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### Attending to the Beauty of Creation and the New Creation

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# ATTENDING TO THE BEAUTY OF CREATION AND THE NEW CREATION

CHARLES P. ARAND & ERIK HERRMANN

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THE BEAUTY OF  
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NEW CREATION**

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## About the Authors

# Charles P. Arand

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His areas of interest and expertise include the Lutheran Confessions and theology of creation. He received his Master of Divinity, Master of Sacred Theology and Doctor of Theology from Concordia Seminary (1984, 1987, 1989). He also holds a bachelor's degree from Concordia College in Milwaukee (now Concordia University Wisconsin) (1980).

He has translated the Apology of the Augsburg Confession for the Kolb-Wengert edition of the Book of Concord (Fortress). In addition to publishing more than 50 articles, he has written two books: *Testing the Boundaries: Windows into Lutheran Identity* (Concordia Publishing House); and *That I May Be His Own: A Theological Overview of Luther's Catechisms* (CPH). His other research interests include the theology of creation to which end he served as the primary drafter for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) document “Together with All Creatures: Caring for God’s Living Earth.”

In addition to his Seminary work, he has served on CTCR (for which he has drafted three documents) and as a drafter on the Synod committee responsible for revising the Explanation to Luther’s Small Catechism.

He and his wife, Betty, have two children, Becky and Benjamin; and one daughter-in-law, Bethany. He is a whooping crane enthusiast and a self-described “craniac.”





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His writing works include "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" in *The Annotated Luther: Church and Sacraments*, vol. 3 (Fortress Press); "Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings, 1539" in *The Annotated Luther: Pastoral Writings*, vol. 4 (Fortress Press, 2016); "Living in the Promises and Places of God: A Theology of the World" with Dr. Charles Arand in the spring 2015 issue of *Concordia Journal*; and "Luther's Absorption of Medieval Biblical Interpretation and His Use of the Church Fathers" in *The Oxford Handbook to the Theology of Martin Luther* (Oxford University Press, 2014). He also edited the "Preface to Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Defense against the False Charge of Rebellion (1525)" and "Preface to Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Explanation of How Karlstadt Understands His Teaching concerning the Lord's Supper and Other Teachings, and How He Wants Them to Be Understood, (1525)," both of which were published in *Luther's Works*, volume 59 (Concordia Publishing House, 2012).

Herrmann and his wife, Aliesha, have five children; Augustine, Constansa, Mathias, Tobias and Elspeth. They live in Eureka, Mo.



# Attending to the Beauty of the Creation and the New Creation

*Charles P. Arand and Erik Herrmann*

The beauty of the earth, in all its intricacies, is a gift of the creator to us. And its value is not practical or ethical, but is given to us simply to delight us even as God delights in it. And it is powerful. N. T. Wright notes that beauty, whether in God's creation or in human art, "is sometimes so powerful that it evokes our very deepest feelings of awe, wonder, gratitude, and reverence."<sup>1</sup> Beauty blossoms into appreciation for God's creation and love of the creator.

An aesthetic appreciation for creation is also one of the very reasons we are able to rule over the earth in a caring way as God's special creatures. As those creatures made in God's image, we find ourselves attracted to, attending to, and wanting to preserve that which we find beautiful. Our appreciation of beauty in other creatures and the wider creation draws us into an ethic of nurture and preservation rather than exploitation and survival of the fittest. The impoverishment of our world when species are lost is felt by us on a deeper level than merely pragmatics. It is perceived as a moral issue. Thus, there is in the first article relationship of aesthetics and ethics, as aesthetics plays an important role in ethics.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, it's been suggested that what we consider to be beautiful has played a far more important and effective role in preserving pieces of creation than have moral or ethical precepts. J. Baird Callicott observes, "In the conservation and resource management arena, natural aesthetics has, indeed, been much more important historically than environmental ethics."<sup>3</sup> But the aesthetics (or the appreciation of beauty in creation) and its value for ethics, is a fairly recent area of study among environmental philosophers, ethicists, and theologians dating to the eighteenth century when discoveries in astronomy and geology sparked a reconsideration of the beautiful in creation.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of this essay is to suggest some considerations for thinking about beauty with regard to the creation. As Christians, we affirm that beauty in creation is objective and universal, given that God repeatedly admires what he has made as "good."<sup>5</sup> It pleases and delights him. It witnesses to his benevolent wisdom. But we must also recognize that perceptions of what constitutes the beautiful are often culturally conditioned. What we find beautiful is often filtered by how we have learned to perceive it.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, we will first explore how we can find beauty in the “non-scenic” and ordinary things of creation as a confession of God’s evaluation of his creation as “good.” In doing such we may give thanks and praise to God for his entire creation and not only to the parts that we like. Second, we will consider the importance of finding (or restoring) beauty in the midst of creation’s bondage to corruption as a confession of our eschatological hope of the new creation. In doing so we may persevere in work that endures into the age to come.

### ***Finding Beauty in the “Non-Scenic” within Creation***

Few people in America today would argue with the need to protect the beauty of Yosemite, the Rocky Mountains, or Grand Canyon National Park. We travel across the country to see them, admire them, and photograph them. Consider what are considered the most photographed mountains in the world—the Grand Tetons. Obviously, we should preserve them! But then we drive back home to the plains of Kansas, the concrete canyons of the city, the sameness of suburban landscapes, and complain how we have only wetlands and marshes, grasslands and flat plains “and they’re so boring.”<sup>7</sup> So how have we been conditioned to see beauty in mountains but not in flatlands? In large part it occurred by means of various fields of study from philosophy to science to art to theology (and their influences upon each other) over the course of the past three-hundred years.

