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God the Carer: Revelation and the Environment

Mark Bredin

Abstract

This article is concerned with the extent to which Revelation can be claimed as a pro-creation text. It is argued that Revelation has a positive view of the whole of creation. Bredin suggests that Revelation has a strong ecological doctrine of creation, which is consistent with the Hebrew Bible and at the heart of both. An understanding of caring in the caring professions is applied to both the Hebrew Bible and Revelation to unpack important aspects of God's nature, which more common descriptions such as king and steward do not. It follows from this that understanding God as carer leads also to an understanding of human beings as carers made in God's image.

The question I pose for this article: Is Revelation's message contrary to environmental preservation? Increasingly the ecological crisis is seen as the major catastrophe humanity faces (Abbott, Rogers, & Sloboda). Because Revelation is a central Christian text, it is essential that theologians examine it in the light of this calamity. Richard Woods has done so, concluding that Revelation has much to contribute to understanding human culpability in this crisis:

Revelation ably describes the inevitable destruction of the biological systems of the earth whenever human foolishness, greed, selfishness and waste take precedence over mercy and justice [14].

Woods detects in Revelation an unmasking of the violent and devastating consequences of its avarice. I, too, will argue that Revelation has much to offer in thinking about Christianity and the ecological crisis. I argue that there is an ecological doctrine of creation at the heart of Revelation in harmony with the Hebrew Bible. The core of this doctrine is a God who "must have a world teeming with life" (Fretheim 1991a: 392). Further, while *care* is a word often used to describe God's activities, *Carer* is not. I suggest "God

as Carer" is biblical and relevant for an understanding of ourselves as "carers" made in the image of God. I use J. Blustein's four understandings of "care" (129) and apply it to Revelation and the Hebrew Bible vis-à-vis our relationship with the earth:

- God cares for his creation in that he likes what he has made
- God has care of his creation in the sense of respon-

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sibility

- God cares about his creation as one who has invested his being into it
- God cares that his creation comes to have a right relationship with him

A carer seeks to facilitate what she or he cares for to reach its full potential. Our relationship with creation should not be to treat it as an object for our gratification. Carers allow what they care for to be what they were created for. I suggest that Revelation's message is a call to be carers testifying against actions that destroy, disable, and disfigure the earth. We have authority from Jesus to care (Bruner: 53), and as carers we are to recognize our neglect of care and reconfigure new caring models to bring about "a world teeming with life."

God's Own Work

Throughout the Hebrew Bible the earth is said to be God's and he is Lord of Earth (Deut 10:14; Ex 9:29; 19:5; Ps 24:1–2; 50:12 and Job 41:11; see Fretheim, 1991a: 392; Wright, 106–116). Similarly in Revelation, God is Creator of heaven, earth and sea and everything that is in it (10:6). In 14:7 the angel in mid-heaven proclaims that God is the one "who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." In 11:4 God is "Lord of Earth," emphasizing that God is careful and watchful of his creation and that creation is his and that he cares for it. In using the title "Lord of Earth," John never forgets that God is a great God with dominion over all the earth (Morris: 148).

Made for a purpose

God is motivated to care because he likes what he has made and to enable it to be what he intended (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 25). God is not a clock maker who sets the thing in motion, but he makes it to radiate his goodness. We should also remember that in Genesis 1 God valued creation before human beings were created. God's address to Job indicates no particular preference for humans, rather that this world has worth and purpose apart from any human valuation (Patrick: 111–113). Bauckham adds that non-human creation does not need humanity to mediate its praise (2002b: 50). Therefore, heaven and earth are both created with value, order and balance independently of human creation. Heaven and earth are not present simply to satisfy human needs. So we read that the heavens and earth are summoned to bear witness to God (e.g. Deut 30:19; 32:1; Isa 1:12; Ps 50:1–6),

they declare his glory (Ps. 19), they rejoice at his judgement (Pss 96:11–13; 98:7–9). Similarly in Revelation, we find the same story. Harrington, for example, sees Revelation 4 as 'a celebration of creation' (82). The twenty-four elders sing:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for *you created* all things, and by your will they existed and were created [4:11].

The Four Living creatures in Revelation 4 represent the universe's praise of its Creator (Sweet: 120). In Revelation 4:8, humanity is alongside other creatures before the throne having the same end; that is, to assist each other in their worship (cf. Bauckham 2002a: 177). Together, they praise God: "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." This alludes to Isaiah 6:3 which adds that the earth is full of God's glory. This bit is missed in Revelation 4:8, but in 21:11, at the consummation, the New Jerusalem, which is the New Earth, "has the glory of God." In 21:23 the glory of God will be its light.

