

REPRESENTING GOD TO CREATION: THE *IMAGO DEI* IN ACTION

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An Unnatural Mess

The recent presidential campaign featured environmental concerns as a prime issue in the debates. I will not endeavor to examine or justify any of the candidates' positions on the matter; I only make the observation. Our departing President has been busy in his efforts to seal off huge chunks of American soil from productive use, and politicians all over the country are made and broken depending upon their stance on environmental policies. People are going to jail and paying huge fines when the government steps in and declares the drainage ditch in their yard a wetlands. A frequent assertion on television programs from "National Geographic Explorer" to "The Magic Schoolbus" is that if man would just quit messing around with the environment, everything would be all right.

Inconsistently, the same people who moan about man's introduction of non-native species encourage policies that demonstrably have the same destructive tendencies. In Nevada, for instance, environmentalists bewail the dramatic decline in sage grouse and deer populations, blaming hunters and farmers for the decline. But the reality is that eco-laws preventing the humane control of mountain lion and coyote populations (natural predators of deer) have led to exploding populations of these predators, with rapidly shrinking deer numbers as the "natural" result. Laws protecting the raven (these scavengers love grouse eggs) have had similar results among sage grouse. Statistics of animals taken by hunters and farmers, on the other hand, have not significantly changed in years. This sort of thing is rampant in our country and our world. The lunacy seems not to stop, and it comes from the highest levels of government and society.

The United Nations has drawn up a program called Agenda 21, with the stated goal of achieving "sustainable development" of human population and use of the earth's resources. On March 21-23, 1996, a group of more than 100 free market conservationists — scholars, activists, and religious leaders — went to Kansas City to attend a conference exploring the subject "Global Environmentalism: Agenda 21's Impact on America." William Norman Grigg examines the UN's agenda in his excellent article "Battle for Sustainable Freedom," in *The New American*, Vol. 12, No. 09, April 29, 1996. Mr. Grigg observes:

As Dr. Michael Coffman [of Environmental Perspectives, Inc.] warned, the premise of sustainable development is that "human society, particularly industrial society, is a cancer on the planet and must be eradicated." Panelists at the conference documented that the realization of the UN's designs would require the abolition of national sovereignty, central planning of the world economy, systematic disruption of the traditional family, a radical reduction in the human population, and the adoption of a pre-industrial standard of living for those allowed to inhabit the earth.

Grigg quotes John Davis, editor of the Wildlands Project's journal *Wild Earth*, as saying,

“Everything civilized must go....” Even though President Clinton’s signing of the Biodiversity Treaty, which would have implemented the forced takeover of roughly half the land area of the United States, was not ratified by the Senate, the madness goes on in the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and the efforts of our own Department of Energy. Environmentalism will be the excuse to return the world to peasantry (the UN’s words, not mine) under the control of a few, and it’s happening now. For more on this, see Jennifer Gritt’s article “Eco-socialist Shell Game,” *The New American*, Vol. 17, No. 3, January 29, 2000 (http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/2001/01-29-2001/vo17no03_ecosocialist.htm).

What has brought about the foolishness and perversity of the environmental agenda? Grigg has this to say in “Battle for Sustainable Freedom”:

In her address to the [Kansas City] conference, Representative Helen Chenoweth pointed out that the concept of “sustainable development” is inspired by a religious worldview – “a cloudy mixture of earth worship, pagan mysticism, and folklore.” That worldview was endorsed by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt during a November 21st address to the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, in which he condemned traditional Christianity and exalted pagan nature worship as the basis for a new social “covenant.” Chenoweth noted that Babbitt “really believes nature and the natural landscape are literally holy and that anything we do on the landscape is sacrilegious — that we’re disturbing his temple.”

Babbitt is not unique in his devotion to eco-paganism. Vice President Al Gore’s soporific opus *Earth in the Balance* dismisses Christianity and other monotheistic religions as inadequate for the needs of contemporary society and urges the enshrinement of a “pan-religious perspective” as the basis of a world spiritual tradition. Furthermore, the UN Environmental Programme’s Global Biodiversity Assessment (GBA), a 1,140-page document which provides the theoretical and conceptual basis for the world body’s environmental agenda, maintains that sustainable development will require the abolition of biblical civilization and the adoption of the values of pre-Christian pagan societies.

