusted with the sight of our world, what we have done to Earth. I so much wanted to escape reality.”{2}

The pantheists’ hope is reflected in *Avatar*. Pantheist religions like the New Age teach that when enough of mankind is enlightened, the forces of the universe will respond and restore paradise on earth. In Genesis 1 and 2, man once lived in paradise in Eden, but this was lost in Genesis 3. Will paradise ever be restored or have we lost Eden forever?

The Bible teaches that we all look forward to that day when creation will be restored. In Romans 8:18-22 Paul states,

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. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

In this passage Paul exhorts Christians to patiently endure the suffering they presently face for there is a glorious future awaiting the believer. One day not only the Christian, but creation also will be transformed and delivered from the present state which is in subjection to decay as a result of sin. At this time all creation experiences frustration and incompleteness as we await this coming transformation.{3}

The Bible promises that paradise will be restored—not by the work of man or an enlightened mind, but through the return of the King of Creation. When Christ returns, He will defeat evil and then Revelation 21:1 promises that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, for the old earth which was under the curse of sin is done away.

The message of hope presented by the Bible is not limited to

an individual hope of one's eternal salvation. It is a message of hope for all mankind and for all of creation.

Until Creation is Restored

The new 3-D experience of the pristine paradise of Pandora and the strong environmentalist message of the movie Avatar, stirred the hearts of many people to appreciate and preserve the natural beauty that we have on earth. Avatar wrapped its environmentalist message in the worldview of pantheism. The solution to the environmental problem is enlightenment to true reality. Man is one with all of nature, thus lowering the value of man, making him equal to the plants and animals. When enough people attain enlightenment, there is hope that restoration will come to our planet.

The Bible teaches that one day the world will be transformed and paradise will one day be restored when the king of creation returns. Until that day comes, what are Christians called to do in regards to the environment?

As mentioned previously, man was given dominion over the earth. We are to use the resources of the earth to improve our lives in our struggle against the curse of sin and death. However, we are stewards of God's creation and we are commanded to exercise great care over the earth. Throughout the Bible, God commands believers to care for the land. Here are a few examples.

In Leviticus 25, God commands His people to sow the fields for six years but in the seventh year, they must not sow but to give the land rest. In Deuteronomy 22:1-12, God commands His people to care for the animals, both domesticated and the wild animals that live in the land. Therefore, if anyone should have a strong environmentalist message, it should be the Christian.

The Christian must address the environmental problem. The

problem is rooted in human sinfulness. This sinfulness manifests itself in two primary ways, greed and haste. Christians must stand against the exploitation, wasteful destruction, and abuse of land by companies seeking maximum profits with no regard for their surroundings. Francis Schaeffer rightfully stated that the Christian community must “refuse men the right to ravish the land, just as we refuse them the right to ravish our women.”^{4}

Few churches and schools preach or teach on the Christian view of the environment. This message must be taught once again in our churches and schools. Christians must also practice sound ecological principles such as recycling, using cleaner energy sources, and the conservation of energy. Christians should also be involved in environmental causes that seek to preserve the beauty of the land and promote responsible mining and use of our natural resources.

Although nature is affected by the fall, we must be involved in the healing process from the fall. Christians must restore the relationship between God and man which is done through the ministry of the gospel. We must also seek to restore the proper view of our role in caring for the environment.

Notes

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2. Ibid.
3. Douglas Moo, The Epistle to the Romans. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 513.
4. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1970), 82.

Hope in the Midst of the Growing Malaria Pandemic

The Growing Scourge of Malaria

We don't know much about malaria in the United States anymore. The disease was once prevalent in the Southern States as far north as Washington D.C. George Washington suffered from malaria as did Abraham Lincoln. A million casualties in the Civil War are attributed to malaria. But malaria was eradicated in the U.S. and much of Europe by 1950 with the use of pesticides, eliminating the sole transmitting agent of the malarial parasite, *Anopheles* mosquitoes.[\[1\]](#)

Malaria not only continues elsewhere but is a growing threat in the tropics around the world and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Half the world's population is at risk for malaria with some estimates as high as 500 million cases every year and over 2 million deaths. Most of those deaths are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and over half of them are of children under five years of age. In some parts of Zambia there are over thirteen hundred cases of malaria for every thousand children under five. That means some children are infected more than once per year.

