

A Survey of Evangelical Hermeneutical Approaches to Conservation

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KEY WORDS

| Christian Environmentalism | Conservation | Biblical Interpretation |
| Evangelical attitudes | Eschatology | Premillennialism | Creation |

ABSTRACT

As environmental concerns have risen to prominence within many quarters of Evangelicalism, this article seeks to discover how scholarly evangelical attitudes towards conservation are informed by interpretation of Scripture. The literature of Western evangelical scholars is surveyed and chief hermeneutical approaches to conservation analysed and discussed. It is found that evangelical hermeneutical approaches are largely influenced by five principal factors, namely: (i) attempts to resolve the tension between the dominion and cultural mandates of Gen. 1:28 and 2:15 respectively (ii) understanding of creation's 'original state' (iii) interpretation of the relationship between the Adamic and Edenic covenants (iv) eschatological outlook (v) hermeneutical literalism. It is concluded that many post- and amillennialist evangelical scholars – in stark contrast to dispensational premillennialists – are responding to past criticisms of Christianity's perceived environmental indifference by embracing an eco-centric stewardship paradigm that views mankind's chief ecologic function as guardian and protector of creation, not exploiter.

I. THE CURRENT DEBATE

Whether they are concerns such as anthropogenic global warming, species extinctions and tropical deforestation; or more local issues such as overcrowding, air quality and noise pollution, environmental concerns have become deeply ingrained within the social fabric of the contemporary First World. For those living in economically developed Western nations, it has become customary to hear the latest gloomy prediction of impending ecological catastrophe from filmmakers, scientists and mainstream media alike. Whether it be the Hollywood blockbuster 'An Inconvenient Truth', the IPCC 'hockey stick' temperature graph, the 10:10 Climate Change campaign¹ or Extinction

Rebellion's dire warnings of impending climate catastrophe, society is being bombarded with neo-Malthusian scares over resource shortages and rising global temperatures. Unless mankind radically alters course, it is argued, ecological doom is heading our way.

Though a contentious issue within secular society, environmental concerns are particularly divisive within Evangelicalism due to disagreements over interpretation of Scripture, economics and science (McCammack 2007, 646).² Left-leaning evangelical scholars,

The film was later removed from the campaign's website and pulled from YouTube amidst mass public outcry.

1 Which produced "No Pressure", a darkly satirical film depicting anthropogenic global warming sceptics/'dissenters,' including children, being blown up.

2 Though scientific claims and economic policies are contentious within Evangelicalism, theological interpretations are particularly divisive due to Evangelicalism's reverence for Scripture.

disillusioned with Evangelicalism's perceived indifference towards environmental concerns, are increasingly supportive of eco-centric secular environmental organisations such as Greenpeace, The World Wide Fund for Nature, and Friends of the Earth. Conservative right-leaning evangelical scholars often regard such support as tantamount to endorsing a neo-pagan, new-age and pantheistic 'social gospel'; one that distracts the Church from its main task of evangelism (Davis 2000, 274). For premillennialist scholars, environmental concerns are often denigrated as unimportant in light of the earth's future conflagration and destruction (2 Pet. 3:5-13).

In keeping with Evangelicalism's theological and political diversity, a growing number of evangelical scholars are seeking to tread a middle ground between eco-fascist/atheistic and dispensationalist strains of environmentalism by constructing a practical, postmillennial environmental theology that interprets key passages of Scripture and biblical themes in environmentally sensitive ways.

II. WHY THIS APPROACH

Popular treatments often provide a broad overview of the contemporary environmental movement before constructing a Christian environmental theology (McGrath 2002; Schaeffer 1970; Grizzle and Barrett 1998; Wright 1995). Others seek to either critique various strands of evangelical environmentalism or rally support for particular environmental causes (Elsdon 1992; Bookless 2008). Whilst there is undoubtedly poor exegesis and doctrinal waywardness within evangelical environmentalism, a critique of evangelical environmental hermeneutics is beyond this study's scope. Similarly, this article avoids

'converting' the environmental heathen and instead seeks to present and analyse evangelical hermeneutical approaches to conservation³ dispassionately whilst allowing for personal expression and viewpoint scrutiny where appropriate.

Much work has been done investigating the impact of religion on environmental concern. Greeley, for example, develops the findings of a 1989 survey in Tulsa, Oklahoma to show a positive correlation between "biblical literalism" and "low levels of environmental concern" (1993, 19) and a similar link between 'looser theology'⁴ and "support for environmental spending" (ibid.). Similarly, Eckberg and Blocker analyse 1993 General Social Survey data to conclude that Christian theology exhibits an "antienvironmental" effect as opposed to a "proenvironmental" one stimulated by more liberal expressions of Christianity (1996, 343). Building on this study, Sherkat and Ellison analyse the same data set and discover that willingness to "make personal sacrifices for nature" is negatively correlated with conservative forms of Protestantism and biblical inerrancy (2007, 77). Crucially, however, their study also found that conservative Protestants, biblical inerrantists and regular churchgoers take environmental concerns seriously through the "fostering [of] stewardship orientations" (80); an observation which suggests that conservative inerrantists acknowledge the gravity of environmental concerns but are reluctant to engage in personal forms of environmental action.

