



**iDiv**

German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv)  
Halle-Jena-Leipzig



**HELMHOLTZ**  
Zentrum für Umweltforschung

# A Christian Perspective on Environmental Care

European Leadership Forum 2023

*Daniel Vedder*

- What attitudes do you encounter on environmental issues?

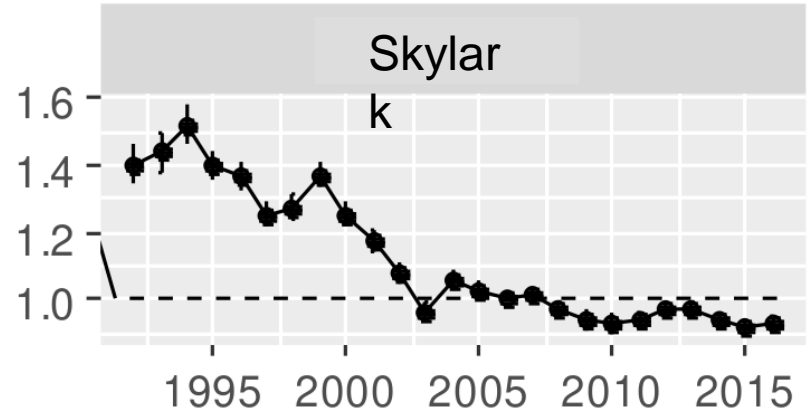
- In which ways are environmental issues relevant for Christians to think about?

# Outline

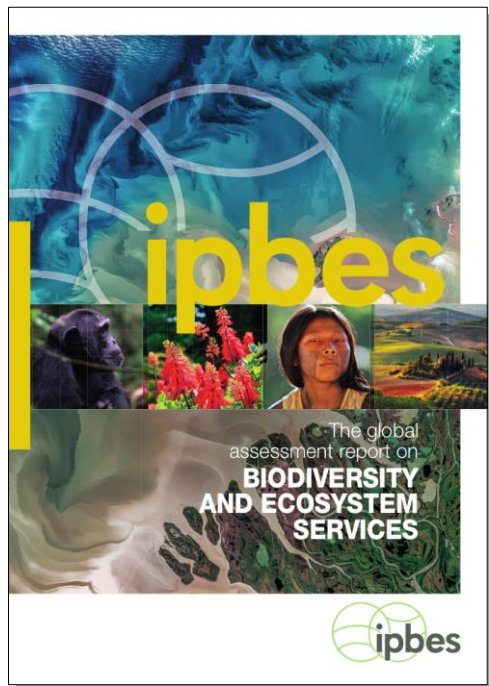
- 1 What environmental crises do we face?
- 2 How does our understanding of nature affect our response to these crises?
- 3 What is a biblical understanding of nature?
- 4 What is a Christian response to environmental crises?



Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*).  
© Lars Petersson, used by permission.



Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft, F. A. (2019). DO-G  
Positionspapier: Weiterentwicklung der Gemeinsamen  
Agrarpolitik ab 2021. Vogelwarte, 57(4), 345–357.  
[http://www.do-g.de/fileadmin/DO-  
G\\_Positionspapier\\_Agrarvoegel\\_21.10.2019\\_n.pdf](http://www.do-g.de/fileadmin/DO-G_Positionspapier_Agrarvoegel_21.10.2019_n.pdf)