The economic effects are just as severe. Malaria drains the Indian economy of nearly \$800 million each year due to lost wages from death, absences, fatigue and money spent on insecticides, medicines, and research. Uganda spends over \$350 million annually on malaria control, and forty percent of their health care dollars are spent on treating malaria. Still eighty thousand die every year.

The disease begins with a painless bite of the female *Anopheles* mosquito that needs blood to feed her eggs every three days. To prevent coagulation of her victim's blood she injects a little saliva which also may contain only a couple dozen one-celled organisms of the genus *Plasmodium*, the human malarial parasite. These make their way to liver cells where they multiply by the tens of thousands. After several days these liver cells rupture, releasing the parasite into the blood stream. The new parasites infect red blood cells and multiply again by the tens of thousands. Still the victim is unaware anything is wrong.

Once the parasites have consumed the red blood cells from the inside out, they rupture the cells and tens of millions of parasites are loose inside the blood. The first immune response begins, and muscle and joint aches are the first sign something is wrong. But the parasites infect new red blood cells within thirty seconds of release and hide from the body's defenses for two more days. When the next wave of parasites release, the immune system can be overwhelmed. Fever, cold sweats, and chills ensue and the fight is on. At this stage if an uninfected mosquito bites the sufferer, she will ingest a new form of the parasite and the cycle begins anew.

We need to get this scourge under control.

New Hope with DDT

As noted previously, malaria was prevalent in the U.S. until the late 1940s. We rid ourselves of this scourge through the use of the "miracle" pesticide DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane). Malaria was eliminated in Europe and North America by eliminating the species of mosquito that carried the disease-causing parasite.

DDT was used during WWII essentially as a secret weapon

against malaria in the Pacific war. Not only were American bases sprayed with DDT to rid them of malaria carrying mosquitoes, but freed prisoners of war were dusted with DDT powder to rid them of insect parasites. DDT was used to great effect and was deemed entirely safe to humans.

After WWII, Europe and America began applying DDT to their malarial and agricultural problems in mammoth proportions. Malaria was eliminated in Europe and the U.S. in a few years. Greece reportedly eradicated malaria within one year. Sri Lanka used DDT from 1946 to 1964 and malaria cases were reduced from over three million to twenty-nine.[\[2\]](#)

Recent studies have shown repeatedly that DDT causes no harmful effects to human health, and when used as currently prescribed there is little possibility of harm to the environment.[\[3\]](#) In South Africa, Sri Lanka, Mozambique and other nations, DDT has been extremely effective in reducing the rates of malaria, as much as an eighty percent reduction in one year.[\[4\]](#)

DDT is not sprayed out in the natural environment but on the walls of homes and huts. This use repels Anopheles mosquitoes, agitates those that do enter the home so they don't bite, and kills only those that actually land on the wall. Since most mosquitoes are not killed, just repelled, little opportunity exists for resistance to DDT to build up. Even mosquitoes that are known to be resistant to DDT are still repelled by it.

South African Richard Tren, president of Africa Fighting Malaria, says that "In the 60 years since DDT was first introduced, not a single scientific paper has been able to replicate even one case of actual human harm from its use."[\[5\]](#)

The World Health Organization in 1979 deemed DDT the safest pesticide available for mosquito control, and estimates from reputable scientists indicate DDT has been responsible for saving up to 500 hundred million lives.[\[6\]](#)

DDT is effective, cheap, long lasting, and safe. By itself, DDT is not a magic bullet, but it's pretty close. Certainly more aggressive use of bed nets and newer drug treatments for those already infected still need to be used, but without DDT, these are only putting band aids on inches-deep open wounds. But some third world countries still do not know about DDT or are afraid to use it.

