

## ECOLOGICAL “BLIND SPOTS” IN THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF RECENT EVANGELICAL SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIES

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Almost a generation ago Francis Schaeffer issued a challenge for the evangelical church to take more seriously issues of environmental stewardship: “God’s calling to the . . . Christian community . . . is that we should exhibit a substantial healing, here and now, between man and nature and nature itself, as far as Christians can bring it to pass.”<sup>1</sup> Many segments of the evangelical community have in fact responded positively to Schaeffer’s challenge in the last two decades. Evangelical theologians, however, have exhibited a rather uneven record in their incorporation of environmental concerns into the basic fabric of their theologies.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that certain “blind spots” in the structure and content of recent evangelical systematic theologies have contributed to the neglect of environmental issues and environmental stewardship in certain segments of the evangelical subculture.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, it will be argued that deficiencies in the doctrines of *creation* and the *atonement* in evangelical systematic theology textbooks have contributed to this problem. After a brief introduction to the historical background of evangelical theological reflection on environmental issues, an “ecological audit” of the treatment of these two critical theological *loci* will be undertaken for twenty representative evangelical systematic theology texts published since 1970. The paper will conclude with an analysis of the results, and with a call for evangelical theologians to correct an *imbalance* in the treatment of the doctrine of creation and an *omission* in the doctrine of the atonement, so as to provide a more adequate theological basis for evangelical environmental ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970) 69.

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## I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The seminal article by historian Lynn White published in 1967, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,"<sup>3</sup> charging that Biblical teachings such as "dominion" and the "image of God" were significant contributing causes of the environmental crisis, produced an outpouring of scholarly responses across the theological spectrum of the Christian community.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 1970, many evangelicals became more attentive to environmental issues.<sup>5</sup> A significant minority of evangelicals, however, remained (and continue to remain) indifferent toward or even hostile to environmental concerns.<sup>6</sup> The association of prominent streams of the environmental movement with "New Age" and eastern religions, liberal Protestant theologies, feminism, and opposition to free-market capitalism has contributed to the ambivalent attitudes toward environmentalism among these conservative evangelicals.<sup>7</sup> It is not the purpose of this article, however, to focus on these historical and cultural roots of evangelical ambivalence toward environmental concerns. The focus of this study is to examine *theological* blind spots in the structure and content of evangelical systematic theology, especially in the doctrines of creation and atonement,<sup>8</sup> which have inadvertently contributed to this problem.

<sup>3</sup> In *Science* 155 (1967) 1203–1207.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the essays collected in David and Eileen Spring, eds., *Ecology and Religion in History* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> Early responses included Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970), and Henlee H. Barnette, *The Church and the Ecological Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). More recently, see Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, ed., *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); Calvin DeWitt, ed., *The Environment and the Christian: What Can We Learn from the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), and F. Van Dyke, D. C. Mahan, J. K. Sheldon, and R. H. Brand, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991). For extensive reviews of Christian responses to environmental concerns, see Joseph K. Sheldon, *Rediscovery of Creation: A Bibliographical Study of the Church's Response to the Environmental Crisis* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1992), and R. J. Berry, "Creation and the Environment," *Science and Christian Belief* 7/1 (1995) 21–43.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Sugden, Director of the Oxford Center for Mission Studies, has noted that it is hard for evangelicals to take the environment seriously as a *mission* concern, for evangelicals, as "gospel people," are focused on the salvation of human beings from sin. "Ideas that the trees and the land and the rivers, let alone the foxes and the butterflies are worth the time, attention, and the resources of the Christian constituency have struggled to find acceptance in evangelical counsels." Sugden, "Evangelicals and Environment in Process," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17/2 (1993) 119–121 (the quotation is from p. 119).

<sup>7</sup> These factors have been studied by Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), and by Richard T. Wright, "Tearing Down the Green: Environmental Backlash in the Evangelical Sub-Culture," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 47/2 (1995) 80–91.

<sup>8</sup> Other evangelical scholars have examined the area of *eschatology*, arguing that dispensational and premillennial teachings, which tend to have pessimistic outlooks on the future of the present creation, have contributed to the neglect of environmental concerns. See, for example, Al Truesdale, "Last Things First: The Impact of Eschatology on Ecology," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46/2 (1994) 116–122, and Thomas Finger, *Evangelicals, Eschatology, and the Environment* (Wynnewood, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1998). For a reply to Truesdale, see R. S. Beal, Jr., "Can a Premillennialist Consistently Entertain a Concern for the Environment? A Rejoinder to Al Truesdale," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46/3 (1994) 173–178.