The earth is good to the extent that it reflects something of its Maker (Wright: 106). Consequently, the goal of creation is to radiate back to God the divinity that God showered over it (Ps 19:1; see Kuypers: 97). As his creation, it depends on him and God feels a duty of care towards it. He cares that its goal is one with his. In Revelation 5:13 John personifies the whole of creation as one in raising its voice in praise to its Maker. God knows that his creation is good inasmuch as it worships and reflects his glory (Wright: 108). By analogy, what we invest in, we care for so that it brings us joy and reflects our being. Similarly, so does God. The scene in Revelation 5:13 fits his hope for creation when it reflects and sings of its Maker. Fretheim argues that God establishes his Sinai covenant so that Israel cares for earth as the people of God in the service and restoration of creation (1991b: 362–363). At the completion of creation God orders creation in such a way that there will be no hunger and the sun will not strike humanity in a way that destroys it (7:15–17; cf. 12:6, 14). In this consummated state, Jesus is the shepherd lamb who leads his faithful to be nourished by the earth (7:17; also see 2:2, 17 and 19).

Yet in providing this caring environment, being at one with God's purpose, the non-human Earth can be said to praise and reflect God by vomiting out the previous inhabitants for their wickedness (Lev 18:25–28) and consuming the wicked (Num 16:32, 34; Ps 69:15). This is not so much God using Earth to punish humanity, but is "rather the result of human rejection of God's invitation" (Jer 23:10; Har-

rington: 108; Woods: 13). Earth is shown in these actions to be at one with God's purpose. It is pro-life and pro-creation by rejecting what is anti-life and anti-creation. Consequently, God gives the wicked up to reap the natural consequences of anti-creation behavior. In Revelation 12, the earth is used by God to nourish (Greek: *trephe*) the faithful woman and swallow the flood the serpent has poured out to destroy her. So Earth is valued as good independently of human creation. Similarly, Maier contrasts the consummated and healed earth in 22.15 which "portrays a symbiotic relationship of interdependence between Earth and its inhabitants" with the destructive relationship of Earth and its inhabitants sketched in earlier chapters of Revelation (Maier: 170). Murray detects a cosmic covenant in the Hebrew Bible, which he understands as a divinely willed order harmoniously linking heaven and earth (Murray: xx; Northcott: 167–98; Wright: 132–37). This everlasting covenant is the one that God makes with Noah "and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (Gen 9:16). Therefore, the kernel of God's covenant with Israel is the need for humanity to preserve and restore this divine order (Northcott: 167; cf. Fretheim: 1991b). Wright draws from this that human value begins when we perceive ourselves as part of the whole creation that God already values (107). Therefore, it certainly points towards a relationship of care.

It is not surprising that non-human creation in the Bible is seen, at times, at odds with the wicked suggesting that it is at one with God's intentions challenging the wicked to see their sin (Jer 2:19–20; 3:3). The breaking of the covenant, therefore, results in a disharmony between human creation and non-human which is manifested in plagues, famine, floods and wild beasts, etc. In Numbers, the earth opens its mouth and swallows the wicked (16:32). This leads to the whole of Israel crying out: "The earth will swallow us too" (16:34). In Psalm 69 the psalmist calls out to God: 'Do not let the flood sweep over me' (69:15).

These texts hint at the independence of earth and its status in harmony with God's will over and against rebellious humankind. Yet if humanity lives in harmony with God's will it will be nurtured *by* and live *in* harmony with earth (Lev 26:3–6; Isa 54:9; Jer 31:35–36; 33:20–25; and Ezek 34:25–31). In Genesis 6, God establishes a new covenant and commands Noah to "keep alive" two of every kind of animal (6:18–19). The Septuagint has *trephe* which means feeding (1 Kgs 18:3), rearing, shepherding (Gen 48:15) and making alive. So the role of humanity is of nourishing earth. Presumably, this is the new order of things after the destruction which had resulted in earth being corrupt

and violent (6.11–12) (Murray: 32–35; Northcott: 167). In God's natural creation order all these things were not intended to happen. Indeed Jesus describes God as one who feeds (*trephe*) the birds (Matt 6:26/Luke 12:24) and explains how the righteous should act towards others (Matt 25:37). We also see God and his servants shepherding and leading the faithful (Jer 3:15).

There is also evidence of earth's independence in Revelation. The remarkable sight of the earth opening its mouth and swallowing the flood reveals the independence of humanity and goodness of earth. It is shown as being on the side of God's people who live according to the covenant (12:17) but acting independently of human beings (Harrington: 135). That God's anger is aimed at "those who destroy the earth" (11:18d) suggests God's passion and concern for what he has created.

The value of non-human creation in the eyes of God is again evident in 9:4 where God commands that the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree must not be harmed. Those who are to torment those humans who don't have the seal of God are humans themselves. John sees the tormenting locusts as human beings (9:7–10) who are ordered not to damage the grass of the earth or trees but only those who had not been sealed by God (9:4). The action is directed against rebellious humanity and not nature (Sweet: 168; Beale: 496) and fits with God's actions of destroying the destroyer of earth. The description of the locusts having human faces should not be missed. Caird observes that evil has many forms, "but in the last analysis it has a human face, for it is caused by the rebellion of human wills against the will of God" (120).