The Objections of the Environmentalists

For some, the reemergence of the pesticide DDT in the escalating fight against malaria raises concerns as it did for me since we are aware of the troubles allegedly caused by DDT for birds, particularly hawks and eagles in the '60s and '70s.

When the U.S. eradicated malaria, DDT was almost too effective and too cheap. Agricultural use was stepped up, and since DDT is a long-lasting chemical, it built up in the environment and in the food chain. Fish particularly began harboring large amounts of DDT in their tissues and Bald Eagles, which feed on fish, began a build-up of the chemical in their tissues as well. Eventually, Rachel Carson's 1962 book, *Silent Spring*, blamed the declining numbers of Bald Eagles on the use of DDT. By 1972, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had banned the use of DDT in the U.S. despite mountains of evidence that this ban was unwarranted.

Bald Eagle numbers were plummeting before the use of DDT, and were recovering before the chemical was banned.[\[7\]](#) Specific tests done with numerous birds found no correlation between thinning egg shells and DDT. But the damage was done. The U.S. and European nations banned DDT and expected other countries to do the same. Both governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began rejecting goods from other countries that used DDT.

When Sri Lanka and South Africa stopped use of DDT, malaria

rates soared.

The indoor residual spraying method offers no risk to humans or to the environment, yet environmental groups still resist its use. “If we don’t use DDT, the results will be measured in loss of life,” says David Nabarro, director of Roll Back Malaria. “The cost of the alternatives tend to run six times that of DDT.”[\[8\]](#)

But this truth seems to be lost on many activists and aid agencies. The human toll of malaria worldwide is far more important than imagined environmental risks and discredited scare campaigns. International aid agencies need to free up important aid dollars to secure DDT for countries whose people can’t afford the latest malaria medicines and whose government’s health budgets are stretched to the breaking point simply taking care of already sick patients.

Obviously there is something more going on than just unrealistic objections to a particular chemical. DDT is environmentally safe, without risk to human health, extremely effective and incredibly cheap.[\[9\]](#) The environmentalist worldview comes clearly into focus, even though their policies mean death and disease throughout over one hundred countries where malaria is endemic.

“Sustainable Development” Keeps Billions in Poverty, Disease and Malnutrition

DDT was unfairly criticized and banned in 1972 in the U.S. and eventually around the world despite clear evidence to the contrary. Places where malaria had been nearly eradicated, such as Sri Lanka, saw an immediate surge in malaria after its use was discontinued. But even now as the scientific credibility of DDT has been restored, many continue to fight its use.

Environmentalists and officials at the World Health Organization seek to reverse recent decisions to rehabilitate DDT and begin its effective use in malaria stricken countries. But why? If DDT is so effective, safe, and inexpensive, why would some continue to fight its use? The answer is bigger than just misinformation or stubborn adherence to worn out doctrines.

In his book *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death*, Paul Driessen exposes an intricate web of conspiracy to keep third world countries energy deficient, disease plagued, chronically poor, and malnourished, all in the name of “sustainable development.” The bottom line is that sustainable development means that, if there is any supposed or imagined risk to the environment, then economic development must be curtailed to insure that whatever development occurs is sustainable by the environment with no risk at all.

Therefore, drugs like DDT for malaria control, fossil fuel-burning power plants, and even dams providing irrigation, safe drinking water, and cheap electrical power are resisted by powerful and well-funded environmentalist groups.

The Narmada dam project was killed in India by environmentalist groups concerned by a particular fish species that might be threatened. They persuaded international lending agencies to withdraw their support. Local residents were incensed. The project would have provided low cost electricity, sewage treatment plants, irrigation and clean water for 35 million people. People displaced were to be given new homes and farmland. But when a tiger and wildlife preserve was formed, displaced peoples were given no place to go and threatened with extreme measures if they returned.[\[10\]](#)

But why would seemingly well intentioned people appear to be so harsh and cruel to people simply wanting a better life? At the heart of this problem is a foundational worldview issue.

The Difference a Worldview Makes

It's alarming to see how frequently environmental groups will deliberately distort the truth and outright lie to achieve their ends. They have been caught many times, but are never held accountable.