One evangelical scholar has recently noted, for example, that "much popular evangelical belief lacks any doctrine of creation, apart from opposition to evolution."<sup>9</sup> Much time and attention is devoted to the issue of creation and *evolution*, but much less time to developing the implications of the Biblical doctrine of creation for humanity's proper *relationship* to creation.<sup>10</sup>

Recent Biblical scholarship has begun to recognize the *cosmic* impact of the atoning work of Christ,<sup>11</sup> and this recognition has begun to make itself felt in evangelical environmental scholarship.<sup>12</sup> There seems to be a growing recognition that texts such as Col 1:20, which state that in Christ God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether *on earth* or in heaven, through the blood of the cross, have powerful implications for an evangelical stewardship of creation.<sup>13</sup> As this study will seek to demonstrate, however, evangelical theologians have by and large not incorporated this insight into their treatments of the doctrine of the atonement.

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It is not the purpose of this article to pursue further this issue of the relationship of eschatology to environmental concern. It is the view of the present writer that while eschatology is important, the doctrines of *creation* and *redemption* (atonement) are even more fundamental for a sound environmental ethic.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan R. Wilson, "Evangelicals and the Environment: A Theological Concern," *Christian Scholars Review* 28/2 (1998) 298–307 at 305. Wilson argues that in both evangelical theology and environmental practice, the doctrines of creation and redemption do not adequately inform and illuminate one another. This writer is in agreement with this assessment, and will seek to demonstrate the existence of this problem in recent evangelical theology textbooks.

<sup>10</sup> This point has been made in the fine article by R. J. Berry, "Creation and the Environment," cited in note 5 above.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the important work in this area by J. G. Gibbs: *Creation and Redemption: A Study of Pauline Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971); "Pauline Cosmic Christology and the Ecological Crisis," *JBL* 90 (1971) 466–479; and especially "The Cosmic Scope of Redemption According to Paul," *Bib* 56 (1975) 13–28. Note also the earlier works by Louis H. Taylor, *The New Creation: A Study of the Pauline Doctrines of Creation, Innocence, Sin, and Redemption* (New York: Pageant, 1958) 123–133, "The Sub-Human Cosmos as Renovated Creation in the Age to Come"; Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963) 227: "The realm of Christ's lordship is much larger than the Church. Literally no element of creation is excluded from it"; George A. Maloney, *The Cosmic Christ: From Paul to Teilhard* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 26–30, "The Redemption of the Whole Universe" (on Col 1:15–20). These latter authors do not, however, develop the ecological implications of the texts.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, Richard Young, *Healing the Earth* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994) 148; Loren Wilkinson, "Christ as Creator and Redeemer," in *The Environment and the Christian*, 25–44, esp. 28–29 (on Col 1:15–20); and most notably, in Jim Ball, *Planting a Tree This Afternoon: Global Warming, Public Theology, and Public Policy* (Wynnewood, PA: Crossroads, 1998) 12–19, also on Col 1:15–20.

<sup>13</sup> For exegetical discussion of Col 1:15–20, see the author's article, "The Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence and the Christian Doctrine of Redemption," *Science and Christian Belief* 9/1 (1997) 21–34, especially 30–34, "Colossians 1:15–20 and Cosmic Redemption," and commentaries on Colossians by P. T. O'Brien (1982), Markus Barth (1994), Murray J. Harris (1991), and Eduard Lohse (1971), as well as detailed studies of the setting and nature of the Colossian heresy by Thomas J. Sappington (1991), Richard DeMaris (1994), and Clinton Arnold (1995). It is the present author's understanding that the scope of the "all things" reconciled by the blood of Christ in Col 1:20 is coextensive with the "all things" created by Christ in Col 1:15. The creation so reconciled includes the sub-human creation; consequently, this text is understood to have important implications for a Biblical environmental ethic.

## II. EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY: AN "ECOLOGICAL AUDIT"

In this central section of the paper, twenty evangelical theology textbooks published since 1970 will be examined in regard to their treatments of the doctrines of creation and atonement, with a view to determining whether or not theological "blind spots" in these areas may have contributed to an imbalanced or incomplete evangelical environmental ethic. The date 1970 is the year of the first Earth Day, and plausibly represents one benchmark for the emergence of the environmental movement into the broader public consciousness. The doctrine of creation is obviously crucial to any Biblical ethic of environmental stewardship,<sup>14</sup> while the doctrine of the *atonement*, being integral to Christology, is central to the structure of Christian theology as a whole. Failure to discern any legitimate ecological implications of the *work of Christ* would constitute a serious omission in theological reflection in this area.

