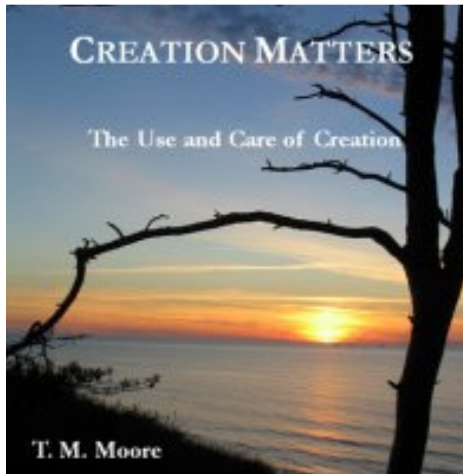


CREATION NOT NATURE

Creation Matters (1)



The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Psalm 24:1, 2

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By T.M. Moore

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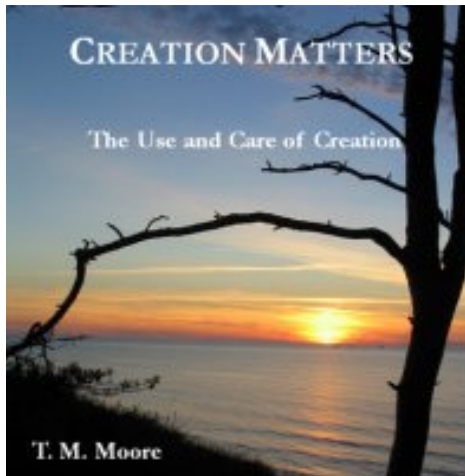
It matters how we think about **the world and everything in it**. If, as Kantian and evolutionary thought insist, the cosmos is merely a vast collection of impersonal matter, formed by chance, devoid of purpose, and, while interesting and provoking to wonder in many ways, nothing to be considered of any eternal significance, that outlook will determine our approach to and use of the earth and its resources. This is doubtless one of the reasons **environmentalists** find entrepreneurs and consumers so irritating, whom they regard as treating the earth like something to be used up and discarded, rather than as a kind of sacred trust. In response, entrepreneurs and consumers mock what they regard as the **false piety** of environmentalists, whose view of the earth, in their eyes, approaches a kind of religious awe inconsistent with evolutionary ideals.

But if, as our text indicates, the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, and if the reason for this is that the cosmos is **God's creation** and not merely some kind of **impersonal nature** to be used however men see fit, then our approach to the world will be defined by such a conviction. From this perspective, the perspective of the Christian worldview, **creation matters** more than the businessman, consumer, environmentalist, or politician can imagine. In these days of high environmental drama – global warming, cap-and-trade, save-the-whales, and so forth – it ill behoves the Christian to be ignorant of the Biblical teaching about the cosmos.

Concerning the cosmos the Bible makes three unmistakable claims. First, the world and everything in it belong to God, Who created all things out of nothing by the power of His Word. The cosmos belongs to God because He made it. Thus, in the second place, God, Who never does anything without a purpose, has specific purposes and uses in mind for the world He has created. He has not hidden those purposes from us but, rather, has clearly declared them in His Word. They who know the Lord and would serve Him faithfully must understand and embrace those purposes if they would be pleasing to God in matters related to the creation. Finally, the Scriptures teach that God loves the cosmos, loves it so much that He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem and reconcile the creation back to its rightful Owner.

Creation matters to God; therefore, creation must matter to us. The cosmos is not just random stuff, nature, gathered by chance into its present form, here to be used as men see fit for as long as the cosmos allows us to remain. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. Creation matters to the believer because all the matters of creation matter so much to God.

TO REFLECT THE GRANDEUR OF GOD



And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.
Genesis 1:31

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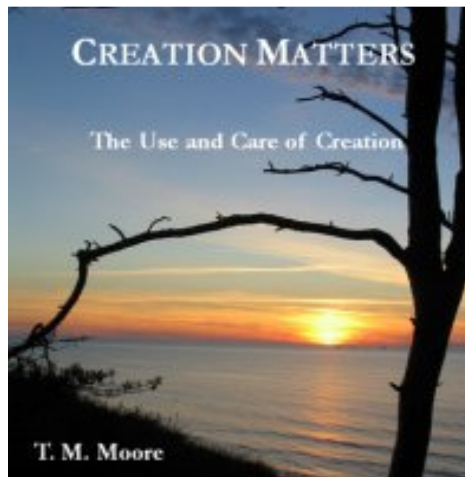
The vast cosmos is the **creation of God**. He made it, and He has His purposes for why He did and, therefore, for how the creation should be used. Gerard Manley Hopkins echoed the words of Moses in our text when he wrote, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." Men don't have to look far in order to be persuaded of this. Ken Burns' newest documentary series, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea," is a clear example of Hopkins' claim. The first episode, a two-hour overture to the series, is entitled, "The Scripture of Nature." The narration focuses on Yosemite and Yellowstone National Parks and is shot through with religious imagery, references to the Almighty, celebrations of the power and beauty of God, and speculations on the Deity's purpose in granting such delights to men.