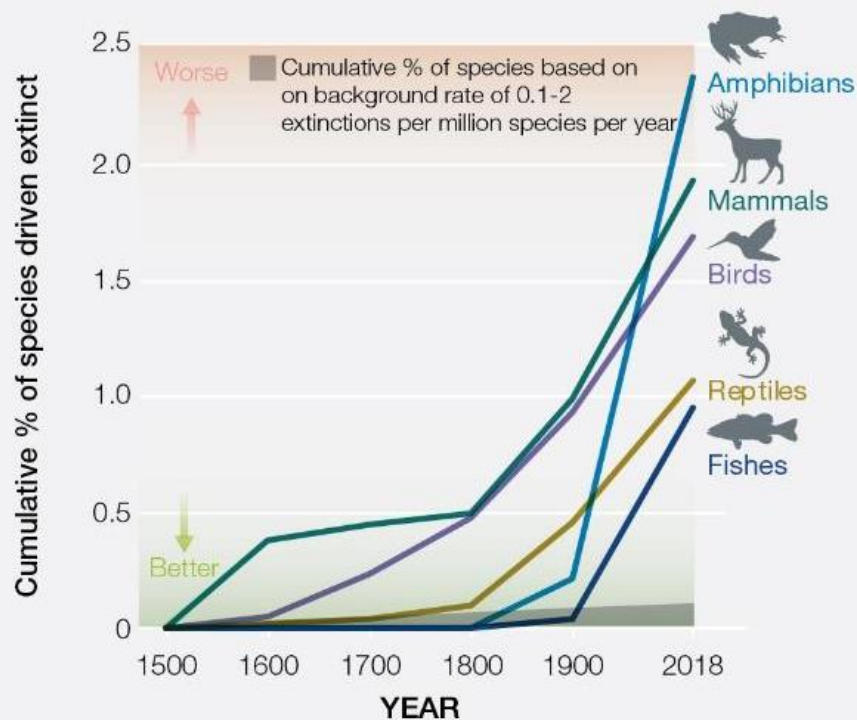


IPBES (2019). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579>

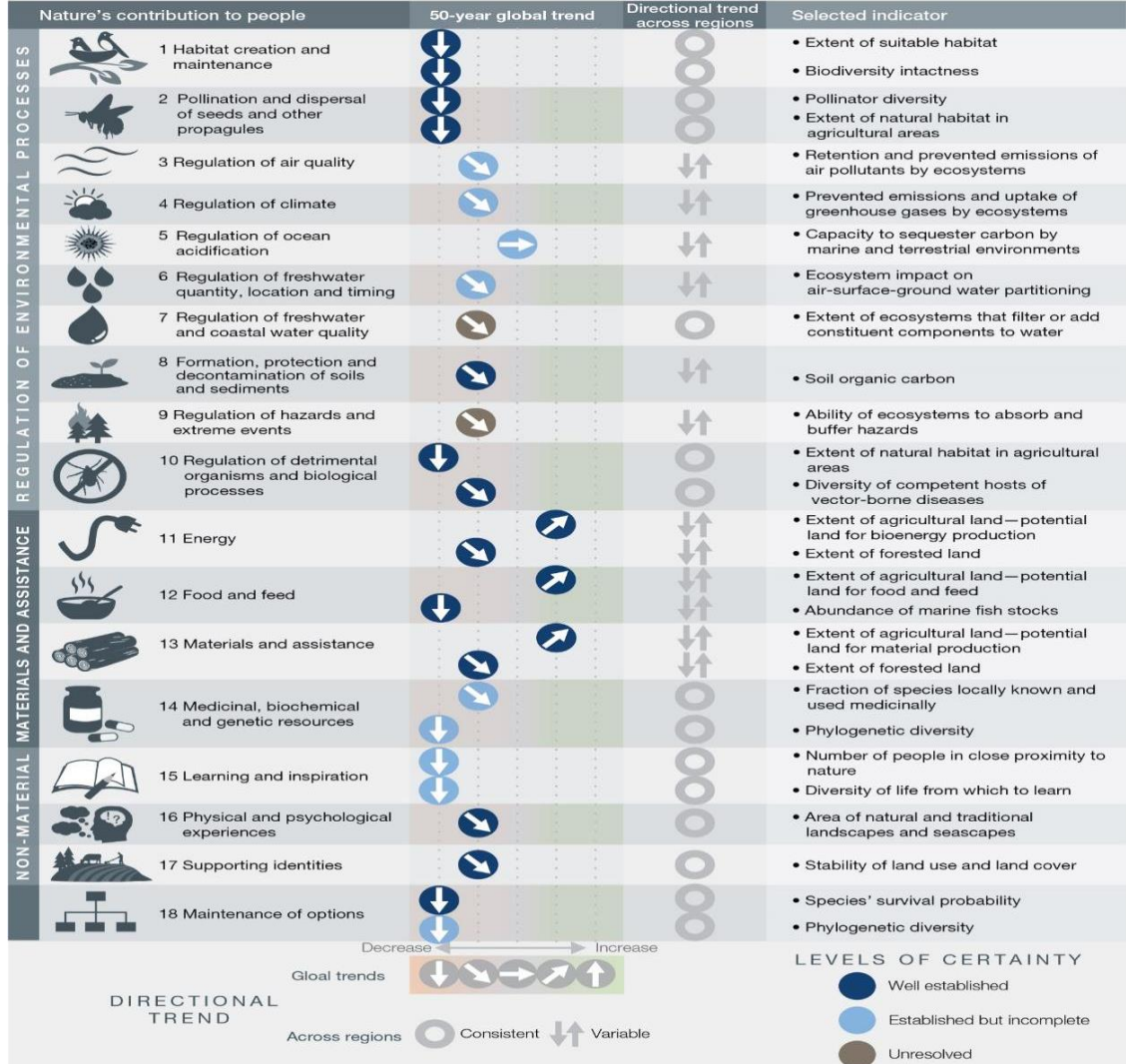
**B**

## Extinctions since 1500



IPBES (2019). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3553579>







Wurtsbaugh, W. A., Paerl, H. W., & Dodds, W. K. (2019). Nutrients, eutrophication and harmful algal blooms along the freshwater to marine continuum. *WIREs Water*, 6(5). <https://doi.org/10.1002/wat2.1373>

## NEWS

Home | War in Ukraine | Climate | Video | World | UK | Business | Tech | Science | Stories

World | Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | Latin America | Middle East | US & Canada