In his two-volume *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*<sup>15</sup> (1978–79) Donald Bloesch attempts, according to the dustjacket, to express a broadly based evangelicalism that avoids, on the one hand, a "nebulous born-again experience" and a "rigid fundamentalism" on the other. Bloesch wants to restore the balance between "doctrine and life" that he believes current evangelicalism needs. He has a very brief two-page treatment of the doctrine of creation in volume one under the rubric "Creator and Lord." To affirm God as Creator and Lord means to affirm the essential goodness of creation.<sup>16</sup> The same God who created the material world has redeemed it and sanctified it through the incarnation of his Son.<sup>17</sup> Bloesch, however, draws no connections between these theological truths and the believer's ethical responsibility to care for God's creation.

In his discussion of the atonement Bloesch quotes the words of P. T. Forsyth to the effect that the cross of Christ means "the reconciliation of *the world as a cosmic whole*" [italics original].<sup>18</sup> No reference, however, is made to Col 1:20. Evidently, Bloesch understands the "cosmos" to include all humans (and possibly the demonic forces), but not the animals, plants, and earth. No connections are drawn between the atoning work of Christ and the redemption of the material creation.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In an otherwise very helpful article, "The Four Most Important Biblical Passages for a Christian Environmentalism," *Trinity Journal* 19 NS (1998) 139–162, Michael A. Bullmore studies Psalm 104, Genesis 1–2, Genesis 9, and Rom 8:18–23, but strangely omits Col 1:15–20 which addresses the *work of Christ* in both *creation* and *redemption*.

<sup>15</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (2 vols.; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978–79). References are to the first volume.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

<sup>19</sup> While it is stated on the dustjacket that the aim of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* is to clarify and explore "the implications of a broadly-based Evangelicalism" and to discuss what evangelicalism "can offer a bruised and fractured world," it is notable that the subject indices to the two volumes do not have any entries for "ecology," "environment," or "environmental ethics."

In his 1981 text, *The Word of Truth*,<sup>20</sup> the Southern Baptist theologian Dale Moody devotes 42 pages to the doctrine of creation. Six pages, or approximately 14.3% deal with issues of Genesis, creation, and modern science. In a section dealing with the ethical significance of the Biblical truth of the goodness of creation, Moody makes applications to Christian marriage and the use of alcohol, but no implications are drawn for environmental ethics.<sup>21</sup> Some eleven pages are devoted to the doctrine of the atonement, and the NT theme of "reconciliation" is developed. Moody does comment on Col 1:19, noting that the ". . . object of reconciliation is the universe,"<sup>22</sup> but no application is drawn for environmental concerns.

Carl F. H. Henry treats the doctrine of creation in volume six, part two of his multi-volume work, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1983), one of the major contributions to evangelical theology in this century. Chapters five through eight are titled, respectively, "God the Sovereign Creator"; "Creation *Ex Nihilo*"; "The Six Days of Creation"; and "The Crisis of Evolutionary Theory."<sup>23</sup> Some 72 of these 88 pages, or 81.8% of the space, is devoted to issues such as the age of the earth, the Big Bang, and creation and evolution.

Henry asserts that the doctrine of creation is the "bedrock of every major doctrine of the church," and that neglecting this doctrine has "inescapable consequences for the temporal realm."<sup>24</sup> He notes that Christ is the mediator of the work of creation, and is the one in whom and through whom the disordered cosmos is redeemed, citing Col 1:16.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, no connections or applications are made from these observations to issues of environmental stewardship. In volume two, however, Henry does address ecological concerns very directly. In a chapter titled "Divine Revelation in Nature," he draws attention to the covenant with creation (Gen 9:16), rejects a purely naturalistic and anthropocentric understanding of nature, and argues that the Biblical view of redemption includes the cosmos as well as a redeemed humanity. "From the creation account onward," notes Henry, "the Bible boldly correlates the fortunes of the cosmos with those of man."<sup>26</sup>

In the first edition of his widely-used textbook *Christian Theology* (1985), Millard Erickson devotes about 33% of the chapter on the doctrine of creation to issues relating to Genesis, modern science, and evolution.<sup>27</sup> In discussing the "Implications of the Doctrine of Creation," Erickson devotes one paragraph, or about 1.5% of the chapter, to ecological concerns. He notes that Christians should be at the forefront of the concern for the welfare and

<sup>20</sup> Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 148–151.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 331.