Whilst the aforementioned studies, written

3 Conservation may be defined as "the efficient and non-wasteful use of natural resources" or more loosely as "any form of environmental protection" (Johnston et al. 2000, 106).

4 Defined by Greeley as one which encompasses "a gracious image of God" and is "Catholic" in outlook (1993, 19).

from a social science perspective, further understanding of the influence of varying expressions of Christian belief on attitudes to the environment, there is a pressing need to discover the hermeneutical and theological reasons why, for example, conservative inerrantists are less likely to engage in personal forms of environmental action than their liberal counterparts (and vice versa). Such a proposed shift in focus reflects the need to advance the research goal beyond a preoccupation with the question of what in order to explore the question of why. A social science approach with superficial or no scriptural treatment,⁵ though helpful in identifying trends and statistically significant relationships between variables, can never satisfactorily explore the interplay between biblical interpretation and resulting environmental attitudes. Only those familiar with evangelical theology and hermeneutics, willing to conduct an intertestamental survey of the evangelical conservation movement's chief hermeneutical tenets, are sufficiently equipped to analyse how biblical interpretation affects attitudes towards environmental protection.

The constraints of this short article permit only a presentation and discussion of evangelical conservationists' chief hermeneutical linchpins. It is hoped that this study will enable evangelicals to make an informed decision regarding the exegetical and theological validity of hermeneutical approaches to conservation, filling existing niches in the current body of Christian environmental literature in two ways. Firstly, whilst there is no dearth of Christian literature on environmental themes, such texts often emphasise the importance of creation before seeking to construct a responsible environmental ethic (e.g. Bullmore, 1998;

Grizzle et al. 1998; Wright 1995). Whilst these treatments are generally helpful, there is a growing need to push the debate forward by examining the hermeneutical and theological factors that underpin evangelical attitudes to of conservation. As this movement becomes increasingly strident and militant in outlook, now more than ever evangelicals must take up the challenge of scripturally engaging with its suppositions and demands.

Secondly, evangelical literature has largely yet to systematise the influence of eschatology on attitudes towards environmental concerns; an area this paper seeks to develop. Whilst Bridger's article explores the 'neglected' interplay between ecology and eschatology (1990, 291), he is primarily concerned with constructing an "anticipatory ecological ethic" (ibid.). Similarly, rather than examining how use of Scripture informs environmental outlook, Truesdale seeks to identify a "compelling alternative" to dispensationalist premillennialism (1994, 118) that draws on the writings of Jewett, Dyrness, Hall and Pinnock (118-120) to eschew apocalyptic/destructive interpretations of the environment's fate in favour of reconciliatory and restorative visions of planetary healing. This article, however, chooses to systematise the influence of eschatology on environmental hermeneutics by utilising a millenarian framework [post-, a- and premillennialism]⁶ to analyse and discuss the influence end-times thinking has on attitudes to conservation.

A fresh evangelical treatment is merited in light of Evangelicalism's avowed reverence for Scripture, its social conscience and its important role in forging nuanced intertestamental theologies of conservation.

5 Sherkat and Ellison, for example, devote only half a page to a discussion of biblical texts pertinent to the environmental debate (2007, 74).

6 Chosen as it encompasses most evangelical eschatological outlooks.

III. THE CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AND THE BIRTH OF EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM⁷

The birthing of the contemporary environmental movement in the 1960s, wrought in large part by the seminal works of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Kenneth Boulding's concept of 'spaceship earth' (1966) and Garrett Hardin's 'The Tragedy of the Commons' (Science, 1968), sparked widespread debate on issues such as pesticide usage (specifically DDT), the potential for exponential growth to outstrip the earth's supply of finite natural resources, and the economic incentives that encourage overgrazing and environmental degradation of the commons (land, air and sea). Stemming from this environmental awakening, the concept of sustainable development emerged, first advanced by Ernst Schumacher in his 1974 work *Small is Beautiful* which espoused anti-growth sympathies. Later defined by the WCED/'Brundtland Commission' (1987, 45) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", it was not until the UNCED 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 that the concept of sustainable development gained widespread recognition.

In the midst of heightened concerns over an impending environmental catastrophe, a number of secular and Christian scholars began to criticise Christianity's perceived indifference, even exploitative attitude, towards the environment (White 1967, 1205). Dominionism was derided as "anthropocentric" (ibid.) and "instrumentalist" (Moo 2006, 499)

7 This section deals exclusively with the contemporary environmental movement (1960s -).

for affirming that creation's sole purpose is to serve mankind. The claim that the doctrine of mankind's Imago Dei (Gen. 1:26f, 5:1-3, 9:6) somehow fosters 'anthropocentrism' is of course not new. As early as the mid-nineteenth century Ludwig Feuerbach (1843, 287) claimed: "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul". This observation developed a more accusatory and confrontational tone, however, with the publication of White's (1967) 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis'. White essentially argued that orthodox Christianity's desacralized/anti-pagan view of nature fostered a utilitarian attitude towards the environment, one that legitimised exploitation of the earth's resources "in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (ibid., 1205). In eschewing "pagan animism" (ibid.) by worshipping the Creator and not creation, White contends that Christianity fostered a hostile view of nature; one bolstered by man's Imago Dei.⁸ Though critiqued for its "historical and theological superficiality" (McGrath 2002, 30), regarding Judeo-Christians as a homogenous group (Guth et al. 1995, 367),⁹ White's thesis – still accepted by many today – sounded a wake-up call for evangelicals who had previously given little theological consideration to environmental issues.