### 'Rivers of acid' in Zambian villages

8 September 2015



A court case will decide if a copper mine has been polluting the water these women are carrying

**Zambian villagers are taking a multinational copper mining firm to court in the UK, accusing it of poisoning their water. The BBC's Nomsa Maseko visited the area which has allegedly been polluted.**

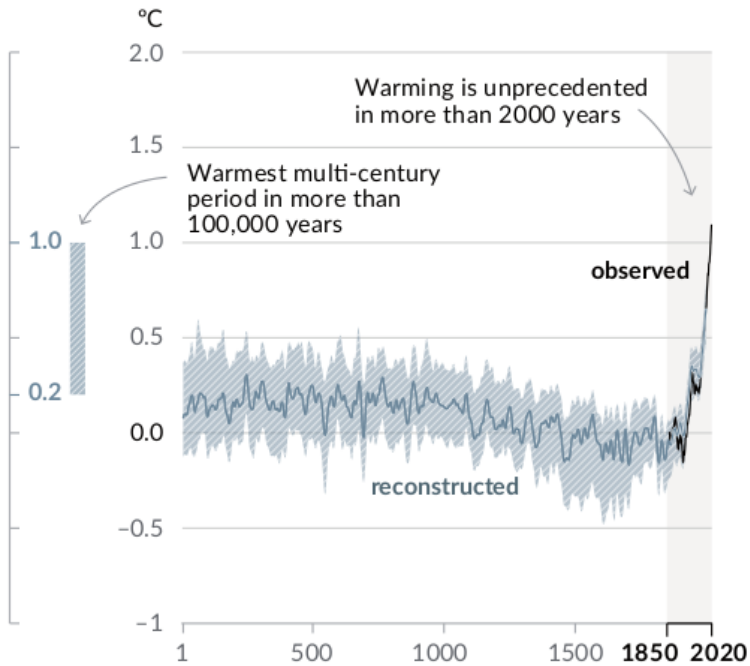
Dressed in colourful sarongs and t-shirts, the women of Hippo Pool village collect their water on the banks of the Kafue River on Zambia's copper belt.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34173746>

