



Discernment

SO THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO DISCERN WHAT IS BEST. PHIL. 1:10

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Discernment aims to stimulate interest in the moral dimensions of contemporary issues; to provide a forum for Christian reflection; and to foster the teaching of Christian ethics across the curriculum. Published three times a year.

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Renewing Earth and Rebuilding Culture

Dietrich Bonhoeffer described the future as a “world coming of age” and predicted the disappearance of “religious Christianity” in favor of a new *Zeitgeist* he could see only dimly and called, appropriately enough, “religionless Christianity.” Many commentators since Bonhoeffer’s day have suggested that he rightly discerned the times and boldly projected the struggle that evangelical faith would face, even decades before the term “post-modern” had been coined.

Lynn Buzzard, former head of the Christian Legal Society and now professor of law at Campbell University, speaks directly to that subject in passionate tones which Bonhoeffer would surely recognize but with a distinctive evangelical voice which perhaps he could not foresee. Professor Buzzard’s article is part of a much longer argument which we hope to see published soon (albeit elsewhere) in all its nuance and vividness. Many social thinkers wring hands over moral relativism or moral whatever-ism, but Mr. Buzzard goes beyond hand-wringing to offer practical suggestions on what churches and schools can do—indeed, should do.

When great minds assemble to speak on the environment, one is either overwhelmed with an array of thoughtful and wise commentary, or inspired by many helpful suggestions for study and action, or ashamed at one’s own lack of awareness of such a crucial area of human need. I dare suggest that most of us in the audience last March at the CACE trialog workshop found ourselves alternating among all three reactions. The panel’s two and a half hours of discussion did no justice to either their assembled expertise or to the complexity of the issues at stake, but the audience was satiated and the banquet could go on no longer. We offer readers morsels from the table in this issue, and urge that these mere appetizers lead the hungry into libraries, bookstores, and journals for a more adequate menu of our panelists’ ideas. Their collective *vitae* would doubtless consume an entire issue of this newsletter.

Our CACE theme this year is “Valuing the Family.” We bait you for future issues by that simple announcement, and urge that you write to us with your ideas and on that wide-ranging theme. We all support the idea of family, but which idea, whose version, and how elastic might those versions be. You will hear much from us on these matters in issues to come. ■

“We learn to cope with the people of this world because we learn to cope with the members of our family. Those who flee the family flee the world; bereft of the former’s affection, tutelage, and challenges, they are unprepared for the latter’s tests, judgments, and demands.”

James Q. Wilson
The Moral Sense

Mark Fackler

Last March, a distinguished panel of experts in sociology, public policy, and missions convened at Wheaton College around the theme

Eroding Environment, Booming Population: Two Sides of a Growing Crisis

Dick Staub: Eighteen hundred years ago, Tertullian, an early church father also believed to be a lawyer, was convinced that the world was overpopulated. He wrote: "Everything has been visited, everything known, everything exploited. Now present estates obliterate the famous wilderness areas of the past. Plowed fields have replaced forests. Domesticated animals have dispersed wildlife. There are as many cities as in former years there were dwellings. Islands do not frighten nor cliffs deter. Everywhere there are buildings; everywhere people; everywhere communities; everywhere life. Proof of this crowding is the density of human beings. We weigh upon the world; its resources hardly suffice to support us. As our needs grow larger, so do our protests, that already nature does not sustain us. In truth, plague, famine, wars, and earthquakes must be regarded as a blessing to civilization since they prune away luxuriant growth of the human race."

Today as the earth's population hurtles to six billion, questions surface regarding the earth's capacity. Are we bumping up against the limits this planet can sustain? What are the ethical implications for people of faith who are called both to be fruitful and multiply and to steward the earth?

How has the issue of environment and population become important to you personally?

Claire Manning: My focus is that government is always in the position of balancing issues of the individual versus industry in managing our environment.

Tim Stafford: My interest was not merely to discuss policy but to think about what Christians might say distinctively.

Susan Bratton: I've been very interested in increasing Christian dialogue over environmental issues, and at one point, I just decided that this was something that we were not talking about, and it needed to come forward.

Paige Cunningham: I represent a public policy organization involved in issues respecting the dignity of human life from conception through natural death. We come up against these issues when an answer to environmental problems is "Let's get rid of the people."

Oyvind Aadland: What drew my attention to the environmental crisis was living in Ethiopia with its population explosion that you could literally see. As I travelled through the lowlands and saw the forest disappear, I concluded that ecology was one of the aspects of the Great Commission.

Susan Drake: When I went to a Christian environment meeting, I learned that Scriptures had much to say about our role to "tend and keep the garden" and about land perishing because we disobey God. It started me thinking that perhaps there was something missing in my world perspective and in my walk as a Christian.

Peter Uhlenberg: I came to appreciate that God is at work in the world today reconciling His creation to Himself, and that we are given the tremendous privilege of cooperating with God in this work.

Mr. Staub: Mona Charon wrote recently: "Scholars have demonstrated that the population explosion is a myth. The book *Passage to a Human World* examines population trends spanning thousands of years and concludes that the current population boom will not continue. As nations become wealthier, rates of population slow. There could be, with available technology, plenty of food, space, and natural resources to support a world population of ten billion people. The greatest threat to human welfare is not the scarcity of essential resources provided by mother earth. It is the cruelty and stupidity of governments."