In 1995, Shell Oil was announcing plans to sink one of its offshore oil rigs in the Atlantic with a permit from the UK Environment Ministry. Greenpeace, an international environmentalist group, launched a \$2 million public relations campaign that accused Shell of planning to dump oil, toxic wastes, and radioactive material into the ocean. Shell eventually backed off and spent a fortune to dismantle the platform onshore.

A year later, Greenpeace actually published a written apology, effectively admitting the entire campaign had been a fraud. There were no oil or toxic wastes, and the admission was buried with small headlines in the business page or obituaries.[{11}](#)

The Alar apple scare of 1989 has been exposed as a gross misuse of science that ended up bringing in millions of dollars to the National Resource Defense Council that orchestrated the campaign. Never mind that grocers, apple growers, and UniRoyal lost millions of dollars as well as the use of Alar, an important cost-saving and harmless chemical.[{12}](#)

But why such fraud and misinformation in the name of a safe environment? My analysis indicates a clear difference in worldview. Many of the leaders in the environmental movement are operating under the banner of a naturalistic worldview. In that context, nature as a whole takes precedence over people. Anything that they perceive as even potentially causing harm should be avoided. Nature must be preserved as it is.

Invariably, the one species asked to make sacrifices is always human beings. This is clearly reflected in third world countries struggling to overcome the crippling effects of poverty and disease. Rather than develop cheap electricity through fossil fuel power plants, millions are forced to burn dung and local wood products, causing large increases in toxic fumes and other indoor pollutants.

Nearly a billion people worldwide suffer from increased incidence of asthma, pneumonia, tuberculosis, lung cancer, and other respiratory diseases linked to indoor pollution caused by burning raw biomass fuels to heat their homes and cook their food.[\[13\]](#)

As Christians, we recognize that people are made in the image and likeness of God. While we are always responsible for carrying out our responsibility to rule and have dominion over God's creation, a larger, primary concern is to look after human needs and relieve human suffering. Let's start allowing people the right to make their own decisions concerning electricity and malaria with our advice and not unreasonable pressure.

Notes

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2. Richard Tren and Roger Bate, *Malaria and the DDT Story* (London, UK: Institute of Economic Affairs, 2001), 35-37.
3. Tren and Bate, 45-47.
4. Paul Driessen, *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death* (Bellevue, Washington: Free Enterprise Press, 67).
5. Richard Tren, quoted by Driesen, *Eco-Imperialism*, 69.
6. Driessen, *Eco-Imperialism*, 69.
7. J. Gordon Edwards and Steven Milloy, 100 things you should know about DDT, www.junkscience.com/ddtfaq.html (accessed on Jan 10, 2008).
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11. Ibid., 25.
12. Michael Fumento, The anatomy of a public scare, www.fumento.com/ibdalar.html. Accessed on March 3, 2008. Also see Michael Fumento, *Science Under Siege* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1993), 19-42.
13. Driessen, *Eco-Imperialism*, 38-39.

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Global Warming: Cool the Hype

Al Gore's film, "An Inconvenient Truth," won an Academy Award for best documentary. And Al Gore is being treated like a rock star at Hollywood parties and when he testified in front of Congress. But has Al Gore's hype and hysteria gone too far?

That's what many scientists and supporters are beginning to say. They are alarmed at his alarmism. "I don't want to pick on Al Gore," Don Easterbrook (emeritus professor of geology at Western Washington University) told hundred of experts at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America. "But there are a lot of inaccuracies in the statements we are seeing, and we have to temper that with real data."[\[1\]](#)

Kevin Vranes (climatologist at the Center for Science and Technology Policy Research at the University of Colorado) has praised Gore for "getting the message out" but also questioned whether his presentations were "overselling our certainty about knowing the future."[\[2\]](#)

Global warming is the observed increase in the average temperature of the Earth's atmosphere and oceans in recent decades. The argument made in many science journals and in Al Gore's film is that most of the observed warming over the last fifty years is attributable to human activities. Political activists argue we must act now to prevent a global catastrophe.