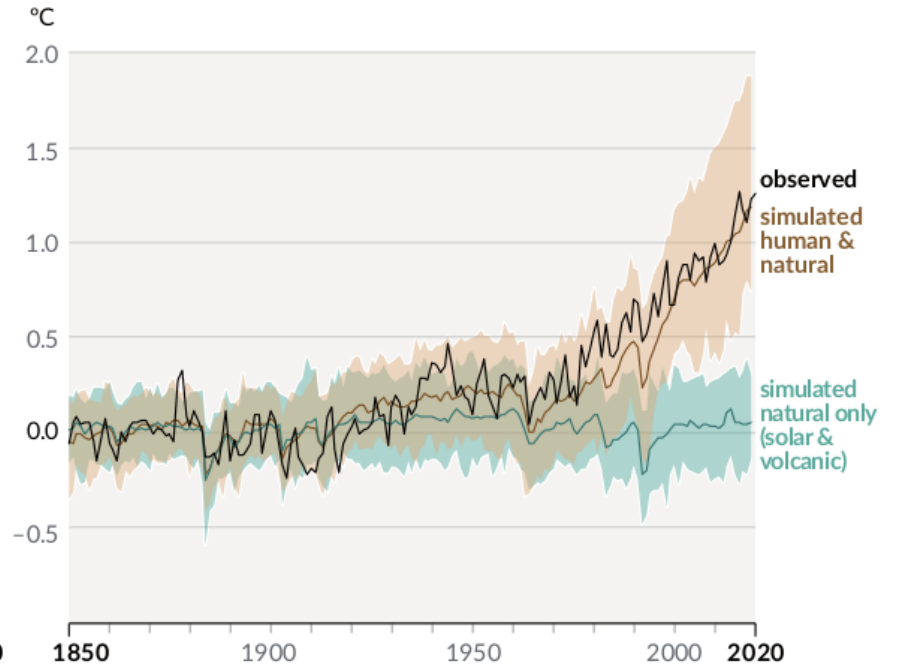


## Changes in global surface temperature relative to 1850–1900

(a) Change in global surface temperature (decadal average) as **reconstructed** (1–2000) and **observed** (1850–2020)



(b) Change in global surface temperature (annual average) as **observed** and simulated using **human & natural** and **only natural** factors (both 1850–2020)



IPCC (2021). Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896>

## (b) Observed impacts of climate change on human systems

Human systems	Impacts on water scarcity and food production				Impacts on health and wellbeing				Impacts on cities, settlements and infrastructure			
	Water scarcity	Agriculture/crop production	Animal and livestock health and productivity	Fisheries yields and aquaculture production	Infectious diseases	Heat, malnutrition and other	Mental health	Displacement	Inland flooding and associated damages	Flood/storm induced damages in coastal areas	Damages to infrastructure	Damages to key economic sectors
Global	+	-	○	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Africa	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Asia	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Australasia	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	not assessed	-	-	-	-
Central and South America	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	not assessed	-	-	-	-
Europe	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
North America	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Small Islands	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Arctic	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Cities by the sea	○	○	○	-	○	-	-	not assessed	○	-	-	-
Mediterranean region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	not assessed	+	-	○	-
Mountain regions	+	+	-	○	-	-	-	-	-	na	-	-

IPCC (2022). Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009325844>

- Where nature suffers,
  - people suffer.

- What is the relationship between humans and nature?

- *Option 1:*  
Anthropocentrism

“

Humanity now faces a choice: we can continue down a path where our demands on Nature far exceed Nature's capacity to supply them on a sustainable basis; or we can take a different path, one where our engagements with Nature are not only sustainable but also enhance our collective well-being and the well-being of our descendants.

”

Dasgupta, P. (2021). The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta review. (London: HM Treasury.) p. 487

“

One basic weakness in a conservation system based wholly on economic motives is that most members of the land community have no economic value.

”

Leopold, A. (1949) A Sand County Almanac. Oxford University Press, New York. pp. 198



- *Option 2:*  
Ecocentrism

“

Biotic diversity has intrinsic value, irrespective of its instrumental or utilitarian value. [...] In emphasizing the inherent value of non-human life, it distinguishes the dualistic, exploitative world view [i.e. anthropocentrism] from a more unitary perspective: Species have value in themselves, a value neither conferred nor revocable, but springing from a species' long evolutionary heritage and potential or even from the mere fact of its existence.

”

Soulé, M. E. (1985). What is Conservation Biology? *BioScience*, 35, 727–734.

“

We claim that in order to induce transformative change in human-nature relations we need a shift from a morality of utility to a morality of care, a reallocation of property rights, and the extension of the community of justice to non-human entities.

”

Muradian, R., & Gómez-Baggethun, E. (2021). Beyond ecosystem services and nature's contributions: Is it time to leave utilitarian environmentalism behind? *Ecological Economics*, 185, 107038. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107038>

# But:

- Why would a common evolutionary origin mean that we should care about non-human beings?
- Are selfish humans capable of a true “morality of care”?
- Both anthropocentrism and ecocentrism reflect worldviews that to not consider God – each put something created in the place of the Creator!