Dr. Uhlenberg: If you feel increasing population means inevitable environmental problems, you are in a very difficult position, because almost certainly the world population is going to increase a lot over the next century. This increase is because of what we call population momentum: young populations — a huge wave of people who are going to have children. There is no question that population growth is a very serious challenge. There is no question that environmental degradation is a serious problem. The link is not as close, I think, as many popular thinkers would suggest. The linking of these two things come more often from biologists than from social scientists, who appreciate that populations always encounter the social world through

"It is mathematically certain that, short of mass emigration into space, with rockets taking off at the rate of several million per second, uncontrolled birth-rates are bound to lead to horribly increased death-rates."

Richard Dawkins

social organization. We have the potential through social organization to deal with many of the problems that exist in our environment.

Mr. Staub: What is “carrying capacity”?

Dr. Bratton: We use the phrase in biology: I might talk about the carrying capacity for white-tailed deer. That is, there is so much forage in the forest, and when the deer reach a certain point, if the population doesn't decline, they all die due to disease or starvation. The same would be true for humans in terms of food resources, but we have to be careful in our account with our ability to change the way resources are distributed, and our ability to adapt to different environmental situations.

Mr. Staub: Tim, you talk in your writing about the great “bet” on resources.

Mr. Stafford: Paul Ehrlich, strongly in favor of population control, and Julian Simon, an economist who says population isn't a problem at all but an advantage, made a “bet” about scarcity of resources. With a finite earth and an expanding pool of people, there are going to be fewer resources per person. The more we use up, the less will be left over, so the price will go up. Julian Simon says ‘No, the price of raw materials will go down. It has always gone down, historically. Any resource you can name, I will bet it's going to go down. You can choose any mineral you want.’ Ehrlich bet a thousand dollars and chose five minerals. Ehrlich lost. With all five, the price went down over a ten year period. This has to do with a view of humanity in reaction to its resources: people, creatively human, multiply resources. Environmental problems, like all others, are open to dynamic

solutions. It's the social organization Peter referred to earlier.

Mr. Staub: Must “capacity” be faced?

Mr. Stafford: There's a capacity issue at every point of human history. Back in Abraham's time, with 100 million people or so, the earth was “filled.” There was no leftover food. People were hungry. Abraham had to go down to Egypt to get food.

Mr. Staub: When governments announce a crisis, they construct a new reality. How do governments define this problem currently?

Ms. Drake: It really depends on what part of the world you're from. Different governments respond differently. But we really have to ask the question, as Christians, ‘When have we filled the earth?’ What does that mean in terms of wildlife? Do they have a right to live? And if so, only in zoos? Are they to be free as part of the creation that we are a part of? We are connected to them. We are part of creation. The natural creation was created before us. We are created in the image of God, which means we are to walk in right relationship to God, to our neighbor, and to the creation itself.

Mr. Staub: One of the questions people constantly ask is, ‘So what does this have to do with me? I live in Illinois.’

Ms. Manning: Our problem is resource management, not just what resources are there, but what we do with the resources we have. In the environmental area, government is trying to manage the resources in a way that makes sense for everybody. If you think we have

—Eroding Environment, *continued on page 8*



Appearing in a special plenary session of our CACE workshop series on the environment: **Susan Bratton**, Ph.D., author, *Six Billion and More*; **Peter Uhlenberg**, Ph.D., professor of sociology at the Univ of North Carolina; **Susan Drake**, senior conservation officer and coordinator for the Presidential Initiative on Coral Reefs with the U.S. State Department; **Timothy Stafford**, author and journalist; **Claire Manning**, chair, Illinois Pollution Control Board; not pictured: **Oyvind Aadland**, missionary to Ethiopia; **Paige Cunningham**, president, Americans United for Life; and **Dick Staub**, moderator for the panel and host of Salem Radio Network's nationally syndicated “Dick Staub Show.”

Too Little Too Late

The Irony of the Evangelical Recovery of a Worldview and Implications for the Christian Community

Lynn R. Buzzard, Professor of Law
Campbell University School of Law

Evangelicals "Come Out"

The resurgent political awareness and activism of evangelicals in the 1970s and 80s are now so prevalent that they are hardly newsworthy. The coming out of the closet into the world of politics, law and social policy is nearly complete — at least rhetorically. Christian colleges eagerly market their worldly savvy in business, government and law. Television programs and newsletters abound keeping evangelicals solicited and aware of crises, legislative affairs, and the cultural signs of the times. One doesn't hear so much anymore of the criticisms of the pious that "they were so heavenly minded they were no earthly good."

Surely separatist remnants continue to creep among us, but in the main we've left that world and eagerly become neo-Calvinists committed to God's work in all precincts. College students committed to Christ now are as apt to seek admission to law school, or to work in a politician's Washington office, as to sign up for missions to Africa.