<sup>23</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Volume VI, Part Two (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 108–196. These volumes do not address the doctrine of the atonement.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 111.

<sup>26</sup> Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, Vol. II: *God Who Speaks and Shows* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 101. Cf. also the larger section, 97–103. I wish to thank Dean Ohlman for drawing the passages in this volume to my attention.

<sup>27</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 365–386.

preservation of the creation. "Everything within creation has its function; that of man is to care for the rest of God's world."<sup>28</sup> In the second edition (1998) of the text he observes that since inanimate matter also comes from God, "I am, at base, one nature, for we are members of the same family . . . God loves and cares for all his creation."<sup>29</sup> In his treatment of the atonement, Erickson does discuss the NT theme of reconciliation, but this affects only humankind, not the creation, and there is no reference to Col 1:20.<sup>30</sup>

James Montgomery Boice devotes eight pages to the doctrine of creation in his one-volume text *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (1986).<sup>31</sup> Only one and a half pages (18.75%) are devoted to creation and science issues, but one page (12.5%) is devoted to the implications of the doctrine of creation for humanity's *responsibility* toward nature. Boice believes that just as a husband has a responsibility in marriage to sanctify his wife, so men and women together have a responsibility to "sanctify and cleanse the earth," in anticipation of its ultimate redemption.<sup>32</sup> Every tree and natural object has its own intrinsic value, and should not be seen in terms of a merely utilitarian or man-centered point of view.<sup>33</sup> Boice's chapter on the atonement, titled "Paid in Full,"<sup>34</sup> does not discuss the theme of "reconciliation" or Col 1:20 and its cosmic implications.

In 1986 two Dallas Theological Seminary professors, Charles C. Ryrie and Robert D. Lightner, published texts reflecting dispensational points of view. In his *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review*, Lightner devotes some 32 pages to the doctrine of creation.<sup>35</sup> Under the rubric of creation the author deals with angels, demons, man, the image of God, and the fall—but not the earth or the plant and animal kingdoms. Only about 4.6% of the space is devoted to Bible and science issues, e.g. the theory of theistic evolution and the origins of man.<sup>36</sup> No applications are made to environmental issues, and the subject index has no entries for "environment," "ecology," or "earth." The theme of reconciliation is mentioned in the discussion of the atonement,<sup>37</sup> but there is no discussion of Col 1:20 and the cosmic impact of the death of Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 385.

<sup>29</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 402. In *The Evangelical Mind and Heart: Perspectives on Theological and Practical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), Erickson devotes two chapters to environmental issues: Chap. 3, "An Evangelical Theology of Ecology," and Chap. 4, "An Evangelical Ethic of Ecology." The treatment of ecology is commendable, but it is noticeable that the later chapters on Christology (pp. 85–125) are not related to ecology, and there is no treatment of Col 1:20 and the cosmic impact of the atonement.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology* (1st ed. [1985] 815; 2d ed. [1998] 832).

<sup>31</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1986) 159–166.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 321–330.

<sup>35</sup> Robert D. Lightner, *Evangelical Theology: A Survey and Review* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 153–184. According to the book jacket, the text has a concern for the "application of doctrine to life."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 178–179.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 195–196.

Charles Ryrie's *Basic Theology* devotes some 28 pages to the doctrine of creation.<sup>38</sup> Like Lightner, he discusses angels, demons, and man as the image of God, but omits any treatment of the earth and the sub-human creation. Some 67.8% of the space is devoted to issues related to evolution and the age of the earth. In the section on eschatology Ryrie holds that during the millennium the curse on creation will be reversed,<sup>39</sup> but no connection is made between this belief and environmental stewardship. In both Ryrie and Lightner the doctrine of creation is decidedly *anthropocentric* in its orientation, with the sub-human world having little or no theological significance.