- *Option 3:*  
Theocentrism

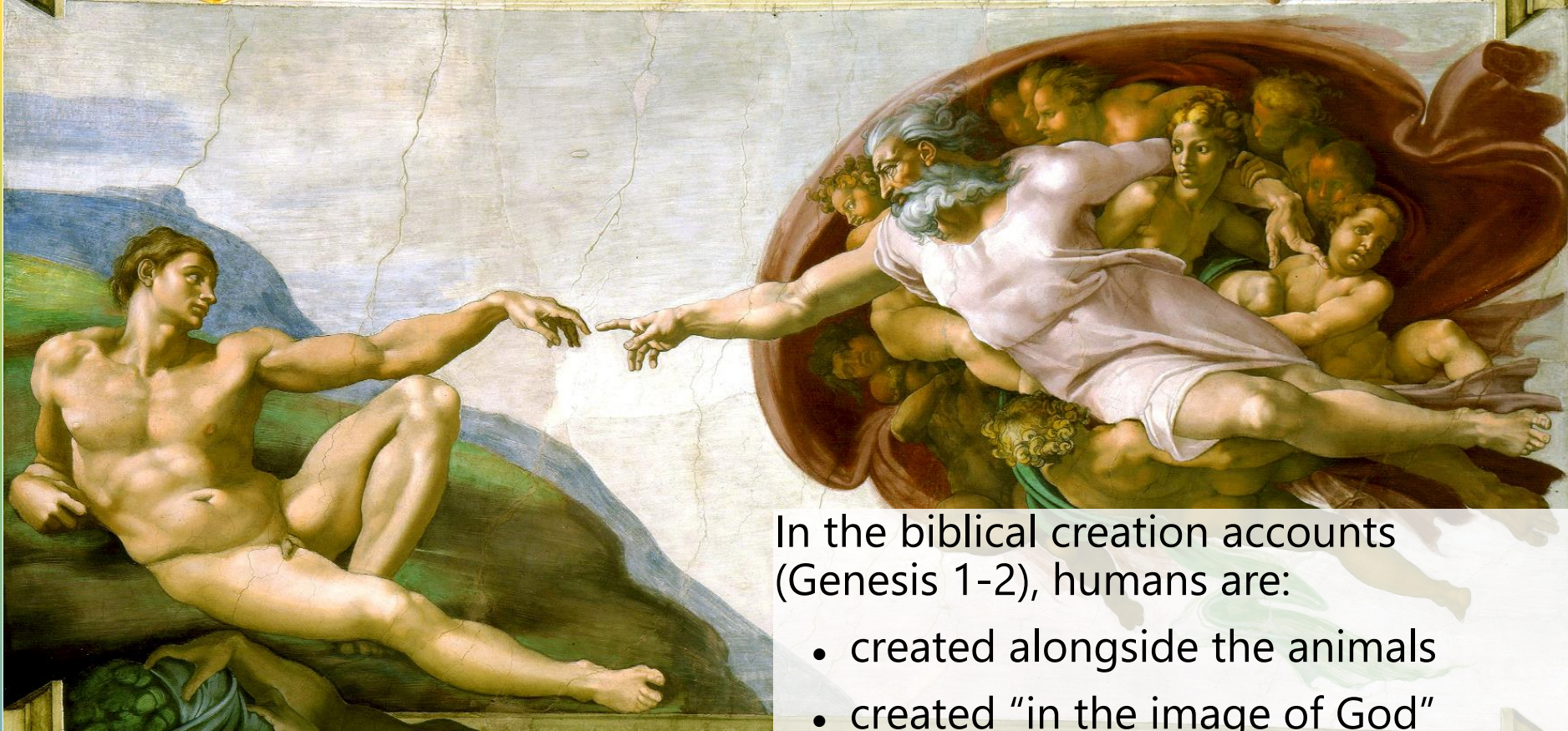
“

The Speeches out of the Whirlwind do not describe the beauties of nature for their own sake; they are concerned with nature's God. By their sweep and majesty, the God Speeches underscore the insight that nature is not merely a mystery but a miracle as well, a cosmos marked by order and beauty. [...]

The universe is not anthropocentric, but theocentric, with purposes known only to God, and which man cannot fathom. Man is not the goal of creation and therefore not  
the master of the cosmos.

”

Gordis, R. (1986). Job and Ecology (and the Significance of Job 40:15). In: Judaic ethics for a lawless world (pp. 189–202). Jewish Theological Seminary of America.



