

**Heralds of Creation**

*James Montgomery (1771–1854)*

Heralds of creation! cry—  
Praise the Lord, the Lord most high;  
Heaven and earth, obey the call,  
Praise the Lord, the Lord of all.

For he spake, and forth from night  
Sprang the universe to light;  
He commanded,—nature heard  
And stood fast upon his word.

Praise him all ye hosts above,  
Spirits perfected in love;  
Sun and moon, your voices raise;  
Sing, ye stars, your Maker’s praise.

Earth from all thy depths below  
Ocean’s hallelujahs flow;  
Lightning, vapor, wind, and storm,  
Hail and snow, his will perform.

Birds on wings of rapture soar,  
Warble at his temple-door;  
Joyful sounds from herds and flocks,  
Echo back, ye caves and rocks.

High above all height his throne;  
Excellent his name alone;  
Him let all his works confess.  
Him let all his children bless.

**ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ**

*In the Nick of Time*

**God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 6: The Devaluation of Nature**

*Kevin T. Bauder*

During creation week, God brought the world from a relatively lower level of order to a relatively higher level of order. In an unfallen world, humans would have continued this process of ordering creation as God’s sub-regents, exercising dominion and subduing the world. By sinning, however, they brought death into the world, and with death came disorder. Creation has become less responsive to human dominion than it would have been, and humans became less capable of exercising what dominion they still had. Furthermore, they began to exercise it in ways that thwarted rather than fulfilled God’s purposes.

Sinful people think wrongly about God. They think wrongly about themselves. Inevitably, they think wrongly about creation. Wrong thinking about creation takes two broad forms: people either devalue it or they overvalue it.

The devaluation of creation has both ancient and modern forms. One ancient form was Gnosticism, which saw the material world not as the creation of a benevolent God but as the product of a stupid and ill-willed Demiurge. People who have been influenced by Gnosticism tend to view material creation as evil and not good. This judgment extends even to their own bodies. If materiality is bad, then embodiment is bad, and all bodily functions such as eating and procreation are also bad.

Full-blown Gnosticism arose during the Second Century. It was condemned early by Christians, but it continued to exert an influence. Its effects still linger in an attenuated form. The result is that, even though Christians may not see creation and ordinary life as evil, some of them dismiss it as worthless. They denigrate ordinary life, and especially the ordinary pleasures of life. These people tend to see overt devotion and evangelism as the only rightful pursuits for Christians. In their minds, whatever is not explicitly religious is at least suspect and probably sinful. Perhaps certain pleasures (such as the joys of the table or the marriage bed) cannot be avoided altogether, but they ought not to be sought. Activities such as reading fiction, playing games, or listening to non-religious music are seen as a form of idleness and are better avoided in favor of explicitly spiritual pursuits such as singing hymns, visiting the afflicted, and reading the Bible. They tolerate instruction in the



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interest of understanding the Bible, but learning for its own sake is frowned upon.

For such people, the beauties of nature may (perhaps) be enjoyed but not pursued. In fact, these people view the natural world largely in terms of its utility. They tend to be interested in creation only as a thing to be manipulated to meet their needs. Land that cannot be farmed or mined or built on they do not see as good or useful. They discipline themselves to spend all their time productively, and they believe that nature must be similarly disciplined. The created world is seen largely as an obstacle to be overcome. Wetlands are for draining. Rivers are for damming and bridging. Forests are for logging. People who think this way exhibit little interest either in appreciating the immediate beauty of creation or in grasping the intricacies of its interconnectedness.

The denigration of creation also takes a more modern and secular form. In this secular form, a utilitarian view of the natural world is twisted and amplified by two factors. One is a turning away from the concept of God. The ancients—even the Gnostics—still believed in some sort of God or gods who would ultimately hold them accountable. Modern people have jettisoned this prejudice. Secular people may believe in God, but their professed beliefs no longer exert significant influence over their daily choices. Even if they believe that God exists, they behave as though He had no interest in their activities. They are not so much atheists as they are un-theists.

This shift to un-theism means that people no longer see the natural world in connection with God or with any sort of a divine order or purpose. Everything becomes here-and-now, and they lose any sense that they will ever be held accountable for their use of the created world. In a word, they are free to destroy and pollute wherever and whenever it serves their purpose.

By itself, the harm that stems from this change in attitude would be slight if it were not for a second change. That second change is industrialization, or the ability to use machinery to produce on a large scale. Industrialization amplifies the damage that people can do to the created order. A single person casting a net could never overfish the oceans, but enough people with diesel-powered trawlers could. A single blacksmith heating iron over his fire is not likely to change the air quality, but a series of foundries can. A farmer spreading manure in his field will not cause algae blooms in nearby lakes, but all the farmers spraying industrial fertilizers on their crops will.

Unfortunately, secularization and industrialization virtually coincided in the West. The moment when people were losing their sense of inward restraint was the same moment in which they were overcoming outward obstacles. They became less inhibited about damaging the created order (and each other) at the very time when they gained the ability to do more damage than ever before.

Secular industrialization held sway from the mid-to-late Nineteenth Century until the final third of the Twentieth. This was a period of tremendous technological expansion, resulting in everything from skyscrapers to automobiles to labor-saving devices in every home. Those were also the years when skies were filled with smog and rivers with pollutants—not to mention the years when weapons of unimaginable terror were unleashed in wars of unparalleled scope.

The predations of secular industrialization could not be sustained. The image of God is hardwired in humans, and God's image-bearers cannot stand to live in permanent disorder. By the 1960s, even secular industrialists were coming to understand that they had to clean up their mess. By the 1970s they had begun this process, and by the turn of the millennium many of the environmental effects of secular industrialization had been reversed.

In the process, however, something happened to the environmental movement. What started as an effort to clean up the mess turned into the equal and opposite error. Instead of denigrating the created order as they had for so long, people began to deify it. That shift has led to even more calamitous results, as we shall see in subsequent discussions.



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This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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