Barker argues that underlying the phrase "destroyers of the earth" is the fallen angel Azazel. Azazel with the other fallen angels abused heavenly knowledge and used it to corrupt and destroy earth, and they can be seen in the king of the locusts in Revelation 9 and the fallen angels in Revelation 12. These destroyers of the earth were breaking the cosmic covenant whose bonds secured the created order (Barker: 214). Christian hope is the return of the LORD, which brings about the restoration of creation (Barker: 49).

Those humans who are sealed are also protected, as nature is. This would suggest that nature and faithful humanity are at one. We learn in 9:20–21 that those who do not have the seal of God are devoted to idolatry. Rowland suggests that "The ultimate idolatry is to make the creature the goal and measure of creation" 1993: 95). The fall is connected with humans behaving as if they were creators and everything is for their benefit. These human beings are worshippers of

the created, and this is something Israel is forbidden to participate in (Deut 4:15–20; Jer 1:16; 3:9; cf. Job 31:26–28). Revelation 9:20–21 links idolatry and murder.

Girard has suggested the cause of murder is acquisitive desire of what the other has. Modern studies of the relationship between economic growth, consumerism, and idolatry in the biblical world are helpful as we seek to understand the locusts with human faces. Idolaters are greedy (Eph 5:5). The essence of the idolater is that creation replaces the creator (Moritz: 68). To commit idolatry by craving material values is tantamount to denial of the salvific relevance of selfless acts, which Christ models (Moritz: 69). Revelation 9 is in fact an optimistic analysis of the world and sin. It hopes that the idolaters will destroy idolaters without the destruction of the faithful or the rest of earth. But there is a battle between evil and good. Idolatry leads to destruction.

Earth is Distinct from God

The idea of God as Creator of Earth and all in it is evident throughout the whole of Revelation. The fact that all creation praises God suggests the dependency of creation on its Creator (5:13). That Earth is distinct from its Creator does not lessen God's care for it. In fact the role of God as life giver is developed. He wishes only to care for his creation in the sense of bringing it to completion when he is at one with it. God has built into Earth an incredible capacity for renewal, recovery, balance and adaptive ability, and this should not be ignored (Wright: 110). God is responsible and invested his whole being in his creation to the extent that the Bible looks to the time when God dwells fully on earth. Take for example the depiction of God in Revelation 7:15b who "will make his dwelling (*Shekinah*) to dwell with them" (Morris: 118). In this place where God dwells, creation has been brought to consummation and creation is to worship/serve (Greek: *latreuō*) its Creator (7:15 and 5:13).

Humans and Earth are the Same Stuff

Much of society focuses on the distinction between non-human creation and humanity. Yet the Bible depicts them as the same stuff. Wright comments:

The opening chapters of the Bible do not immediately emphasize human uniqueness. On the contrary, it seems that at point after point the Bible tells us that we have more in common with the rest of the animal creation than in distinction from it [117].

The argument often used to distinguish humanity from the rest of creation is that we are made in the "image of God." This phrase, however, rarely occurs in the Hebrew Bible; furthermore, it does not suggest that creation is for our own purposes in which we drain life from it. In terms of Revelation, the overwhelming depiction of human beings is that they are created and not creator. Further, non-human creation figures more in Revelation than any other book in the New Testament. Humanity suffers the consequences of its rejection of God as non-human creation appears at odds with humanity because of its failure to turn to God (Sweet: 165; Harrington: 108; Woods: 13). Yet, even though human beings are depicted throughout the Bible as having an intimacy with God, there is no ontological distinction between human beings and the rest of creation. As Genesis tells us, we are earthlings/earth (Hebrew: *'adam*)—creatures (1:27). The Hebrew word *'adam* is often translated either man/kind or human/kind and is intimately related to the word *'adama* (ground, earth, soil). The Bible makes much of the relationship between *'adam* and *'adama*. Revelation uses the phrase "inhabitants of the earth," emphasizing that *'adama* is where humanity dwells (3:10; 6:10; 8:3; 11:10; 13:8; 17:2, 8).

Revelation has the Greek *gē* for earth, and the Septuagint on a number of occasions translates the Hebrew *'adama* with the Greek *gē*, suggesting that Revelation has *'adama* in mind. The Hebrew underlying the phrase in Revelation probably is one that expresses the intimacy of the relationship between humankind and the richness of the earth. Revelation may allude to Isaiah 45:18 in which God is said not to have created chaos but he created it to dwell. Jeremiah's prophesy is against the inhabitants of the earth telling them that destruction is coming upon them for they "worshipped the works of their own hands" (Jer 1:14–16; cf. Hos 4:1) and for not respecting God's creation (Jer 2:20). These inhabitants are told that it is their wickedness that leads to their punishment (Jer 2:17, 19; Hos 4:1–4). Their castigation is revealed in Revelation as the pollution of the land, and in Jeremiah as showers being withheld and the land mourning (Jer 3:2, 9; 23:10). Like Revelation, Jeremiah looks to a time when the inhabitants will have shepherds who will give them right understanding and knowledge unlike the fallen (Jer 3:15).

