




6-2-2017

All It Contains: Biblical Perspectives on Environmental Care

Gavin Willis

Western Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cedar.wvu.edu/s2ss>

 Part of the [Civic and Community Engagement Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), and the [Theory and Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willis, G. (2017). All It Contains: Biblical Perspectives on Environmental Care. *Summit to Salish Sea: Inquiries and Essays*, 2(1), 87-100. Retrieved from <http://cedar.wvu.edu/s2ss/vol2/iss1/8>

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-reviewed Journals at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Summit to Salish Sea: Inquiries and Essays by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

All It Contains: Biblical Perspectives on Environmental Care

Gavin Willis, Western Washington University

Abstract

In this speech, Gavin I Willis discussed the often-competing views of religion and science. Gavin sees his faith as a Christian as motivation for being an environmental educator. He wishes for others to see how critical interpretation of the Creation story leads to strong, positive environmental ethics, and he hopes to continue creating a space where objective and subjective thinking are not polar opposites but complement each other to create a more complete understanding of the natural world.

Keywords: Christianity, environmental education, religion,

Good morning, and thank you all for coming here today! For those of you I haven't had the pleasure of meeting yet, my name is Gavin Willis, and I'm one of the members of Cohort 14. Before I begin, I'd like to thank North Cascades Institute for hosting all of us for this celebration for the week, all of you who are both my cohort members and my friends for the support you've given me and each other throughout the quarter, and all of the rest of you; NCI coworkers, friends, family, anyone else who's supported the program. I think I speak for the entire cohort when I say that we definitely feel all of your strength behind us today. I also want to thank our heavenly Father for giving us this beautiful setting, giving us all safe travels to come here, and blessing all of our efforts thus far.

And already, you've probably noticed that this presentation is different than the others. In some ways, very much so; in others, it is remarkably similar. But I want to take a moment, before we get too deep into the presentation, to acknowledge those differences, and make sure that they are clearly out in the open.

I'm a Christian; many of you already know this. It's a huge part of my identity, and it influences my thoughts and actions in almost every aspect of my life. Like any other part of identity, it also influences the way that others perceive me. Perhaps you were surprised that I thanked God a minute ago. Maybe it made you uncomfortable. That's ok.

I'm not going to stand here and tell you that those feelings are wrong. I know for many people the Christian faith can be a sensitive topic; it has the potential to be the cause of strife in all kinds of relationships. However, it also has the ability to bring people together. So today, I'm not telling you to push your feelings of discomfort to the side, or to entirely abandon any personal philosophy you may carry with you.

I'm just asking you to listen with an open mind to what I have to say, consider where your feelings are coming from, and ask me the questions you want answered. I can't promise that I'll have all the answers, and I'm not trying to convert all of you, but if my speech sparks something in your thoughts or in your life, then I'll consider that all the more a greater blessing.

I recently decided that I wanted to start a blog, so I forced myself to think about the origins of my worldview. Why am I so convinced that Christian faith and environmental care are so deeply entangled? The easiest way to answer that is to go straight to scripture, to read what the Bible has to say.

In Psalm 24:1-2 we read "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and all who dwell in it, for he founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters". This psalm, written by David, was originally part of a processional liturgy, written for when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem.

So in essence we have a song written to praise God when He comes among His people, and the first thing it references is the natural world.

Like all good poetry, the words here have been very carefully chosen. In particular, the use of the words "founded" and "established" infers a very specific context: these are the words used for the construction of a temple (Poole 2008). A Christian should no more destroy the created world than the Israelites, in the time of David, would burn down the temple; they are both created vessels to see the beauty and power of God and to worship Him.

Because I see this connection so clearly, it deeply pains me to see so many historians, scientists, and social critics place the blame for our environmental problems directly on the Christian faith (Means 1967, White 1967, Wilson 2006). The most outstanding example of this would be Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis". Here is a sampling of what he had to say:

He starts off with some pre-Christian philosophy, and then moves into his interpretation of the creation story.

Greco-Roman mythology denied that the visible world had a beginning. Indeed, the idea of a beginning was impossible in the framework of their cyclical notion of time. In sharp contrast, Christianity inherited not only a concept of time as non-repetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation.

By gradual stages a loving and all-powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, and the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam. Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man's benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes

From there, he goes on to talk about the effect of Western Christianity on technology.

The Greeks [that is, the Greek Orthodox Church] believed that sin was intellectual blindness, and that salvation was found in illumination. The Latins [the Roman church] felt that sin was moral evil, and that salvation was to be found in right conduct. The Greek saint contemplates; the Western saint acts.

