

- **INTRODUCTION** – Several years ago, a brave woman I know, who is deeply committed to animal rescue, was driving through rural Kentucky and spotted a man holding a dog down with his foot, pointing a gun at the dog. She slammed on her brakes, hollered “stop” and shouted a few other choice words at the guy, and jumped out of her car. The guy stood there open-mouthed as she moved his gun-hand in a safe direction. “What are you doing,” she asked. “I can’t afford to feed him so I’m going to shoot him,” was his reply. “You are not going to shoot him, you -----; I know people who will feed him, so I’m taking him with me.” She drove off, dog in her car, with the man standing open-mouthed by the road, still holding his gun. Out of love for creatures of God, my friend sought justice for that dog! This guy thought he had ownership, dominion over that poor dog; the thought of the dog’s companionship never entered his mind. Superficially the word “dominion” appears to give humans license to degrade and subdue the earth and everything in it. But the early Jewish Rabbis do not read Genesis this way. One rabbi wrote: “Man is entitled to pre-eminence (dominion) only as long as man cultivates God-like qualities; when he voluntarily abandons [those God-like qualities] he is even lower than the brute creation.” In other words, as long as we take loving, responsible God-like care for creation, rather than dominating, abusive ownership, we are OK with God.
- **DOMINATE, DOMINION** –Genesis 1:27 says, “*God blessed [Adam and Eve], and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”* The Message reads, “*Let them*

*(Adam and Eve) be responsible for all living creatures*". One Old Testament scholar, argues that the Hebrew word translated as "dominion" (רדה ) must be understood differently than dominion as we think about it today. It must be understood "in terms of care-giving and nurturing, not exploitation." Because we humans are made in the "image of God," in fact each with a piece of God in us, humans should relate to nonhumans as God relates to human beings, that is with love, compassion, and care. When God saw all that God had made, it was very good (Gen. 1:31). God's declaration of "very good" says that when God gave dominion, humans took on the responsibility to be very good. God took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.<sup>1</sup> Keep the Garden in order, guard it, protect it, NOT destroy it. *"Could one reason for human existence be simply 'to care for the Garden'? Were we created not to win salvation in another world, but to enjoy this [world] and help it to flourish? Could the goal of creation be the fulfillment of ALL God's creatures and not just the redemption of a few human creatures?"*<sup>2</sup> Blessed are those who care for God's creation.

- **CREATION AND EVOLUTION** – Sadly, some Christians believe that creation and evolution are in absolute conflict. I disagree! Is it not even more to God's greater glory that God could create a creation in which one creature or plant could eventually give rise to new, exciting, and different creatures and plants? Charles Darwin thought so! Darwin was born February 12, 1809, graduated from Cambridge University in 1831 and immediately set out on a five year journey

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ge 2:15). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

<sup>2</sup> Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 2008) p.66.

around the world on the HMS Beagle. On this journey, Darwin observed the bountiful diversity of animal and plant life that filled the world, and those observations formed the basis for many of his conclusions in *The Origin of Species* he first published in 1859. In *Origin of Species*, he moves easily from talking about pigeons to snapdragons to horses to parsley to beetles, connecting his arguments for the diversity of earthly life through his knowledge of the diverse varieties of life. Evolution as Darwin presents in *The Origin of Species* “requires variation and Darwin presents more than sufficient evidence that organisms produce variations with great frequency.”<sup>3</sup> Darwin does not accept the idea put forth by some creationists that every single variation of every single species is an individual act of creation. He writes that this view “makes the works of God a mere mockery and deception.”<sup>4</sup> Darwin was raised in Christianity and he held Christian thought dear. At one point, Darwin brilliantly wove theology and science together when he wrote: “*As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides, many feebler branches, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful [results].*” That sounds like resurrection; it sounds like Jesus’ declaration from the throne in Revelation: “See, I am making all things new!” Blessed are those who embrace Creation’s newness!