To be sure, there have been problems with the Christian's newly found cultural agenda. The engagement has often been reactive rather than principled. It has lacked a sound theology of the state of law, and been merely an impassioned jeremiad against perceived ills. It has often confused conservative economic or political theory (a sort of evangelical political correctness) with biblical mandates. We have suffered often at the hands of religious media and financially driven agenda which has too often sought slogans and symbols rather than substance. Politicians eager for constituents and lobbyists seeking allies have too often managed to create a bizarre amalgam of issues under labels of a "Christian Coalition" — with little spiritual principle binding legislative goals. At times the political renaissance has been little more than an internal conversation within a subset of evangelicals rather than real engagement with secularists, politicians, jurists, and others.

Yet for all the problems which have plagued the new evangelical engagement, I am convinced that the shift to a public agenda is theologically, culturally, and morally mandated — a more holistic reflection of biblical thought than the personal piety which seemed the exclusive mark of evangelicalism in the American frontier. The moral crises of our day, the relegation of the church by cultural leaders to the backwaters, and a

recovery of a more reformed theology have properly fueled this engagement with the principalities and powers.

No Halt to the Slide!

At the risk, however, of throwing a damper on the revival party, it appears increasingly clear to me that for all the talk and Christian think tanks, the culture moves relentlessly and recklessly toward a Romans 1 crisis, an inexorable descent from a rejection of God to the basest animalism.

Consider, for example, education. For all the books on the need for moral reform in public education, the engagement of parents with school boards, alarmist newsletters, legal defenders, and tragic anecdotes of educational malfeasance — are schools reversing the trends toward secularist, materialist, valueless emphasis?

Consider the media. For all the wringing of hands from Tupelo, or threats of boycotts, are movies or TV programs demonstrating signs of repentance? Does an hour's MTV signal moral enlightenment? Do labels disclosing rock lyrics witness to moral resurgence?

Consider life. Despite the warm appeal that "life is a beautiful choice," has the abortion culture been stemmed?

Consider the American family. Has the plea for responsible sex, the celebration of "promise keepers," or the targeting of dead-beat dads provided us with a vision of sexuality and family life which provides a nurturing environment for children?

I think clearly not. There is not a moral recovery. There is no turning. There is no breaking dawn. There is, in fact, increasing darkness.

As a law professor, I am struck by the radical dissonance of the modern generation from the values and norms which shaped America and once were normative in western civilization. The shift is apparent in the *a priori* assumption of modern students that moral questions are at most private, and for many, mere products of socio-cultural forces which reflect the dysfunctional biases of western civilization. Christian ideas are not simply rejected, they are irrelevant — an intrusive and divisive element. I see no indication that the intellectual culture is having second thoughts about its positivism. The American university's hobby of debunking religious value and moral absolutes continues unabated, while of course it substitutes its own idols which it worships with intensity.

No, I am afraid that candor demands an admission that our situation is like that of a Jeremiah or Ezekiel who, while declaring the faithful Word of God, hold no illusions that the people will repent. He is called to deliver the Word of God but with no promise of success. His listeners are like thorns and briar patches. In fact, the promise is not deliverance, but judgment.

The Tragic Irony

This is the tragic irony of the modern dilemma for evangelicals enthused by a relevant Gospel. Just now, when we have finally discovered a more faithful biblical witness to the world and our culture — when we are prepared to take the Gospel into the streets, markets, board rooms and courts — when we have appreciated the implications of doctrines of Creation and Lordship for the reach of the Kingdom, when we are ready to address the arts, science, law, and philosophy in a principled, theologically sound manner — just then we are dismissed, ignored, humored, and sometimes chosen as color-contrast or as a foil in some talk show, but not really a part of the debate, the action. Just when we were *coming out*, we are *shut out*; as we were moving from the sidelines, we are marginalized again.

Having stood on the sidelines during the secularization of education, the de-moralization of much of public life, the adoption of the radical version of separation of church and state, the collapse of the family, the celebration of unbridled freedom, the seduction of our Christian colleges that left them with secular philosophies and pious presidents and deceived donors, the marginalization of Christian intellectual thought, the reign of positivism in philosophy — now, we find our newly introduced wares largely unsold in the marketplace of ideas. Ideas have consequences, Justice Holmes observed, and we are reaping the whirlwind.

What a nasty trick our recovery of biblical worldview has played on us: invited to prepare for the party, we show up — only to be unwelcome.

Why Such Pessimism

I do not succumb to the simplistic pessimism of an earlier generation equipped with end-time charts. Rather, I am pessimistic in the sense I believe the biblical prophets often were — because I believe the overwhelming evidence of evil before us. We are witnesses to the principalities and powers, to the “war” of the dragon on the church pictured in Revelation.

The intimations of hope in the occasional moral moment which squeezes itself into public life — a Forrest Gump film hero, the isolated believer acting effectively in some arena, Philip Johnson’s intellectual challenge to evolutionary dogma, or some judicial ruling permitting some degree of religious freedom — these cannot be seriously taken as signs of a sweeping, godly cultural repentance, or even a mini-revival.

The real signs around us are the insatiable hedonism that marks our public and commercial life, the growing rawness and near paganism of public enter-

tainment, the tragedy of the American marriage, the abandonment of children by parents whose lust for convenience and self-centeredness have left their children functional orphans; the not-so-well masked racism; and the failure of the legal system — both civil and criminal — to provide any vision of truth.