In his systematic theology the Methodist theologian Thomas Oden has attempted to present a contemporary statement of the "classical" Christian tradition that draws heavily on the writings of the church fathers, and that might be welcomed by Protestant and Roman Catholic pastors alike. In volume one, *The Living God* (1987), Oden devotes 42 pages to the doctrine of creation. About four pages, or 9.5% of the space, are devoted to issues of Christian faith and modern science.<sup>40</sup> In one paragraph the stewardship implications of the "dominion mandate" (Gen 1:26, 28) are mentioned: "You shall have dominion' implies: 'Take care of it. God entrusts the world to your care . . . it shall be an arena . . . in which it is . . . morally required to respond fittingly to the One who gives and transcends all creaturely values.'"<sup>41</sup> The basis of an environmental ethic can be found here, but one might have hoped that the specific applications to environmental problems had been more clearly made.

Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest have taught systematic theology at Denver Seminary for many years, and their *Integrative Theology* (1987, 1990) attempts to combine the "historical, Biblical, systematic, and practical fields." Some 51 pages are devoted to the doctrine of creation, and 40 of these pages, or 78.4% of the material, are devoted to issues of science and Scripture.<sup>42</sup> About one page, or 2% of the chapter on creation, is devoted to the need to "Conserve Earth's Limited Resources," where specific environmental issues are addressed.<sup>43</sup> In their discussion of the atonement, Lewis and Demarest discuss Col 1:20 and make an explicit connection between the cross of Christ and the creation in a section titled "Christ's sacrifice Provides for Future Cosmic Peace." When Christ returns, his atoning work will then be the basis for removing "all the remaining consequences of sin on the race and the earth."<sup>44</sup> In connection with both the doctrines of creation and

<sup>38</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1986; 1999) 195–222.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 595.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God: Systematic Theology: Volume One* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 265–269.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 252–253.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) 17–57.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 62, 63.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 407.

atonement, this text by Lewis and Demarest is notable in comparison with other evangelical texts in terms of its concern for environmental stewardship.

*Renewal Theology* (1988) by J. Rodman Williams, professor of theology at Regent University, is written from a charismatic perspective. About seven of the 22 pages devoted to the doctrine of creation, or 31.8% of the space, address issues of Genesis and modern science, e.g. the “six days” and the age of earth. There is a hint of environmental concern in a reference to Christ as both the redeemer and channel of creation, and a quotation of Col 1:20, but no specific or explicit ecological application is made.<sup>45</sup> Rodman states that the truth of the goodness of creation should “awaken us to joy and celebration,”<sup>46</sup> but again, there is no specific environmental application. Twenty-seven pages are devoted to the doctrine of the atonement,<sup>47</sup> but there is no discussion of Col 1:20 and the cosmic impact of the cross.

In their 1989 text *What Christians Believe*, Wheaton professors Alan Johnson and Robert Webber attempt to present a “general theology” that affirms evangelical unity in the essentials and yet which allows for diversity in matters of secondary importance. They are also committed to a contextual approach which attempts to make Christian faith “understandable and available in a particular historical and cultural setting.”<sup>48</sup> Only two pages of the text are devoted to the doctrine of creation.<sup>49</sup> In this short section titled “God the Creator,” the authors observe that the goodness of God is seen in his preserving and sustaining the creation, and that God “cares for what he has made, especially for humankind.”<sup>50</sup> No reference is made, however, to environmental problems or to humanity’s responsibility to care for the creation. No space is devoted to issues relating Genesis to modern science. In their treatment of the work of Christ, Johnson and Webber discuss the reconciliation of the *whole world* in Christ (2 Cor 5:18–19), but this is the *human* world, and no attention is given to Col 1:20 and the cosmic impact of the cross.

Thomas Finger is a Mennonite scholar whose *Christian Theology* (1985, 1989) emphasizes the role of eschatology in the structure of Christian faith. About eight of the 24 pages devoted to the doctrine of creation address issues of science and Scripture.<sup>51</sup> In one sentence Finger observes that salvation “will involve the transformation of the social *and natural orders* [emphasis added]”<sup>52</sup> but no explicit application is made to environmental problems. In the discussion of the atonement,<sup>53</sup> there is no exposition of Col 1:20. Elsewhere, Finger does refer to Col 1:20, but here the “reconciliation” is

<sup>45</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: God, the World and Redemption* (Grand Rapids: 1988) 103.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 114.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 353–379.

<sup>48</sup> Alan F. Johnson and Robert E. Webber, *What Christians Believe: A Biblical and Historical Summary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) x.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 60, 61.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1985, 1989) 407–431, v. 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 430.