*Photo: The Upper and Lower Yosemite Falls*



Callicott points out that prior to the seventeenth century, nature was not considered to be a subject of serious painting.<sup>8</sup> When the landscape painters (Claude Lorraine, Salvatore Rosa, Salomon van Ruysdael, and Meindert Hobbema) came on the scene they shaped a perception of beauty that came to be known as the “picturesque”<sup>9</sup> that focused on woodland lanes, river scenes, and park-like settings. This had two effects. It created the activity of scenic tourism to places with beautiful landscapes and it gave rise to what came to be known as landscape gardening. Most of these were pastoral or cultivated landscapes. Wild landscapes like mountains, in keeping with much of the western tradition, were viewed with disdain both aesthetically and theologically.<sup>10</sup>

The eighteenth century brought about dramatic changes in aesthetic perception. Developments in astronomy and geology led many to embrace the grand, vast, and irregular landscape on earth as beautiful. Theologians responded with an “aesthetics of the infinite” in which they stressed God’s infiniteness and eternity. These developments found full flower in the nature writing of Transcendentalists and Romantics who sought the beautiful and sublime in landscapes untouched by human hands such as mountains, oceans, and deserts.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is not by accident that our earliest national parks were those that had grandiose and dramatic features—Yellowstone, Yosemite, etc. It was not until the twentieth century that we had an Everglades National Park and a Great Plains National Park.

The impact of the sciences and humanities upon our perception of beauty in creation is not necessarily bad. Christians can receive these First Article disciplines as gifts of God and use them for exploring and discovering God’s world. However, we must use them critically, by recognizing that they too are culturally conditioned and thus their results are provisional. Second, we can best use their results when they come from a ministerial use of reason, but not when they exercise a magisterial use of reason that expels God from his creation, or fails to recognize creation today as one groaning in bondage to corruption on account of human sin. In these ways, we can use them to enhance and enlarge our perceptions of beauty in creation so as to delight in and care for God’s entire creation, including the “non-scenic” corners where we live.

### ***Science and the Perception of Beauty***

A pivotal figure for connecting beauty to the conservation of “non-scenic” landscapes was the forester, wildlife manager, and conservationist, Aldo Leopold.<sup>12</sup> In the 1940s he criticized the callousness with which scientists approached nature solely in terms of statistics and scientific studies. Speaking to the Wildlife Society, he complained that the definitions of science penned by the National Academy “deal almost exclusively with the creation and exercise of power.” But he asked, “what about the creation and exercise of wonder or respect for workmanship in nature?”<sup>13</sup> He argued for the humanities to help rewrite the objectives of science.<sup>14</sup> The development of an ethic by

itself was insufficient for the cause of conservation. Ethics dealt with duties that are seen as burdensome whereas beauty attracts. People cherish and treasure that which they regard as beautiful. And so Leopold proposed a “land aesthetic” to go along with his land ethic<sup>15</sup> to counter the prevailing tendency of valuing land only in economic terms which led to the draining of marshes and bogs, and putting seemingly, every square foot of land into development.

In his land aesthetic, Leopold called for a change in the mind’s eye that went beyond the scenic. He argued that instilling an appreciation for nature is a ‘job not of building roads into lovely country, but of building receptivity into the still unlovely human

*People cherish and treasure that which they regard as beautiful.*

mind.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, it is not about taking people into scenic areas in order to view scenic overlooks. It was about helping them to see beauty in the “ordinary” places where they lived. For Leopold, such an appreciation could be cultivated through knowledge of the new field of ecology combined with evolutionary

biology. The combination of seeing interconnections within the whole (synchronically) in addition to connections through history (diachronically) would enable people to see even wetlands, bogs, and marshes as beautiful.

Leopold illustrated his new conception of beauty his “Marshland Elegy,” a “haunting ode” to Sandhill cranes and their marshland homes in Wisconsin.<sup>17</sup>

Our appreciation of the crane grows with the slow unraveling of earthly history. His tribe, we now know, stems out of the remote Eocene. The other members of the fauna in which he originated are long since entombed within the hills. When we hear his call we hear no mere bird... He is the symbol of our untameable past, of the incredible sweep of millennia which underlies the daily affairs of birds and men... Amid the endless mediocrity of the commonplace, a crane marsh holds a paleontological patent of nobility, won in the march of aeons, and revocable only by shotgun. The sadness discernible in some marshes arises, perhaps, from their once having harbored cranes. Now they stand humbled, adrift in history.<sup>18</sup>

For Leopold, we should not see cranes apart from marshes or marshes apart from cranes. Put another way, “We cannot love cranes and hate marshes.”<sup>19</sup> This way of “seeing with the mind” and thus perceiving with our senses allowed us to see that the marsh is no longer a “waste” or “God-forsaken mosquito swamp” but a thing of precious beauty.<sup>20</sup>

Leopold’s use of ecology can help us in a provisional way to see the beauty of interconnections between creatures and the places for which they were made. At the



*Aldo Leopold beholds the Rio Gavilan watershed in the northern Sierra Madre, circa 1936-7 (Photo: US Dept. of Agriculture via Wikimedia Commons).*

root of his culturally-conditioned evolutionary analysis<sup>21</sup> of the history of cranes, according to Holmes Rolston III, is a respect for life and the beauty of its persistence and perseverance—something that Christians can also appreciate, but attribute it to the power of God’s word of blessing to “be fruitful and multiply.” Taking this into account, we may well find beauty in the ecology of the places where we live as we explore the harmony of the interconnections between the various flora and fauna, as well as the cultural history that has shaped those places.