Michelangelo, "The Creation of Adam", via Wikimedia Commons

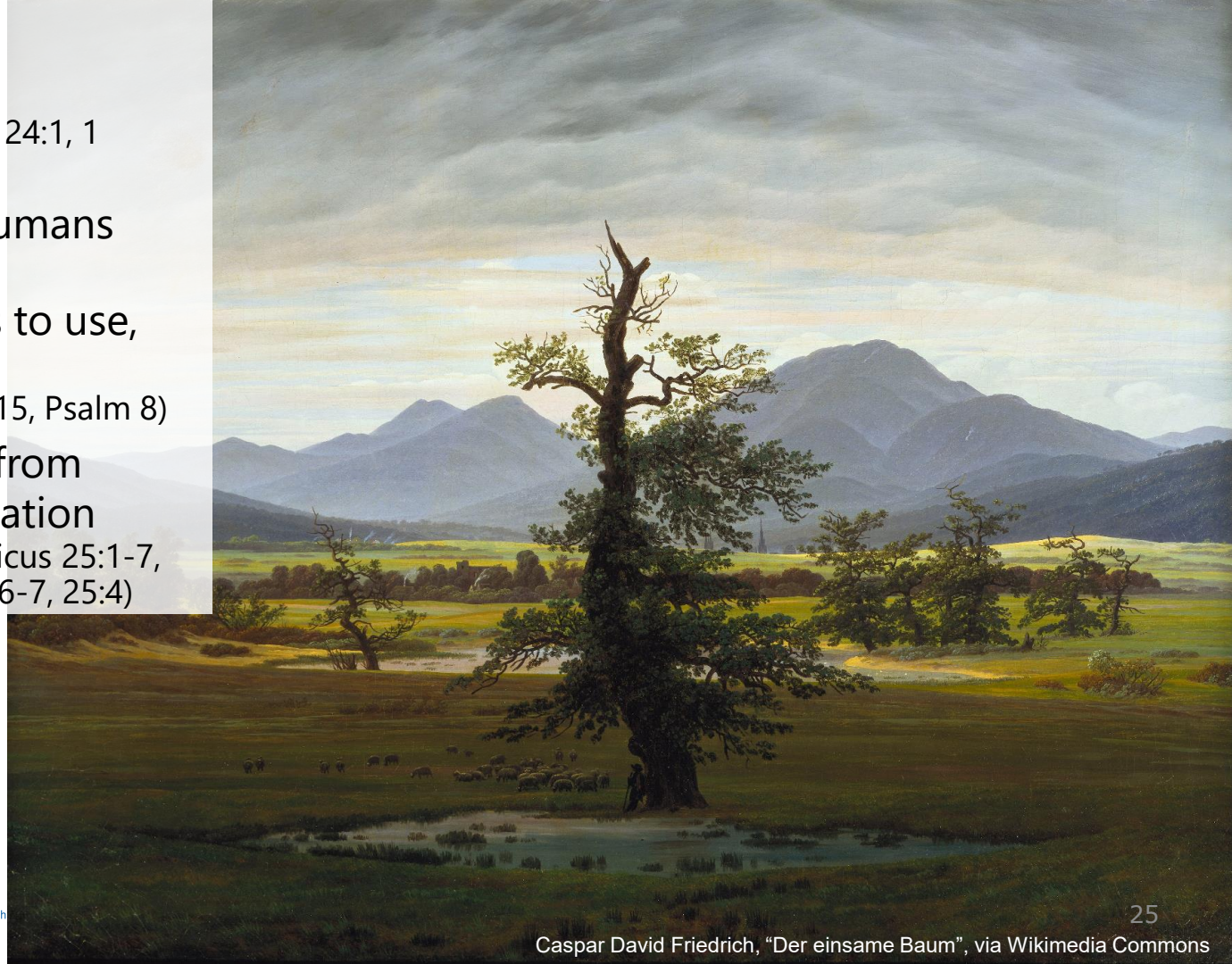
In the biblical creation accounts (Genesis 1-2), humans are:

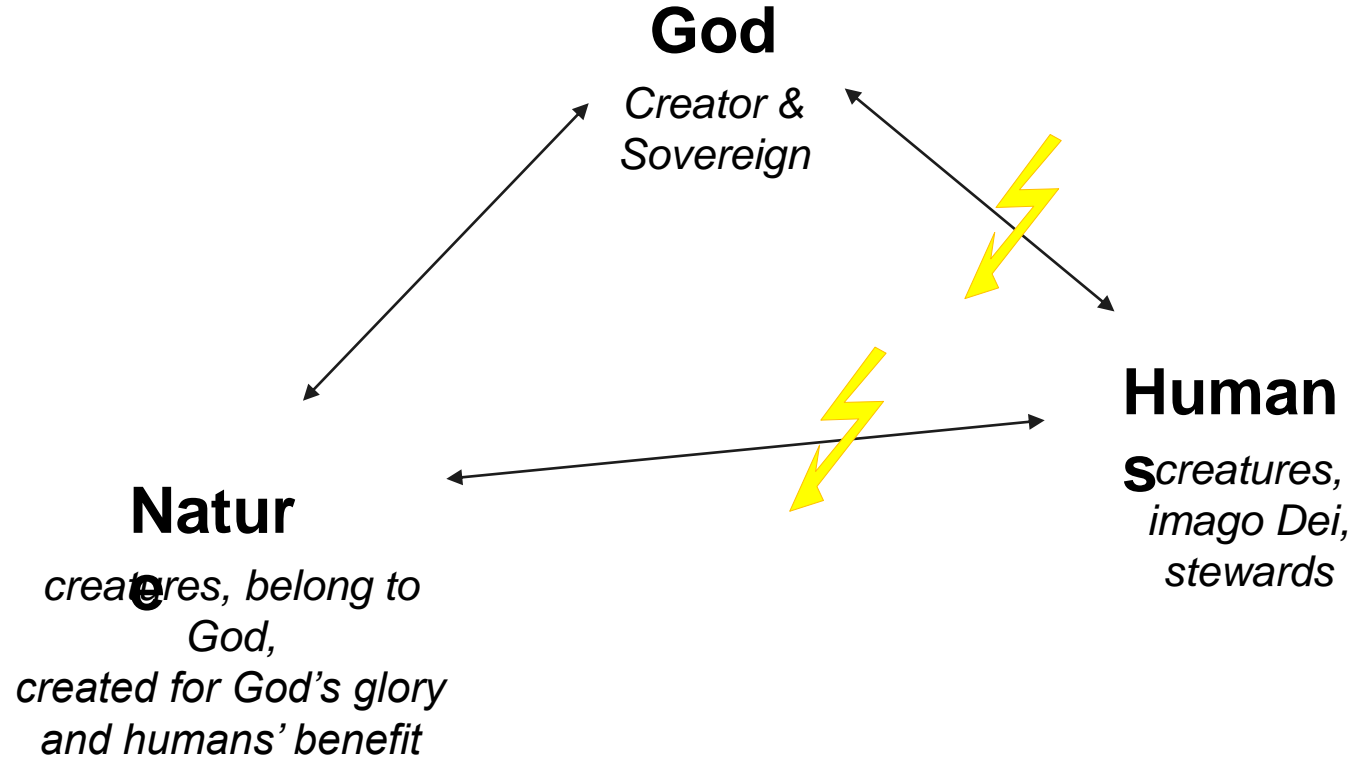
- created alongside the animals
- created "in the image of God"
- given dominion over the earth
- told to "work and keep" the earth



# In the Bible, nature:

- belongs to God  
(e.g. Exodus 9:29, Psalm 24:1, 1 Corinthians 10:26)
- is not just about humans  
(Psalm 104, Job 38-41)
- is given to humans to use, enjoy, and steward  
(e.g. Genesis 1:28-30, 2:15, Psalm 8)
- is to be protected from human overexploitation  
(e.g. Exodus 20:10, Leviticus 25:1-7, Deuteronomy 20:19, 22:6-7, 25:4)





“

For the creation was subjected to futility [...] in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Now in this hope we were saved.

”

Romans 8:20-24, HCSB

- It is our sin that is scarring this planet –  
sin that requires redemption.

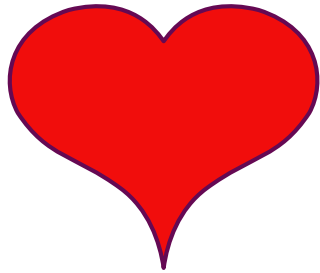
“

So man has dominion over nature, but he uses it wrongly. The Christian is called upon to exhibit this dominion, but exhibit it rightly: treating the thing as having value in itself, exercising dominion without being destructive. The Church should always have taught and done this, but she has generally failed to do so, and we need to confess our failure.