The evidence is not just “out there” among the secular pagans, but inside the Christian community as well. As Os Guinness noted several years ago in *The Gravedigger Files*, it is not just secularism as a philosophy which threatens the church, but the invasive secularist way of choosing, deciding, and living which has captured nearly all of us — a way of living which largely discounts or ignores spiritual and biblical principles.

For all the theoretical talk about a Christian worldview, do Christian families act in demonstrably different ways in vocational choices, handling money, or raising children? I think not. Are Christian young people actually rejecting the sexual permissiveness of the pagan culture? Not if the surveys are any clue.

Are churches acting with moral courage and discipline in the face of the explosion of divorce within Christian families? No. Far more common is the sound of rhetoric not from Scripture but some counseling clinic. Our exceptions have swallowed up our rules.

I am struck with how easily the prevailing cultural views of the good life are uncritically bought by even serious believers. Listen to Christian parents talk about the educational choices for their children — from elementary school to the university. At the law school level, Christians who are often deeply committed and

thoughtful people, instinctively assume that able young people ought to go to the “top” schools. And what does “top” mean? Does it mean a place to think Christianly about law, a place where moral and spiritual principles are “in the game?” Not at all. It is the prestige, the job opportunities that come from such a place which define “quality.” Now, perhaps there are justifications for Christian choices of such prestige schools, but certainly not on the uncritical acceptance of the mythology of the culture about such options. The same is true in almost every arena of life.

Sadly, even evangelicalism has adopted a reductionist Christianity, adjusting theology to accommodate culture. Like some positivist lawyer’s treatment of the Constitution, we have tried to keep the Bible “in tune with the times” and in so doing have written a new document. We have done mentally what Jefferson did physically, cut up our Bibles and pasted together a version we like.

“If you marry the spirit of the age you’ll soon find yourself a widower.”

Dean Inge

—Too Little Too Late, *continued on page 10*

Francis Schaeffer 'locked on' to the environment, giving us reason to think with the

Boldness of Stewards

A recollection by James Albritton, Administrative Director
Francis A. Schaeffer Institute, Covenant Theological
Seminary, St. Louis

In the late 1960s, Lynn White, Jr. wrote an article for *Science* magazine entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in which he blamed Western Christianity for the environmental woes of this world. It is in response to this article that the late Francis Schaeffer published *Pollution and the Death of Man* in 1970.

In his article, White states: "More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."

Here, White rightly presents us with our two options; either we look for a new religion, abandoning Christianity (which many have done), or we rethink Western Christianity and find a biblical ecological position. Francis Schaeffer rethought Christianity in relation to ecology (as he has done for many issues) and presented Christianity with a clear vision.

Schaeffer started with the fact that this world, and all that is within it, is a creation. Everything we observe throughout the universe was created by God, who exists outside of the space time continuum, and who is autonomous when nothing else can be. There is God, and there is His creation — this is fundamental to Christianity, and it forms the base upon which Schaeffer builds his ecological views. There are, though, two significant aspects to this foundation.

First, we as human beings are creatures, creatures just like the tree, the mountains, the bear, and even the snake. We are one with all of creation simply because we are part of creation — apart from God. A crucial second point, though, is human creation in the image of God, which highlights humanity as a unique aspect of God's creation. We are, in one sense, one with creation, and in another sense, unique within creation. What, then, does this mean for the Christian?

We are commanded by Christ to love our neighbor, our fellow man—whether Christian or not—as we love

ourselves. We are forbidden to kill one of our fellow humans. Why? Because every man, woman and child is one of God's creatures, special and due proper respect for that reason alone. Likewise, we as Christians have the highest and clearest reason for our ecological view—it is God's creation and is worthy of honor and respect simply because He made it. Yet, there is another aspect which is unique to humanity.

As there is a chasm between God and His creation, so there is a chasm between man and the rest of creation. As creatures made in the image of God, mankind is higher than the rest of creation and given dominion over creation. Dominion does not imply domination. Creation is not ours to do with as we would please; rather, we are God's stewards, given responsibility to care for creation and use it as we see need, not as we see fit. This responsibility, this position of dominion, was complicated by the Fall. With the Fall, dominion became a moral dilemma. Moral in the sense of right and wrong within the eyes of God, not moral like the modern ecological movement's pragmatic egoism that looks toward future generations.

In Francis Schaeffer's own words: "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 it has generally failed to do so, and we need to confess our failure."

Francis Schaeffer made one of the first Christian contributions to the ecological discussion; *Pollution and the Death of Man* is still essential reading for any Christian coming to grips with this issue. During the late 60s and early 70s, when many were asking questions and were not getting serious answers from Christianity, Schaeffer offered answers that kept some from seeking a new religion. Nevertheless, in modern evangelicalism one would be hard pressed to hear a biblical sermon on ecology, much less a church with a ecological statement. But

this shouldn't surprise us, especially when we read statistics that show the rates of abortions and divorce within evangelicalism are almost as high as those in the general culture. Even when we preach on a subject and have a clear statement regarding it, we don't always follow what we know to be right. Schaeffer's contribution in this area is important because it comes from Scripture, but truth unheeded lies dormant. ■

Further Reading:

Pollution and the Death of Man, by Francis A. Schaeffer
The Future Great Planet Earth, by Wim Rietkerk

"It is the biblical view of nature that gives nature a value in itself: not to be used merely as a weapon or argument in apologetics, but of value in itself because God made it."