### **Art and the Perception of Beauty**

Along with science, art can also cultivate an appreciation for creation by honing our perceptions. Following Leopold’s lead, Richard Bauckham has argued that it is not enough for Christians to assert that human dominion entails ethical obligations on the grounds that the earth belongs to God. We also need an appreciation for nature.<sup>22</sup> Bauckham acknowledges that such appreciation “in its various forms of expression, is not, of course, purely altruistic, but like the pleasure we gain from knowing other people (as distinct from the benefit we gain from using other people) it entails a sense that nature does not exist simply for our benefit, but is inherently valuable (‘good,’ as God said in Genesis 1).”<sup>23</sup> Appreciation for creation combined with our control over creation “leads to a caring, respectful exercise of this power, which aims to preserve the intrinsic value we perceive in nature.”<sup>24</sup>

Humanly produced art can help us cultivate an appreciation of nature in several ways. First, it takes us “beyond the role of mere spectators of nature’s spectacle towards engaged contemplation of nature and appreciative participation in nature.”<sup>25</sup>

[Art] whether literary, visual, or even musical, can, as expressing and fostering human appreciation of nature, be part of our curatorship of nature. It also alerts us to the fact that we cannot relapse into a one-sided preference for “unspoiled” nature over nature adapted by human skill and art, a romantic view which is based on what we have seen to be an artificially sharp distinction between nature and culture.<sup>26</sup>

Second, it can hone our perceptions by helping us to see the world through the eyes of others. As Scott Russell puts it, “What comes through to us from a work of art is not simple transmission of what arose within the artist, but rather a new impression refracted differently through the lens of each individual.”<sup>27</sup> Third, it causes us to do a “double take” if you will, to pause and ponder before moving on. This seems especially true for nature poetry.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, art will reflect its own particular cultural contexts as well. The eighteenth century shifted the perception of beauty from the small, exquisite, and symmetrical in nature to the vast, grand, and irregular nature, from seeing it in flat plains and rolling fields to seeing it in mountains, oceans and deserts.<sup>29</sup> Theologically it shifted from seeing God’s goodness and wisdom in nature to seeing the infinity and eternity of God in space and the vast objects of the universe.<sup>30</sup> This flowered in the Romantic poets of the nineteenth century such as William Wordsworth,<sup>31</sup> and the nature writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Muir, as well as the portrayals of creation’s grand and dramatic features in the paintings of Thomas Cole and the photography of Ansel Adams.

In the last fifty years the nature writings of Rachel Carson, Peter Mathiessen, and Carl Safina, have drawn attention to the diversity and inter-connectedness of life on earth. William Warner explores the interconnections of blue crabs and fishermen in the Chesapeake. Annie Dillard shows us the mix of beauty and horror in creation. And the photography of Michael Forsberg has sought to highlight the beauty of the Great Plains. The same applies to the documentaries of Jacque Cousteau or David Attenborough (Planet Earth, Frozen Planet).<sup>32</sup> Christian literature such as in the Psalms, Christian hymns, and canticles can also play a role in honing our perception of creation.<sup>33</sup> Each of these gives us a fresh way of seeing the beauty of creation.

### ***Theology and the Perception of Beauty***

In addition to science and art, we need to add the most important component for shaping our “mind’s eye”; for finding beauty in the non-scenic of creation, namely, to see the Creator’s attentive care for his creation. It should especially be able to help us appreciate beauty in the ordinary or “non-scenic” when Irenaeus affirms the intrinsic goodness of creation or when Aquinas celebrates the diversity of God’s works in creation as manifestations of God’s goodness.<sup>34</sup> But, as Luther laments, the tendency

in our fallen nature is that we do “not wonder at these things, because through our daily association with them we have lost our wonderment (*italics added*).” But he adds, “if anyone believes them [God’s words] and regards them more attentively, he is compelled to wonder at them, and his wonderment gradually strengthens his faith.”<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps no one embodies such wonder and delight more than St. Basil the Great, of the fourth century. Basil was one of the most educated men of the early church, having studied at the major intellectual centers of the ancient world. During Lent one year, Basil preached a series of sermons on the six days of creation (known as the Hexaemeron) in which he drew upon the science of his day, personal observation, and the Scriptures. His homilies were so well regarded that Gregory of Nazianzus declared, “When I take his Hexaemeron in my hand and read it aloud, I am with my Creator, I understand the reasons for creation, and I admire my Creator more than I formerly did when I used sight alone as my teacher.”<sup>36</sup>

Basil affirms the intrinsic beauty and worth of creation in light of God’s evaluation that it was “very good.” He describes beauty as “that which is brought to perfection according to the principle of art and which contributes to the usefulness of its end.”<sup>37</sup> He writes,

...a hand by itself or an eye alone or any of the members of a statue, lying about separately, would not appear beautiful to one chancing upon them; but, set in their proper place, they exhibit beauty of relationship, scarcely evident formerly, but now easily recognized by the uncultured man. Yet, the artist, even before the combination of the parts knows the beauty of each and approves them individually, directing his judgment to the final aim. God is described on the present occasion as such an artistic Commender of each of His works, but He will render becoming praise also the whole of completed world.<sup>38</sup>

So Basil compares how we perceive the beauty of creation with how God views it in light of the overall purpose of his creative activity.