”

Schaeffer, F. (1970). Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology. Tyndale House Publishers. p. 72

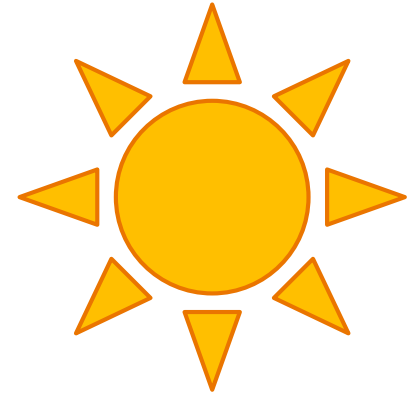
- A Christian Response



**Enjoy God's good creation:**  
be thankful and content

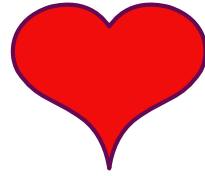


**Love your neighbour:**  
consider the consequences  
of your actions,  
pursue justice



**Share the hope:**  
God will make  
everything new in Christ,  
we do not have to fear



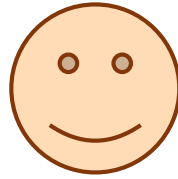


“

When you eat and are full, you will praise the LORD your God for the good land He has given you. [...] When you eat and are full, and build beautiful houses to live in, and your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold increases, be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the LORD your God.

”

Deuteronomy 8:10,12-14, HCSB



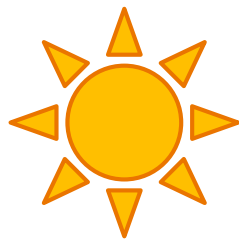
“

“Why have we fasted, but you have not seen? We have denied ourselves, but you haven't noticed!”

“Look, you do as you please on the day of your fast, and oppress all your workers. [...] Isn't the fast I choose: To break the chains of wickedness, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, and to tear off every yoke?”

”

Isaiah 58:3,6, HCSB



“

For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind. Then be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I will create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people. The sound of weeping and of crying will no longer be heard in her. [...] People will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

”

Isaiah 65:17-19.21, HCSB

- Creation Care and Christian Witness:  
guarding our testimony, sharing our hope.



**Guy Pe'er**

@GuyPeer3



I cannot fathom how people who call themselves [#Christians](#) can accept, or even promote, annihilating God's makings. God surely cannot approve that we wipe off his wonders by bulldozers, tractors, pesticides etc, turning Earth into a desert. Our kids shouldn't accept it either.

8:56 PM · May 16, 2023 · **364** Views

**3** Retweets **5** Likes



“

We have missed the opportunity to help man save his earth. Not only that, but in our generation we are missing an evangelistic opportunity, because when modern young people have a real sensitivity to nature, many of them turn to the hippie communities or mentalities [...] because they have seen that most Christians simply do not care about the beauty of nature, or nature as such.

”

Schaeffer, F. (1970). Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology. Tyndale House Publishers. p. 85

“

People often say to me that I am wasting my time talking about environmental sustainability. “The world” they say “will never agree to take the necessary action.” I reply that I am optimistic. One reason I give is that I believe that God is committed to His creation and that we have a God-given task of being good stewards of creation.”

Houghton, J. (2007). Why care for the environment?  
Faraday Institute for Science and Religion.

## Dedication

### Sir John Houghton

(30 December 1931 – 15 April 2020)



The Working Group I Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis* is dedicated to the memory of Sir John Houghton, who was one of the key figures in the creation of the IPCC in 1988, and served as Chair and Co-Chair of Working Group I for the IPCC's first three assessment reports from 1988 to 2002.

Sir John's work was a major factor in the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the IPCC in 2007, shared with former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore. He contributed to the development of climate science and building international cooperation based upon climate research. Sir John played a key role in ensuring a robust science-policy interface, used in the IPCC process, but his role in international scientific research extended beyond the IPCC, for instance in contributing to the establishment of the World Climate Research Programme, which he chaired from 1982 to 1984.

Sir John was a brilliant communicator among scientific colleagues, policymakers and the public at large, explaining the fact and threat of climate change with clarity and directness.