Following that, he discusses how Christianity was the driving force behind the formation of modern science.

The consistency with which scientists during the long formative centuries of Western science said that the task and the reward of the scientist was "to think God's thoughts after him" leads one to believe that this was their real motivation. If so, then modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology. The dynamism of religious devotion, shaped by the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation, gave it impetus.

Next, he connects the dots he's been setting up.

We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as a realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature.

But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology – hitherto quite separate activities – joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.

Finally, he proposes some kind of solution to the problem that he claims to have identified.

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. The beatniks, who are the basic revolutionaries of our time, show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.

Others soon followed White's philosophy. The next year, Richard Means (1967) released an equally divisive paper arguing that a turn to Buddhism in the American population was necessary to protect the economic system that the nation depends on.

And so it may be apparent now that White and Means share a very Marxist approach to religion, treating it as "an opium for the people". Essentially, they are identifying religion as some inverted consciousness of the world, and religious people as the creators of their god, an approach almost certainly rooted in some feelings of intellectual superiority. It's important to note that they did have an example on which they could base their call to a religious shift.

Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and others, many of whom spent significant time in the mountains around us, did turn to Zen Buddhism as a method of resistance to mid-century materialistic hedonism (Wilson 2006). White called them revolutionaries of modern culture; history was less kind to the beatniks.

However, we must consider the efficacy of White's approach here. Is his approach effective? Simply put, he is saying "I don't need religion, but I've demonstrated that your religion has negative impacts on my world; you should remove it from your life and replace it with this religion over here." This treatment of religion as a sort of chosen consciousness, when considered thoroughly, is offensive to Christians, and judging by some of Kerouac's comments wouldn't have impressed him either, and so it is unlikely to create any real change.

The problem with so many of these criticisms is that they are rooted in a misunderstanding of Scripture, or the Bible. But then we have to deal with the question: is it even possible to have an "incorrect" or "wrong" understanding or interpretation of the Bible?

This discussion of hermeneutics, or interpretation, depends heavily on the framework of society. The post-modern philosophy that is so heavily interwoven in Western society prizes both subjectivity and objectivity, so much so that it places them both on a pedestal. However, it places those pedestals remarkably far apart, and then assigns every discipline of thought to one or the other, the effect of which is to have science and big data and all that over **here** on **this** pedestal of objectivity, and religion and morality and the arts over **here** on **this** pedestal of subjectivity.

As a result, the idea of truth changes depending on what pedestal you're standing on. If we're over here on the pillar of objectivity, nothing is true unless it has empirical data that backs it up. And then if we go over here to this pillar of subjectivity, everything is true, but only to you. Not to anyone else. Not unless they personally decide that it's true for them too.

In post-modern society, these pillars keep growing further and further apart, with **no way to bridge the gap between the two**. And this polarization of objectivity and subjectivity shows up all the time in our everyday life: on the one hand you hear

“That’s great that your religion works for you, but don’t push it on me, or on my children, or on your children even; that should be something that is personal and that they discover on their own” and then meanwhile “well, the data shows that vaccines are effective, so your child is going to get immunized whether you like it or not”.

Now just to be clear, I’m using this as an example; I’m by no means an anti-vaxxer, modern medicine has done great things to make society safer for everyone. However, shouldn’t it strike us as odd that there is such a divorce between these ideas of subjectivity and objectivity in our society?

Ken Wilbur (2000) tackles this idea of the problem of post-modern subjective interpretation quite well. If you’re not familiar with Wilbur, he’s a modern American philosopher who’s goal is to pretty much tackle everything in modern society, so he’s got this book called *A Brief History of Everything*, which is really pretty ambitious, but when dealing with this issue, he basically says look, **interpretation is not some purely subjective whim**.

And so he goes on to give the example of an interpretation of Hamlet. Now if you’re unfamiliar with the story of Hamlet, the basic idea is that Prince Hamlet returns home to Denmark following his father, the King’s death, to find that his mother has already married his uncle, who has subsequently declared himself king. The ghost of Hamlet’s father then tells him that his uncle murdered him, so Hamlet sets out to avenge his death. However, Hamlet struggles throughout the play with both his conscience and his ability to plot a murder, and in the final scene everyone dies. It’s a tragedy in the truest sense of the word.

Now as is true with nearly every one of Shakespeare’s works, there is plenty of symbolism, and there are meanings that can be interpreted. However, Wilbur reminds us, there are good interpretations of Hamlet and bad interpretations of Hamlet. Hamlet isn’t about the joy of war. That’s an objectively bad interpretation.