We are told in the opening chapters of Genesis that humankind is made in the image and likeness of God. Consequently, humans have dominion over earth, and they are to fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1:26–28). In 2:15 only humanity is told to till (Hebrew *'abad*) and keep (Hebrew

shamar) the Garden of Eden. 2:15 does not present too many problems, as the language of "till" and "keep" does not suggest predatory exploitation (Moltmann: 30). In fact *'abad* and *shamar* are usually translated "serve" and "guard" elsewhere. Jeremiah, for example, condemns the inhabitants of the earth for saying: 'I will not serve (*'abad*).' The refusal "to serve" is manifested in breaking the cosmic covenant (Jer 2:20a). Being made in the image of God suggests a close and intimate connection between humanity and God, which the rest of creation doesn't share. Having dominion (Hebrew *radah*) and subduing (Hebrew *qabas*) are linked with correspondence between human beings and God. The wider biblical testimony tells us that God is creator, preserver, carer, and shepherd. His work exudes wisdom in planning, power in execution, and goodness in completion (see Ps 145; Wright: 121). Murray observes that having dominion (*radah*) and subduing (*qabas*) are too crudely translated for exploitation (99). *Kabas* suggests utilizing the environment for life and survival, while *radah* suggests more of a kingly role (Barr: 21–23). Wright comments: "It seems clear that God here passes on to human hands a delegated form of God's own kingly authority over the whole of his creation" (121).

Summary and Conclusion

- God cares *for* earth because he likes it. He cares *for* earth in the sense that he considers it good and worthy, he has affection *for* it, and is attracted to it and is pleased with it.
- God takes care *of* his creation because of his sense of responsibility. He has care *of* the earth and he is, therefore, charged with responsibility for supervising, managing, providing for, attending to needs, or performing services. God does all these things.
- God cares *about* it as one who has invested his whole being. From my discussion so far, it is evident that God is one who cares *about* his earth in a way that a husband would care *about* his wife and vice-versa.
- God cares *that* earth becomes what he intended it to become, full of life. It should be so that "all creatures bring glory to God simply by being themselves and fulfilling their God-given roles in God's creation" (Bauckham 2002b: 47)

So far I have attempted to show that God is a Carer whose task is to make the world teem with life. Blustein's points elucidate for us care in a fuller sense than is normal in care work, as well as pointing towards a more refreshing, dynamic, and relational way of thinking about God and, consequently, what

it means for us to be made in the image of God.

Made in the Image of God

Murray does much to revive the 'servant king' understanding of kingship in the first temple period. It conveys major aspects of God's image. Consequently, it points towards an understanding of human beings' relationships with one another as well as with non-human creation. It is one of restoring the broken covenant and establishing justice (Ps 72 and Murray: 41–43). Therefore, it is a relationship of care. The other common term used today to express what it means to be made in the image of God is "steward." I think this is unhelpful as it suggests the management of things, rather than of caring relationships (Wright: 123). It might fit Blustein's second point, but not all the other points. Steward is not a metaphor we would use, for example, to describe our relationship with close friends, children, wife, husband, lover or parents. Priest has also been used to describe our relationship with earth. This is similar to the role of king as understood by Murray and Barker. According to Bauckham, however, a priestly vocation for humanity is unnecessary, as it demonstrates arrogance, sustaining the hierarchical and potentially exploitative model (1999: 101).

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The term "servant king," then, conveys important insights that can be helpfully developed vis-à-vis the ecological crisis. I want to appropriate some of them but reject the term itself in favor of God as carer. I want initially to explore more fully what it means to be made in God's image—what God represents, and what this unpacks for us. I will continue to draw upon the four aspects of care as a way of keeping in mind the fact that at the center of an ecological doctrine of creation is that of God as carer. But my overall argument remains: as carers we see ourselves in a relationship of equality, seeing the whole of creation praising and worshipping God as our ultimate creator (Bauckham 2000: 99–106).

The Image of God as Caring-in-Relationship

Underlying being made in the image of God are Swin-

ton's insights of caring-in-relationship. Care and responsibility, Swinton observes,

are inextricably intertwined. When one enters into a caring relationship with another, one takes responsibility for the other, not in the sense of domination over them, but in the sense of striving to enable them to develop types of relationships with God, with themselves and with others which actualize the *imago Dei* [48].