➤ CLIMATE, CREATION, AND EVOLUTION – If we believe, and I do believe that human beings have responsibility for God’s gift of creation, in fact we are

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, introduction by (Barnes & Noble, New York, 2004) p.xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

commanded by God to care for the created, evolving Garden we have been given. So, we must be aware of harmful things we put into the air, the water, and the ground. “In order to care for this garden, we need to know about it; in order to help ALL creatures who constitute this body flourish, we need to understand how we humans fit into this body.”<sup>5</sup> Science tells us that the carbon dioxide we spew into the atmosphere from burning oil and coal to power our cars, our air conditioners, our heating systems, and our televisions cause heat to be trapped in the earth’s atmosphere and the earth gets warmer. And what happens as the earth grows warmer? Some rich farming areas turn into deserts and the people who live there can no longer grow food needed to survive; they cannot grow enough to provide income needed to support their families. In the North Pole areas, ice melts and polar bears no longer have solid areas from which to hunt seals for food. Some polar bears are drowning. Fish that used to live in the middle part of Earth can no longer stand warmer temperatures – some are dying, and some are moving further north and there are fewer fish to catch. Polar ice is melting, and sea levels are rising, meaning people, animals, and plants on coastlines are displaced. People, polar bears, fish, flooded coastlines – everything is related! We are responsible for our care of creation and we are not fulfilling our responsibility! Consider that Earth is part of the body of God, as is every one of us, and every polar bear, every fish, every plant is part of the body of God. Are we taking care of our part of God’s body? Are we taking care of our God who cares for us? Are we aware of the relationship that we humans have to every other creature, every plant, and all the oceans? If we are not aware of those

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<sup>5</sup> Sallie McFague, p. 74.

relationships, are we really aware of our relationship to God? Are we aware of our need to bring justice to every created thing – human, animal, and ocean? Blessed are those who seek justice!

- **SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO?** – If global warming is serious AND I believe it is. What should we do? One thing we need to recognize is how we are related, not just person to person, but person to polar bears, person to fish, person to oak trees, person to bacteria. *“This means we are like and unlike [all] these others in mysterious and interesting ways.”*<sup>6</sup> Humans are different from animals and plants, yet there is a genetic continection that we don’t think about or completely understand. We are NOT rugged individuals, we are dependent on each other, much more than we think. *“What climate change is telling us loud and clear is that the days of radical individualism and its consumer culture are over; it is time to return to the roots of religion and the roots of life: we are, all of us, in this together.”*<sup>7</sup> The key here is love and with love comes justice. We look at 1 Corinthians 13 and say, “love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,” we are not just talking about our relationship with other people. We are talking about our relationship with everything, everything in God’s creation. John Woolman wrote: “one can’t love God without loving all that God has created.”<sup>8</sup> If we don’t love our atmosphere, we don’t worry about discharging too much carbon dioxide into it. If we don’t love our oceans, we don’t care about them warming up. If we don’t love polar bears, we don’t care about them starving and drowning. (And if you’ve ever visited the Columbus Zoo and

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<sup>6</sup> McFague, p. 148.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 150.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 146.

seen the polar bears, how could you not but love them?) Love is not a sentimental religious teaching; rather love is an objective statement about our world and where we fit into it. What should we do? We should love everything that God has created! We should love like my friend loved that dog in rural Kentucky, loved him so much that she dared put herself in danger. Blessed are those who love!

➤ **CONCLUSION** – God said, “It is good!” when God created the universe and everything in it. It is good and the evolution that is very much part of God’s creation is good. *“God is [a] (liminal) presence in all things. The divine presence announces itself in a breeze rustling through leaves, in the sound of a bird’s call, in the face of a starving child (or a happy child), in a clear-cut forest. God is in all things because all things are in God – in all shapes and shades, all conditions and crises, all joys and sorrows. God is in birth and death, and everything in between. God is ubiquitous, [everywhere]: God is wherever I am, wherever each and every [tiny bit] of creation is.”*<sup>9</sup> Theological truths and scientific truths stand equally alongside each other. God’s generous love gives creation and evolution from creation the diverse generosity of life? We need to look at love from both sides: the love of God that gives us Jesus Christ and the love of God that gives us creation’s incredible diversity. But there is yet another side to God’s love and that is to share the love of God with our neighbor, whether person, polar bear, or oak tree. The Squirrel Manifesto that I read to the children expresses how we are to love: “Care for the world you live in and act; save a little, spend a little; and always give back!” Blessed are those who care for God’s created world! AMEN.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 163.

➤ *Let us pray.* Holy Creating Always Evolving, yet Ever Constant God, we are so thankful for your love that passes all understanding, love that has given us everything we see and everything we don't see. Guide us as we help you care for the "good" you created. Amen.

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