The Scripture does not point out exactly this, that a certain delightful vision of the sea presented itself to God. For, the Creator of all creation does not look at beauty with eyes, but He contemplates in His ineffable wisdom the things made. A pleasant sight, indeed, is a whitened sea, when settled calm possesses it; and pleasant also when, ruffled on the surface by gentle breezes, it reflects a purple or bluish color to the spectators, when it does not beat violently the neighboring land, but, as it were, kisses it with peaceful embraces. Surely, we must not think that the meaning of Scripture is that the sea appeared good and pleasant to God in this

way, but here the goodness is determined by the purpose of the creative activity.

And then Basil goes on to describe “ecologically” what we today would identify as the water cycle in a way that seems remarkably current today.

In the first place, the water of the sea is the source of all the moisture of the earth... Consequently, the sea is good in God’s sight because of the permeation of its moisture into the depths of the earth; and it is good because, being the receptacle of rivers, it receives the streams from all sides into itself but remains within its own limits. It is good also because it is a certain origin and source for aerial waters. Warmed by the rays of the sun, it gives forth through vapors a refined form of water, which, drawn to the upper regions, then chilled because it is higher than the reflection of the suns’ rays from the ground and also because the shadow from the cloud increases the cooling, becomes rain and enriches the earth.<sup>39</sup>

Note how Basil shows himself familiar with science of his day and places it within the context of God’s benevolent work to refresh and make fruitful the earth.

Although Basil does not possess an ecological understanding of cranes as members of a biotic community, Basil composes his own celebration of cranes and their characteristics.

How the cranes in turn accept the responsibility of outposts at night, and while some sleep, others making the rounds, provide every safety for those asleep; then, when the time of watching has been completed, the guard, having called out, goes to sleep and another, succeeding provides in his turn the safety which he has enjoyed. You will see this discipline also in their flight, a different one takes up the task of guiding at different times and, after having led the flight for a certain appointed time, goes around to the rear, transferring the leadership of the journey to the one behind him.<sup>40</sup>

Basil sees them as marvelous expressions of God’s providential wisdom. “In what bird does nature not share some marvel peculiar to it?” How many varieties of winged creatures he has provided for! How different he has made them from each other in species! With what distinct properties He has marked each kind!<sup>41</sup> And in what becomes something of a recurring refrain, Basil emphasizes that God has given each creature exactly what it needs: “Thus, everything in existence is the work of Providence, and nothing is bereft of the care owed to it. If you observe carefully the members even of the animals, you will find that the Creator has added nothing superfluous, and that he has not omitted anything necessary.”<sup>42</sup>

Such appreciation for creation and its beauty evokes wonder for the Creator. Basil exclaims, “What time can suffice to say and to explain all the wonders of the Creator?” and “All things bear traces of the wisdom of the Creator.”<sup>43</sup> Basil thus not only grasps the creature, he also grasps the creator “in, with, and under” the creature, a theme that Luther would develop as the *larvae Dei* (masks or veils of God).<sup>44</sup> In his Genesis commentary, Luther makes that point again, “When God reveals himself to us, it is necessary for him to do so through some such veil or wrapper and to say: ‘Look! Under this wrapper you will be sure to take hold of me. When we embrace this wrapper, adoring, praying, and sacrificing to God there, we are said to be praying to God and sacrificing to him properly.’”<sup>45</sup>

And so both Basil and Luther continually see in all the features of creation witnesses to the creator’s benevolence and benefaction. To that end, Basil prays for his congregation,

May God, who created such mighty things...grant to you an understanding of His truth in its entirety, in order that from visible objects you may comprehend the invisible Being, and from the greatness and beauty of creatures you may conceive the proper idea concerning the Creator [*italics added*]...Therefore, in the earth, in the air, and in the heavens, in water, in night and in day, and in all things visible, clear reminders of the Benefactor grip us.<sup>46</sup>

In a sense, what both Basil and Luther engage in is what Joseph Sittler calls “beholding.” He notes that “the word ‘behold’ lies upon that which is beheld a kind of tenderness which suggests that things in themselves have their own wondrous authenticity and integrity.” It is to live in the world with awe for life that acknowledges God’s attentive care for his creatures and sees them as our fellow creatures. In other words, “To stand beholding means that one stands within the Creation with an intrinsically theological stance.”<sup>47</sup>

### ***Embodied Participation in Beauty***

Theology, science, and art are not intended to replace but to assist our own direct, personal experience of creation’s beauty. And, it is a personal participation in, and sustained attention to, the particular patch of earth on which we live that can foster affection for it. Basil modeled this in his *Hexameron* when he declares, “I have seen these wonders myself and I have admired the wisdom of God in all things.”<sup>48</sup>

Personal immersion in creation is especially important for us as embodied and sensoried people. God made us a psychosomatic unity of body and soul. Direct contact with creation employs all of our senses and faculties. God gave us senses to interact with the full spectrum of creation and its beauty: eyes to see sunsets and the shimmering red throat of a hummingbird; ears to hear the songs of birds and the beating of their wings; a nose to take in the fragrance of wine or the sweetness

## *Direct contact with creation employs all of our senses and faculties.*

of cedar; taste in the earthiness of wine or hoppiness of beer; and touch in a cool breeze or the heat of the sun. And he gave us the faculties of reason and imagination to perceive its workings and beauty.