How does "king" relate to Swinton's observations? There is a predominant cultural tendency to see kingly rule as domination. It leads to the domination of nature: the domination of the animal kingdom, the domination of illness, and very often the domination of human beings by other human beings (44). Swinton makes the interesting suggestion that the Hebrew word *radah* means "to exercise care" and not "to have domination." Swinton writes:

In a very real sense, to care for one another, for God and for His creation, to live one's life in relationship which manifest care and responsibility, is to participate authentically in the actualization of the *imago Dei* [45].

I suggest that "to care" emphasizes an important aspect of the essence of God. Even though Hebrew scholars may be dubious of translating *radah* "to care," if we take Blustein's full semantic range of "care," Swinton may not be far wrong. Certainly Blustein's second aspect of care points to the need to make decisions that are more in line with being a manager and, therefore, taking charge of the situation. This is certainly a predominant meaning of *radah* in kingly terms and we should not lose sight of it. Those who work the land know the experience of the harshness of that life, and caring for the land involves a "battle" against the elements. But this does not indicate domination in a negative sense. God is one who gives life and so should humans (Ps 104).

I think "king" does not help us see this aspect of God. Therefore, in contrast to Murray, I believe that "king" is an unhelpful term for many in our modern society. It connotes power, success, and celebrity even if that was not how the ancient first temple king was seen. In the same way that we must not think of the image of God as male, so also king (Bauckham 2002: 117). While scholars promisingly argue that kingship implies service to the people, this is not so in practice. Kings and queens are seen as distant, untouchable, and separate from most people's lives—contrary to what Deuteronomy commands (17:20). They are not models of ser-

vanthood. They are associated with palaces and fine clothes, cars, travel and romance. They are not obvious metaphors for modeling a nurturing life. They do not act as though we belong to them, nor that they have any responsibility or investment in us or what they are responsible for. They have no hopes or desires for us as they live their detached lives. Royalty terms do not fit any of Blustein's categories for care.

What about servant? Servant, while conveying much of God's nature particularly as revealed in Jesus, has associations of being a victim (Isa 53) and connections with the subordination particularly of women, and of course black people. It also tends to romanticize powerlessness and thus perpetuates an oppressive status quo. Dewey has argued that women are led to subordination because of Servant Christology (2004). Similarly, Mercadante reveals disturbing aspects of servant Christology in Lars von Trier's film "Breaking the Waves." Although these negative suggestions are modern and not necessarily intended in the Hebrew word for "servant," *ʿbʿd*, caution is needed today in translating *ʿbʿd* as "servant." Central to *ʿbʿd* is the notion of anointing by God and the task of bringing healing and justice to the earth (Isa 42:1–7; 49:5–6). There is nothing of the passive and unwilling victim in the Bible. It is important to see God's *ʿbʿd* as a carer vis-à-vis all of Blustein's categories of care. Therefore, *ʿbʿd* is a true image of God caring for the whole creation. But we need to ask whether sovereignty is lost in rejecting the use of "king."

Few associate the notion of "sovereign" with that of a modern "carer." As God is most certainly "sovereign," I will explore more the biblical depiction of "sovereign." I will show that "carer" also fits the sovereign aspect of God. Although God is depicted as a sovereign king in the Hebrew Bible, it is as one whose reign is governed by justice, mercy and true concern for the welfare of all (Murray: 98). Jesus is also described as "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5). Wright comments:

A king exists for the benefit of his people, not vice versa. The metaphor that expressed this, and which is common throughout the ancient Near East and not just in Israel as a metaphor for kingly rule, was that of *shepherd*. Kings were shepherds of their people [122; cf. Murray: 41].

Wright's words locate "sovereignty" and "king" closer to "carer" according to Blustein's principles. Still, it should not be forgotten that God is an imperious commander. The voice of God, for example, is a commanding voice when he speaks to Israel from Sinai (Brueggemann: 125). Bruegge-

mann observes that the Bible contrasts God's leadership with Pharaoh's and shows to us what God's image is. Similarly, Fretheim writes: "Pharaoh's oppressive measures against Israel are viewed as fundamentally antilife and anticreation" (1991b: 385). The scene on Sinai is a break with the Egyptian slave camp and represents a counter-cultural challenge to the world. Brueggemann comments that there is no self-giving on the part of Pharaoh to make, for example, a covenantal bonding possible. Pharaoh devours all the land and its produce. He devours the Nile, turning that river of life into a death canal (Exod 7:24). Pharaoh devours the slave community. Unfettered consumerism, absent citizenship, devours not only the produce of creation, but the sources of produce until the land is reduced to waste (Brueggemann: 124–25). Pharaoh represents all that takes life; but God gives life (Ps 104).

To develop this comparison, Brueggemann observes that the God of Israel is one who sets limits, boundaries, and restraints in Genesis 2:17 in order to make life possible (125). These words are seen in contrast to God's words in Genesis 1:28: to have domination and subdue all creation. In the light of 2:16–17, we must understand the idea of "subdue" and "having dominion" as one of restraint. God is for restraint, but not so Pharaoh. The God of Israel in contrast to Pharaoh is a model of right desire, who sets out that subduing and having dominion must entail "giving life," in other words, "caring." The Israelites, however, rebelled and desired a leader like Pharaoh (believing that this would lead to success and power) despite Samuel's opposition (1 Sam 8:5–6). In other words, we are called to follow the way God's own being is revealed uniquely to us in the figure of Jesus the carer.