In response to White's thesis, many evangelicals have sought to construct environmental theologies that minimise the

8 There is evidence to suggest that White (1973, 57) tempered his criticism of Christianity's perceived environmental indifference in later years, writing "No sensible person could maintain that all ecologic damage is, or has been, rooted in religious attitudes" and again "All that can be said ... is that Christianity in its Latin form (which includes Protestantism...) provided a set of presuppositions remarkably favourable to technological thrust" (ibid., 58).

9 See McGrath 2002, 30-1 for a number of responses to White's paper.

tension between the dominion and cultural mandates by developing the concept of stewardship. Ball (1998, 33) notes that 'Wise Use' evangelicals attempt to theologically justify mankind's exploitation of the earth's resources and are vociferously opposed to eco-centric stewardship ethics. 'Caring Management' or 'Creation Care' (ibid.; Grizzle et al. 1998, 8-11) is embraced by McGrath 2002; Schaeffer 1970 and Bullmore 1998 who observe, amongst other things, creation's intrinsic value to God and humankind's obligation to guard/protect the earth. 'Servanthood Stewardship' evangelicals interpret dominion as "service rather than as a license for ungodly behaviour" (DeWitt 1998, 41). By insisting that mankind is to 'serve' non-human creation, they place less emphasis on humanity's superior ontological status (Ball 1998, 33). 'Social Justice' approaches, usually associated with Catholics and mainstream Protestants, have made headway with American evangelicals and emphasise the "vicious cycle of poverty and environmental destruction" (Grizzle et al. 1998, 7-8). Proponents of 'Environmental Justice' draw attention to the fact that it is often the poor and socially disadvantaged who disproportionately suffer the consequences of environmental pollution (ibid., 11-12), whilst 'Eco-Justice', an approach commonly criticised for being devoid of evangelistic impulse, seeks to demonstrate how the marginalised in society as well as the earth's biota suffer from the effects of mankind's profligate consumption (ibid., 13-14).

Despite its mainstream evangelical appeal, 'Creation Care' is opposed by those who regard eco-stewardship to be an endogenous concept derived from eisegetical modes of interpretation. This view, known as 'Dominionism' or 'Subjectionism' (ibid., 6) teaches that God, as Creator, Ruler and Owner of creation, has

endowed mankind with responsibility to wield dominion over the rest of creation, despite man himself being directly responsible to God. Beisner (1990, 24), a chief proponent of this view, contends that the cultural mandate was given to enable the earth "to meet man's needs more fully than it naturally would". He argues from a techno-centric viewpoint, affirming a belief that man's technological expertise will enable him to successfully mitigate any environmental challenge. To this litany of views outlined above, 'Shepherdism' might be added; a perspective that expresses Dominionism sympathies yet seeks to harmonise humanity's superior ontological status with a duty to responsibly care for the earth (Vantassel 2009, 160-78).

Though various schools have been presented, it is the author's contention that only scholars writing from either a 'Wise Use', 'Creation Care', 'Servanthood Stewardship', 'Subjectionism' or 'Shepherdism' viewpoint offer truly evangelical treatments of hermeneutical approaches to conservation. In attempting to 'green' the Gospel by appealing to ecological proof texts and thereby ignoring the centrality of human salvation and evangelism in the biblical witness, it is argued that 'Social Justice', 'Environmental Justice' and 'Eco-Justice' approaches are largely incompatible with orthodox evangelical tenets and are thus excluded from this study.

IV. HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES TO CONSERVATION

A. THE INTRINSIC VALUE AND 'GOODNESS' OF CREATION

Like secular conservationists, evangelical scholars who affirm the need to conserve species often emphasise creation's intrinsic value and beauty, yet additionally stress God's

relationship with non-human creation alongside the pleasure He derives from His handiwork. Such an approach represents a departure from traditional environmental hermeneutics which usually appraised creation's value exclusively in the context of man's relationship to it.¹⁰ As God sustains and cares for creation (Matt. 6:26; Lk. 12:24), it is argued that mankind must not regard itself as the sole object of God's delight, but rather protect creation by conserving the earth's rich supply of biotic life and natural resources. Evangelical conservationists thus tread a thin line by seeking to uphold mankind's privileged place in creation whilst emphasising the independent value of creation to God. DeWitt (1998, 49-55), for example, observes God's admiration of charismatic megafauna such as the "behemoth"/hippopotamus in Job 40:15-24 (see also the "leviathan"/crocodile in Job 41:1-34), arguing that only God Himself has the right to destroy the works of His hands.