These claims bring us back to the hype that many see in Al Gore's film. He argues "Humanity is sitting on a ticking time bomb" and that "we have just ten years to avert a major catastrophe that could send our entire planet into a tail-spin of epic destruction involving extreme weather, droughts, epidemics and killer heat waves beyond anything we have ever experienced."[\[3\]](#)

Throughout the film, Al Gore invariably will pick the most extreme estimate to prove that we are on the edge of a catastrophe. For example, if global warming really is taking place, how much will the sea level rise? Gore says 20 feet, and then shows a dramatic animation of what it would look like if various locations on earth were flooded by a sea level rise of 20 feet.

Yet the most recent summary of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change doesn't say anything like this.[\[4\]](#) Even though this panel is full of policy makers who believe in global warming and argue for major policy changes, they conclude that sea levels might rise 7 to 17 inches over the course of a century. There is a vast difference between sea levels rising about one foot versus 20 feet!

Add to this the number of factual errors in many of the presentations heralding a looming catastrophe from global warming. Iain Murray documents "25 inconvenient truths for Al Gore" in his column that analyzes the scientific statements in "An Inconvenient Truth."[\[5\]](#) Bjorn Lomborg, author of the

Skeptical Environmentalist, shows how the report on climate change by Nicholas Stern and the U.K. government makes sloppy errors and cherry-picks statistics.[\[6\]](#)

We should also mention that many scientists believe that the current warming is due to factors other than human activity. Sami Solanki (Max Planck Institute for Solar System Research, Germany) has quantitatively reconstructed the sun's activity since the last Ice Age and says the sun "is brighter than it was a few hundred years ago and this brightening started relatively recently."[\[7\]](#) Scientists have observed that the ice caps on Mars are melting, and Jupiter is developing a second giant red spot due to the sudden warming of our solar system's largest planet.[\[8\]](#)

Those who dare to criticize the global warming scenario are often compared to being the moral equivalent of a holocaust denier.[\[9\]](#) In the film, Al Gore compares scientists who criticize his theory to scientists at the tobacco companies who tried to tell us that smoking was not harmful. Gore and others also say that many who are skeptical about global warming are being paid by the oil companies they say are running a disinformation campaign.

This last charge infuriated Dr. Easterbrook who told the geologists, "I've never been paid a nickel by an oil company." He went on to add, "And I'm not a Republican."

Al Gore argues that the global warming issue isn't a political issue but rather a moral issue. Yet in his film, Al Gore argues we need the political will to confront and solve the issue. It doesn't take much insight to realize there is a political agenda here.

The first step, say the activists, is to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This treaty calls for the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, the European Union, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. When Al Gore was

Vice President, it was brought before the U.S. Senate and defeated 95-0. It won't pass if put up for a vote once again.

But even if it did pass, it would only be a start. Estimates are that it would cost \$200 billion to \$1 trillion every year. But other Kyotos treaties would have to be ratified by the developing countries. After all, there are a billion people in China and a billion people in India, and China plans on building an additional 2,200 coal plants by 2030.^{10} One scientist speculated that "it might take another 30 Kyotos" to deal with global warming.^{11} And what would be the impact? Critics say that even if adhered to by every signatory, it would only reduce surface temperature by 0.13° F.^{12}

Even if we assume that global warming is occurring and assume that it is due only to human activity, the cost-benefit is enormous. Bjorn Lomborg established a program known as the Copenhagen Consensus.^{13} This panel (that included three Nobel Laureates in economics) evaluated strategies to deal with major problems facing humanity. When they listed these alternatives in descending order of effectiveness, things like treating communicable disease and hunger were at the top of the list while dealing with climate change were at the bottom of the list.

This suggests that *adaptation* to climate change will be more effective and less costly than *mitigation*. We need to cool the hype and let cooler heads make wise decisions.