Following the Lamb

Here I want to contrast the way of God to the way of the beast in Revelation in order to establish what it means to be made in the image of God and in order to develop more fully what has been said about the way of God. God is a commander and warrior who is at war against all that stands against him. God is the opposite of the beast who is anti-life and anti-creation. In Revelation 13, the beast is a duplicate of the Dragon who is Satan in chapter 12. The reign of Satan is perpetuated through cycles of violence. I believe Revelation 13 is a depiction of the world grounded in what Girard calls "the single victim mechanism." So Rome represents Satan and deceives the world by the way it is healed (13:3), that is, establishes its false peace. This healing is achieved

by putting others to death so that another representative of Satan can reign. One group blames the emperor for the suffering as they put him to death. Satan deceives and survives by accusation and rivalry. Empires fall and others rise as they imitate the reign of the previous ones (Wink: 91).

What dominates the reign of Satan is consumption. Just as Satan has ruled through Pharaoh, so he does through Caesar. Of all the New Testament books, Revelation is the most politically critical of Rome. Bauckham shows how it unmasks Rome's self-understanding, identifying its crimes of violent oppression and economic exploitation. Revelation 18 illustrates this by listing the luxurious items it plundered from the provinces it had conquered. The reign of the beast is depicted in destruction, plunder, ecological destruction, plagues, and death. We read of the destruction of a third of the rivers and the springs of water (8:10; 16:4) as well as land, trees and green plants. Maier writes: "The detailed listing of merchant cargo (Rev 18:11–14, 16) describes the way the Earth is mined, slaughtered, logged, spun, and sold for the sake of profit" (176).

The accumulation of the world's resources in the imperial Roman metropolis was a source of national pride (Horsley 2003: 30). Rome claims divine status by acquiring the wealth and beauty of others. In contrast, the way of God is the way of the lamb who leads to life (7:17). Smith writes of the way of God in Revelation as "one that delivers us from materialism and sheer nihilism which currently leads the world astray" (42).

The Way of Care: Revelation 12

Caring and life-giving are important elements in the biblical depiction of how God is—and of how Israel should be. This is perhaps most evident in Revelation, the visions of which Smith summarizes as "life-giving and life-transforming." They lead us, he points out, "from lies and delusions to truth and reality" (42). Smith's observations are illustrated in Revelation 12. Here the Dragon seeks to destroy the faithful mother, but God is said to have prepared a place for her in the desolate land where she would be nourished/given life (Greek *trephe*) (12:6, 14). This image of the nourishing, life-giving God is clearly one of caring, in contrast to the Dragon who "devours" (12:4). To foster growth is fundamental to *trephe*, a notion also linked to shepherding (Septuagint Gen 48:15) and giving life.

We see also Jesus the lamb shepherding and leading the faithful to springs of water (Rev 7:17). God is the one who promises hidden manna at the end of the age (2:17). Being

made in the image of God is, therefore, to be *caring* for the very things Pharaoh and the beast of Revelation did *not* care for. The role of human beings as we bear witness to God is to remove mourning and crying and pain (Rev 7:17; 21:4). So, to be made in the image of God means we must not ignore the sense of God who gives life. God who nourishes us revealed in Christ is the ruler of the kings of earth because he cares. Revelation looks to a time when the caring way of Christ will be the reign of the kings of the earth.

Destroying the Destroyers of the Earth

We cannot ignore that God is praised for destroying his enemies (Rev 11:18; 18:20). To understand Revelation's depiction of God and the lamb, we need to pay special attention to 11:17–18. At the blowing of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God is fulfilled (10:7). John recounts in 11:18c what this fulfilment means, telling us that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Messiah, and he will remain for ever and ever.”

Consequently, the twenty-four elders praise and thank God in a song of praise. The final part of this song thanks God “for destroying those who destroy the earth.” Beale observes that the pre-text for 11:18c is Septuagint Jeremiah 28:25 (MT 51:25), which states that God destroys Babylon for destroying the earth. We can work out what being made in God's image means in Revelation by looking at what is the opposite, what is excluded from the city: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (21:8; cf. 9:20–21; 22:15).