According to DeWitt, mankind's dominion over the animal and vegetable kingdoms (Gen. 1:28, 9:1-3) encourages the protection and conservation of species – not their wanton destruction. To allow or precipitate the extinction of certain endemic species by hastening the degradation of their respective ecosystems is heinously disrespectful towards God's "very good" creation (Gen. 1:31). Elsdon (1992, 53), for example, contends that "creation is good independently of our presence here and our ability to perceive it" (see Ps. 104). The cultural mandate is therefore interpreted as a command to conserve the earth's biodiversity. However, when this conservation ethic encounters biblical passages that permit or even condone the slaughter of animals, such

as Deut. 13:12-15 and 1 Sam. 15:2-3 (Vantassel 2009, 60), it is apparent that animal life is neither sacrosanct nor afforded protected status in Scripture.¹¹ Fully aware that mankind has excessively harvested animals throughout the ages, conservationists are presented with the task of choosing which species to conserve in order to avoid the spectre of further extinctions. It is often those species that are both charismatic and highly endangered that receive protected status.

This raises an important question. If, as DeWitt (1998, 52) affirms, the value of a species lies in its status as a work of God, it may be asked why some species are considered more valuable than others when all are created by God. By acknowledging the intrinsic value of all species, yet bestowing more 'value' on rare species, Grizzle and Barrett (1998, 240) argue that some hermeneutical approaches to conservation exhibit a logical inconsistency. They note that this conservational bias is cemented by evangelicals who choose to conserve only the benevolent aspect of creation (cf. Gen. 3:14-19). Why not, for example, conserve disease vectors and parasites such as mosquitoes and tapeworms? They are just as much a part of creation as the red squirrel, the black rhinoceros and the Bengal tiger. They argue that in overlooking the existence of a malevolent aspect of creation, many evangelical conservationists downplay or ignore the environmental effects of the Fall, resulting in a romanticised view of nature (ibid.). Bullmore (1998, 149), though he eschews such romanticism, embraces a nascent natural theology whereby "every species that is lost, every ecosystem that is destroyed results in a diminution of man's opportunity to observe the perfection of God" (cf. Rev. 4:11). By

10 Vantassel (2009, 1) notes that Dominionism, though neither universally nor uniformly held within the Church, was nonetheless the predominant view espoused by Christians for over two millennia.

11 Consider for example Gen. 4:3-5, 8:20ff, 9:1-3; Acts 10:9-16; Mk. 7:19.

weakening the evidential witness available to unregenerate man (cf. Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19-21), he contends that environmental degradation tarnishes the goodness and splendour of creation. His conclusion is partially embraced by Vantassel (2009, 169) who distinguishes between individual animals/organisms and their species/kinds (see Gen. 7:9); asserting that humans have a biblical right to kill animals but not to exterminate whole species (Deut. 22:6).

B. CREATION'S ORIGINAL STATE

Evangelical approaches to conservation are further influenced by what the exegete considers to be creation's original state. For many post- and amillennial evangelical scholars, Gen. 1-2, in particular the Edenic state (Gen. 1:28-30, 2:4-25), provides an environmental blueprint for the conservation and restoration of creation's ecological diversity and harmony. This view is embodied in the 'Initial Chaotic Theory' and 'Pre-Creation Chaos Theory' of Gen. 1:1-3. The former regards the chaos of v. 2 to have occurred in conjunction with the original creation in v. 1; the latter regards the chaos to have existed before the creation in v. 1 (the majority view today).¹² The third main view, 'Restitution Theory'/'The Gap Theory', teaches that the chaos of v. 2 occurred after an undisclosed period of time – a 'gap' that separates v. 1 from v. 2 (see Fruchtenbaum 2009, 28-9). Whilst this theory has been extensively employed by old earth creationists to accommodate the geological ages in the creation account, Fruchtenbaum rejects the tendency to "dump in the fossil record, the geological ice ages ... "dinosaur space"" between verses 1-2 by noting that this gap need not be a very long time at all (ibid., 37).¹³ He regards the

12 For a detailed discussion of these three views see Fruchtenbaum 2009, 25-9.

13 Fruchtenbaum's modified 'Gap Theory' regards the

'Mineral Garden' of Ezek. 28:11-19 as illustrative of how the planet looked when it was created, and contends that the new earth will be adorned with the same types of precious stones that covered the earth before the fall of Satan (Ezek. 28:13f, 16 cf. Rev. 21:18-21) (ibid., 40-1; Fruchtenbaum 2003, 556, 564).

Espousing a modified version of 'The Gap Theory', Fruchtenbaum (2003, 556-69) argues that Satan is cast out of the 'Mineral Garden' (his second abode) and into the atmospheric heavens (his current third abode) during the small 'gap' between Gen. 1:1-2; relinquishing to mankind the authority he once held over the earth. As a result of Satan's fall, a state of chaos/judgement ensues in v. 2, and water completely covers the earth before the first day of creation (Fruchtenbaum 2009, 40-1). Fruchtenbaum adduces evidence for this gap by observing the existence of a vav disjunctive in v. 2 [*ve-ha-aretz*], indicated by a *rebhia* notation in the Masoretic Text (ibid., 36), which results in the Hebrew reading "Now the earth" and not "And the earth" (ibid.).¹⁴ He therefore asserts that v. 2 is not sequential to v. 1 as the vav disjunctive introduces a new episode in the creation narrative (ibid.; Walker-Jones 2003, 164). He further demonstrates how the *syntagme* "formless [*tohu*] and void [*vohu*]" (v. 2 cf. Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23) always refers to divine judgement by connoting chaos and desolation (Fruchtenbaum 2009, 38-9) and notes how this language of judgement is reinforced by the phrase "darkness was over the surface of the deep" (v. 2) – darkness being "a symbol of divine judgement throughout the Old Testament" (ibid., 39).¹⁵

days of creation as twenty-four hour periods, maintains that death came only as a result of the Fall, and is therefore compatible with a young earth.