Yet we have become increasingly disconnected from creation by surrounding ourselves in the synthetic environments of

our own making.<sup>49</sup> Few authors have addressed these issues more compellingly and prophetically than Wendell Berry, the Kentucky farmer, essayist, novelist, and poet.<sup>50</sup> He draws attention to the importance of acquiring an intimate familiarity with the particular places where we live and the particular creatures with whom we share those places. Through such familiarity, we cultivate imagination as a way of “seeing.” As he puts it, “To imagine is to see most clearly, familiarly, and understandingly with the eyes but also to see inwardly, with the ‘mind’s eye.’” And so by “imagination we see it [the land] illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it. By imagination we recognize with sympathy the fellow members, human and nonhuman, with whom we share our place.”<sup>51</sup> Our interaction with creation comes to be understood within “the context of normal, everyday relationships.”<sup>52</sup>

### ***Beauty and the New Creation***

In the first article of the creed, our challenge is to see that all of it—in its order, provision, and harmony—is the beautiful work of God. But as we turn to the second and third articles, we encounter a deeper problem, namely, the diminishment of creation brought about by the fallenness of God’s human creatures. Here we move away from the need to find beauty in the “non-scenic” of creation to finding beauty in the midst of creation’s bondage to decay. In this context, beauty again plays an important role. Whereas beauty in the first article attracts us to creation, arouses appreciation for creation, and thus serves the cause of conservation so beauty in the second and third articles can serve to arouse and foster hope for the renewal of creation. And so we not only need to find beauty in the “common” elements of creation as impetus for its preservation, but beauty within the diminishment of creation for our persistence in its preservation.

### ***The Misuse and Diminishment of Beauty in Creation***

We approach creation and its beauty today as fallen creatures who have misused the creation and brought suffering to it. Nowhere is this revealed more starkly than at the horror of the cross. There is no “pulchram” at the fulcrum of sin and redemption, nothing beautiful to see here. The suffering Son of God possessed no “form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Is 53:2). The fact that our Lord died as one without form or comeliness is part of his

passion in our behalf. Sin rendered him downright ugly. Sin is ugly. His cross stands before us as a grotesque and cruel image, a mirror and revelation of all that has gone wrong with our world. The cross casts a shadow of judgment on all sinners who, acting as “theologians of glory,” not only distort goodness and truth, but also twist one’s relationship to what is beautiful.

Yet what precisely does the crucifixion reveal about this fallen relationship to beauty? The problem is not the ontological quality of beauty itself—that somehow beauty in God’s eyes looks like a man hanging from a gibbet and we have wrongly preferred sunsets and cherry blossoms. Nor is our problem really an issue of epistemology—that we can only know the divine beauty through what is vile and repulsive. On the contrary, the goodness and beauty of creation does testify to goodness and beauty of God (e.g. Rom 1, Ps 19). Rather, the problem of beauty revealed by the cross is an issue of hamartiology: we take what in creation is empirically and actually beautiful and ascribe divinity to it. Such things of creation are not in themselves evil—it is our sinful perception and use of them, thus Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation (1518): “without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.” Beauty, like all that is genuinely good is quickly turned by the sinner into something divine or a means to the divine, in fine, they “worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25).

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we refuse to believe it.*

So rather than receiving the beauty of creation as a gift from God for our good and our delight, we seek to possess it and claim it as our own. Luther points out in his Large Catechism, “Therefore, if we believe it [the first article of the creed], this article should humble and terrify all of us.”<sup>53</sup> God has given us all that we need, yet we refuse to believe it. And so we misuse all his gifts for our own “pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator.” He continues, “For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves. . .”<sup>54</sup> As a result, we confuse the creator with the creature by failing to distinguish the creator from his works. Idolatry ensues, as Luther never tires of reiterating.<sup>55</sup>

As a result of our idolatry, creation groans in subjection to the bondage of the curse.<sup>56</sup> “The beauty of the present world is transient.”<sup>57</sup> Holmes Rolston III observes, “Every wild life is marred by the rips and tears of time.”<sup>58</sup> We see birds with torn or missing feathers and the full elk with scars from battles. In addition, the direct human impact of sin on creation over the last couple centuries has become clearer. Timothy Dudley Smith’s hymn, “The God Who Set the Stars in Space” captures

it nicely: “But yet on ocean, earth and air; The marks of sin are seen; With all that God created fair; Polluted and unclean.”<sup>59</sup> And this is something that all can see (as Niebuhr once said, “sin is the one empirically demonstrable teaching of the church”). Aldo Leopold lamented that one of the consequences of an ecological education is that it opens our senses<sup>60</sup> to see that “one lives alone in a world of wounds.”<sup>61</sup>

It is not just creation that suffers. What affects creation affects us—physically, emotionally, psychologically, and aesthetically. Peter Harris, founder of A Rocha, put it pointedly, “if there is damage done to the creation, there is damage done to the human community.”<sup>62</sup> That is easy to see when pollution contaminates the air we breathe and the water we drink. But we are also impoverished by the loss of beauty in creation resulting from, for example, the extinction of our fellow creatures of God.<sup>63</sup>

As Aldo Leopold reflected on the extinction of the passenger pigeon in the early twentieth century he wondered what we may have lost.

We grieve because no living man will see again the onrushing phalanx of victorious birds sweeping a path for spring across the March skies, chasing the defeated winter from all the woods and prairies...Our grandfathers were less well-housed, well-fed, well-clothed than we are. The strivings by which they bettered their lot are also those which deprived us of pigeons. Perhaps we now grieve because we are not sure...that we have gained by the exchange. The gadgets of industry bring us more comforts than the pigeons did, but do they add to the glory of the spring?<sup>64</sup>

In a similar vein, an editorial entitled “On Cranes and Culture,” in the *Christian Science Monitor* reflected on the precarious situation of whooping cranes in the country in 1954.