We must also recall that those in the city are the ones who do not destroy the earth (see 11:18). Caird makes the point that the destroyers are those deceived by Satan and we see them in the four riders, the blazing mountain (8:8), the star called wormwood (8:11), the angel Abaddon (9:11) and the monster that arises from the abyss (11:7). It is Babylon, the beast, and that means Rome. The Dragon, who deceives the beast, embodies itself in one empire after another (Wink: 91). The Dragon scorches the earth, always ready to cast one empire off for another as we see in Revelation 6; 8:8, 11; 9:11; and 11:7. Similarly, Isaiah adds that God has “created the ravager to destroy” (54:16b). Yet he states that strife and destruction are not caused by God (Isa 54:15). Humanity allows all this to happen by breaking God's covenant. The four horsemen in chapter 6 are what exists on earth already by human mishandling of earth, i.e., breaking

the cosmic covenant. Rowland and Kovacs believe that chapter 6 reveals the world as God sees it—as violent and greedy—and that through Christ's loving actions and teaching this has been revealed to us. They draw well upon the insights of Girard, observing that Revelation unmasks human culture by revealing the vindication of the lamb who was slain. The story of Jesus' death is a revelation of the false consciousness encouraged by the scapegoat mechanism and the violence it institutionalizes (2004: 80). The only way the destroyers of the earth can be destroyed is by the end of destruction. This can happen only when the example of the lamb is followed. Destruction ceases when communities stop blaming others for the social plagues that come upon them. In other words, the cosmic covenant is kept when humans acknowledge that their sins bring plagues upon earth (Jer 2:17, 19; 3:3, 9) in their greed and failure to care for the earth (Jer 2:20). We will explore in the next section the countercultural aspect of following the way of the lamb.

Human Witnesses: Revelation 11

In Revelation 11 we have the only occurrence of human witnesses in Revelation, and startlingly they cause destruction to earth, water and human beings. This would seem to contravene my ecological reading of Revelation. John tells us that the two faithful witnesses stand before the Lord of the Earth, thus emphasizing their closeness to God. Those who try to harm them are to be consumed by fire (v 5). They have authority to bring a drought while they witness, and to turn water into blood, as well as strike the earth with every kind of plague (v 6). An initial reading might lead us to think it is not surprising that the inhabitants of earth celebrate when they are destroyed because these two prophets had been a torment to them (11:10).

The key to unlocking what lies behind the conflict between the faithful witnesses and the inhabitants of the earth is the joy at the witnesses' demise. I suggest that the cause of the inhabitants' torment is their own doing and not that of the two witnesses (11:5; cf. Jer 3:2–3). Anguish comes upon them because they tried to harm the faithful. The inhabitants of the earth, not the faithful, cause the fire, drought, water pollution and plagues. In the ancient world, the word “plague” nearly always included a social dimension (Girard: 52). Plagues are “an epidemic of mimetic rivalries” (Girard: 53). Smiting and causing plagues are what the inhabitants of the earth accused the faithful of—disrupting what they considered the natural order. This text depicts the inhabitants blaming the faithful for everything that goes wrong. Yet

the plagues are what the inhabitants bring upon themselves, just as Pharaoh did in his own time while blaming them on Moses. The natural order of God's creation is upset by the inhabitants' unfaithfulness to the cosmic covenant. In disrupting this order, they become the objects of God's wrath. There is a direct correspondence between deed and consequence in this text (Fretheim 1991a: 394).

Caird hints at this idea when he suggests that the actions attributed to the witnesses "are to be a torment to the inhabitants of the earth because their testimony is a searing indictment of the world they live in" (137). Their witness unmasked and, therefore, disturbed the established peace of society which was based on greed, envy and consumption. This is enough to mark them out as scapegoats. They are sacrifices for the good of the many so that the reign of greed and consumption can continue. Jeremiah perhaps utters the sentiments later expressed in Revelation: "Now I am bringing you to judgment for saying 'I have not sinned'" (Jer 2:35). The disruption of the natural order described in what the saints do, is the result of greed and consumption. It is what Satan, in Revelation, seeks to perpetuate, each person seeking to have what the other has.

We are told that the cause of the death of the two witnesses is the beast from the bottomless pit (Rev 11:7). This is none other than the one named Abaddon or Apollyon (Rev 9:11). The beast is, as both words indicate, a force for destruction. The beast is also king over the locusts with human faces who cause such pain and torment that people seek death (Rev 9:8). The witnesses uncover the mechanism of violence. To recognize that the torment is what each person and community causes the other is the manifestation of the beast's reign. The beast, the superpower, is none other than Satan or the devil. Girard's understanding of Satan fits the beast in Revelation 9 and elucidates profoundly what is happening in Revelation 11 to the witnesses. Satan is a figure that exists as a parasite on the being of humankind. Satan describes the mechanism of accusing and lynching a victim.