14 Fruchtenbaum (2009, 36) notes that in v.2 the subject ('the earth') precedes the predicate ('was formless and void') which in Hebrew grammar indicates that the author wants to say something new about the earth.

15 See ibid., 38-9 for Scripture references.

Though the water of v. 2 partially recedes and allows dry land to appear (v. 9f), Fruchtenbaum holds that the effects of Satan's banishment from the Mineral Garden remain in that approximately seventy percent of the earth is covered by oceans and seas (Fruchtenbaum 2003, 564). As he argues that only the creation of the new heaven and the new earth will fully and permanently reverse the environmental effects of Satan's fall (Ezek. 28:13f, 16f cf. Rev. 21:1-22:5) (ibid.), it is understandable how one might regard attempts to conserve and restore creation to its Edenic state as misguided and futile. In particular, Fruchtenbaum notes how as a consequence of the Fall creation becomes doubly accursed; subjected not only to the environmental repercussions of Satan's fall, but also mankind's in Gen. 3. By stark contrast 'Initial Chaotic Theory' and 'Pre-Creation Chaos Theory', rejecting the notion that the earth is cursed by Satan's fall, embrace an eschatology that emphasises mankind's ability to reverse the planet's degraded condition.¹⁶

Even if one does not assent to Fruchtenbaum's interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2, the exegete who avows a belief in mankind's ability to restore the environment to its Edenic state must ponder how, in light of the Adamic curse, such a goal is achievable.

C. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ADAMIC AND EDENIC COVENANTS

One's understanding of the relationship between the Adamic and Edenic covenants profoundly influences attitudes towards conservation. As the sustainable development ethic emphasises mankind's duty to "keep" the Garden (Gen. 2:15), any form of human activity that embraces a utilitarian view of the environment – thus

¹⁶ Vantassel (2009) argues that one must neither emphasise "otherworldly salvation to the detriment of the physical world" (88) nor "... turn back the clock to the Garden or fast forward to the *eschaton*..." (91).

disturbing man's harmonious relationship with creation (Gen. 1:28-30, 2:4-25) – is regarded as unsustainable. Typically this approach deemphasises the change in relationship that occurs between mankind and the environment under the Adamic curse (Gen. 3:14-19) where man's harmonious relationship with the earth is severely disturbed. The ground is "cursed" (Gen. 3:17b), man and animal now adopt a carnivorous diet (Gen. 1:29f., cf. 4:4f 9:3), a malevolent aspect of nature is introduced (Gen. 1:12 cf. 3:18a), the land's productivity greatly decreases (Gen. 2:15-17 cf. 3:17b-19) and mankind is forced to work the earth harder for diminished agricultural yield (Gen. 1:29, 2:15ff cf. 3:17b-19) (Fruchtenbaum 2009, 107-8). Whereas under the Edenic covenant Adam and Eve's relationship with nature was one of earthly productivity (Gen. 1:28f, 2:15f), after the Fall labour becomes arduous and requires 'managing' – and not simply 'keeping' – creation (Gen. 3:17b-19). Evangelical hermeneutical approaches that emphasise the innate goodness of creation and man's duty to "keep" the Garden (Gen. 2:15) therefore deemphasise and sometimes ignore the effects of mankind's rebellion on the environment. The view that physical death, predation and environmental malevolency existed before the Fall is embraced by old earth creationists who assert that millions of years of death and decay preceded mankind's existence. By contrast, young earth creationists reject the notion of death before sin by affirming that death occurred as a result of the Fall. Evangelicals are therefore divided over their positions on Creationism as well as their interpretation of the Adamic and Edenic covenants.

For evangelicals who adopt a more disjunctive interpretation of the Edenic (Gen. 1:28-30, 2:4-25) and Adamic (Gen. 3:14-19)

covenants, mankind’s relationship with nature has now fundamentally changed, and so too has his ecological role. According to Fruchtenbaum (2009, 187), this change in ecological function is reflected in the Noahic covenant of Gen. 9, specifically vv. 1, 7 where man “retains the authority over the animal kingdom and the vegetable kingdom” yet forfeits his authority to “subdue” and “rule” the earth (cf. Gen. 1:28; see Lk. 4:6; Jn. 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4). In light of the Adamic curse (Gen. 3:17bff), Beisner (1997, 188) argues that mankind’s chief ecological function has changed from that of passively ‘keeping’ the Garden (Gen. 2:15) to that of “transforming the wilderness by cultivation into a garden” (Gen. 3:17b-19). He argues that the land’s diminished productivity following the Fall requires mankind to adopt more intensive modes of development so as to facilitate and maintain present rates of industrial and economic growth.

