

Creation Care and Frontier Missiology

by Robert Sluka

While walking a beautiful, palm-lined beach in a remote part of the Maldivian Islands, my friend Mohammed informed me that we were going to collect some coral to use as building material for a house. That presented me with an uncomfortable predicament. I knew that this kind of coral mining was impacting coral reefs in the Maldives, since my visa to work in the Maldives focused on researching these coral reefs and associated fish species.¹ In my halting Dhivehi (language learning resources at the time being more readily available in Klingon than for this ancient language) I asked him, “Isn’t that illegal?” Mohammed’s reply was to peer around and ask, “Who would see?” In a desire to open up evangelistic opportunities, I replied, “God is watching.” Mohammed just gave a little smile, and we turned around and walked back towards the village.

I could feel the pleasure of God in my small attempt at sharing my faith among a highly restricted Muslim people. As one of the least reached countries in the world, and still without any movement to Christ in their history, the Maldives remains high on most lists of places to send teams. What I gave no thought to at the time, but which now occupies much of my thinking and ministry, is an additional question: Was God as pleased with my small attempt at pointing Mohammed to the need to care for coral reefs? Or to frame this in other ways: Was God as interested in my presence and work in the Maldives as a marine biologist as he was in my presence as a Christian witness there to share my faith? Was my marine research and advocacy work also an aspect of bringing about God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven? Is conservation and care of creation an expression of the “Good News”?

The goal of this article is primarily to help those with a calling to unreached people groups understand how creation care can integrate with that calling. Mission sending agencies don’t find it easy to graft these together. An example is the recent email I received from a team seeking to bless an unreached

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Muslim people group by helping protect seagrass beds, which when healthy can provide abundant food. These habitats were not healthy and the team, which is also seeking to see a community of Jesus followers develop, was unsure whether their efforts were in accord with our current ecological understanding. They were looking for a greater capacity or expertise to help integrate this aspect of their kingdom work.

After offering a short introduction to creation care, I will examine just how creation care can facilitate the way we engage unreached people groups. I also want to challenge us to make sure we aren't hurting these same people groups by the way we live in relationship to the natural world. The intersection of creation care principles with frontier missiology will form the bulk of the article,² but I want to describe this intersection through the paradigm shift I experienced personally while living out my calling to unreached peoples. Ultimately, I want us to rethink how our current practice of reaching the unengaged is actually limiting God's work among the nations.

The laser-like focus of UPG mission agencies means that issues like creation care are dismissed as either a tangent or potentially leading to mission drift.

Creation Care

Creation care is a gospel issue under the lordship of Jesus Christ—so states the Cape Town Commitment arising from the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in 2010.³ Early in the history of the Lausanne Movement, at the same time Ralph Winter delivered his game-changing lecture on unreached peoples, there was significant division over the relationship of what I will term “loving your neighbour” and evangelistic proclamation.⁴ Though the tension and integration of proclamation being both in word and deed is not new, in recent decades we are learning to extend this discussion to include its implications for the wider creation. The 2010 Cape Town meeting extended our missiology further by including creation care as integral to the gospel and not simply fulfilling our stewardship mandate.⁵ Many think the seminal biblical text on creation care makes this abundantly clear: “*all* things are made by and for Jesus and *all* things are reconciled to him on the cross.” (Col. 1:15–20, emphasis mine)

Where is the vision for the future of unreached people groups laid out in the Bible? If pressed, I would have us consider Revelation 5:9 and the magnificent vision of all nations, tongues and tribes before God's throne. This verse was fundamental to my missiology, and it became the basis for the Vision 5:9 movement among Muslim peoples. It's a vision that moved me to get involved in the beginning of this movement, and subsequently to serve in their Fruitful Practices research

project. Yet, I had failed to notice that just a few verses later, that same vision is embellished in further detail:

Then I heard *every creature* in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13, emphasis mine)

This verse astounded me. It says, “every creature.” God used it to help me see what the true greatness of “the multitudes” actually means: not only every nation, tribe and tongue, but every species as well.