Notes

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8. Lorne Gunter, "Brighter sun, warm earth. Coincidence?" 12 March 2007, *National Post*, <http://tinyurl.com/ysnwb5>
9. Dennis Prager, "On comparing global warming denial to holocaust denial," 13 February 2007, <http://tinyurl.com/2wdpee>
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Christian Environmentalism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective on You and the Earth

Dr. Bohlin applies a biblical point of view in determining a concerned Christian relationship to environmentalism. As Christians, we know we have been made stewards of this earth,

having a responsibility to care for it. Understanding our relationship to God and to the rest of creation gives us the right perspective to apply to this task.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



Is There an Environmental Problem?

The news media are full of stories concerning environmental disasters of one kind or another, from global warming to endangered species to destruction of the rain forests to nuclear accidents. Some are real and some are imaginary, but it's not hard to notice that the environmental issue receives very little attention in Christian circles. There are so many other significant issues that occupy our attention that we seem to think of the environment as somebody else's issue. Many Christians are openly skeptical of the reality of any environmental crisis. It's viewed as a liberal issue, or New Age propaganda, or just plain unimportant since this earth will be destroyed after the millennium. What we fail to realize is that Christians have a sacred responsibility to the earth and the creatures within it. The earth is being affected by humans in an unprecedented manner, and we do not know what the short or long term effects will be.



Calvin DeWitt, in his book *The Environment and the Christian*,[\[1\]](#) lists seven degradations of the earth. First, land is being converted from wilderness to agricultural use and from agricultural use to urban areas at an ever-increasing rate. Some of these lands cannot be reclaimed at all, at least not in the near future.

Second, as many as three species a day become extinct. Even if this figure is exaggerated, we still need to realize that once a species has disappeared, it is gone. Neither the species nor the role it occupied in the ecosystem can be retrieved.

Third, land continues to be degraded by the use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. While many farmers are rebelling against this trend and growing their produce organically or without chemicals, the most profitable and largest growers still use an abundance of chemicals.

Fourth, the treatment of hazardous chemicals and wastes continues as an unsolved problem. Storing of medium term nuclear wastes is still largely an unsolved problem.

Fifth, pollution is rapidly becoming a global problem. Human garbage turns up on the shores of uninhabited South Pacific islands, far from the shipping lanes.

Sixth, our atmosphere appears to be changing. Is it warming due to the increase of gases like carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels? Is the ozone layer shrinking due to the use of chemicals contained in refrigerators, air conditioners, spray cans, and fire extinguishers? While I remain skeptical of the global threat that many see, pollution continues to be a local and regional concern prompting ever more stringent emission controls for our automobiles.

Seventh, we are losing the experiences of cultures that have lived in harmony with the creation for hundreds or even thousands of years. Cultures such as the Mennonites and Amish, as well as those of the rain forests, are crowded out by the expansion of civilization.

Never before have human beings wielded so much power over God's creation. How should we as Christians think about these problems?

The Environmental Ethics of Naturalism and Pantheism

Some people have blamed Western culture's Judeo-Christian heritage for the environmental crisis. These critics point

squarely at Genesis 1:26-28, where God commands His new creation, man, to have dominion over the earth and to rule and subdue it.^{2} This mandate is seen as a clear license to exploit the earth for man's own purposes. With this kind of philosophy, they ask, how can the earth ever be saved? While I will deal with the inaccuracy of this interpretation a little later, you can see why many of the leaders in the environmental movement are calling for a radical shift away from this Christian position. But what are the alternatives?

The need to survive provides a rationale for environmental concern within an *evolutionary* or *naturalistic* world view. Survival of the human species is the ultimate value. Man cannot continue to survive without a healthy planet. We must act to preserve the earth in order to assure the future of our children.

The evolutionary or naturalistic view of nature is, however, ultimately pragmatic. That is, nature has value only as long as we need it. The value of nature is contingent on the whim of egotistical man.^{3} If, as technology increases, we are able to artificially reproduce portions of the ecosystem for our survival needs, then certain aspects of nature lose their significance. We no longer need them to survive. This view is ultimately destructive, because man will possess only that which he needs. The rest of nature can be discarded.