Francis Schaeffer
Pollution and the Death of Man

Ideas That Drive the Environmental Movement

Donald Worster, *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 255 pp. \$25.00.

Reviewed by Paul Heidebrecht

To truly appreciate Donald Worster's recent collection of essays entitled *The Wealth of Nature*, one should also read his earlier works that have made him a leading historian of the American environment and of environmentalism itself. *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (1979) earned Worster the Bancroft Prize for its sobering analysis of America's worst ecological disaster, for which Worster places blame squarely on our economic culture, the "gospel of more," unrestrained capitalism. His *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (1985) is not pleasant reading either. It too reveals darker themes ignored by triumphal histories of the West's settlement. Focusing on the story of irrigation and water-control efforts, Worster arrives at the conclusion that the "flowering of American democratic values and institutions" in the Western states occurred at the expense of nature. Indeed, liberal social philosophy carried within itself the doctrine of total domination over nature. Land and rivers suffered along with subjugated native populations and cheap immigrant labor.

Worster, who now teaches at the University of Kansas, is really an intellectual historian. This is most evident in his *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (1977), where he asserts that the history of ecology is fundamentally moral. Humanity's view of its place in nature is the constant question, which we have rarely answered very well.

The sixteen essays of *The Wealth of Nature* represent Worster's reflections on that constant question over a period of thirty years. Most are previously published articles; some are speeches never printed before. They represent the range of Worster's research and passions as a scholar and an environmentalist. Major themes which he tackles include the new interdisciplinary field of environmental history, agricultural history (considered ecologically), water development, and contemporary ecology.

Worster traces his "conversion" to environmental history to his reading Joseph Wood Krutch's *The Twelve Seasons* while a graduate student and realizing there

was "no nature" in most American historiography. The land and other species were consistently ignored. History was told without its physical context. Worster determined to overcome this distortion. His "intellectual turning to the land" inducted him into a small band of historians seeking to develop an ecological perspective on history (and a cultural history of nature). The mission of this "new history" is to "deal with the role and place of nature in human life" (p. 48). It operates at the intersection of the natural and cultural spheres.

According to Worster, there are three levels of inquiry in environmental history: first, how nature was organized and functioned in the past; second, how technology has structured human ecological relations; and third, the perceptions and ideologies that have structured our dialogue about nature. The essays display Worster's adeptness at all three levels, though he is at his best on the third.

Though Worster disavows any confidence in Christian doctrines, religious issues pervade his essays. He identifies himself as an "antimaterialistic" materialist who yearns for "a less reductive, less ecologically and spiritually nihilistic, less grasping kind of materialism" (p.x.). The solution to the environmental crisis, he believes, lies in a post-materialistic culture. In what comes close to a creedal statement, he writes, "My own preference is for an environmentalism that talks about ethics and aesthetics rather than about resources and economics, that places priority on the survival of the living world of plants and animals regardless of their productive value, that cherishes what nature's priceless beauty can add to our deeper-than-economic well-being" (p. 144). Though he admits historians are indifferent prophets, he does state it is time to "learn humility in the presence of an achievement that overshadows all our technology, all our wealth, all our ingenuity, and all our human aspirations" (p. 155).

For Worster, religion was a check against economic and scientific materialism and its reductive, mechanistic view of the world. But in his view, it is part of a past that cannot be restored. To become like Francis of Assisi, embracing plants and animals as equals, is simply ethnocentric and anachronistic. What is left? Transcend our fundamentally materialistic worldview. Get on with creating a post-materialist one in which science and economics play a more modest, humble role.

Perhaps most intriguing is a phrase Worster uses in passing to describe the new history—the "old parson-naturalist synthesis"—in which there was no split between the study of history and of nature. "Antiquities and natural curiosities lay jumbled together in the same

—Ideas That Drive, continued on page 11

Eroding Environment, *continued from page 2*

abundant resources in Illinois, just look at the air and the ozone — we have a problem. Environmental regulation gets right into people's lives, controlling how we live. There's an ozone problem, and who's going to reduce the level of emissions in order to solve the problem? We're not very forward thinking. We react to problems. In government, we must think ahead and project.

Mr. Staub: In the face of all this, what it does mean to be committed to life?

Ms. Cunningham: Frequently, the first solution trotted out is that there are too many people. One hundred years ago, we were told there were too many people, the world just couldn't sustain life, and the answer was fewer people. The people behind that solution were not entirely egalitarian — they meant there were too many of the wrong kind of people. So we saw the eugenics movement and more than thirty years of forced sterilization in this country. Are there too many people today in the Third World. Leaders there would turn around and say, 'No, there are too many Americans who are using too many valuable resources.' I see the conflict between those who understand that an individual is created in the image of God and those who bury the individual in a group. Some policies proposed at the Cairo conference were opposed by a majority of countries because they were not just 'population control' but coercive policies against moral and religious beliefs. Not just Catholic countries, but Muslim and Buddhist countries as well, oppose abortion.

Mr. Staub: Some people view environmental alarm as just another Trojan horse being used to force agendas concerning population control and the need for regulation. Is there any real reason to regulate human behavioral change?