Often when we think of the theme of creation care, we utilise the metaphor of stewardship and find the biblical basis for it in the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 (1:26–29 and 2: 8, 15). Yet, many have warned that the language of “stewardship” can be misconstrued, that this motif of “stewardship” can fall into an anthropocentric worldview which opens us as humanity to hubristic illusions.⁶ Regardless of which

metaphor we use, from beginning to end, Scripture makes clear that all of creation matters to God.⁷ In Genesis 1, God declares (repeatedly) that creation is good. We are to value creation because God does—creation has theocentric value, given to it by God declaring it good. The mandate of rule that God gives to humanity in 1:28 is given in this context. And the nature of our rule? Made in God's image we are to be God's appointed rulers of God's beloved creation. While this rule (stewardship) involves using creation for human wellbeing, it is clear, too, that creation has value in and of itself, not merely for its usefulness to humanity.

Indeed, creation's purpose, as is ours, is to praise and glorify God. Paul reminds us that this praise of creation, its witness, leads people to an understanding about God that is sufficient for them to face judgement (Rom. 8).⁸ This praise of all creation culminates in the heavenly chorus of all creatures above the earth, below the earth, on the sea, and under the sea, praising God alongside those nations, tribes and tongues! As glorious a vision as it is to think of all UPGs before the throne, Revelation 5:13 offers us an even vaster, more glorious, and destabilising vision. It is not just our species, but all species standing in worship before the throne. One response that is commonly heard is a visceral one—that God's love and provision for all creation and the role of other species as fellow worshippers diminishes our special place as humanity.

This reaction betrays our inherent anthropocentrism. For it is not humanity, but rather the slain Lamb who is at the centre of this vision.

Mission Drift Versus Opportunity

The modern unreached people group movement often traces its beginning to Ralph Winter's Lausanne presentation in 1974.⁹ This led to the growing number of mission agencies taking up this mandate, most of whom still seek to help the church live out this missiological understanding of the Great Commission. These agencies were inspired with a simple, though difficult, vision. The laser-like focus of UPG mission agencies means that issues like creation care are often dismissed as either a tangent, bolt-on extras, or more likely labelled as potentially leading to mission drift.¹⁰ I will argue later that integrating creation care into our mission, far from causing mission drift, is actually a corrective to our current dualistic models.¹¹ We will examine below some of the implications for missiology and praxis, but for the moment let's see how creation care is an opportunity to achieve our goal of reaching the unreached.

Many, if not most, church planters come from a lifestyle of disconnection from land and sea. While we might go to parks or go camping for recreation, we obtain our daily bread from the local supermarket. However, among rural peoples, the land or the sea still provides food security in the form of small-scale farms or subsistence fishing. In the case of Maldivians, this island nation still depends upon the sea for much of its food resources. Tuna fishermen start out early each morning and collect bait fish—small reef-associated fish which are then used to attract tuna. The fishery is highly admired and promoted worldwide due to their method of using poles with barbless hooks which catch fish one by one, eliminating wasteful catching of “bycatch” (e.g., turtles, dolphins) in large nets. Fishermen return home to process the fish on the beach—which, interestingly, has in and of itself changed the nature of nearshore areas through increased nutrient input from the discarded parts of the fish.¹² The fish are eaten fresh, smoked, or dried. Some are canned and sent off to supermarkets across the world (like the can we discovered in a local village shop while living in rural England). If we are to love Maldivians, we must also love the sea. Their lives are so intertwined with their environment that to engage meaningfully in culturally appropriate ways necessitates addressing their relationship with the ocean. Additionally, their livelihoods depend on the productivity of the sea—to love our Maldivian neighbour, we must take care of (rule or steward) the fish in the sea.