Though Beisner rejects a harsh and exploitative view of nature, he is nonetheless techno-centric in his affirmation that mankind is to harness – and not simply conserve – creation’s ecological potential (ibid., 184, 192-3): a potential that climaxes with a city (the New Jerusalem) and not a restored Garden (Heb. 11:10, 16; Rev. 21:10-27). In a similar vein, Vantassel (2009, 164-5, 166-8) acknowledges the environmental effects of the Fall yet argues that responsible stewardship is achievable by relying upon the Holy Spirit and following Christ’s example in the Scriptures.

D. ESCHATOLOGIES OF REDEMPTION

1. Post – and Amillennialism

Postmillennialism asserts that Christ’s return takes place after a future millennial period. Exponents of this view are typically ambivalent on whether the millennium is a literal thousand

year period or whether it denotes a time when the church symbolically reigns on earth through Christ. Resulting from a desire to usher in God’s kingdom on earth, many postmillennialists are socio-politically engaged and committed to ‘winning over’ secular institutions for Christ. Amillennialism, however, rejects outright the notion of an earthly reign of Christ and insists that the church is presently living in a symbolic millennium which will eventually culminate in the final judgement and Christ’s return.¹⁷ Crucially, both post- and amillennialism deny a future Tribulation, a seven year period in which God’s wrath is poured out on the earth and its inhabitants;¹⁸ favouring instead to downplay or ignore prophetic portions of Scripture depicting environmental destruction.

Hermeneutical approaches to conservation are therefore influenced by differing eschatologies of redemption. Postmillennial and amillennial outlooks both affirm creation’s restoration (i.e. “set free” [Gr. *eleutheroō*] in Rom. 8:21) (Moo 1996, 517); the former prior to the Millennium before being redeemed at Christ’s Second Coming; the latter here in the present before being redeemed at the Parousia. Consequently, post- and amillennial eschatologies often equate ‘millennial’ passages with the Eternal Order, and ‘tribulational’ passages with a process of transformation and renewal. Both teach that mankind is able to ecologically transform a fallen world by ushering in God’s Kingdom. Such a grand motive fully aligns with post- and amillennialism’s proclivity to over-realise aspects of inaugurated eschatology. Though neither of the eschatologies draw a comparison between a

17 For an excellent critique of post- and amillennialism, see Vlach, Michael J. “The Kingdom of God and the Millennium.” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, 23, no.2 (2012): 225-254 [available at: <https://www.tms.edu/msj23m.pdf>]

18 The environmental aspects of which intensify during the second half of the Tribulation.

redeemed creation and the Mineral Garden of Ezek. 28:11-19, the majority of contemporary evangelical scholars agree that creation's 'groaning' [Gr. *sustenezō*] in Rom. 8:22 refers to the whole of creation, including the "sub-human"/ "nonhuman creation" (Moo 2006, 460; Moo 1996, 514; Bridger 1990, 299; Schreiner 2008, 435).¹⁹

In light of creation's value, as seen in God's plan to restore it (Rom. 8:19-23; Col. 1:15-20), many contemporary evangelical post- and amillennialists embrace a form of Christus Victor theology by emphasising Christ's cosmic redemption of both human and non-human creation. As Christ has reconciled "all things to Himself" (Col. 1:20) and is both Redeemer and Sustainer of creation, it is argued that mankind should seek to live in light of creation's inaugurated reconciliation by engaging in conservation efforts (Schaeffer 1970, 49-50) (cf. the New Testament's 'here/not yet' eschatological tension).²⁰ This tension is observed in Rom. 7-8 where Paul discusses the conflict between believers' sinful nature and the indwelling Spirit (Rom. 7:24). Just as believers are exhorted to live a sanctified life as 'new creations' (2 Cor. 5:17) despite present sinfulness and frailty, so Schaeffer argues that the future redemption of creation must be 'realised' in the present by effecting "substantial healing" between mankind and nature (ibid.). Bridger (1990, 300) notes that we are to look both backward (Col. 1:15-17) and forward (Rom. 8:19-23), concluding "The life of ethical obedience ... cannot be regarded as dualistic ... This forces us not to withdraw from the world but to take its [the earth's] fate seriously" (ibid., 296).

In so doing, the church would act, according

19 Moo (2006, 459) argues that Rom. 8:19-22 and Col. 1:20 are "the clearest expression of future hope for the physical world in the NT".

20 See Bridger 1990, 297.

to Schaeffer (1970, 58), as a "pilot plant" where man can see in our congregations and missions a substantial healing of all the divisions, the alienations, man's rebellion has produced". As Christ has reconciled "all things to Himself" (Col. 1:20), believers are exhorted to embrace a lifestyle that conforms to this inaugurated reconciliation rather than accept creation's "slavery to corruption" (Rom. 8:21). Schaeffer's approach thus softens the effects of the Fall on the environment by insisting that it is not only possible but morally imperative that mankind treats creation *not* as something accursed (Gen. 3:17b-19) but rather as a treasured soon-to-be-redeemed entity. Moo (2006, 484) endorses Schaeffer's argument whilst drawing attention to the danger of excessive homocentrism: "The 'not yet' of a restored creation demands an 'already' ethical commitment to that creation now among God's people" adding "To be sure, our efforts must always be tempered by the realization that it is finally God Himself, in a future act of sovereign power, who will transform creation". Similarly Bridger (1990, 301) argues that mankind, though unable to redeem creation, is nonetheless obliged to "preserve and enhance the created order", performing an act of ethical obedience that points to creation's eschatological redemption and "the coming rule of God in Christ".