In the fictional universe of *Star Trek*, vacations are spent in a computer generated virtual reality and meals are produced by molecular manipulation. No gardens, herds, or parks are needed. What value does nature have then?

Another alternative is the *pantheistic* or *New Age* worldview. Superficially, this view offers some hope. All of nature is equal because all is god and god is all. Nature is respected and valued because it is part of the essence of god. If humans have value, then nature has value.

But while pantheism elevates nature, it simultaneously degrades man and will ultimately degrade nature as well. To the pantheist, man has no more value than a blade of grass. In India the rats and cows consume needed grain and spread disease with the blessings of the pantheists. To restrict the rats and cows would be to restrict god, so man takes second place to the rats and cows. Man is a part of nature, yet it is man that is being restricted. So ultimately, all of nature is degraded.{4}

Pantheism claims that what is, is right. To clean up the environment would mean eliminating the undesirable elements. But, since god is all and in all, how can there be any undesirable elements? Pantheism fails because it makes no distinctions between man and nature.

The Christian Environmental Ethic

A true Christian environmental ethic differs from the naturalistic and pantheistic ethics in that it is based on the reality of God as Creator and man as his image-bearer and steward. God is the Creator of nature, not part of nature. He transcends nature (Gen. 1-2; Job 38-41; Ps. 19, 24, 104; Rom 1:18-20; Col. 1:16-17). All of nature, including man, is equal in its origin. Nature has value in and of itself because God created it. Nature's value is intrinsic; it will not change because the fact of its creation will not change.{5} The rock, the tree, and the cat deserve our respect because God made them to be as they are.{6}

While man is a creature and therefore is identified with the other creatures, he is also created in God's image. It is this image that separates humans from the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 139:13-16).{7} God did not bestow His image anywhere else in nature.

Therefore, while a cat has value because God created it, it is inappropriate to romanticize the cat as though it had human

emotions. All God's creatures glorify Him by their very existence, but only one is able to worship and serve Him by an act of the will.

But a responsibility goes along with bearing the image of God. In its proper sense, man's rule and dominion over the earth is that of a steward or a caretaker, not a reckless exploiter. Man is not sovereign over the lower orders of creation. Ownership is in the hands of the Lord.[\[8\]](#)

God told Adam and Eve to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15), and we may certainly use nature for our benefit, but we may only use it as God intends. An effective steward understands that which he oversees, and science can help us discover the intricacies of nature.

Technology puts the creation to man's use, but unnecessary waste and pollution degrades it and spoils the creation's ability to give glory to its Creator. I think it is helpful to realize that we are to exercise dominion over nature, not as though we are entitled to exploit it, but as something borrowed or held in trust.

Recall that in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, the steward who merely buried his talent out of fear of losing it was severely chastised. What little he did have was taken away and given to those who already had a great deal.[\[9\]](#) When Christ returns, His earth may well be handed back to Him rusted, corroded, polluted, and ugly. To what degree will you or I be held responsible?

This more thoroughly biblical view of nature and the environment will allow us to see more clearly the challenges that lie ahead. Our stewardship of the earth must grapple with the reality that it does not belong to us but to God though we have been given permission to use the earth for our basic needs.

Abuse of Dominion

While God intended us to live in harmony with nature, we have more often than not been at odds with nature. This reality tells us that man has not fulfilled his mandate. The source of our ecological crisis lies in man's fallen nature and the abuse of his dominion.

Man is a rebel who has set himself at the center of the universe. He has exploited created things as though they were nothing in themselves and as though he has an autonomous right to do so.[{10}](#) Man's abuse of his dominion becomes clear when we look at the value we place on time and money. Our often uncontrolled greed and haste have led to the deterioration of the environment.[{11}](#) We evaluate projects almost exclusively in terms of their potential impact on humans.

For instance, builders know that it is faster and more cost effective to bulldoze trees that are growing on the site of a proposed subdivision than it is to build the houses around them. Even if the uprooted trees are replaced with saplings once the houses are constructed, the loss of the mature trees enhances erosion, eliminates a means of absorbing pollutants, producing oxygen, and providing shade, and produces a scar that heals slowly if at all.