If we go back to those twin pillars of subjectivity and objectivity, we start to see a problem with that statement. I just called that interpretation of Hamlet an **objectively bad interpretation**. And so there is obviously some crossover between the two ideas, even if society has created a dichotomy there.

If we take a purely empirical approach to Hamlet, we can talk about who wrote it, when it was written, how many words there are, and where the wood was sourced for the pages in this specific copy. So interpretation isn’t purely objective, but it isn’t purely subjective either, since we can say with certainty that there are interpretations that are right, and interpretations that are wrong.

So what makes a good interpretation? That’s a really tough question to answer, but Wilbur points to the idea of context, in two different ways. First of all, there is the

context of the story as a whole. So take this quote: “To be or not to be, that is the question”. Now taken with no context, you could say “well, this is a precursor to Rene Descartes ‘cogito ergo sum’, or ‘I think, therefore I am’”. But if you take the context of the entire story of Hamlet, it’s pretty clear that what you have is a young man dealing with some serious internal conflict.

The second context to consider is shared context between the reader and the text. Although the interpretation is bound by context, the context itself has no limits, and the greater the context, the more precise and accurate the interpretation will be. So on the simplest level, to interpret this copy of Hamlet, you need the shared context of being able to read English. Without that, you’re not going to be able to come up with a good interpretation.

And you can continue from there: there’s the context of Western society, the context of all of Shakespeare’s other work, the context of the manner in which Shakespeare expected his plays to be performed, and so on. And the greater the amount of context shared between the writings itself and the personal bank of knowledge that you’re applying to it, the greater the likelihood that your interpretation would be a good one.

So if someone else came in who had the same context as all of us, plus they were an expert on 13th century Danish royal hierarchy, we would expect that they would be able to give us a better interpretation of the power struggle at the heart of the story of Hamlet than we could derive ourselves.

It’s important to recognize that this symbolism is something that’s implicit in good literature. Ernest Hemingway can claim all he wants that there isn’t any symbolism in *The Old Man and the Sea*, that the sea is the sea, the boy is a boy, the fish are fish, but if you read the book in the context of Western society it is absolutely riddled with symbolism. That’s what good authors do.

And so if we’re reading the Bible from the Christian pre-suppositional position that it was directly inspired by God, then we essentially have literature written by the greatest author of all time, and there are going to be questions of interpretation, so we need to ensure that we’re looking at each and every text with as much context as is possible, both in terms of considering the entire text, and also in considering shared context with the text, or lack thereof.

With that idea of context in mind, we can go to the story of Creation. When Lynn White says that the creation was given to man for his benefit, he is specifically talking about Genesis 1:28, usually referred to as the Dominion Mandate: “God blessed them (that is, Adam and Eve); and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it’” But there’s a lot of context to consider around that, so we’re going to take a look at it together.

The first thing to note is that there are two versions of the creation story given in the beginning of the book of Genesis. The first is a historical chronological version, that

gives context to the book of Genesis as a whole, an introduction of characters and setting as it were, the second is a poetic version that sets up the story of redemptive history for the rest of the Bible, so that's part of the bigger context we have to consider (Poole 2008).

The story, and the whole Bible, really, opens with a pretty clear summary statement: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". From there, we get a day-by-day breakdown of how the earth was formed. Day one was the creation of light. Day two, the atmosphere is separated from the seas. Day three, land is created, and plants are added. Day four, the sun, moon, and stars are placed. Day five, fish are created in the sea, and birds in the air. Day six, animals are created, followed by man and woman. And, in day 7, God rests.

It is in the penultimate day, day 6, that we get a critical sequence of events. Later in Genesis 2, in the second story of Creation, we learn that after the creation of man, but prior to the creation of woman, God placed Adam, the first man, "in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (NASB). The Hebrew for this verse, Genesis 2:15, is literally "Then he, Lord God, took the man and left him in the Garden of Eden to serve her and to keep her." Note that at this point, man has not yet been given the Dominion Mandate.

God then brought all of the animals and birds to Adam so that he could give names to them. Interestingly, the Hebrew word translated as "name" here is "shem". However, "shem" means more than just what something is called, but also "the essential reality of what something is, and its place". When Adam meets an animal, he is not only identifying their name, which he determined based on their nature, but also their place in the natural order, and their essential reality or identity. He continues to do this for all of the animals and birds. What an incredible level of eco-literacy that must have been!