Biblical Cleanup

Obviously, eco-paganism runs directly counter to biblical Christianity. Adam was given specific duties to fulfill as he demonstrated his faith in his Creator. First, he was responsible to “fill the earth” with offspring, as recorded in Genesis 1:28 (compare 9:1-7). “Fill” means to *fill up* or *satisfy* (compare 2:5) the earth. God’s command stands in stark contrast to the world’s current depopulation trends of birth control, abortion, euthanasia, genocide, and homosexuality. Instead of being “satisfied,” the earth groans under man’s rebellion. The Apostle Paul declares in Romans 8:19-22:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation

itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

The problems that face our environment, in other words, are not a result of man's dominion: they are a result of man's *sinful* and *selfish* dominion. Though the ultimate redemption of the created order will not occur until our God comes again in power, creation may experience some relief now when men exercise their duty as God ordained. And chief among those duties is to fill the earth with people who will tend it and keep it. Frankly, overpopulation is nothing but an urban myth: even in China, the crowded conditions exist only in the cities. Hunger and famine are typically the result of totalitarianism and not natural causes. The technology to grow food whatever the weather is readily available to any country, if only its leaders will use it. But using food (or the lack of it) to control populations is an ancient practice of wicked men. When I was in Ukraine recently, I learned that during World War II the Nazis scraped the topsoil from Ukrainian soil by the trainloads to take back to Germany. The outrage of stealing the very land itself to impoverish a nation's inhabitants is no greater than petty tyrants the world over keeping supplies and means of production out of reach of their citizens. This is nothing more than sin.

Second, Adam and his progeny were to rule the earth as God's image. Genesis 1:26-28 reads:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our own image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

The word "image" means a *representative* or *likeness* (compare 9:6), and has nothing to do with physical appearance. Paul uses the term *ambassador* in 1 Corinthians 5 to describe the relationship between God and his minister, and the analogy is appropriate in Eden as well. Adam was to fulfill his ambassadorship in two ways: "subdue" and "till" (or, "cultivate") the earth: "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:15, compare verse 5).

The word "subdue" (1:28; 2:19, 20) literally means to *tread upon*, but its usual connotation is to *impose rule upon*. This means that Man, as God's representative, is to know his Master's mind concerning what the flora and fauna should be producing, and take steps to ensure that the Master's will is carried out, especially by mankind. Man is to act as the divinely appointed authority in the earth, not look to nature itself to dictate a course of action. Man is to use the unorganized raw materials that God provided to create order and beauty as God's image. I am not suggesting that creation is not beautiful in its natural state, for it certainly is. Neither am I suggesting that mankind mow down whole forests to build strip malls or ski resorts. I am not in favor of hunting for hunting's sake (just so one can hang the heads of animals on the wall).

I believe that God would have us creatively and responsibly use the resources available to not only sustain but enhance life on earth, and make it possible for all to enjoy the wonders of creation that God has given us to point to himself (Psalm 19:1-6).

Adam was also commanded to till or cultivate the earth. This command provides the boundaries for man's tending activities. "Cultivate" comes from the Hebrew for *serve*, which puts a check upon man's methods of subjugation. Authority does not equal license; mankind is to view himself as the servant of God and his creation, nurturing it to bring about the Master's will. The Hebrew terms for *tend* and *keep* found in Genesis 2:15 ("Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it"), are used together in the Scriptures more than forty times. They seem to make up two parts of a whole idea. Using different English words, a priestly application is seen in Numbers 3:7-8, "And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle." The same words are used of the action of God on behalf of His children in Psalm 86:2, "Preserve my life; for I *am* holy: you are my God, save your servant who trusts in you!" Other passages chastise God's servants for not keeping the law. Whether it is the Garden of Eden, the law of God, or the priestly ministry, the idea of the two words together seems to be diligent, humble service through guarding and nurturing. Here is the foundation for biblical environmentalism!

I hope that you find this issue to be thought provoking, and that you will act upon what you learn here. Our goal in this issue is not to answer every question that could be asked, or rebut every false idea out there. (After all, environmentalists can't even agree among themselves about what the problem is or what should be done: everyone does that which is right in his own eyes.) We do hope to provide somewhat of a foundation for understanding; a proper approach to begin the debate and sharpen our thinking on what God has to say about how man is to take care of his earth. Let us know what you think.