This is as it should be, for God's primary purpose in creating the vast cosmos is to **reflect Himself** and His grandeur, to provide an abiding, seemingly boundless witness to His goodness, beauty, wisdom, majesty, power, and pleasure. God made the world as a way of helping its creatures, in particular, human beings, to gain some insight into the immensity and steadfast love of Him Who brought them into being and sustains them by His grace. When, on the last day of creation, God surveyed all He had done and pronounced His pleasure over it, He signaled to every sentient being that this world would henceforth serve to reveal its Maker and to beckon men to consider, seek, and know Him (Acts 14:17; Acts 17:26, 27; Rom. 1:19, 20).

But, as Hopkins continued in his poem to explain, men have disregarded God's purpose for the creation and have "bleared" and "smeared" the earth with their own rapacious, destructive ways. This is doubtless one of the reasons Ken Burns dwells so much on the divine reflections which are everywhere on display in our national parks: people have become so accustomed to the creation that they have lost the sense of wonder and transcendence it holds. We have become developers, consumers, exploiters, and wasters of the creation, and we need a kind of "national wake-up call" to remind us of just what it is we are trampling and smearing with our consumerist agendas and ways.

God made the world in order to show the world His glory. This is the starting-point for a Christian understanding of creation matters; it is also the most compelling explanation for why creation matters so much to those who know its Creator.

APPOINTED TO RULE



...what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings...You have given him dominion over the works of your hands... Psalm 8:4-6

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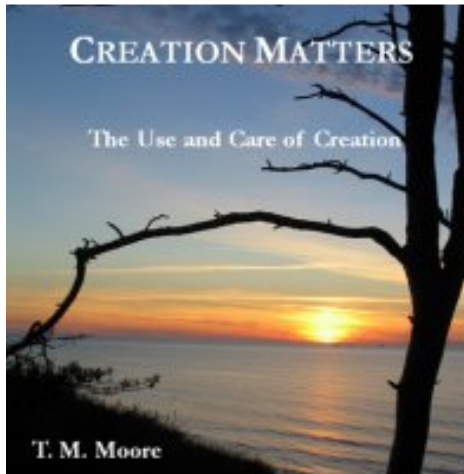
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The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. He created it as a **great reflecting-glass** of His own glory, so that every sentient being might wonder, delight, and participate in the very being of God. And although God made the cosmos complete and wholly to His satisfaction, He left in it room for improvement. For all its beauty and majesty, the glory of the creation, as God made it, was amenable to being polished to an even brighter and more glorious sheen. The glory of God is without end; it can be enlarged, brightened, and extended throughout the cosmos in infinitely more glorious ways. And precisely for the pursuit of this lofty objective, **God made people** and gave them the mandate of **exercising dominion** over all the creatures God had made.

Secularists have scoffed at the idea of man's exercising dominion over the earth. In particular they have heaped scorn on the Christian worldview, which they regard as having given birth to an exploitative approach to the earth in the name of exercising dominion. To be fair, many developers of earth's resources have taken just that approach, and, sadly, even some of them, as it were, in the Name of the Lord. But when God called men to exercise dominion over the creation, He meant that they should do so in a way that, like everything else in the creation, reflected His goodness, beauty, and truth. Thus, when human beings consider how they might explore, engage, develop, and use the earth and its resources, they must be careful that their endeavors reflect the divine purpose and aim at ends that will be pleasing to God first of all.

People, in other words, have been appointed by God as **stewards of His creation**. God expects us to receive the creation as a gift and to use it in ways that will enlarge and polish the sheen of the divine reflecting-glass which is the earth and everything in it. The dominion God exercises today through the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ is a rule unto righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). The Apostle Paul calls on the followers of Jesus Christ to take those guiding precepts and objectives as their own in seeking to advance the rule of King Jesus within the bounds of their own appointed place of stewardship (Rom. 14:18). This includes every aspect of the created order with which we, as the redeemed of the Lord, have interaction or responsibility. God has entrusted to each one of us the care of His creation, as much of it comes into our hands, or that we are otherwise able to affect. Our stewardship must be a dominion of beauty, goodness, truth, righteousness, peace, and joy in which the work of the Spirit of God can flourish and prosper through every aspect of the creation unto God's glory.