The Jamaican Call to Action, developed as a follow-up conference to the Lausanne 2010 focus on creation care and

the gospel, calls on Christians to develop “environmental missions among unreached people groups.”¹³ Opportunities abound for loving our neighbour and showing the love of Christ through caring for the world—their world—so that it provides for the people we are called to serve. If we love the people we are trying to serve and they are severely impacted by a plethora of environmental issues (i.e., climate change, deforestation, overfishing, and pollution), we must act on these issues to serve them. Migration patterns due to climate change and environmental refugees are increasingly becoming a reality.¹⁴ Even in urban situations, there is abundant evidence that access to green space improves mental health.¹⁵ Without a connection to non-human creation, we suffer mentally. Recent evidence suggests the important role that water plays in this process. Being in, around and near water (lakes, rivers and particularly the ocean) results in better health, both physically and mentally.¹⁶ The call to action states:

We participate in Lausanne's historic call to world evangelization, and believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ and plant churches among the unreached and unengaged people groups in our generation.¹⁷

Creation Care at Home—its Impact on UPGs

In looking at the list of environmental impacts which are affecting unreached people groups, it becomes obvious that we could be spending significant efforts to send a team to a particular people group while at the same time hurting that same people group through our daily lifestyle in our remote home countries. Consider again the Maldives and the example of tuna. Each time you buy a can of tuna, you are on the end of a chain of blessing or a curse: a blessing to those on that Maldivian boat that leaves early before dawn to catch fish in a sustainable way—but which may cost you a bit more to purchase; or a cursing to those who are modern day slaves on a factory boat that uses huge nets to scoop up all the fish surrounding the tuna, killing endangered species and providing a pittance to fishermen among a people we've been sent to bless—but you do get your tuna cheap. These two different food chains offer an extreme contrast, and both the solution and the situation are usually in the middle. Nevertheless, it provides a real example that someone sitting in America or Europe is impacting an unreached people for good or bad by what he purchases.¹⁸

We could follow with other examples, but my encouragement is to think through your life, your home, the things you wear and eat, your church's energy and plastic use, your mission agency office/headquarters, and your travel. In short—everything! How we live at home matters to the rest of the world through chains linking us ultimately—through markets

and global transport—to someone who has to farm or harvest what you are eating, to make what you are buying, or who is impacted by your activities through global geo-chemical cycles and ocean currents. We need to link our lives in our home countries to the care of God’s world in such a way that we are blessing the nations.

Creation Care and Frontier Missiology

God’s kingdom did not begin with “let us make man . . .” (Gen. 1:26) but with “let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). Biblically, we must maintain a radically theocentric—even christocentric—perspective on the kingdom of God. As frontier missionaries, we are not bringing God’s kingdom to an unengaged people group. All creation already declares his kingdom. Paul makes it clear that if we don’t speak, the rocks themselves will cry out. This is no hyperbole. The totality of Scripture indicates that all of non-human creation is praising God and bearing witness to its Creator. We can think of creation as an orchestra—each species giving its voice of praise, making the whole much more than the sum of the parts.

Psalm 19 says the heavens declare the glory of God—yet we have filled the skies with so much of our own light that God’s glory is diminished. We now have to declare Dark Sky Parks at special places in the world where we can see that glory revealed in the night sky. The dodo, the Caribbean monk seal, and Steller’s sea cow—all species that have gone extinct—no longer praise God. The global orchestra of God’s praise is diminished, and the implications are greater than just poor stewardship. A biblical interpretation keen to the opening order of creation may help us realize that we are making the task of reaching the unengaged more difficult. The background music of our world is meant to point people to God and his kingdom. In many ways we could see reaching unengaged people groups as helping people to understand the voice of creation which has been pointing them to the Creator from their youth—the witness to Christ in each and every place where our human voices have yet to join in.

I had the privilege of working with the Fruitful Practices research team, studying how believers come together and churches are formed across the Islamic world.¹⁹ There were many valuable insights, but one which applies particularly in this case is the importance of modelling by workers.²⁰ Churches planted or movements started tend to reflect the priorities of those who started those fellowships. The implication is this: it is unlikely that a congregation of

believers will care for creation unless this commitment is modelled by the church planter. Another model is more likely demonstrated in our engaging of unreached peoples, one that is dualistic, anthropocentric and a “staged” view of witness: first we need to get people into the kingdom, organised in some sort of community, and then we can worry about these other aspects of God’s kingdom. The new community of believers will imbibe this perspective and reflect these same underlying principles.

