

The Soul of Creation Care

By Ken Wilson, February 18, 2007

The Soul of Creation Care is a mystical awareness of creation which leads to an understanding that we're a part and not the whole and God cares for it all.

Pastors have defenses against groups trying to access your church for their cause. We're invited to luncheons for pitches, sent books and CD's by the dozen. In 1999 a steady stream of the well intentioned lobbied me to mobilize our church for the coming Y2K disaster when the computer systems of earth would collapse and we'd be thrown back into the stone age. Could we store bulbar wheat in the church basement and encourage people to fill bathtubs with water for the big event? I gave it a miss.

Someone sent me Saving God's Green Earth by Jason Chatraw and Tri Robinson, pastor of the Boise Vineyard. I thought, "Good for Tri but I've got other fish to fry; besides, don't need convincing about this issue; I just don't have the bandwidth to take on something new."

Then I was asked to represent the Association of Vineyard Churches at a retreat of top environmental scientists and evangelical leaders. Twenty seven people in all. I'm having dinner with people whose books I've read like E.O. Wilson, the best known biologist alive. E.O. is way above my station, so I'm thinking, "What am I doing here?"

At the retreat I'm hob-nobbing with these notebook-toting scientists pursuing their data. Not wild eyed ideologues, but measured and cautious people. Careful not to cry wolf. Just the facts ma'am.

Like Gus Speth, the first person to advise a U.S. President on climate concerns. Speth stands up and says to the assembled group: "I used to think we could solve environmental crisis--conditions so bad in Africa much of land won't grow crops; clean water not available to millions; rain forest shrinking fast, all this landing heavily on poor in developing nations or inner cities where asthma rates skyrocketing, lead poisoning harming kids--by throwing enough good science at the problem. I was wrong. The primary threat isn't pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, or habitat destruction. It's selfishness, greed, apathy. We need a spiritual and cultural transformation to deal with that." A shiver went up my spine like it does when God is talking. Something in me changed in that moment.

Speth then adds: "We scientists are too nervous about calling the environment, the creation. That's got to stop." This from Dean of School of Forestry & Environment at Yale. I was witnessing a "moment" in history.

Concern for the environment went from my head to my heart. Creation care is not another politically correct concern. It's faithfulness to God knowing we will give an account of our stewardship when our tour of duty is up.

Except duty or obligation or whatever it is that makes us the kind of people who floss daily isn't what fuels this thing. What fuels this thing goes much deeper than that and is expressed in Psalm 104.

1-14 O my soul, bless God! God, my God, how great you are!
 beautifully, gloriously robed,
Dressed up in sunshine,
 and all heaven stretched out for your tent.
You built your palace on the ocean deeps,
 made a chariot out of clouds and took off on wind-wings.
You commandeered winds as messengers,
 appointed fire and flame as ambassadors.
You set earth on a firm foundation
 so that nothing can shake it, ever.
You blanketed earth with ocean,
 covered the mountains with deep waters;
Then you roared and the water ran away—
 your thunder crash put it to flight.
Mountains pushed up, valleys spread out
 in the places you assigned them.
You set boundaries between earth and sea;
 never again will earth be flooded.
You started the springs and rivers,
 sent them flowing among the hills.
All the wild animals now drink their fill,
 wild donkeys quench their thirst.
Along the riverbanks the birds build nests,
 ravens make their voices heard.
You water the mountains from your heavenly cisterns;
 earth is supplied with plenty of water.
You make grass grow for the livestock,
 hay for the animals that plow the ground.
14-23 Oh yes, God brings grain from the land,
 wine to make people happy,
Their faces glowing with health,
 a people well-fed and hearty.
God's trees are well-watered—
 the Lebanon cedars he planted.
Birds build their nests in those trees;
 look—the stork at home in the treetop.
Mountain goats climb about the cliffs;

badgers burrow among the rocks.
 The moon keeps track of the seasons,
 the sun is in charge of each day.
 When it's dark and night takes over,
 all the forest creatures come out.
 The young lions roar for their prey,
 clamoring to God for their supper.
 When the sun comes up, they vanish,
 lazily stretched out in their dens.
 Meanwhile, men and women go out to work,
 busy at their jobs until evening.

24-30 What a wildly wonderful world, God!
 You made it all, with Wisdom at your side,
 made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.
 Oh, look—the deep, wide sea,
 brimming with fish past counting,
 sardines and sharks and salmon.
 Ships plow those waters,
 and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them.
 All the creatures look expectantly to you
 to give them their meals on time.
 You come, and they gather around;
 you open your hand and they eat from it.
 If you turned your back,
 they'd die in a minute—
 Take back your Spirit and they die,
 revert to original mud;
 Send out your Spirit and they spring to life—
 the whole countryside in bloom and blossom.