There are twenty-six whooping cranes left in the world, says the National Audubon Society, two of them in captivity. And the Society appeals to sportsmen to save these great man-high birds from extinction by sparing them as they migrate from northern Canada to their winter refuge. Well, so what? The dodo bird and the passenger pigeon are already extinct. So, almost, are the trumpeter swan and the heath hen. And civilization seems to survive.

But does it, wholly? Can a society, whether through sheer wantonness or callous neglect permit the extinction of something beautiful or grand in nature without risking the extinction of something beautiful or grand in its own character? And the American society does have a conscience about such things.

Some millions of Americans will hope, we are sure, that the whooping cranes are spared for their own sake. And we have an idea that most of them will at least sense, also, that each of these beautiful birds, as it flies southward, carries a Yellowstone or Quetico-Superior Wilderness [a Canadian park] between its great wings.<sup>65</sup>

What is the nature of that impoverishment? Perhaps three things. First, we lose God's beautiful works that evoke from us awe and wonder. Second, we lose the capacity for wonder and beauty and instead content ourselves with settling for less. Third, we have lost something in our moral character for "each species made extinct is forever slain."<sup>66</sup>

Such losses elicit not only sadness and grief, but at times hopelessness and despair. Fred van Dyke has commented that as a result, many conservation biologists suffer from a sense of frustration, despair, and even hopelessness at the possibility of making any progress in preserving the biodiversity of the earth.<sup>67</sup> And Peter Harris reports that "one of the marker personality traits among environmentalists is anxiety. The Christian approach is very different: it is celebratory and grateful and hopeful."<sup>68</sup>

### ***Beauty and Hope of the New Creation***

Jesus came to reclaim and restore his entire creation as the Lord of creation.<sup>69</sup> He does so by beginning with where the problem of creation's ruin began, namely, with us. By uniting us with Christ's death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit makes us new creatures. He renews us in at least two ways. First with regard to our perceptions and senses. Second with regard to our actions. When we let go of our idolatry, we can begin to perceive properly. Not to claim that we have this of ourselves, but to receive it for what it is, a gift from God.

Apart from faith, creation's witness to God was largely "muffled" by us. It is as if we had wax in our ears, or had hit the mute button, refusing to hear its witness. Luther speculated that Adam and Eve would have had intuitive insight into the "disposition of all animals, into their characters and powers." He goes on to note that due to sin, we now lack the "insight into that fullness of joy and bliss which Adam derived from his contemplation of all the animal creatures...all our faculties today are leprous, indeed dull and utterly dead..."<sup>70</sup> Thus we fail to see God's benevolent wisdom in his creatures.

But the gospel has ushered in the "dawn of the age to come" and now we begin to hear and see. Preaching on Mark 7:31–37 ("be opened"), Luther notes that the gospel opens our "ears, eyes, mouth, and hands to apprehend the world as creation... But now, at the dawn of a new age, we are beginning to acquire once again the knowledge of the creatures that we lost through Adam's fall. Now we can look at the creatures much more correctly..." And so we "begin, by the grace of God, to recognize his majestic works and wonders even within the little blossoms, when we

reflect about how almighty and good God is.” In his Large Catechism Luther speaks of how all the creatures and temporal blessings help us to see God’s goodness.<sup>71</sup> Luther expressed this vividly in a catechism sermon in the 1530s when he encouraged children to open their ears with faith and listen. So when you see a cow in the field, imagine it saying, “Rejoice and be glad, I bring you milk and butter from God.”<sup>72</sup>

So through faith, we suddenly discover that “the whole earth is filled with speaking.”<sup>73</sup> In fact, faith sees that “the creation is ‘our Bible in the fullest sense, this our house, home, field, garden, and all things, where God not only preaches by using his wonderful works, but also taps on our eyes, stir up our senses, and enlightens our heart at the same time.’”<sup>74</sup> For, like Luther, we can now “recognize his majestic works and wonders even within the little blossoms, when we reflect about how almighty and good God is.”<sup>75</sup> We discover that God speaks “true and existent realities... Thus the sun, moon, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc. we are all words of God, in fact only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation.”<sup>76</sup> God has his own

*Faith enables us to see the persistence of beauty in the present creation in the midst of its suffering and decay*

grammar in which every creature is a noun or syllable.<sup>77</sup> And not only does God speak, but God is present “in, with, and under” his speaking in creation.<sup>78</sup> Bayer suggests that this understanding of God’s words helps us to speak of “God’s immanence in the

world” in the midst of our current ecological crisis.<sup>79</sup> And so the recreative word of the gospel sends us out into creation where we encounter his original creating words reverberating all around us.

Faith enables us to see the persistence of beauty in the present creation in the midst of its suffering and decay. The beauty of hyacinths and tulips pushing through the snow in spring testifies to the persistence and perseverance of life due to God’s original word of blessing.<sup>80</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Jesuit priest and poet, captured this in his poem “God’s Grandeur.”<sup>81</sup> But the hope of the new creation also changes our vision of the present creation. It is like a husband who first hears that his wife is expecting—he sees her beauty anew, now as a mother to be. So it is that in hearing the gospel we can see the beauty of this creation with the expectation of new birth and the “life of the world to come.” N. T. Wright suggests that we think of the present beauty of creation the way we view a glass of wine. The beauty of the crystal glass holds the promise of the wine that we will drink from it.<sup>82</sup> So the present creation anticipates and holds the promise of an even more beautiful creation when Christ renews all things.