“For all these decades, missionaries never told us that God was concerned about how we managed the forests. Why?”

One member of a team amongst a UPG was once asked (by a new believer) the rather innocent question, “What do you eat for breakfast?” The answer was breakfast cereal or some other Western fare. The new believer in Christ, unbeknownst to the team member, began to change his diet because this is what Christians eat! We pass on much more than we intend to communicate. Particularly in the regions of the world with the highest numbers of UPGs, holism—that interrelationship of all reality—is inherently more natural. We, in our own Western thinking, end up, inadvertently, importing an ideology that reflects more the priorities of a pagan Greek dualism than a true biblical theology.

That is quite an accusation! It emerged from assessing my own unawareness and the wider implications of my own insufficient understanding of God’s plan for all of creation. I had minimized my membership in what theologian Richard Bauckham calls the “Community of Creation,”²¹ that basic dichotomy between Creator and created. I am of the latter, along with all of creation. Yes, we can point to Genesis 1:26–28, that we are made in God’s image, that mankind is given a special relationship with him; yet, we are not the Creator—we are not omnipotent nor omniscient. We are matter—made of the same stuff as the rest of the world—and even in the new creation, we will not be God. There is a fundamental divide, which we can bridge through Christ, but that is not of our doing or because we are in some way special. It is a gift of God due to his death on the cross. So, the Scripture teaches us, sometimes vividly (i.e., the last few chapters of Job and Ps. 104), that we are fundamentally part of creation. Because of the incarnation, matter matters.²² If we, in our attempts to engage the unengaged, do not understand and teach this wider picture, we leave the fledgling community

with a priority system and a theology that does not equip them to build God's kingdom in a fully biblical manner.

Kenya provides an interesting case study of this failure: of why the initial development of a community of believers and only later the introduction of biblical concepts (such as creation care) is ineffective in changing practice. Craig Sorley, who works among peoples in the famous Rift Valley of northern Kenya, relates a story about his experience as a missionary with Care of Creation Kenya.²³ He describes the area as "once carpeted by a lush cedar and African Olive forest, feeding streams into the valley, [yet] most of this escarpment now lies completely denuded of all forest cover."

As he taught about the biblical basis for creation care an old man asked him, "Why is it that for all these decades the missionaries right here have never told us that God was concerned about how we managed the forests?" Sorley indicates that this points to the fact that

something has been missing in our efforts to advance the gospel. We have shown little regard for what God has made and most of us have overlooked the wonderful truth that caring for creation is an excellent means of loving both God and people.²⁴

He points out that this area has been reached with the gospel for decades and the majority of people attend church. But the damage is done, and *all* creation suffers in that place. I suspect that a major cause of this suffering is because of the truncated, dualistic gospel that was originally preached.

But there is hope. We don't have to repeat the Kenyan situation where the work of caring for people and for non-human creation is made so much more difficult because of our past teaching and actions. We can develop communities of believers who understand holistically God's wider intentions for *all* creation and that his kingdom is one that transforms *all* relationships, not just those between God and humans. Sorley concludes his chapter this way:

By integrating creation care into the cause of evangelical ministry, we bring good news to a world that strives to wrestle with this problem in its own strength—a world that normally leaves God entirely out of the environmental picture. Caring for creation can be a wonderful way to love God and to meet the needs of others.²⁵

The radical implications of this involves a paradigm shift that is already occurring in many mission communities.²⁶ But it must reorient our Christology and our understanding of the kingdom. A quick examination of recent contributions to frontier missiology will note how Gill's commentary on Colossians introduces the central role of Christology in Paul's missiology.²⁷ But the creation care theological community would suggest that Colossians does more than