So the two witnesses are accused, in Revelation 9 and 11:5–6, of causing destruction. Satan deceives people so they do not see the truth, believing rather the lie that the plagues and the disruption of creation is the fault of another (Rev 12:10). This ability to deceive needs an object of blame to maintain the deception. Satan depends on the success of the deceived in blaming someone for what they perceive to be their torment. Those who proclaim God's word become the focus of Satan's accusation. This understanding of Revelation's Satan is stated in 12:10: "the accuser or our brothers and sisters." This mechanism of accusation is implicit in

Revelation 11, where the faithful are blamed because of their disturbing words echoing their master, Jesus. That is why they are said to have been killed where their master was crucified (Rev 11:8). They too are charged for causing social torment as Jesus was by Caiaphas (John 11:50). The torment they cause can be a torment only if the inhabitants fail to recognize the truth of the testimony of the faithful. Their message does not bring peace but a sword—which reminds us of Jesus' teaching (Matt 10:34–36; cf. Rev 13:10). The witnesses declare that the inhabitants bring disruption to God's creative intention because they break God's covenant. They are the locusts of Revelation 9 who cause destruction by their mimetic rivalry and acquisitive desire leading to deception, accusation, blame, and retaliation. The moral order of the beast results only in death and decay. In attributing the destructive actions in 11:5–6 to the faithful, the Hebrew Bible states that God gives the inhabitants up to reap the "natural" consequences of their anti-creation behaviors.

Therefore, the plagues represent the consequences of living by deception and accusation, the way of Satan's rule. The inhabitants cannot see that they have caused their own torment, and they cannot live with that knowledge. They blame those who expose them to the truth. The plagues, however, are not what bring repentance and salvation, just as the cross of Christ does not.

What does? The vindication, symbolized in the ascension, of the two witnesses in 11:11–12 leads to the repentance of many (11:13). John draws on the prophecy of Zechariah 12:10: "When they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn him (Rev 1:7; Sweet: 188). Their elevation before the inhabitants is greeted with terror (11:11). Yet many of the inhabitants come to see the truth and see the world from the perspective of the two witnesses and recognize they are the destroyers. The destruction in 11:13 is limited and a reversal of the destruction expected in the Hebrew Bible. The vindication of the saints demonstrates that the witnesses' testimony was correct. It is this realization that can lead to people identifying the true causes of not living according to God's intentions. They have now realized that their greed led to torment. God intends, however, that people care for each other and the earth that each may receive life and praise God.

Conclusion: Humans as God's Carers of Creation

I set my task to ask whether Revelation stands for environmental preservation. In assessing Revelation's pre-text

traditions, Revelation itself and briefly the social context, I conclude that Revelation challenges us to come out of today's Babylon witnessing against its consumerism and greed that leads to the destruction of the land. Ultimately this shows respect and concern for the preservation and care of the whole of creation. Jeremiah in many ways sums up the message of Revelation when he asks: "Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?" (Jer 9:12). He answers his own question in 9:13–15 (cf. Jer 8:14), echoing John's words later in the first century:

Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accordance with it, 14 but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their ancestors taught them. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am feeding this people with wormwood, and giving them poisonous water to drink.

Uttering the consequences of the blowing of the third trumpet in Revelation 8:10–11, Jeremiah depicts one consequence of human failing to live according to his covenant alluding to Jeremiah 8:14 and 9:13–14 (Sweet: 164). I have argued that central to the covenant are correct relationships within the whole of creation. However, our world is rooted in an understanding of relationships that sees people and non-human creation as objects for the individual's own self-aggrandisement. It is the reign of the devouring Dragon of Revelation 12. Revelation calls for environmental preservation, which is about nourishing the planet. Revelation like the Hebrew Bible affirms non-human creation.

The essence of being made in the image of God is to care for creation as God cares and nourishes. Blustein's four understandings of care express the wider semantic range of the word "carer." These understandings account for God as sovereign, healer, nourisher, helper of the weak, and seeker of the lost. Swinton shows further that being made in the image of God suggests caring-in-relationship (46). Blustein's understandings of care are that the ultimate goal of care is to allow creation to be co-equal, as God intended, and not something formed by human beings into objects to satisfy their own desires and greed.

Further, Girard's insights have elucidated Revelation as unmasking the truth of human deception in which humans cover up the truth of what their greed and desires cause: ecological and social catastrophe. In other words, we declare, as Jeremiah again puts it so well: "Peace, peace, when there is no peace" (Jer 8:11). Instead, he declares "we are greedy for

unjust gain" (Jer 8:10), and ecological disasters will come upon us (Jer 8:14). Jeremiah clearly saw this (9:12–15) and it is a point that Revelation picks up on. This is seen through our exegesis of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Unless we accept Revelation's invitation to see the truth, humans will not survive and the ecological plagues of Revelations will become common realities with increased fighting for decreasing natural resources including water, and the depletion of bio-diversity, our rivers will indeed be turned to blood and become bitter. Yet we look upon the eschatological horizon shown appropriately in the last two chapters of Revelation. Here is the New Jerusalem which replaces this world of sin and evil. God will "make *all* things new" (Rev 21:9), and as Isaiah says: "Your land shall no more be desolate" (62:4b). Such transformation means we look for a time when there will be wholeness to individuals, the human community and the totality of creation" (McDonagh: 164).

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