Perhaps this is also, in part, why Christians are drawn to one another. In the promise that has been given to each of us in baptism, we perceive in one another the beauty of our resurrection hope. More than simply the consolation of knowing someone with a shared ideology or world view (actually we often don't share these things!), Christians recognize in one another that Christ dwells in us and that his life is continually being manifested in our own (e.g. Gal 4:19, Rom 8:10, 2 Cor 4:10–11). The aesthetic dimension of our Christian fellowship is not often appreciated, but it is especially present when we let the glory and beauty of the new creation fill the hope of our life together now.

Yet as Christians, we do not stop with rediscovering or taking comfort in the remnants or glimpses of beauty that remain within the present creation in the midst of its corruption. Christian care seeks the flourishing of life and the blossoming of beauty. It is not that we can bring it about now (ala post-millennialism). Instead, Christian faith in the eschatological promises of God (renewing the beauty of creation) prompts us to engage in acts of beauty as confession of the hope that we've been given. Such acts speak to both the restoration of proper dominion and creation's future renewal.<sup>83</sup>

Luther suggests that we currently “retain the name and word ‘dominion’ as a bare title, but the substance itself has been almost entirely lost.”<sup>84</sup> What rule we exercise now we do so by power and force not by gentleness and kindness. He encourages us to ponder this to increase our “longing for the coming Day when that which we lost in Paradise through sin will be restored to us.” Scott Ickert notes, “Moreover—and this point is crucial—any ongoing reconsideration of dominion is intensified by an eschatological urgency, whereby creation's original harmony is transferred into the realm of expectation and hope.”<sup>85</sup> Our dominion and attempts at restoration now “becomes a sign of the time when perfect harmony will be restored.” It plays an eschatological role by “anticipating the coming harmony of humans and animals adumbrated in creation's initial ordering.”<sup>86</sup>

It should be pointed out that engaging in acts of restoring beauty as part of our dominion may often go against the grain of a culture that prizes above all else cost-benefit analyses, “bang for the buck,” and efficiency. Thus the culture may well ask “why waste money on that endeavor?” It is hopeless or useless.

Consider the story of Jesus and the woman who poured the nard. When viewed exclusively through the ethics shaped by the first article, one can sympathize with the disciples' objections. What a waste of resources! What could have been used to serve the hungry and relieve the poor was lost on this impractical, lavish, opulent act! It is an argument that we often hear today when it comes to art in church or the beauty invested in the church buildings themselves. But Jesus moves them beyond simply the first article preservation of this present world (“you will always have the poor with

you”) to beauty and a hope beyond this present existence: “She has done a beautiful thing to me...she has prepared my body for my burial.” Jesus invites the disciples to consider this act from an entirely new perspective. Though it was incomprehensible to the disciples and even the woman, this reverent act for burial would give way to the beauty of the resurrection and the new creation. Her act would not be wasted or in vain, it would not die with the old world as so many of our efforts will (Ecclesiastes!). No, this would be made known wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world. So beauty here also carries an ethical act, but one that can only be valued as such in light of the resurrection and the hope of the new creation. Apart from this, beauty can seem absurd or even immoral.

In light of the life to come beauty can act as a testimony to that hope, filling others with hope and purpose that no amount of pragmatics can accomplish. Consider the Italian movie, *Life is Beautiful*. In the midst of the death and depression of a concentration camp, Guido, the main character, breaks into the guard station to play a record over the camp PA system—a song that he and his wife danced to when they fell in love. The act seemed to be as foolish as it was dangerous, for it accomplished nothing. He was still imprisoned in this gray reality. He was still destined for death. Yet as the strains of classical music wafted across the air, his wife, hearing it on the other side of the camp, was lifted out of the darkness of her present state. A moment of beauty, a moment of hope. The same might be said about planting flowers in a depressed area, or taking care of the land around an urban church. “When people cease to be surrounded by beauty, they cease to hope.”<sup>87</sup> It not only says something about the future; just as importantly, it says something about us now, about what we were created to be and what God has promised to give us in that eternal Spring.<sup>88</sup>

Beauty as a confession of faith and hope also has implications for the church. From the perspective of the old world, spending money to beautify our church buildings does not appear ethical but absurd or even evil. After all, that money could be better spent on taking care of the poor or spreading the gospel, couldn't it? But from the perspective of the new age, spending our treasures on artistic expression within the church becomes part of our public confession of our hope. In this regard, it is interesting that in Hispanic communities, the church will often be built before the residents' homes, and often more opulently. Perhaps this is how one should understand the function of the great beauty and art inside the temple of Solomon—beauty that no one could actually ever see, but served in this case as a testimony of God's presence.

Beauty also has implications for our work in the creation. One might ask, if it is worth the millions of dollars to bring an endangered species back from the brink of extinction. It has taken over seventy years to restore a flock of whooping cranes that migrates from Aransas, Texas to Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta, Canada.