Dr. Bratton: We have to be careful about the difference between global and regional concerns, but at least in certain regions, growing populations do correlate with problems of land tenure — that is, having enough agricultural land for everyone in that region. Child mortality is related to how much agricultural land families have; it's related to family size, at least among the poor. In terms of world hunger, we're probably not making adequate progress. We've still got millions of people right now who don't have the resources they need. Maybe reducing population is not the way to solve that, but somewhere things are not matching for a lot of people out there.

Mr. Aadland: This is very complex. The main reason for food shortage in some African countries is political and economic structures. But in certain countries in Africa, not the whole continent, the birth rate is growing faster

than the rate of food production. If we compare the access to infrastructure with primary needs in Africa, it is really an ethical question for us., if we are to lift the consumption in Africa to the level of the North. We all have to start on the microlevel with ourselves as individuals and try to extend it to the political arena.

Ms. Drake: There is a faulty assumption that we can manipulate our resource base to such a degree that we can create something from nothing. There's a biblical principle about the Sabbath rest for the land; there's a reason for that. When you pressure the land too far, it can't come back. We continue to press to get as much as we can out of land, water, everything, because why? We have given the rest of the world the expectation that they should get to our standard of living, and they are doing everything they can to reach it, and the land is responding with 'please stop.'

Dr. Uhlenberg: One of the most effective ways to bring down fertility is to improve educational levels for women and health conditions for women and children. We use the word "crisis" pretty easily now, and "alarm" — it gets everyone's attention. There are two reasons to be cautious in talking about crises. First, a "crisis" is a justification for some kind of coercive government action. If there is an "alarming" problem, then we have to sacrifice some people's rights and freedoms in order to deal with that problem. Second, we should not require a crisis in order to respond in a Christian way. I don't see how we could read the Bible or understand the life of Jesus and not have compassion about the health, including maternal health, of poor people throughout the world. That ought to exist whether or not we see a serious population crisis.

Dr. Bratton: We have major environmental problems related to the way we're expanding agriculture and the way we're doing economic development. No doubt there is species loss involved. In this country, we could support our present population with better environmental management policies, and not all from government. Individual citizens can help improve things, and businesses can too.

Ms. Drake: We have lost thirty percent of our coral reefs just in the last twenty years, and the reasons are directly related to land-based sources of marine pollution. With reduced bio-diversity, we lose potential for biological pharmaceuticals and medicines that we don't even know exist yet. This loss is caused by waste products produced by human beings. Science and technology afford some solutions, but we often postpone the inevitable because our society does not want to deal with the issue of limits. That's taboo.

Mr. Staub: What strategies are available to Christians for dealing with population growth?

Dr. Bratton: Women's health and women's education. Christian medical missions and other groups must play a role in this. The Christian community must be in dialogue about family issues of all types. When Christians are silent on this, government steps in. And if we're going to object to governments stepping in, it's not right to just sit on the sidelines.

Ms. Cunningham: When women are educated, they tend to get married later, have fewer children, and delay child-bearing. It's not that you educate just for those reasons, but because God views women as worthy of being educated and enjoying good health.

Ms. Manning: We all need to be personally responsible. We shouldn't forget that everyday we impact the environment. Every one of us, every day.

Mr. Stafford: We would all do well to read the first chapter of Genesis and think about what it says. The two things that stand out to me are the glory of the creation and its diversity, which is treated as a thing of delight to God and is meant to be delightful to us as well. The distinctive human project is to fill the earth, to multiply, to tend and care for the earth, and to master the earth. These are all put together in a package that implies a blessing. Blessings can become curses. All God's blessings have been curses at times, but they're not meant to be. Christians need to witness to both these realities: the loveliness and wonder of creation, and the blessing of the human presence on this planet.

Ms. Drake: What does it mean to love my neighbor, to do good to my neighbor? Is it my right to dump toxic waste in water that's going to flow into my neighbor's yard? Some people would say, 'Yes, it is my right, my God-given right, because it's my property.'

Mr. Staub: Summarize your utmost concerns. Advise students present tonight.

Ms. Manning: Think about your own personal responsibility, daily and throughout the rest of your lives.

Mr. Stafford: Evangelicals have been skittish about birth control, particularly as it relates to medical missions. It's pretty clear that in America we evangelicals do use birth control and consider it good. We should be willing to do the same for people we're helping overseas — drop that skittishness and make family planning part of medical missions.

Dr. Bratton: This may sound rather ironic, but I would like us to recognize how many Christians there are

worldwide. We're one of the largest organizations in the world that actually cares about the creation and is trying to understand it as the handiwork of God. We're one of the largest organizations in the world that cares about the welfare of women and children. We're one of the largest organizations in the world that cares about what's happening to the poor. And when we don't show leadership in environmental areas, we miss a chance to establish communication channels between the North and South, between citizens and governments. We're really missing a marvelous chance for ministry.

Ms. Cunningham: Some view people as our most expendable resource because there are so many. Yet each one is a unique individual never to be repeated. I believe that the solution can come through people who understand God's wisdom and God's knowledge through His Word and through His Holy Spirit. Frankly, in our own wisdom, we're not going to solve this. It's not a government solution or

even an individual solution, but it's God's solution through us.