<sup>53</sup> V. 1, *ibid.* 303–348.



understood to refer to the principalities and power, but not the sub-personal creation as such.<sup>54</sup> In his later writing Finger has explicitly addressed some of the environmental concerns that are only implicitly included in his systematic theology text.<sup>55</sup>

James Leo Garrett's two-volume *Systematic Theology* (1990, 1995) is written from a Southern Baptist perspective. Two chapters in the first volume are devoted to the doctrine of creation, and eleven pages out of 28, or about 39.3% of the total, are focused on issues of Genesis, modern science, evolution, and the age of the earth.<sup>56</sup> Garrett states that Christians should recognize the "centrality of the doctrine of creation and seek to apply it to all areas of life,"<sup>57</sup> but there is no application made in the text to contemporary environmental problems. In the second volume 75 pages are devoted to the doctrine of the atonement. There is no discussion of the theme of "reconciliation" or Col 1:20 and the cosmic impact of the cross. In the section on the "Last Things," there is a reference to Col 1:20, but here the point is made that the text does not teach universal salvation; no environmental connections are drawn.<sup>58</sup>

Paul K. Jewett's *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (1991) reflects the author's long years of teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary. According to the book jacket, the approach is "neo-evangelical" in the sense that it attempts to relate an evangelical and Reformed theology to the "scientific and social issues that confront the church in the contemporary world." About 14 of the 74 pages on the doctrine of creation (18.9%) are devoted to issues of science and Scripture. In a section titled "Creation and the Christian Life," Jewett devotes one paragraph (about 1% of the chapter) to environmental concerns. Since God made the world, "we live in the world as his tenants." Reverence for the Creator entails reverence for his work; we have no right "to destroy his property which he has entrusted to us as stewards."<sup>59</sup> Having made this point, Jewett returns to more anthropocentric concerns, noting how the doctrine of creation determines man's self-understanding. Christ's role in creation is noted, and Col 1:15–18 is cited in this regard,<sup>60</sup> but no environmental application is made. The scope of the text does not include the doctrine of the atonement, so there is no discussion of reconciliation or the cosmic impact of the cross.

In their 1993 work *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective*, William Menzies and Stanley Horton focus on "sixteen fundamental doctrines of the Bible," one of which is "The Fall of Man." Their treatment of the doctrine of creation is decidedly anthropocentric, inasmuch as they focus on the origin

<sup>54</sup> V. 2, *ibid.* 286.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Thomas Finger, *Evangelicals, Eschatology, and the Environment* (Wynnewood, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 1995) 1.309–319.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 319.

<sup>58</sup> V. 2, *ibid.* 681.

<sup>59</sup> Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 503.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 448.

and nature of humankind, the image of God, and the origin of sin. There is no treatment of the animal kingdom, the physical earth, or the sub-human creation as such. Nevertheless, in dealing with human origins and the text of Gen 1:26–28, they note that the concept of “dominion” does not imply exploitation of the natural world, but rather care and proper use. “Ruling the animal world included proper care and respect for its creatures.”<sup>61</sup> About 33.3% of the space in this chapter on creation deals with Bible and science matters.<sup>62</sup> In spite of the anthropocentric orientation of this chapter, the one full paragraph devoted to environmental concerns amounts to some 2.8% of the total, placing this text above others in this survey.

Alister McGrath’s *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1994) has become a widely used text in the English-speaking world. The chapter on “God the Creator” is rather brief, amounting to only eight pages. About one-third of a page, or some 4% of the space, is devoted to issues relating to modern science and Scripture, in this case, to the “Deist Model” and Newtonian physics.<sup>63</sup> In developing the “Implications of the Doctrine of Creation,” McGrath devotes one paragraph to the concept of the stewardship of creation. The doctrine that we are stewards of the world—not its owners—“is of major importance in relation to ecological and environmental concerns, in that it provides a theoretical foundation for the exercise of human responsibility toward the planet.”<sup>64</sup> This one paragraph represents about 3% of the space in the chapter on creation, and in this respect, McGrath’s text receives a higher mark than many of the other texts examined thus far. In McGrath’s discussion of the atonement,<sup>65</sup> however, there is no development of the theme of “reconciliation,” and no reference to Col 1:20.

Written from an Anabaptist perspective, James W. McClendon’s *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (1994) expresses the conviction that ethics is the most practical starting point for systematic theology. Some eight pages out of a total of 43 (18.6%) devoted to the doctrine of creation deal with issues of modern science and Scripture.<sup>66</sup> Four pages, or about 9.3% of the space, are devoted to developing the ecological consequences of the Biblical teachings on creation. In this regard, McClendon’s text compares very favorably with those of his fellow evangelical theologians.