Building around the trees, while more expensive and time-consuming, minimizes the destructive impact of human society on God's earth. But, because of man's sinful heart, the first option has been utilized more often than not.

As Christians we must treat nature as having value in itself, and we must be careful to exercise dominion without being destructive.[{12}](#) To quote Francis Schaeffer, We have the right to rid our house of ants; but what we have no right to do is to forget to honor the ant as God made it, out in the place where God made the ant to be. When we meet the ant on the sidewalk, we step over him. He is a creature, like ourselves;

not made in the image of God, it is true, but equal with man as far as creation is concerned.{13}

The Bible contains numerous examples of the care with which we are expected to treat the environment. Leviticus 25:1-12 speaks of the care Israel was to have for the land. Deuteronomy 25:4 and 22:6 indicates the proper care for domestic animals and a respect for wildlife. In Isaiah 5:8-10 the Lord judges those who have misused the land. Job 38:25-28 and Psalm 104:27-30 speak of God's nurture and care for His creation. Psalm 104 tells us that certain places were made with certain animals in mind. This would make our national parks and wilderness preserves a biblical concept. And Jesus spoke on two occasions of how much the Father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Matt. 6:26, 10:29). How can we do less?

Christian Responsibility

I believe that as Christians we have a responsibility to the earth that exceeds that of unredeemed people. We are the only ones who are rightly related to the Creator. We should be showing others the way to environmental responsibility.

Christians, of all people, should not be destroyers, Schaeffer said.{14} We may cut down a tree to build a house or to make a fire, but not just to cut it down. While there is nothing wrong with profit in the marketplace, in some cases we must voluntarily limit our profit in order to protect the environment.{15}

When the church puts belief into practice, our humanity and sense of beauty are restored.{16} But this is not what we see. Concern for the environment is not on the front burner of most evangelical Christians. The church has failed in its mission of steward of the earth.

We have spoken out loudly against the materialism of science as expressed in the issues of abortion, human dignity,

evolution, and genetic engineering, but have shown ourselves to be little more than materialists in our technological orientation towards nature.^{17} All too often Christians have adopted a mindset similar to a naturalist that would assert that simply more technology will answer our problems. In this respect we have essentially abandoned this very Christian issue.

By failing to fulfill our responsibilities to the earth, we are also losing a great evangelistic opportunity. Many young people in our society are seeking an improved environment, yet they think that most Christians don't care about ecological issues and that most churches offer no opportunity for involvement.^{18} For example, in many churches today you can find soft drink machines dispensing aluminum cans with no receptacle provided to recycle the aluminum, one of our most profitable recyclable materials.

As a result, other worldviews and religions have made the environmental issue their own. Because the environmental movement has been co-opted by those involved in the New Age Movement particularly, many Christians have begun to confuse interest in the environment with interest in pantheism and have hesitated to get involved. But we cannot allow the enemy to take over leadership in an area that is rightfully ours.

As the redeemed of the earth, our motivation to care for the land is even higher than that of the evolutionist, the Buddhist, or the advocate of the New Age. Jesus has redeemed all of the effects of the curse, including our relationship with God, our relationship with other people, and our relationship with the creation (1 Cor. 15:21-22, Rom. 5:12-21). Although the heavens and the earth will eventually be destroyed, we should still work for healing now.

For Further Reading

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Population, Resources, and the Future. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990.

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Notes

1. Calvin DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Does the New Testament Say About the Environment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).
2. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155 (1967):1203-07.
3. Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 26-27.
4. Ibid, 30-33.
5. Ibid, 47-49.
6. Ibid, 54-55.
7. Ibid, 49-50.
8. Ibid, 69.
9. Ibid, 69-70.
10. Ibid, 71.
11. Ibid, 83.
12. Ibid, 74-75.
13. Ibid, 74.
14. Ibid, 74.
15. Ibid, 90-91.
16. Ibid, 92-93.
17. Ibid, 85.
18. Ibid, 85.