31-32 The glory of God—let it last forever!
 Let God enjoy his creation!
 He takes one look at earth and triggers an earthquake,
 points a finger at the mountains, and volcanoes erupt.

33-35 Oh, let me sing to God all my life long,
 sing hymns to my God as long as I live!
 Oh, let my song please him;
 I'm so pleased to be singing to God.
 But clear the ground of sinners—
 no more godless men and women! O my soul, bless God!

The soul of Creation Care is a mystical awareness of creation...

(And by the way, when we say, Creation, there's no posit this in opposition to the primary narrative of modern science, the idea that all life share's a common

ancestry, and new species emerge as populations separate and adapt to new environments. Evolution can be viewed as elegant mechanism built into the system by an ingenious God. To each his own, of course, but creation and evolution, contrary to the inflamed rhetoric of the culture warriors, are not necessarily opposed to each other.)

The world is one mystical place! "Ever since creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power & divinity have been able to be understood & perceived by what he has made" (Ro.1:20)

"He wraps himself in light as with a garment. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants." (104:2-4, NIV)

In Hebrew spirituality this perspective runs rampant. God appears to Moses in a burning bush. Elijah goes to Mt Horeb and is exposed to the gentle wind that bears "the still small voice." It's not by accident that Jesus ascends in a cloud and ten days later the Spirit descends as wind and tongues of fire!

We don't worship creation. But we listen for God's voice, we feel the brush of his garment across our face in the wind and the dancing flame!

"Mystical shmystical! What are you talking about?" you object, perhaps.

I'm talking about Jesus at his baptism hearing God's voice, "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased." Only some standing by thought it thundered. Mystical awareness: God speaking *through* his creation.

I'm talking about the fact we humans are wired to stand in awe before creation with mouths agape, pupils dilated, faces flushed. Because we know something beyond this world is peeking in at us through this one: Mystical awareness of creation.

I'm talking about Carl Safina, ocean scientist writing in [Song for the Blue Ocean](#) about being in the gulf of Maine in search of whales and finding them: *Charlie [his guide] remarks, 'Boy, there are some whales in here!' [Safina;] Man, this place is alive! In every direction now, creatures far larger than dinosaurs cavort and carry on, blowing voluminous clouds of breath and breaking the sea's surface in rings of foam. The scene is ages old. Pleistocene park. Everything here is giant; the mammals are giant; the fishes, giant; the scale of creatures enlarged to match the oceanic scale itself. The vast sea seems boundless and expansive. From our commanding view the ocean stretches off like a tight azure drum around the rim of the world, and here against the center of this drum pounds the rhythm of the living. I feel utterly captivated, connected and rhapsodic; I feel that somehow a sweepingly enlightening, profound realization awaits just beyond consciousness--like a forgotten dream sensed upon waking--if I can take this scene in for a few more moments, just long enough to let myself open fully and encompass it. 'All right, let's get out of here,' Charlie says. 'We'll see more giant tuna as we go north, I'm sure.'*

This winter I'm driving with my daughter after the ice storm and find myself saying to her: "If we woke up and remembered having a dream where world looked like this, we'd want to go back to sleep."

I received this e-mail from Brown Kinnard, a lover of God and nature and people: *I often marvel at what I see. All it takes is eyes to see and ears to hear. My dad taught me to see things on the farm. A couple of months ago I was heading back out of the woods near us and came to the edge of the gravel pit, same as always. All of a sudden there was a big flurry overhead, and a big bird flew out of a tree. A bald eagle, for heaven's sake! On that same walk I had seen a stately buck watching me from a wooded hillside, spotted a vigilant doe in a shaft of sunlight in a deep dark spruce ravine, found rock piles off trail from long ago inhabitants, and heard the velvety hooting of a great horned owl*

Psalm 104 is God teaching us how to "see things on the farm"...

Creation is God's provision for us body and SOUL! Psychologists call it "fascination" or "biophilia": when exposed to nature, blood pressure lowers, stress hormones retreat, endorphins surge to make the heart glad. Psalm 104 is the psalmist in the mode of fascination, a mystical awareness of the creation.