The concepts of “dominion” and “stewardship” do not imply any partitioning of human nature from the rest of creation.<sup>67</sup> McClendon sees the need to challenge the older anthropocentric concepts of human stewardship and mastery and to recover the ecological motifs in the history of Christian theology.<sup>68</sup> In his discussion of the atonement, he does discuss Col 1:19–20, noting that

<sup>61</sup> William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Approach* (Springfield, MO: Logion, 1993) 79.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 78–81.

<sup>63</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994) 238.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 235.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 341–359.

<sup>66</sup> James W. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 146–189.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 157.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

the text indeed speaks of a reconciliation impacting all things whether on earth or in heaven,<sup>69</sup> but no connection is drawn to the environmental concerns addressed in the earlier discussion of creation.

J. Kenneth Grider, the author of *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (1994), taught at the Nazarene Theological Seminary for 38 years. Some 11.5 pages out of a total of 24 devoted to the doctrine of creation, or 47.9%, deal with issues of Genesis and modern science. Almost 10% of this chapter is devoted to the “Ecological Imperative,” which places Grider’s text near the top in this respect. In the modern world, where “advanced technology tends to upset the world’s ecological balance,” the author notes, “it is imperative that Christian theology address this matter.”<sup>70</sup> Grider reminds the reader of the empirical evidence for the environmental crisis, and then addresses the need to read Genesis correctly. Humanity is called to subdue the earth, but this should be read in the light of the admonition in Gen 2:15 to “till” and “keep” the Garden of Eden. An ethic of love implies an environmental concern that preserves a world that is beneficial to the development of all. A revived appreciation of nature is part of our Christian stewardship. Believers should adopt a lifestyle of ecological self-discipline.<sup>71</sup> In his chapter on the atonement, Grider argues for the “governmental” theory, but does not discuss the theme of reconciliation or the cosmic implications of Col 1:20.<sup>72</sup>

Stanley J. Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God* (1994) is written from a perspective that is Baptist and evangelical, with “community” as an integrative motif. A section on providence and modern science occupies some 5.8% of the space devoted to the doctrine of creation.<sup>73</sup> Grenz cites Col 1:16, noting that all things have been created by Christ and for Christ. He is the unitive principle of the universe, and the Son is the “goal toward which all creation is directed.” The final work of God in salvation history is a redeemed people, dwelling in a renewed earth, in harmony with all creation.<sup>74</sup> Having connected the themes of Christ, creation, redemption, and eschatology, Grenz has given the reader a very robust foundation for an environmental ethic, but unfortunately, this connection is not explicitly made.

In the section on the work of Christ, titled “The Mission of Jesus,”<sup>75</sup> Grenz notes, citing Col 1:19–20, that the death of Christ has cosmic dimensions. The work of Christ on the cross is the basis for the ultimate reconciliation of humankind with the entire creation, including our physical environment. Again, one wishes that these powerful theological insights were explicitly

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 227.

<sup>70</sup> J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1994) 164.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 165–166. Grider does not, however, appeal to *Christology* as a ground for this environmental ethic.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 322–335. The governmental theory of the atonement sees the cross as a public demonstration of God’s will to punish sin, but does not endorse the concept of penal substitution, i.e. that there is a direct transference of guilt and punishment from the individual sinner to Christ.

<sup>73</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994) 155–156; 128–161.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 136, 151.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 444–461.

connected with their implications for Christian environmental stewardship in the present age.

Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* has become a widely used text since its publication in 1994. Grudem, who teaches systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, devotes some 69.2% of the space in the chapter on creation<sup>76</sup> to issues such as evolution, the age of the earth, and the days of Genesis one. This percentage is second only to Lewis and Demarest among the texts examined in this study. In this 52-page chapter on creation, some three sentences directly address environmental concerns. The goodness of creation taught in Genesis one "gives warrant for Christians to encourage proper industrial and technological development (together with care for the environment)".<sup>77</sup> God wants us to use the creation "in ways pleasing to him."<sup>78</sup> One of the "Questions for Personal Application" is, "Are there ways in which you could be a better steward of parts of God's creation which he has entrusted to your care?"<sup>79</sup> These three sentences amount to less than 1% of the space devoted to the doctrine of creation.