After this process is completed, we are told that Adam has still not found a help-mate for himself, so God creates Eve. It is only after this that the Dominion Mandate is given.

Most of us know what happens next in this story. The devil tempts Adam and Eve, they choose to not trust in God and seek their own knowledge, and they introduce sin into the world and are banished from the Garden of Eden. The introduction of sin and evil into the world has irreversible consequences, and changes their relationship with the natural world. In Genesis 3:17, God tells Adam "cursed is the ground because of you".

The order of this entire sequence of events is the critical context that we must consider in order to fully understand the Dominion Mandate. There is a very distinct sequence.

First of all, God creates the fish, birds, and animals, so all living things, **before** he creates man. Simply put, this shows us where the natural world gets its value: not from man, since it was created before he was, but from the God who created all of it (Schaeffer 1970, Santmire & Cobb 2006).

Second, God creates man. He then gives man a series of gifts: He puts him in the Garden of Eden, a utopia of nature, in order to serve and keep it, He gives him essentially complete knowledge of the natural world, and He creates woman, a companion for man to share in the glory of the created with.

It is with this context that we can see that the Dominion Mandate was not given to allow sinful man to exploit the earth (Schaeffer 1970). Instead, it was blessing, that's important, Genesis 1:28 calls it a blessing, given to a man who, in a world without sin, had a knowledge of the natural world more complete than anything humanity has managed to compile since.

At the fall into sin, all of this was lost. Since Adam and Eve chose their own knowledge over the knowledge of God by choosing to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they have transformed the world in such a fundamental way that the ecological knowledge that they had compiled became worthless. No longer were they the ideal gardeners, managing the natural world to the glory of God. Instead, they found themselves engaged in a battle with the world for their own survival.

Breaking it down like this, it seems clear that man does not have a blessing from God to exploit the natural world. Although we have been blessed by God with modern technology that makes our battle for survival comparatively easy, we should still strive to glorify Him by caring for His creation (Schaeffer 1970).

There is one other misunderstanding that I'd like to address, and that's the idea that the fact that God will come to renew or destroy the earth means that as humans its fate is out of our hands, and so we have less of a responsibility to care for it.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul deals with a similar fallacy, but instead having to do with care of our bodies. Some among the Corinthians believed that since their bodies would be renewed with the second coming of Christ, then they didn't need to care for them at all, since God would repair all. Paul is quick to remind them that the opposite is true; they should all the more care for their earthly bodies, since they will have to answer to God about them when He returns.

In the same way that knowing that your body will renewed doesn't mean that you won't have to care for it, knowing that the earth will be renewed should not make us exploit it. Instead of looking for corners to cut when it comes to caring for the earth which we've been entrusted with, we should look for opportunities to care for the earth, so that, as in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, God may return and say to us "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

This is not to say that there are not people who are Christians who fall into some of these traps. At a 2013 conference, then-megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll was quoted as joking, in response to a question, "I know who made the environment, and he's coming back and going to burn it all up. So yes, I drive an SUV." I don't have the full context for his quote, all I know is that he used these words, and then some days later clarified that he was joking (although he didn't take that opportunity to recant his words). But as the saying goes, there is a grain of truth in every joke, and this pastor isn't the only one to have suggested such an idea.

However, just because these Christians interpret the Bible in this way, does not mean that their interpretation is correct. Coming from a Biblical perspective, we need to consider the fact that man is sinful, so as soon as we move away from a direct reading of the Bible to an interpretation of it, there is the possibility, and indeed likelihood, that the involvement of sin led to some errors in interpretation. Think back to what Ken Wilbur said; not all interpretation is good interpretation. So how should we answer this question from a Biblical perspective?

First off, this question sounds remarkably similar to a question asked in the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the primary confessions of reformed Christian churches. The catechism is structured as a series of questions and answers that use Biblical texts to answer common questions, and beginning with Question and Answer 59 is discussing the idea of Justification by Grace alone. The basic gist of this doctrine is that humans are saved from punishment for their sins only because of the grace of God; their works don't contribute to their salvation. Answer 63 plainly states that the reward of salvation "is not earned; it is a gift of grace." The catechism then asks "Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked?"

It's a good question to consider, and absolutely relative to what we're looking at right now. In one sense we have people saying that it doesn't matter what we do to the earth because God is going to destroy and/or save it, and in the other we have a question of "since God is going to save us, does knowing that not make people do whatever they want?" And the answer is a resounding "NO." Listen to what the catechism has to say on this question:

Q. Does this teaching not make people careless and wicked?

A. No. It is impossible that those grafted into Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

The Bible even gives us the natural world's perspective on this issue. Listen to what Romans chapter 8:19-21 has to say: "For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God."