Gill suggests. What Paul provides in chapter 1:15–20 is not only an amazing vision of the Christ we are to preach but encapsulates his kingdom work in *all* its glory, in all creation, among all creatures. In an accompanying article David Lim attempts to define our vision of the kingdom,²⁸ but he also neglects the wider work of Christ on the cross—that of reconciling *all* things, including non-human creation and the socio-political-cultural institutions that humans create. Lim notes the intrinsic value of creation, but then turns it into resources to be used by humans. He points out the stewardship mandate, but then turns it quickly into the valuation of human work and production—an instrumental value. He notes the fall, but then neglects its impact on non-human creation and limits the work of the cross to one species. This is an insufficient vision of the kingdom of God. And as Gill points out, the theological understanding of these issues impacts dramatically our missiology and practice.

My own experience is one of continuing to discover my anthropocentric tendencies. I might be considered an amateur theologian who's just "doing theology from the ground up."²⁹ However, I do not merely want an environmental "religiousness" to inform our theological reflection. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury once reflected, we do not care about the environment because there is an environmental crisis, but because of our understanding of Scripture.³⁰ So, my own discovery and my challenge to the reader is to confront our radical anthropocentrism by embracing a Christology that so lifts up Christ that his love is higher, greater and more encompassing than we could ever have imagined. And if that encourages a greater humility for us, that is certainly profitable.

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But is creation care "frontier mission"? R. W. Lewis helpfully recounts the development of that terminology and suggests that it is currently being diluted.³¹ If we use her definition of frontier mission as "the task facing those going to people groups 'where Christ has not been named . . . [and] not building on another's foundation,'" then indeed the most creation care can do for those called to frontier mission is to love those people groups more effectively.³² Creation care can help "catalyse self-sustaining indigenous movements to

Christ in every people group that does not yet have one.” Yet, I’m suggesting that missiology must adapt once again as it brings the interpretation of Scripture into dialogue with today’s ever-changing world. Bradford Greer helpfully points out that frontier missiology is situated in time and space, and these interpretations and adaptations in frontier missiology can divide us as they cut into our “most cherished beliefs, assumptions and values.”³³ We are in a new time and space in relation to the state of our planet and our theological understanding of God’s intentions for *all* creation and human beings’ relationship with non-human creation. Therefore, I believe that though the above definition of frontier mission was incredibly useful, evidence is mounting that it is time for a paradigm shift. As Greer states, we must “raise our level of awareness and increase our capacity for reflection.”³⁴ Revelation 5:9 does not define our goal, but Revelation 5:9–14 could. Though, of course, Genesis 1 to Revelation 21 is a comprehensive vision that should define our goal—one of *all* creation before God’s throne, of *all* relationships healed at the foot of the cross, and *all* glory due to God.

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people
and nation.

¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

¹¹ Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. ¹² In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

¹³ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

¹⁴ The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.³⁵

Revelation 5:9–14 New International Version (NIV)

Creation Care as Frontier Mission

There has been significant theological research and missions practice in the area of creation care to which my article only gives a brief glimpse.³⁶ While people group missiology was

immensely strategic for missions practice, I have argued that it is an incomplete missiology. Integral or holistic mission missiology, as well as observations from groups such as the Fruitful Practices research team, demonstrate that an exclusive focus on seeing churches started was incomplete and lends itself to an anthropocentric and dualistic biblical interpretation.

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The Cape Town Lausanne meeting helped the global Christian community recognize and affirm its call for the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world. Creation care helps us to move towards a theocentric vision of mission with God’s glory and kingdom at the center. Far from diminishing the value of reaching unreached peoples, it helps us to see them as God intended, as people made in God’s image, loved deeply by their creator and placed in a location where they and the land/sea are meant to thrive. Perhaps our modern lack of rootedness to place has blinded us to this intimate connection between people and the land/sea.