TO DEVELOP AND EXTEND



The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15

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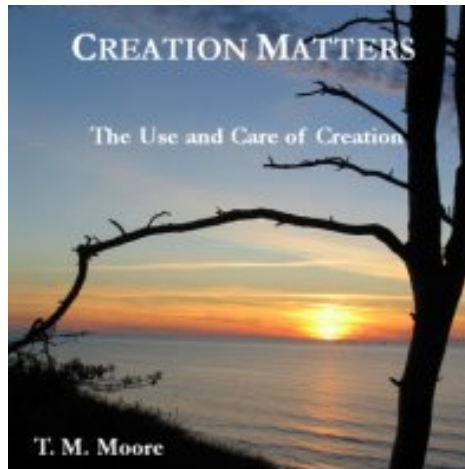
Creation matters to God; for that reason **creation matters to the people of God as well**. We must understand God's purposes for the creation, accept our calling as stewards over the earth and everything in it, and learn as much as we can about what God expects of us as we exercise dominion in His Name. When we turn to God's purpose for the creation of men and women we discover a fascinating, but maddeningly brief, job description that God appointed to His dominion-keepers with respect to creation matters.

In our text God assigned a **twofold mandate** to Adam, and, subsequently Eve. They were to "work" the garden of Eden and to "keep" or, more literally, "guard" it. The garden of Eden, it appears, was adorned with greater abundance and evidence of God's glory than the world around it. Adam's task in that environment boiled down to developing the good gifts of God, deposited in and around the garden, and extending them from the garden to the rest of the earth.

Adam's interaction with the creation involved **plants and animals**, which he was to name and husband, as well as various **other resources**, including, running water (for energy and transport? vv. 10-14) and minerals to be mined and processed (vv. 11, 12). Much of this work would have been back-breaking manual labor, while other aspects of it were likely more intellectual – both blue and white collar, we might say. The idea clearly indicated is that the man and woman, by "working" the garden and its resources, and by having children to fill the earth, were to extend the goodness of the garden, and its heightened power to reflect the glory of God, beyond the original garden to wherever human beings would roam and settle. The fall into sin, of course, short-circuited this plan, and highlights for us Adam's failure at the second task of his job description, that of "guarding" the garden. As important as it was to **develop** all the latent potential of the garden and its resources, the man and woman also had to **keep and care** for it, guarding it against anything that might bring it to ruin.

The mandate to Adam and Eve, in the most general of terms, defines our own mandate yet today. God has appointed people to develop all the goodness and potential of the earth, in ways that will increase and extend His glory, and to guard the creation – in all its forms – from anything which threatens it with destruction or decay. Exercising dominion in this way begins right where each of us lives, with whatever portion of the creation and its fruits the Lord has been pleased to entrust to our development and care.

TO ENJOY AND CONSERVE



The heavens are the LORD's, but the earth He has given to the children of man. Psalm 115:16

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The earth is the Lord's, but He has entrusted it to the **care of men**, to exercise a dominion of stewardship intended to bring out the goodness and glory of God in all our interactions with the creation. The immediate purpose of this is to provide for the needs of men in a setting where goodness, beauty, truth, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit can flourish. Of course, men who have not embraced the redemption that is in Jesus Christ will follow their own agenda in developing and using the resources of the creation. But, for their part, the followers of Jesus must work hard to follow all that God requires of them in developing and caring for the earth and its resources in a way that both benefits men and blesses God.

One obscure Scripture in the Law of God contains a wealth of insight to guide believers in caring for and using the earth. In Deuteronomy 22:6, 7 we read, "If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young. You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you, and that you may live long." Let's make three observations about this text.

First, God provides the resources of the creation to accomplish His good purposes in caring for the community of mankind. The words "go well" in the Hebrew actually recall God's "good" and "very good" of Genesis 1, suggesting that it is in accord with His original plan for men to use the resources of the creation to provide for their needs. At first it might seem cruel to take the eggs and chicks, but there is an important message in this. The eggs and chicks can be replaced; and the mother bird is precisely the creature which can do that.

Thus, in the second place, men must use the resources of the creation in a responsible manner, one that ensures that those resources will be available for the generations to come. The creation and its resources are, indeed, ours to enjoy, but they are also ours to preserve. We must not mindlessly clear forests, alter the course of rivers, hunt wild game, or harvest the edible fruit of plants and trees. Rather, we must always think beyond our immediate needs to the long-term needs of the human community. The challenge in using the resources of the earth is thus to balance enjoying them with conserving them for future use.

Finally, we can see **the wisdom of this principle** in the way developers, farmers, and industrialists are working to act more responsibly in the ways they develop the creation. Erosion control, mountaintop replanting, tree farms, fish and game stocking, acreage set-asides, wetlands preservation – these are all examples of the wisdom of God's Law written on the hearts of men, teaching them to pursue creation matters in a way that mirrors the purposes of God for His cosmos.