Ok, so we're told that all of the natural world is waiting for the second coming of Christ. Why? We read on:

*For the creation was subjected to futility, **not willingly**, but because of him who subjected it" – remember back in Genesis when God said to Adam 'cursed is the ground because of you' – "because of him who subjected it, **in hope that** the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*

So the Bible is pretty clearly telling Christians, "Hey, listen up: you all are waiting for the second coming of Christ? So is the rest of the natural world! It's in the same boat as you." I think we're all familiar with the Golden Rule, "do unto others as you'd have them do unto you." And this text is telling us pretty clearly that we, and that's the royal we, humans and the natural world, are in this together, albeit with slightly different roles.

So right about now you might be thinking to yourself "Ok Gavin, this is great and all, you've quoted all of these Bible texts, refuted these myths, but what's the point? And here's the point. The point is that **accurate Christian theology and teleology leads to strong environmental ethics**, and in really simple terms, here's why.

Think back to those post-modern pillars. Now the idea of value can be, in post-modern terms, a fairly subjective idea. By that logic, any value that I place on something is only value to me, not to you. So in order for something to have value for everyone, it needs to have some autonomous value. It needs to get that value from within itself, and that's generally the stance that modern society has taken. So a person has value, a tree has value, a squirrel has value, and a bird has value. They have value because they are, because they exist (Wilson 2006).

But what about these less concrete things that we can observe? What about symbiosis, and competition, and predation? Since these are abstract concepts, their basis for value becomes really shaky, perhaps even nonexistent.

Compare that to the Christian perspective. For starters, people have value because they are created in God's image. And really there are two pieces to that: they have value because they were created by God, and because they are made in His image. And what about plants and animals and the rest of the natural world? All of these things have value because they were created by God, who is the master creator (Schaeffer 1970).

If that doesn't make sense, imagine some master artist. Imagine Picasso. Now Picasso is undeniably a great artist, on a historical level, so any time one of his paintings goes up for auction, it's valued at an incredibly high price, and is invariably sold for even more. A Picasso painting has value specifically because it's a Picasso.

So the same thing is true of the components of the natural world: they were created by God, so they have the value of something created by God. They have intrinsic value, but not autonomous value; they're getting that value from an outside source. And since God created all of these things to work **in a system**, then that system also has value.

And so not only do we find value in all of these individual pieces of the system, we find value in the system as a whole. We find value in concepts like biodiversity.

I'll give you an example of what this looks like in practice, from Michael Pollan's book The Omnivore's Dilemma (2007).

So if you've read the book you may recall, in one section of the book, Pollan spends a period of time living on a farm in rural Virginia, Polyface Farm. And he spends a large portion of the book explaining the systems that Joel Salatin, the farmer uses, and marveling over their efficiency.

Really, the productivity levels on this farm are absolutely astounding, and this is all top quality food. And so Pollan goes into a lot of detail explaining the mechanisms that make this possible, but there's one thing that he doesn't spend too much time on, and that is, how exactly did this farmer, how did Joel Salatin come up with these ideas?

So what Salatin did was he looked at this farm, his parents had run it but it wasn't enough to sustain them, and he thought "what are we doing wrong?" And he came to the conclusion that if you're going to design an ecosystem for animals, which is essentially what a farm is, then you need to consider what kind of ecosystem those animals were created to survive in. He basically took his Christian background and said "look, God is the ultimate designer, so let's take his design for each of these creatures, and for entire ecosystems, and use that as our model". And we came up with some really innovative solutions.

A good example of this is his grazing system. Instead of having his cows graze freely over a large field, he keeps them in a relatively small fenced area, and then moves that fenced area to a different part of the field every afternoon. The effect is that the cows more completely graze an area, allowing it to grow back at a faster rate.

Four days later he brings the chickens through the field in the same sequence, so that the chickens are able to eat the insects that are pupating in the cow dung at the time when they're best for eating. The actions of the chickens scratching through the cow dung also spreads it out through the field more evenly, so that it acts as a more effective fertilizer.

So now he has this incredibly productive, environmentally-friendly farm, all because he took a Christian approach to environmentalism and saw the value in the animals because God created them. He says "God created a pig to be a pig and act like a pig, so I need to design my farm in a way that allows a pig to act in the way God intended it to." It's a really simple concept, but his application of it has led him to all kinds of new methods of farming. It's pretty incredible.