Erecting signposts that point to creation's redemption is not, according to Bridger, a futile endeavour as these signposts demonstrate man's complete dependence on God's sovereign will and power (ibid.). Moo and Bridger thus pave a theological middle ground between two extremes: environmental apathy associated with ultra-dispensational premillennialism on the one hand, and naive anthropocentrism associated with amillennial eschatology on the other. Their shared conviction is expressed by

Evangelical* Approaches to the Environment	
(Ranked according to level of support given to environmental concerns) 1 = highest support / 5 = lowest support	Brief definition (key words italicised)
1. Servanthood Stewardship	Mankind is to sacrificially <i>serve</i> the environment by protecting its resources and species.
2. Creation Care / Caring Management	Mankind is to <i>steward</i> , protect and guard the earth's resources.
3. Shepherdism	Mankind is permitted to utilise the earth's resources, including animals, in an environmentally <i>responsible</i> manner.
4. Wise-use	Mankind is to steward the commons (land, air and sea) for his own <i>benefit</i> .
5. Dominionism	Mankind has a God-given right to wield <i>dominion</i> over the environment and to utilise its resources in accordance with his superior status in creation.
* Social Justice, Environmental Justice and Eco-Justice approaches are excluded.	

DeWitt (1998, 55): "The message of stewardship is an invitation with the children of God to meet creation's eager expectation". Before one regards these signposts as mere abstract or theoretical constructs, successful 'real world' examples of 'substantial healing' have already been observed, such as the vastly improved water quality of the River Thames in London; once so heavily polluted and oxygen-starved that fish populations could not survive (Southwick 1996, 339). The question, however, of whether the profound environmental effects of the Fall (detailed previously) can be mitigated or even

reversed by human effort remains as stark as ever.

2. Premillennialism

Premillennialism states that the Parousia precedes the Millennium, the latter comprising a literal thousand year earthly reign of Christ. Prior to the Parousia, premillennialists assert that there is a seven year period of tribulation (see Matt. 24:21; Mk.13:19; Lk. 21:23; Rev. 2:22, 3:10, 7:14) where God judges the earth and its inhabitants. Though additional premillennial viewpoints are predicated on the timing of the rapture (God's supernatural removal of believers

from the earth), all premillennialists assent to a future environmental catastrophe occurring i) during the Tribulation before creation is renewed prior to the Millennium [Isa. 65:17-25]²¹ ii) prior to the establishment of the Eternal Order when a new heaven and a new earth will be created [Rev. 21-22]). As these episodes are exclusively futuristic, unavoidable and divinely appointed; premillennialists, in stark contrast to post- and amillennialists, typically espouse an 'otherworldly' faith characterised by socio-political disengagement and scepticism towards environmental concerns.²²

By emphasising creation's "slavery to corruption" (Rom. 8:21), premillennialists reject the anthropocentric notion that man is to save the planet's natural resources for perpetuity and thus typically regard conservation initiatives as futile endeavours (2 Pet. 3:7). Even Vantassel, a proponent of 'Shepherdism',²³ notes that unlike believers who are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing future salvation (Eph. 1:13f), the restoration of creation remains exclusively futuristic (2009, 85). Additionally, Fruchtenbaum notes that the Trumpet judgements described in Rev. 8:7, 8f, 10f, 12 show that between two-thirds and three-quarters of the earth's surface is burned up by fire (Rev. 8:7), one-third of the earth's salt water is destroyed and turns into blood, killing a third of sea creatures (v. 8f), one-third of fresh-water turns bitter and becomes undrinkable (v. 10f), and one-third of the earth's light sources disappear (v. 12) (2003, 226-28). Unlike post-

and amillennial evangelicals who lament the earth's current degraded state and often neglect the force of apocalyptic passages of Scripture, premillennialists note that the language of conflagration in 2 Pet. 3:5-13 and Rev. 8:7-12 et al. is too strong to be equated with 'renewal' or 'restoration'. They additionally draw attention to the fact that Gen. 9:11 does not teach that God will refrain from destroying the earth again, but rather He will not do so by the waters of a flood (Isa. 24:5f; 2 Pet. 3:10-12). As the only eschatological position to affirm a future destruction of the earth, premillennialism is widely regarded as harbouring the most hostile attitude towards conservation (see Guth et al. 1995, 368; Orr 2005, 291; Henderson 2005, 1688).