In the chapter on the atonement,<sup>80</sup> Grudem does discuss the issue of the *extent* of the atonement, but this focuses on the impact of the cross on humanity only, not the creation. "Reconciliation" is likewise understood to involve only human beings (2 Cor 5:18), and Col 1:20 is not examined.

### III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This examination of twenty representative systematic theology texts published since 1970 has shown that evangelical theologians tend to devote a disproportionate amount of space in their treatments of the doctrine of creation to matters related to evolution, the age of the earth, and the days of Genesis one. The percentages here ranged from a low of 0% to 81.8%, with the median being close to 31%. The amount of space in these same chapters devoted to developing the implications of the Biblical doctrine of creation for environmental stewardship ranged from a low of 0% to a high of 12.5%, with the median figure being about 1%. Nine of the authors (Lightner, Garrett, Moody, Williams, Finger, Johnson and Webber, Ryrie, Grenz, and Bloesch) were in the 0% category on explicit environmental application of the doctrine of creation. Three authors—McClendon, Grider, and Boice—were at the top of this category, devoting 9.3%, 9.7%, and 12.5% respectively of their treatments to such concerns. These results indicate not only the pervasive influence of the scientific enterprise in modern culture, but also the impact of the creation-

<sup>76</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 262–314; 273–309 focus on Bible and science issues.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 272.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 309.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 568–607.

evolution controversies on the shaping—or misshaping—of the evangelical theological agenda.

It is likewise apparent that evangelical theologians generally do not see any connections between the atoning work of Christ and the future of the earth and Christian responsibility for its proper stewardship. Of the twenty texts examined in this study only one, that of Lewis and Demarest, specifically comments on Col 1:19–20 and the environmental impact of the cross of Christ. Lewis and Demarest do make this connection, noting that “Christ’s sacrifice provides for future cosmic peace.” When Christ returns, nature itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and believers will enjoy fellowship with God and one another in a new heaven and earth.<sup>81</sup> This perspective is consistent with the authors’ earlier concern that believers are to responsibly conserve the earth’s limited resources.<sup>82</sup>

This paper concludes with a call for evangelical theologians to engage in further development of the doctrines of creation and the atonement with a view toward unfolding in a more systematic and integrated way the contemporary implications of these Biblical truths for Christian stewardship of the environment. The history of Christian thought shows that the church’s understanding of its own theological heritage has often been deepened in response to critics outside the church and to heretics within. The early church’s understanding of Christology and the Trinity was clarified through its struggles with Arius, Apollinarius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and other heterodox teachers.<sup>83</sup> The early church asserted the goodness of the material world (Genesis 1) against the gnostics, and developed the understanding of creation *ex nihilo* in the face of Greek notions of the eternity of matter.<sup>84</sup>

In the current situation, evangelical theologians would do well to consider a three-fold agenda for doctrinal development: (1) correct the current imbalance in the doctrine of creation, shifting the focus from questions of *origins* (e.g. evolution, the age of the earth) to that of humanity’s proper *relationship* to the creation; (2) incorporate texts such as Col 1:19–20 that speak of the cosmic impact of the cross into standard treatments of the atonement; and (3) integrate more fully the treatments of the doctrines of creation and Christology, in recognition of the truth that “all things have been created by him (Christ) and *for him*” (Col 1:16). In so doing, evangelical theologians would be giving their own long-needed responses to the charges made over thirty

<sup>81</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *op. cit.*, 2.407.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 62, 63.

<sup>83</sup> These developments in historical theology are recounted, for example, in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), and Aloys Grillmeir, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964).

<sup>84</sup> For brief overviews of the history of the development of the doctrine of creation, see Denis Carroll, “Creation,” *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987) 249–258; Emil Brunner, “On the History of the Doctrine of Creation,” in Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption* (London: Lutterworth, 1964) 36–39. On the development of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, see G. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation out of Nothing” in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), and the review of May by Paul Copan, “Is *Creatio ex nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention?” *Trinity Journal* 17 NS (1996) 77–93.

years ago by Lynn White that Christian teachings on creation (Genesis 1, “dominion”) have contributed to the environmental crisis. By developing more adequately and coherently our own doctrines of creation and the work of Christ, evangelical theologians can equip the community of faith to deal not only with questions of origins, but more importantly, to care for God’s creation in a manner more consistent with our most fundamental Biblical convictions.