

but deliver us from evil." Give us a right relationship with nature, with each other, and with God. This is a summation of the biblical image of the kingdom or reign of God.

The coming of God's kingdom on earth includes the promise that all people will be fed, that the debts which turn some into debt slaves will be forgiven, that the dreams of some to dominate others will be surrendered. When we pray the prayer of our Lord, we are expressing the active hope that the biblical vision of eco-justice will be realized increasingly among us, and between us and the rest of creation.

—By Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether, professor emerita of Pacific School of Religion



The Progressive Christian Witness

A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion

The Progressive Christian Witness: A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion, www.progressivechristianwitness.org, aims to strengthen the voices of progressive Christianity in the public square by publishing theologically grounded resources—brief articles like this one and longer essays—for laypeople and pastors on significant issues in American life. Contact us at pcw@psr.edu or 800/999-0528.

© 2006 Pacific School of Religion, www.psr.edu. This article may be reprinted and distributed in its entirety for non-commercial purposes without prior permission. Please credit *The Progressive Christian Witness: A Ministry of Pacific School of Religion* on any reprint.

THE CREATED WORLD: A BIBLICAL VISION

DEBATES ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE and other ecological crises permeate what we read and watch today, from best-selling books and motion pictures to political debates and international summits. After hearing the opinions of scientists and policymakers, which are sometimes helpful but not always in agreement, how can a Christian make the right decision about things that have an environmental impact?

In the Bible we have a very important resource for thinking about our relationship with creation. And this resource makes surprisingly strong statements regarding the link between our behavior toward nature and our chances for a better society.

We should note, first, that according to Genesis 1, God is the Lord of creation. As the Lord of the created world, God provides for its welfare. Humans are called to “image” or reflect God’s careful attention to the needs of the creation. We are caretakers of the creation. Especially for Christianity, human “lordship” is to be modeled after the “servant lordship” of Christ—as ones who seek to serve, to heal, to save. We are not given license to dominate the earth and certainly not to abuse it. Our relation to the creation is one of stewardship, and in this relationship we are responsible to God.

What’s more, nature in the Bible is not presented as the passive recipient of our stewardship. Instead, nature is alive, filled with soul or spirit. Nature has intrinsic

worth. God rejoices in nature, and humans interact with the spirit that pervades nature. Nature, in turn, is responsive to God; its living creatures relate to God in their own right.

Finally, central to this worldview is the prophetic vision that links human justice with a plentiful nature and injustice with the devastation of the earth. Humans exist in a covenantal relationship with both the earth and God; justice for nature and justice for humans are connected.

Consequently, biblical religion contains a strong ethic of care for nature. We see this in the Levitical codes that govern agriculture: Fields were to lie fallow periodically and a program of regular land reform sought to prevent exploitation of the land. Nature's response to just human care, according to the Bible, is rejoicing and abundance: "The hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout, they sing together for joy" (Psalm 65:9-13).

On the other hand, when humans abuse the earth, nature's responses are themselves judgments of God upon unjust ways of living by humans with each other and with nature. Thus Psalm 107:34 declares, "He turns rivers into a desert, springs of waters into thirsty ground, a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its inhabitants."

From the biblical point of view, when humans break

their covenant with God and one another by social injustice and war, the covenant among God, humanity, and nature is broken. War and violence in society and a polluted nature are expressions of this violation of the covenant: "The earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the earth lies polluted under its inhabitants. For they have transgressed the laws, they have violated the statutes, they have broken the everlasting covenant" (Isaiah 24:4-5).

But the divine judgment expressed in the desolation of society and nature is not the end of the prophetic vision. When humanity mends its ways with God, the covenant is restored and renewed. Restoration of just relations between peoples also heals nature's enmity. Just, peaceful societies blossom forth in a peaceful, harmonious, and fruitful land. The biblical dream of redemption is one of a flourishing nature in the peaceful Kingdom of God. "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing" (Isaiah 35:1-2).

Justice in human affairs and harmony with nature are joined in the biblical vision. Together they reflect a humanity that is in right relationship with God. The result is an earth filled with peace and plenty. This redemptive vision that knits together nature and society is expressed succinctly in the Lord's prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; lead us not into temptation,