And so we've now just gone on this journey, for the past 45 minutes or so, and we've come back around to why I'm here. And I'm here because I think that we need more of this. We need more Joel Salatin, we need more reminders of the value God places on creation, we need more people willing to act on those reminders.

Maybe a part of Lynn White is right. Perhaps the idea of Manifest Destiny in North America was the realization of some twisted interpretation of the Dominion Mandate. Undoubtedly Christians the world over have harmed the environment. But so have Buddhists, and atheists; Hindus, and Shamanists. Eastern culture is by no means free of environmental damage. Pointing fingers isn't going to solve our environmental problems, but inspiring people just might. And I don't think that the post-modern approach is the way to do this.

I've come to the realization over the past few years in this program, and prior, that I don't have to separate my subjective and objective thinking patterns. I teach Biology at Western Washington University, Bio 101 lab, and next year a seminar course. When I first started teaching I was really worried that I was going to get fired for being a Christian, for subscribing to reformed doctrine, for supporting the ideas of young earth creation. So I would compartmentalize my life. But I've realized that I can't hide that, I shouldn't hide that. It's part of my identity.

I don't have to compartmentalize my religious background from my work as I science teacher, I can bring the two together. I'm not saying that I'm going to spend 15 minutes in every biology lab class reading and analyzing the Bible, that's not what I've been hired to do, that's not my calling. But I shouldn't be afraid to let my spirituality be part of my identity as a teacher and as an educator.

Who knows, maybe I'll get fired. That would hurt, sure. But that's not just my loss. It's their loss too, because incorporating my whole self actually enriches my teaching, it doesn't detract from it.

Maybe it gives students different access points to the material.

Maybe it teaches them that they can consider scientific questions through a religious framework of their own, or a question in geology through a metaphysical framework.

Maybe they challenge me on something I say, and we all grow through discussion.

At the very least they'll see a passionate instructor, and that's something that I **know** for a **fact** makes a difference.

Parker Palmer (2003) has a quote about this that I absolutely love: he says "suppressing a belief system while you teach science is teaching science as a suppressed belief system." That's great. You aren't just teaching students the material or the curriculum, you're teaching students yourself.

And so what I'm asking you today is to be your whole self, and help others do it too.

Let your spirituality be a part of your identity in every role you have in your life.

See the value in all of Creation.

Care for the earth.

Challenge those barriers that you find between subjectivity and objectivity.

And if you're a Christian, live your life in such a way that when God does return, he'll see your actions, and the state of the natural world around you, and say "Well done, you good and faithful steward."

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord God and Heavenly Father,

We come before you this morning thanking you for all the gifts you have bestowed upon us. We thank you for bringing us here together today, and we thank you for the wonderful setting that you have given us.

We thank you for the mountains around us, the forests that we find ourselves in, the weather that you send, and all the birds, animals, fungi, plants, and everything else that makes up this amazing ecosystem.

I thank you for this group of people here today who care so much about the environment, and about your natural world. We ask for your blessing on the work that is being done to protect your creation, its components, and all of the systems at work within it.

Be with all those organizations that are working to conserve and protect natural resources. Allow this work to occur in the government, that they may enact policy that looks to protect the natural world. Work in the hearts of all your people Lord, that they may see the glory and the value in all of your creation.

We pray all these things, not because we deserve it, but in your son Jesus' name alone.

Amen

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'S2SS' written in a stylized, cursive-like font. The '2' is slightly smaller and positioned between the first and second 'S's.

References

- Means, R.L. (1967). Why worry about nature? *Saturday Review* 50, Dec 1967.
- Palmer, P.J. (2003). Teaching with heart and soul: reflections on spirituality in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education* 54(5):376-385.
- Pollan, M.J. (2007). *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York, USA: Penguin Press.
- Poole, M. (2008). *A Commentary on the Holy Bible by Matthew Poole*, 4th ed. Peabody, USA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Santmire, H.P. & Cobb, J.B. Jr. (2006). The world of nature according to the Protestant tradition. IN *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (ed. R.S. Gottlieb). New York, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Schaeffer, F.A. (1970). *Pollution and the Death of Man*. Wheaton, USA: Tyndale House.
- White, L. Jr. (1967). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science* 155: 1203-1207.
- Wilbur, K. (2000). *A Brief History of Everything*, 2nd ed. Boston, USA: Shambala Publications.
- Wilson, E.O. (2006). *The Creation*. New York, USA: WW Norton & Company.