Delving into creation care theology helps us to see ourselves in a much broader story of God’s glory which began before the arrival of humanity. God declared creation good and called us to care for it in the way he does. Christ’s death and resurrection, Scripture tells us, puts *all* things right. Creation fell, and Romans tells us it awaits the children of God (humans) to liberate it from its bondage. Creation waits for us! Too often we have concluded abruptly our reading in Scripture at that cosmic picture in Revelation 5:9. The heavenly vision before the throne is *all* creation praising and worshipping God. Creation itself is now witnessing to that extensive list of unengaged people groups. Perhaps our focus on a particular extra-biblical phrase such as “The Great Commission”³⁷ may inhibit a full biblical understanding of mission. At risk of electing another single verse here in Revelation as a more appropriate image of mission, this

cosmic picture clarifies and promotes our participation in the reconciliation of all things in Christ. It means that creation care is mission.

To conclude, let me push the boat out a bit further and challenge our current understanding of UPGs as *the* frontier of missions. Emerging mission sodalities, such as A Rocha with whom I work,³⁸ do biodiversity conservation as an act of worship and mission. They represent real hope of an integrated and effective approach to the transformation of peoples and places.³⁹ Given our understanding of God's plan for *all* creation; and given the opportunities and obligations to both unreached peoples and the created order; and given our broader vision of who God is and what his kingdom entails, I would propose the following: we need to replace the "P" in UPGs with *Place* rather than *People*. This would focus our efforts holistically, not *only* on specific language and culture groups, but also on the species, habitats, ecological

and social systems that integrate with those people groups.⁴⁰ The argument for extending to social systems has been made elsewhere, so my focus for this challenge is that we must extend Jesus' call to love our neighbour beyond our own species.

We have remade the world in our own image, not in God's. Recent research reveals that 96% of the biomass of mammals globally are either humans or livestock—meaning only 4% represent wild mammals.⁴¹ Seventy percent of all birds in the world are chickens or other poultry destined for our consumption! No longer does the dodo bird praise God—we extinguished its praise some 350 years ago. Species extinction and habitat loss are gospel issues and our missionary enterprise must not only work towards reaching all people groups, but towards the transformation of those places where those people groups live. The entire planet is a part of God's kingdom work, and it is essential to frontier mission. It must be reflected in our frontier missiology.⁴² **IJFM**

Endnotes

- ¹ M. W. Miller and R. D. Sluka, "Coral Mining in the Maldives," *Coral Reefs* no. 17 (1998): 288. I eventually published a short paper on the topic.
- ² I will give special attention to articles in this *IJFM* journal and to commentary on Revelation 5:9–13.
- ³ "Cape Town Commitment," Lausanne Covenant, accessed June 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctcommitment>. The entire transcript of the Commitment is available on the Lausanne website.
- ⁴ Colin Bell and Robert S. White, eds., *Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing LLC, 2016). A consultation was held in Jamaica in 2014, two years after Cape Town 2010, which resulted in this book, an important landmark in our theological, scientific and practical understanding of creation care and missions.
- ⁵ I am avoiding using the terms social justice and integral mission as they can be loaded terms for American evangelicals. Both of these, I believe, are rooted in God's command to love our neighbor and so I am choosing for this audience not to use that terminology.
- ⁶ This thinking did not, of course, begin in 2010! A history of Christian thinking on the environment is not within the scope of this article.
- ⁷ R. J. Berry, ed., *Environmental Stewardship* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
- ⁸ David Bookless, "Creation Care and the Evangelical Understanding of Mission," in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White. The literature on creation care, both theological and practical, is rich. Bookless's chapter is very helpful in reviewing some of the history of evangelical engagement and biblical sources and theologians grappling with this issue of creation care.
- ⁹ We are wrong when we believe that testimony to God to UPG is solely dependent upon our presence—creation has been there all along as a witness (Rom. 1:20).
- ¹⁰ Ralph D. Winter, "The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism," Lausanne Movement, accessed May 2019, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/the-highest-priority-cross-cultural-evangelism>. Paper delivered at 1974 Lausanne Congress.
- ¹¹ My own experience is one of belonging to a gracious organization which endorsed the value of my work as frontier mission and generously supported me when I transitioned into my new role with A Rocha. However, it was also clear that such a shift was necessary in that the laser-like focus on MUPGs made it impossible to develop a creation care ministry underneath their umbrella.
- ¹² Here I am primarily thinking of uplifting of "spiritual" matters over and above "physical" matters. While Scripture clearly teaches us to have an eternal perspective, it also clearly values the here and now. Our eternal perspective instructs us on how to live each day, with teachings such as Matthew 25 clearly warning us of the perils of "being too heavenly-minded we are no earthly good." This dualism has its origin in Greek philosophy which highly denigrated the physical forms. A more-Hebrew approach to concepts such as Shalom and even the original blessing given to Abram are always both physically and spiritually orientated. We must, like other seemingly polar opposite biblical concepts like law and grace, keep these ideas in tension and so not elevate one biblical principle over another.
- ¹³ M. W. Mille, and R. D. Sluka, "Patterns of Seagrass and Sediment Nutrient Distribution Suggest Anthropogenic Enrichment in Laamu Atoll, Republic of Maldives," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* no. 38 (December 1999): 1152–1156.
- ¹⁴ Lowell Bliss, David Bookless, and Jonathan A. Moo, "Call to Action and Exposition," in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White, 7–14.
- ¹⁵ "In Others' Words," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 36, no. 2 (July 2019): 106.

