



Creation in Crisis

As I write, a gigantic oil slick wends its way in the Persian Gulf, threatening untold numbers of life forms and wastefully altering the surrounding environment. Our sense of the catastrophe, sensational at first in its having been captured by TV cameras trained on the war in the Middle East, has now taken a back seat, dulled by the “more crucial” news of the daily conduct of the war and the threat to the water supplies of adjacent human populations. As a tactic of war, it is a poignant reminder that among the horrors of war it is the earth, too, that suffers.

The oil slick in the Persian Gulf is not the first of its kind. War only makes more dramatically evident the havoc we humans continue to wreak on nature in ways less visible but just as destructive. War is simply human desires for more and more stretched to their ultimate (James 4:1-2). And when humans go at it, in the name of progress, efficiency, economic necessity, or justice, so often it is as if war had been declared on the ecosphere, from the tiniest life to the ozone layer that protects the delicate balance of life on this planet. Humanity’s freedom through wisdom and power to master and waste the environment for its own ends is not new—simply more crucial and deadly, given the possibilities presented by modern technological developments. The psalmist announces that the “earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness,” not just those of us who dwell in it (Ps 24:1). It is then with some urgency that we envision the whole creation groaning in pain, “waiting with eager longing” for the restoration God’s redemption will bring (Rom 8:18-23). In the midst of the complexities of a technical age, when we are so easily blind to the ways our “use” of creation has changed from one of care and reverence to apathy, disregard, or even contempt, what role does Christian hope play in the formation of a responsible ethic toward creation?

This issue of *Word & World* on “The Environment” presses us to consider the present “crisis of creation” and those issues of theological perspective and life-style on a personal and global scale that fit our confession that in Christ “all things were created” and in him “all things” are reconciled to God (Col 1:17, 20).

In the perspective essay introducing the theme, *Jürgen Moltmann* argues that our crisis arises from the way our image of God affects our view of the world. Reconciliation with nature can be realized by a new sense of God’s Spirit as the life of all creation and by extending to all creation the implications of God’s covenant of justice and restoration.

The current ecological crisis is often blamed on the impact that the “dominion” language of Gen 1:26-28 has had in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In his introductory article, *James Limburg* says that Gen 1-11 calls us rather to human “responsibility for” and “commonality with” creation and to a renewed sense of care for creation growing out of this connectedness.

According to *Robert Quam*, in reference to the environment our language does make a difference. “Creation” talk keeps before us the particular emphases of the biblical narrative and offers resources for theological and ethical reflection on the relationship of humans to the environment.

Vitor Westhelle, seminary professor in Brazil, argues that the ecological crisis is a new problem in history deriving from the view of nature as a source of value for the accumulation of capital. A Christian theology of creation counters this, shaping a new vision of nature as the “mask of God.”

Péri Rasolondraibe sees the essential linking of environmental concerns to issues of global economic development, particularly the “downward spiral of poverty” in developing countries. Noting our tendency to use ideological concerns as an economic weapon against less developed nations, he suggests the image of the Triune grace of God as “shared otherness” as a symbol enabling establishment of economy on the basis of *shalom* rather than on wealth.

Mary Ann Hinsdale, summarizing the insights of ecology and feminism regarding the environmental crisis, draws upon the “ecofeminist” movement for challenging perspectives on traditional creation and redemption themes to address the anthropocentric bias so often seen in the roots of the ecological crisis.

Two companion pieces focus the environmental crisis of the land and rural America. *Anne Kanten*, family farmer and former Minnesota Assistant Commissioner of Agriculture, facing the declining numbers of farmers in the pinch of current agricultural economics and governmental policies, asks who in the future will “care for the land”? *C. Dean Freudenberger*, agronomist and social ethicist, argues that social, interspecies, and intergenerational justice are all dependent on an ethic of sustainability and enhancement. He raises the challenge of this ethic in the face of prevailing cultural values, United States agricultural policy, and the inadequate theology and response of the church and its ministry.

Finally, *Calvin DeWitt* outlines how churches, for example, through formation of Creation Awareness Centers, can exercise a stewardship of responsibility, addressing the crisis of degradation in creation by learning about the creation, exploring biblical teachings on creation, and applying this knowledge as trustees of creation.

The Resources section begins with a Face to Face discussion by Evangelical Lutheran Church in America bishops *Edward Perry* and *Michael McDaniel* on whether bishops should be elected for life. The issue is a timely one, given the lively debate in the ELCA that has linked this issue with ecumenical discussions and the question of the historic episcopate.

The Summer 1989 issue of *Word & World* addressed the “finality of Christ” and modern pluralism. *Peter Pettit* returns to wrestle with the intersection of “Christ alone” and “pluralism,” appealing to the Lutheran theme of the “hiddenness” of God as a potential resource in the theological discussion.

Ned Wisnefske, a member of the ELCA task force preparing a social teaching statement on abortion, here addresses the theological and practical issues of the problem of abortion in a way that will be relevant and helpful to pastors and congregations.

In our regular Texts in Context feature *David Fredrickson* describes the 2 Corinthians lessons for Pentecost as an extended argument for the ministry of the gospel. He presents here a case for “reading as the birth of action” in the model of Paul as a *pastor* addressing injustice and proclaiming a message of reconciliation and restoration in the Christian community.