Mr. Aadland: We have a mandate to work and try to do the best we can, and there is final hope in the promises of God.

Ms. Drake: There's a world out there which knows very little love, very little gentleness. In my own life, the creation has renewed a sense of the gentleness of the Lord in me. I asked a Haitian woman, "What good is a tree?" Her response was, "That means life. That means food. That means whether my children can live or whether they die because that tree allows there to be rain on the earth. That tree, when cut down, allows there to be energy for me to cook my food, to feed my family. That tree means that I can house myself." It's amazing just what one tree can mean to one person and her family. Look at your life integratively, not in segments, as if this is an environment question and that is a population question. We live in creation; everything is created.

Dr. Uhlenberg: Some of the literature coming from environmentalists view human beings as the great problem, as the enemy of the environment. Those ideas run exactly contrary to what we would learn from the Kingdom of God. Within the Kingdom of God, there are many mysteries, and ultimately we aren't going to solve the problems. We have a responsibility to live as Christians and to have our lives shaped by the faith, with final solutions, as Mr. Aadland put it, in God's good hands. ■

***"From Eden onward,
human beings and the
rest of creation have
been wrapped in one
bundle of life. What
touches one reaches the
other, whether in bane
or blessing."***

David Allan Hubbard

A State of Denial

Where there is great reluctance to accept this view of impending cultural doom, this is our situation.

1. Resilient and Persistent Optimism

One reason we resist the truth of our collapsing culture is the indomitable optimism of the can-do American spirit which too easily replaces a genuine biblical hope with a kind of temporal “light at the end of the tunnel” popular spirituality. It is the “I believe for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows” mentality. No matter what the odds, we shall prevail.

Certainly such optimism, however misplaced or illusory, is socially preferable — at least at parties and churches — to the dour gloominess of doomsdayers. How can churches reach those DINK’s and Yuppies without an upbeat, can-do, self-confident spirit? The tragedy is that this optimism seems rather naked — not much more than a self-help technique for mental health — a sort of whistling while passing the cemetery.

In a recent address to a university commencement, Congressman Henry Hyde — a remarkable person of great integrity and moral commitment — reflected this easy optimism in his suggestion that just as the Berlin wall dramatically fell when the world wondered how it could ever happen, so we are only an election away from changing the decay which has beset our public life. But is that really true? Can recovery be as simple as a change in the lead characters? Is American paganism that thin?

2. Distorted Biblical Confidence — “His Word Will Not Return Void”

Another version of piety tends to discount the impending tragedy — the piety confident in the effectiveness of our Gospel witness. How often have we heard someone insist that all will be well because “His word will not return void” or some other sort of Gospel which sounds very much like we can control history. II Chronicles 7:14 is used as a guarantee that we can control our national destiny. The kernel of truth is that this is well-supported by Scripture within its context, but in its extreme form it smacks of the same defects as the “Gospel of Success” — namely it lacks biblical warrant and historical evidence.

3. Americanism

Another reason perhaps why we find this collapse so difficult to accept is our deeply ingrained sense of the special destiny and covenant character of America with God’s work. Drummed into us from childhood images of pilgrims and Puritans, we have been persuaded of the special spiritual character of America — sometimes even marshaling the language of a New Israel: a chosen people. Add to the Puritan founding,

the great mission thrust of America throughout the world, the moral crusade of WWII, and add America as the protector of Israel — and then a dash of “In God We Trust” and “One Nation Under God” and surely we are God’s people, and He will protect us. Like Israel in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah — surely we, His chosen people, possessors of the temple and Word, will not be overrun by pagan Babylon.

The problem with this vision of America is not only that it is a too simple view of history, but also that it seems to embody a rather unbiblical notion that America is essentially good.

And there is just enough truth in this picture to distort our understanding. There have been times in American history of a moral greatness; and her founders were commonly theists with some basic agreed moral principles; and proper leadership can shape a nation’s destiny. But I suspect we are profoundly naive in thinking our spiritual decay is merely like some skin disease, a superficial wart.

Even those aspects of America we love to celebrate in holidays and incorporate into our church services — such as the commitment to freedom — are badly tainted today. The celebration of freedom in the west compared to the repression in the east, is surely tempered by the loss in the west of any sense of the limits of freedom — and the warning seems ignored that “without discipline, freedom doesn’t know what to do with itself.” Freedom in America has meant freedom for the pornographer, the adulterer, the breacher of marriage covenants, and of raw individualism.

4. The Current Comfort and Vitality of our Life

One reason we resist pessimism may be that for many of us, life seems pretty comfortable. We are “at ease in Zion.” Our barns are full, and many of us are building bigger ones. In terms of human comfort, things simply have never been better. We have an abundance of food, entertainment, housing, gadgets. We travel, eat out, get new clothes constantly. In such a world, isn’t it a bit much — conceptually and psychologically — to get all lathered up about some collapsing consensus, or the need to “come out from among them”?

From a biblical perspective, such was often the spirit in Jerusalem. There were prosperous times when words of prophets fell on deaf ears. The prophets could complain of spiritual decay, and of injustice, judicial corruption, commercial dishonesty, and exploitation of the poor. But the dance was too vigorous for anyone to pay much attention.