- ¹⁶ “WHO: Urban Green Spaces,” *Tashkent Times*, <http://tashkenttimes.uz/world/157-who-urban-green-spaces>. There are numerous scholarly references that can be accessed online to delve into this topic. The World Health Organisation states: “Green spaces also are important to mental health. Having access to green spaces can reduce health inequalities, improve well-being, and aid in treatment of mental illness. Some analysis suggests that physical activity in a natural environment can help remedy mild depression and reduce physiological stress indicators.”
- ¹⁷ Wallace J. Nichols, *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science that Shows How Being In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014).
- ¹⁸ Bliss, Bookless, and Moo, “Call to Action and Exposition,” 9.
- ¹⁹ Leah Kostamo, *Planted: A Story of Creation, Calling and Community* (Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013). This book is a narrative of one attempt at living the creation care mandate out in community. Leah documents her time with A Rocha Canada at their center near Vancouver.
- ²⁰ John Becker and Gene Daniels, “Abide, Bear Fruit: Combining the Spiritual, Strategic, and Collaborative Dimensions of Reaching the Muslim World,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 39–41. This article, by Becker and Daniels, documents the later 2017 conference of the Fruitful Practices team. The original 2007 consultation and development of the Fruitful Practices team, of which Becker and Daniels were an integral part, also produced the book *Seed to Fruit* and subsequent articles in mission journals.
- ²¹ Eric Adams, Don Allen, and Bob Fish, “Seven Themes of Fruitfulness,” *Mission Frontiers* 26, no. 2 (2008): 75–81.
- ²² Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2010.)
- ²³ David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2008). David Wilkinson who has PhDs in both theology and astrophysics has written an insightful book in which he meditates on themes of creation in Scripture.
- ²⁴ Craig Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” in *Creation Care and the Gospel*, ed. Bell and White, 71–85.
- ²⁵ Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” 83.
- ²⁶ Sorley, “Creation Care and the Great Commission,” 83.
- ²⁷ Already TEAM, Wycliffe, and Charstar, to name a few, have developed specific creation care efforts. In 2018, Frontier Ventures hosted a conference entitled, “Creation Care at the Frontiers of Mission.” The talks can be downloaded at <http://www.creationcaremissions.org>.
- ²⁸ Brad Gill, “A Christology for Frontier Mission: A Missiological Study of Colossians,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4 (2017): 93–102.
- ²⁹ D. S. Lim, “God’s Kingdom as Oikos Church Networks: A Biblical Theology,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 34, no. 1–4 (2017): 25–35.
- ³⁰ Brad Gill, “From the Editor’s Desk: Patrick, Muhammad, and ‘Thinking the faith from the ground up.’” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 2 (2018): 1–2.
- ³¹ I took my ten-year old son to hear Archbishop Rowan Williams speak at Southwark Cathedral for Operation Noah’s annual lecture in 2009. We sat in the front row and I was enthralled—but not sure how much my son picked up! He was the only child in the audience. Afterwards, the Archbishop shook his hand and made conversation with my son, a highlight for me, but it was probably lost on my son. I’m also reminded of the time I tried to read the Pope’s recent encyclical *Laudato Si* to the kids for our family devotions—I wept with the amazing vision of the Christian life Pope Francis presented, but the kids slept! The text of this lecture can be found at <http://operationnoah.org/resources/operation-noah-annual-lecture-2009-rowan-williams/>.
- ³² Rebecca Lewis, “Losing Sight of the Frontier Mission Task: What’s Gone Wrong with the Demographics?,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 35, no. 1 (2018): 5–15.
- ³³ I argue above that there is, in fact, no place where we are not building on creation’s foundation of witness.
- ³⁴ Bradford Greer, “Starting Points: Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 33, no. 3 (2016): 93–100. If you re-read Greer’s article in light of our current context environmentally and also with a good grasp of creation care theology, the article I have written may be much more convincing. One interesting example of anthropocentrism from Greer’s article is the reference on p. 96 to “the subsequent covenant with Noah.” We may have interpreted too literally the extra-biblical heading in our Bibles which labels the Noah narrative as “God’s covenant with Noah” in the NIV version. Read the story again—God made a covenant with *all* creation! This is detailed very specifically multiple times.
- ³⁵ Greer, “Starting Points,” 93.
- ³⁶ Note that only one of the faces of the four living creatures is that of a human. Revelation 4:7–9, New International Version (NIV): “⁷ The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.’” ⁹ Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, . . .”
- ³⁷ Bell and White, *Creation Care and the Gospel*. This book resulting from the “Jamaica Lausanne Creation Care” conference provides a number of case studies of creation care in mission practice.
- ³⁸ Notice, too, that most prefer the Matthew 28 version of the Great Commission rather than Mark’s “preach the gospel to all creation” version!
- ³⁹ A Rocha’s focus is on biodiversity conservation and creation care in general, not the developing of fellowships of believers. See the final endnote for more reflection on this, but there is a need for specialised sodalities—that is their niche by definition. There is a great need, therefore if we take this more holistic way of thinking seriously, for better partnerships and perhaps some development of specialists within organisations, an approach some have already taken such as Charstar, TEAM, and Wycliffe.