104 is mystical awareness because in end it says so: "May my meditation be pleasing to Him, as I rejoice in the Lord" (34)

The Hebrews prayed with eyes open much of the time. Issac "went out to the field to meditate one evening and as he looked up he saw..." (Gen. 24:63)

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Many think David's son Solomon wrote 104 because he was a singing, psalming botanist-zoologist: "He spoke 3000 proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He described plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals & birds, reptiles & fish. People of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world who had heard of his wisdom." (1 Kings 4: 32-34)

Ask a botanist or zoologist to describe their specialty species. A friend of mine, John Hoagland, is a prairie dog expert. John talks about prairie dogs like John Simoes talks about his cars and Donnell Wyche his Apple computers. Whoever wrote this psalm is in love with the plant life and the animal life and the planet that sustains all this life believing their love comes from God who cares about it all!

Jesus talked this way! "Consider the lilies they neither toil nor spin, yet God cares for them!" Jesus gave lessons from nature about the nature of God: the kingdom is like a mustard seed, a field of wheat, fish in the net...

Ps. 104: 10-18 indicates that humanity included in his care, but we're not the only ones he cares for.

"The stork has its home in the pine trees" The Hebrew for "home" also means "temple." Pine trees are the sacred temple of storks.

"mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coney [rock badgers.]"

"He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate."

Important word, "cultivate."

"The Lord God took the human and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and take care of it." (Gen. 2: 15) In Hebrew the sense of the word includes notions of work and worship. Care for the environment is our priestly service.

Cultivate and take care of it, not hog the whole thing to ourselves!

Consider Ps. 104: 21-23: the lions own the night and return to their dens at daybreak, and we come out till sundown. We take turns!

At the time these psalms were written, the global population less than 150 million. We're heading for 8 billion by the year 2020.

Our footprint is heavier now than ever! How much more do we need reminding not to be the bull in the china shop: considerate use, not abuse!

The Pacific Northwest is home to the salmon. Born in rivers, Salmon swim to the ocean where they migrate for thousands of miles; when it's time to come back and make merry and have little baby salmon, they come mysteriously over thousands of miles to the same river in which they were hatched! Guided by what, who knows? Fine tuning to the magnetic field? It's still a mystery, I'm told.

"What a wildly wonderful world, God! You made it all, with Wisdom at your side, made earth overflow with your wonderful creations.
Oh, look—the deep, wide sea, brimming with fish past counting,
sardines and sharks and salmon. Ships plow those waters,
and Leviathan, your pet dragon, romps in them.

All the creatures look expectantly to you to give them their meals on time. You come, and they gather around; you open your hand and they eat from it."

Guided by Wisdom, the salmon make their way to the very spot in the river, sometimes a thousand miles inland, in which they were hatched. They come home [Heb. temple]; back to their temple, their sacred place.

Ecologists call it "habitat." "Even the sparrow has a home where she may raise her young near your altar!" (Ps. 84:3) Jesus: "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have their nests..." Habitat is not *just* for humanity.

Home is where the returning salmon lay their eggs and raise their young who swim to sea and the cycle repeats.

Unless their home has been ruined while they were away.

It turns out their home depends on trees that line river to provide shade from the sun; logs in the river provide cover for a birthing center. Unfortunately the trees were clear cut, because we regarded trees as nothing more than ours for the taking; we clear cut them instead of leaving a band of trees along the banks and we ruined their habitat. Now the Salmon population is in such serious decline the fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest is out of luck and nearly out of salmon.

Who cares? Some don't care or make fun of those who do care. But you cannot read psalm 104 and not understand that the God of Creation Cares!

If he cares and we care what he cares about, we care too. We are his Creation Stewards, partners with him in His Creation Care.

Though it is a duty, the soul of Creation Care is not having a "social conscience" drilled into you by Jiminy Cricket. It's about worship and wonder. It's about reverence and awe: a mystical awareness of the creation because the creation is a creation and the Creator is hiding in its shadows and riding on its beams of light.

And it's about the child of awe: humility--finding our place in the creation, not hogging it all to ourselves as if it's just ours for the taking. Considerate use, not abuse is what Creation Stewards aim for.

When I came back from that retreat, I didn't decide to do anything. I just found myself turning out lights, not running water unnecessarily, recycling more, tuning in to the news about the environment, as if it mattered to God.

Today, there is an invitation from the Spirit who renews the face of the earth to open our hearts and eyes to world around us and see it not as consumers but as worshippers of the creator whose world it is.

As we do, "Out of your hearts will flow rivers of living water." We'll be changed on the inside and empowered to care...and that river on the inside will make for a river the Salmon can come home to.

Lord, open my heart to see you shining through the creation and to care for your creation as you desire.