E. HERMENEUTICAL LITERALISM

Premillennialism differs from post- and amillennial eschatologies by embracing a plain-sense reading of Scripture, maintaining that eschatological depictions of mass environmental destruction will be precisely fulfilled in the manner described (2 Pet. 3:5-13; Rev. 8:7-12 et al.). This hermeneutical literalism is commonly associated with absolute and full inerrantists,²⁴ many of whom subscribe to a premillennial or dispensational outlook. Absolute inerrantists maintain that a third of the sea will be turned into literal blood (Rev. 8:8), whereas full inerrantists insist that a third of the sea will give the appearance of blood (Erickson 2001, 248).²⁵ Though absolute and to a lesser extent

21 Examples of renewal/renovation include Mount Zion becoming the highest mountain in the world (Isa. 2:1-3) and the removal of many but not all of the effects of the Adamic curse (Fruchtenbaum 2003, 379-85). See Ps. 24:1-6; Isa. 11:6-9, 65:17-25; Micah 4:1-5 (ibid.).

22 With the exception of instances where environmental mismanagement/degradation negatively impacts quality of life/poses risk to life.

23 What he defines as "a biblically grounded ethic for human wildlife relations" (Vantassel, 2009, *Contents*, 179).

24 This author does not consider 'limited inerrancy' to be a feasible evangelical position.

25 Fruchtenbaum (2003, 4) issues a helpful corrective to those who seek to negate or downplay the literal or plain sense meaning of Scripture by quoting D.L. Cooper's *Golden Rule of Interpretation*: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning, unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

full inerrantists are sometimes accused of embracing hyper-literalism, their interpretive approaches do in fact recognise Scripture's use of similes, metaphors, figures of speech and symbolic language (see Jn. 10:9; Isa. 62:8; 2 Sam. 22:9). Additionally, notwithstanding significant hermeneutical differences, absolute and full inerrantists both agree that a third of the sea will be destroyed by divine judgement. Accusations of environmental indifference are therefore levelled against premillennial evangelicals and inerrantists who hold to a future destruction of the earth during a tribulational period and who consequently regard attempts to initiate substantive healing in creation as futile. Performing bivariate and multivariate analyses on extensive survey data, Guth et al. (1995, 364, 377) discover that conservative eschatology (defined as "Biblical literalism, End Times thinking") and dispensational theology are consistently negatively correlated with evangelical support for environmental protection.

In contrast to the hermeneutical literalism of premillennialists and absolute inerrantists, post- and amillennialists are found to frequently decontextualise, interpret 'restoratively' or simply ignore apocalyptic passages of Scripture that depict mass environmental destruction. Eisegetical hermeneutics are employed by Montefiore (1997, 91) when he observes that the "brimstone and fire" falling upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24) is "probably the nearest equivalent" [of a biblical reference to acid rain]; associates the prodigal son's profligate lifestyle (Lk. 15:11-32) with mankind's wasteful consumption of the earth's resources (ibid., 112); compares Paul's analogy of the body (1 Cor. 12:14-26) with the earth's 'body' that comprises humans and non-humans (ibid., 123-25); and likens the Laodicean church's apathy (Rev. 3:14-

22) to evangelicals who are "lukewarm" over environmental issues (ibid., 151-52). Similarly, Osborn (1993, 143) identifies the "faithful and sensible slave" of Matt. 24:45ff – traditionally regarded as a believer who diligently labours in the Lord's work until He returns – as one who cares for the "household" (v. 45) of God's creation.

This nascent eco-theology, usually the domain of non-evangelical scholarship, is developed by Bookless (2008) who attempts to ecologically redefine Bebbington's Quadrilateral (Bebbington, 2005). In so doing he argues that 'Biblicism' should be infused with environmental concerns; that 'Activism' should reflect mankind's ecological mission; that 'Conversionism' must acknowledge believers' obligation to confront environmental issues; and that 'Crucicentrism' must emphasise Christ's cosmic work of creation and ecological reconciliation and redemption (Bookless 2008, 39-46). Whilst elements of Bebbington's Quadrilateral might concern environmental themes, a wholesale redefinition of evangelical dogma is unjustified as the Bible appears to be 'less green' than Montefiore, Osborn and Bookless would appear to suggest (Horrell 2010, 6). Bookless' 'greening' of Evangelicalism's central dogma is, however, symptomatic of wider evangelical attempts to read the Bible as an ecological handbook rather than as the inspired account of God's dealings with humanity.

V. CONCLUSION

It is found that evangelical scholars are increasingly emphasising creation's intrinsic value, beauty and the pleasure God derives from His handiwork to construct a 'creation care' ethic. This represents a departure from the founding principles of secular conservation

that stressed practical and aesthetic concerns, and which facilitated the rational exploration of the environment. It is found that evangelical hermeneutical approaches to conservation are also bookended and influenced by what the exegete considers to be creation's original state [the Mineral Garden of Ezek. 28:11-19 or the Vegetable Garden of Gen. 1] and one's eschatology of redemption [transformative or destructive].

Additionally, attitudes towards conservation are influenced by one's understanding of the relationship between the Adamic and Edenic covenants. Those who favour a conjunctive reading of the two covenants often deemphasise the change that occurs between mankind and the environment, whereas those who favour a disjunctive reading acknowledge the environmental effects of the Fall and are more likely to harbour sceptical attitudes towards conservation ethics. In light of numerous passages of Scripture that depict eschatological outpourings of God's wrath upon the earth, and the tendency of post- and amillennial evangelical scholars to neglect, interpret in a transformative sense, or allegorise such passages, eschatological outlook and hermeneutical literalism are also found to strongly influence attitudes towards conservation.

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