⁴⁰ Fortunately, there are already systems in place to help us measure our success in maintaining and restoring God's praise amongst all creation. The secular conservation equivalent of the Lausanne Movement is called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. They publish a Red List of Threatened Species which details the state of populations of many species. They classify species on a continuum from least threatened to extinct. This gives us a measure of where to focus conservation efforts and to chart our progress. Moving species from more threatened categories to the category of "least vulnerable" is a measurable task which can help us to guide our efforts to see God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

⁴¹ Damian Carrington, Environment ed., "Humans Just .01% of All Life But Have Destroyed 83% of Wild Mammals—Study," *The Guardian*, May 21, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/21/human-race-just-001-of-all-life-but-has-destroyed-over-80-of-wild-mammals-study>.

⁴² As a worker, I was always reminded to begin with the end in mind. It is not enough to have gathered believers in each UPG—a statement to which I know most involved in frontier missiology would also give assent. This is the beginning of a conversation—hopefully. There is much to be discussed in terms of modalities and sodalities, how to structure and equip teams, accurate data gathering, etc. How do organisations work together to achieve transformation of people and places?

Suggested Books on Creation Care for Further Exploration

The following are a few of the many books available and are a good place to start if you want to explore this topic further.

Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2010.

Bliss, Lowell. *Environmental Missions: Planting Churches and Trees*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013.

Bookless, David. *Planetwise*. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Bouma-Prediger, Steven C. *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010.

Moo, Douglas J., and Jonathan A. Moo. *A Biblical Theology of Creation Care*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Wilkinson, David. *The Message of Creation*. Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002.



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- Diana

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