Our own culture runs precisely such a risk, we who have a stake in it and have done well are especially vulnerable. ■

In the next issue, Professor Buzzard’s concluding thoughts: what’s to be done now.

Ideas That Drive, *continued from page 7*

country cupboard" (p. 31). The image harkens back to his *Nature's Economy* where he praises Gilbert White, the eighteenth-century vicar of Selborne in England, who explored the natural order of his little parish, and wrote its natural history, the first of that literary genre. Ecology, says Worster, has its roots in Selborne. The parson's love of the Creator and his handiwork could also be the foundation of the post-materialist culture which Worster desires. (It is worth noting the fine essay on John Muir's left-wing Protestant heritage and its profound influence on American environmentalism; his sympathetic discussion of the anti-capitalist ethos of nineteenth-century Mormon Utah and its Church-sponsored irrigation system is equally engaging.)

Worster also suggests a marriage between agriculture and the science of ecology, one that could replace the market mentality which "cultivates the ability to see opportunities for personal profit but not a sense of harmonious interdependencies" (p. 70). His studies of such agencies as the Soil Conservation Service illustrate how Americans have lost an "intimacy with the soils" (p. 81). Yet there is hope, partly because ecologically-minded farmers offer biologically informed perceptions of the soil ecosystem.

Stable rural communities are essential; here Worster echoes the popular theme of Wendell Berry. For this to happen, however, American farmers must accept social and ecological restraints needed to have such communities. These restraints will be painful for they curb the individualism and the pursuit of unlimited wealth, the pillars of the materialism Worster rejects. He wants to believe old habits can be broken.

Worster deserves our attention. Environmental history, capably and powerfully told as he has done in this collection, can serve as a guard against simple-minded Green activism while at the same time, a stiff challenge to myopic and complacent academics and political leaders. It moves the debate into the cultural arena where we all live and asks of us to look at how we think and what we value. It widens our view of what America has been and who else has been part of the story besides human beings. Environmental history should not be perceived as a field for specialists alone. Worster's essays will remove that suspicion. It is for anyone who cares about the relationship of human communities to their ecosystems. Presumably, there are numerous Christians in those ranks. ■

Paul Heidebrecht, Ph.D., is adjunct instructor in Christian education at Wheaton College.

For your environmental ethics library

Island Press continues to put forth thoughtful titles on the environment. Among their recent offerings: Daniel Sperling's *Future Drive: Electronic Vehicles and Sustainable Transportation* and Henry Lee's *Shaping National Responses to Climate Change: A Post-Rio Guide*. Get the Island Press catalog by calling 800-828-1302.

St. Lucie Press has just released *Development, Environment, and Global Dysfunction: Toward Sustainable Recovery* by Yosef Gotlieb, director, Israel Center for International Environmental Studies. And another very new title from St. Lucie, *Economic Theory for Environmentalists* by John Gowdy and Sabine O'Hara of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Call the press at (407) 274-9906.

APPE to meet in St. Louis

The fifth annual meeting of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics will convene February 29-March 2, 1996, in St. Louis, Missouri. Keynote speaker is Amy Gutmann, dean of faculty and Laurance S. Rockefeller Professor of Politics, Princeton University. Program highlights will include an Ethics Center Colloquium for ethics center directors, and a mini-conference on "Public Service Ethics and the Public Trust." Contact the APPE at 410 North Park Ave, Bloomington IN 47405; (812) 855-6450; appe@indiana.edu

An encouraging word

From Lauren Bartlett at the Center for Applied Ethics at Duke University: "Thank you for the Winter/95 issue of *Discernment* on the environment. It's refreshing to read strong Christian standpoints on environmental issues..." Okay, fine, we'll keep publishing.

BACK ISSUES DISCERNMENT

Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1992 ■ ***On Being Truthful***

Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1992 ■ ***AIDS***

Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1992
Legalized Physician-Assisted Suicide

Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1993
Tough Choices in Health Care

Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter 1994 ■ ***Moral Pluralism***
Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring/Fall 1994
Activism, Protest, and Dissent

Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1995
Ethics and the Environment

Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1995
Greed and Generosity

MONOGRAPH BOOKLETS

- **On Being Truthful** by Lewis B. Smedes, Ph.D. (1991)
- **Is There a Right To Health Care?** by David B. Fletcher, Ph.D. (1991)
- **The Bible, Ethics, and Health Care: Theological Foundations for a Christian Perspective on Health Care** by John F. Kilner, Ph.D. (1991)
- **The Sin of Greed and the Spirit of Christian Generosity** by Robert C. Roberts, Ph.D. (1994)
- **Understanding and Responding to Moral Pluralism** by Alister McGrath, Ph.D. (1993)
- **Distinctive Responsibilities for the Environment: A Christian Perspective** by Susan Power Bratton, Ph.D. (1995)
- **Valuing Families and Family Values, A Christian Perspective** by Jean Elshtain, Ph.D. (1996)

The above booklets are available for \$3.00 (postage included)
by writing to the Ethics Center (enclose payment).

New, completely revised and expanded booklet, **Understanding Homosexuality** (1995) by G. Bilezikian, Ph.D., Stanton Jones, Ph.D., Dallas Willard, Ph.D., Judy-Rae Karlsen is now available.
\$4.00 each (postage included).



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