

God Seen In His Works*Anne Steele (1717–1778)*

There is a God, all nature speaks,
Thro' earth, and air, and seas, and skies,
See, from the clouds his glory breaks,
When the first beams of morning rise.

The rising sun, serenely bright,
O'er the wide world's extended frame,
Inscribes, in characters of light,
His mighty Maker's glorious name.

Diffusing life, his influence spreads;
And health and plenty smile around;
And fruitful fields, and verdant meads,
Are with a thousand blessings crown'd.

The flow'ry tribes, all blooming, rise
Above the weak attempts at art;
Their bright, inimitable dyes
Speak sweet conviction to the heart.

Ye curious minds, who roam abroad,
And trace creation's wonders o'er,
Confess the footsteps of the God,
And bow before him, and adore.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***God, Creation, and Humanity, Part 7: The Deification of Nature***Kevin T. Bauder*

Sometimes human beings undervalue the created order. When that happens, they may bring disorder into the natural world because they begin to prey upon creation. This behavior is a reversal of God's intention, which was that humans should continue the work of ordering the world—a work that God Himself began during creation week.

The extent to which humans can disorder their world, however, is generally limited by the degree to which they can themselves tolerate disorder. Order is essential to human flourishing. People can live with a mess only so long before they feel impelled to begin cleaning it up. That is what has happened with the environment, at least in the industrial West (more should be said about the developing world at a later point in the discussion). After creating a significant mess, people started to clean it up—and they were doing a decent job of it.

At the very moment when Westerners began to succeed in cleaning up their environment, however, a different mindset emerged. Rather than demeaning the natural world and seeing it only as a thing to be exploited, some people began to deify the created order and to grant it autonomy from and even authority over human interests. This growing change in attitude was the hinge from a healthy respect for nature into an unhealthy version of Green Environmentalism.

The door was opened for Green Environmentalism by the increasing secularization of the West. By suppressing their consciousness of God, who can be seen in natural revelation, people also diminished their ability to perceive the image of God in humanity. They lost their sense of human uniqueness and began to view humanity as just another species of animal. As mere animals, however, humans could no longer be thought of as exercising any level of rightful dominion over creation. This change in thinking separated nature from both divine and human influence, so it was granted its own autonomy. People no longer had the right to govern, arrange, improve, and order the natural world. Rather, nature had to govern humans.



In the Nick of Time is published by Central Baptist Theological Seminary.
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900 Forestview Lane N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 800.827.1043

Paradoxically, this was also the point at which environmentalism became explicitly religious. The new religion, however, was not one that acknowledged a personal creator God. Instead, it was an amalgam of Eastern pantheism with primitive animism. This vision of the world was turned into propaganda by works like James Cameron's *Avatar* movies. The upshot is that nature itself became divinized. People began to bow before an all-wise and all-giving Environment with something like reverential awe. Furthermore, they had no hesitation about imposing these religious convictions upon others who did not hold them.

This species of Green Environmentalism has committed itself to advancing Marxism in both its political and cultural varieties. The connection is straightforward. If the environment is truly autonomous and if humans have no right to govern it, then any attempt to impose order upon it must be seen as oppression. Consequently, a divinized nature achieves status as a victim for whom social justice must be pursued. Intersectionality links the exploitation of this divinized nature with various other supposed forms of racial, sexual, and economic oppression.

The oppressors, of course, turn out to be the same in every scenario. They are white males of European descent, not because being Caucasian or male has any intrinsic moral value, but because this is the class that has supposedly exercised hegemony over wealth and power. Consequently, the (post)modern Green Environmental movement is dominated by hostility to every form of capitalism, including free markets, capital enterprise, and the private ownership of property. Back in the nineties somebody quipped that environmentalism was like a watermelon: green on the outside, but red on the inside. After three subsequent decades that quip can no longer be taken as a joke. It is a simple statement of fact.

Environmentalists are trying to control legislation so as to "protect" the environment, which means barring its use for the wellbeing of humans. Even more aggressively, they have infiltrated and sought to dominate non-legislative regulatory bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Forest Service. These bodies are structured so that they cannot be accountable to ordinary citizens, and they are free to run roughshod over the interests of farmers, ranchers, foresters, miners, and others who make their living by turning the created world into useful goods for human flourishing.

What (post)modern Green Environmentalists want is not simply to conserve the environment, but to preserve it. They talk about sustainability, but what they want to do is to leave the natural world as nearly untouched as possible. The older notion of conservation included wise use, but the contemporary goal is non-interference. Non-governmental environmental organizations purchase thousands of acres of land every year simply to take it out of human use. They pressure corporations and zoning commissions to take

more land out of human use. In the worst cases, they view human beings as intruders into the natural world, or even as viruses that must in the long run be eliminated.

The tragedy is that the created order responds poorly to non-interference. To cite just one example, wildfires in the American West have been increasing in both frequency and intensity. This increase is the direct result of a non-use policy that bars not only logging, but often even the gathering of dead wood. Forests become choked with tinder that ignites with a spark or lightning bolt. These fires can burn so hotly that the ground is scorched and sterilized, becoming impossible to reforest for generations.

Humans have been given the job of ordering creation. If they abuse that job, they can create a mess that needs to be cleaned up. If they neglect that job, however, and allow an increase in natural disorder, they will discover that the environment itself becomes a predator that renders human flourishing exponentially more difficult. The solution is not simply to exploit the environment, nor to try to preserve it, but to manage it, order it, and use it wisely. This is the only way in which human beings can begin to fulfill their responsibility toward the creation in which they live.



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.