The flock has grown from a low of 16 cranes in the winter of 1941–42 to just over 300 in the winter of 2011–12.<sup>89</sup> In struggling to figure out how best to act, mistakes are made along the way. Wendell Berry puts it well, “An art that heals and protects its subject is a geography of scars.”<sup>90</sup> So, is it worth the money? In some ways, that is not really the point.<sup>91</sup> We do so as a confession of our new creation hope. The same applies to art. N. T. Wright notes that art must describe the world as it is and will be (ought to be). It must come to terms with the wound of the world and the promise of the new creation.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, Rolston notes that wildlife artists often don’t include broken or missing features in their paintings, instead they “repair them” before admiring them.<sup>93</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Beauty is a gift of the one from whom, through whom, and by whom it was made. And that includes beauty as an objective reality in the creation as well as our subjective capacity for enjoying that beauty. To borrow from Samuel Coleridge, we might say that the beauty in creation weds nature to us.<sup>94</sup> As fallen creatures, our challenge is to find beauty within God’s creation where we might least expect it, both in its commonness and in the midst of its suffering to corruption. But in seeking and receiving this gift, beauty also inspires us to act. Time to reflect is often necessary to receive this gift, but when it is received, beauty kindles within us a longing to care and preserve, to confess and give thanks, to serve our neighbor, to strive for unity among Christians, and to bear witness to the gospel which promises to make all things new. Beauty lives among us not as a luxury for the refined, peculiar aesthetic of the artist. Instead, beauty imbues the entire life of Christian faith, hope, and love.

## Endnotes

- 1 N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 44.
- 2 Rolston III cautions that aesthetics can play an important but not decisive role for conservation. He points out that his wife's value is not found only in her beauty, but in her life and character, namely, in her intrinsic value. See "From Beauty to Duty: Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Ethics," in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, eds. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 327. This book is a good introduction to this discussion among environmental philosophers and ethicists.
- 3 J. Baird Callicott, "Leopold's Land Aesthetic," in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 106. The energy of the 1960s and 1970s seemed to be waning by the 1980s when it had become the province of large environmental organizations that approached things from the standpoint of law and policy making for which scientists supplied value free scientific studies. Thus it gradually lost its grass roots support. Sagoff asks, why were more not interested? In part, Sagoff suggests it was due to lack of aesthetic. "The problem science poses for environmentalism is particularly poignant in its attempt to answer questions that require instead theological, moral, and aesthetic judgments." Again, "The environmental movement is dying because because it represents the Enlightenment not the Reformation. It is full of Descartes and empty of Calvin. It is high on rationality and low on redemption." See Mark Sagoff, *The Economy of the Earth: Philosophy, Law, and the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2008), 206–207.
- 4 Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011). Unfortunately, Christianity is blamed for not seeing all of creation as beautiful (just as it was blamed by Lynn White for the ecological crisis in the 1960s. Carlson and Lintott argue that nature aesthetics was "hamstrung by religion which deemed nature an unworthy object of aesthetic appreciation." They go on to observe how for much of Christian history up through the eighteenth century, wild nature such as mountains were seen as piles of rubble and ruin cast up by the Flood and thus reminders of our sin and God's wrath (the same could be said of oceans and deserts). "Introduction," *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism*, 2.
- 5 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 18.
- 6 Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, 3.
- 7 What pertains to the beauty of landscapes also applies to the preservation of nonhuman fellow creatures. It is not by accident that the logos of most conservation organizations are the so-called charismatic (read beautiful and majestic) creatures such as the panda bears, whales, and tigers. Rarely are insects or the "creepy crawly" things of Genesis 1 selected.
- 8 J. Baird Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," in *Companion to A Sand County Almanac: Interpretive and Critical Essays* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 157–71. He did another version entitled, "Leopold's Land Aesthetic," in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, 105–118.
- 9 Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," 159. Callicott also brings out how this was taken to an extreme with the "Claude glass." People would take with them into the country side a concave and tinted rectangular mirror. When they arrived at a location, they would turn their back on the landscape and hold up the mirror and frame the landscape so that it would be "pretty as a picture." Callicott, "Leopold's Land Aesthetic," 107.
- 10 For example, Martin Luther himself appears to have held such an opinion. "And so, just as there are mountains after the flood where previously there were fields in a lovely plain, so undoubtedly there are now springs where there were none before, and vice versa. For the entire surface of the earth was changed." (LW 1:98). But Nicolson argues in part that the tendency to see mountains as blisters and warts was part of the larger Latin tradition in the west from Virgil and Horace. The Romans "felt mountains aloof, inhospitable, desolate, and hostile" (39). These views shaped the next seventeen centuries of the Christian era.
- 11 By contrast, Christians often considered wilderness in negative terms in light of how it is sometimes portrayed in the Bible, namely, a wild area unsuitable for human habitation and in which wild beasts live and other nonhuman creatures live. See Robert Barry Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004). For wilderness in Christian history see Susan Power Bratton, *Christianity, Wilderness,*

*and Wildlife: The Original Desert Solitaire* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1993).

- 12 For many, Leopold is the intellectual father of environmental philosophy. See Curt Meine's, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, 2010).
- 13 Curt D. Meine, "Moving Mountains," *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*, eds. Richard L. Knight and Suzanne Riedel (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18. Callicott, drawing on a number of Leopold's writings, suggests several dimensions of how we determine the beautiful. These include the artistic (color of feathers or the songs of birds); the personality of species (soaring of hawks and eagles); the scarcity value (those rare and less common), the wildness (wolf versus coyote), and the native (versus exotic). "Leopold's Land Aesthetic," 111.
- 14 Meine, "Moving Mountains," 19.
- 15 "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. *Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 224–25.
- 16 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* 176–77; Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," 163.
- 17 Meine, "Moving Mountains," 20.
- 18 Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac: and Sketches Here and There* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 96–97.
- 19 Callicott, "The Land Aesthetic," 162.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Colin Tudge, in *The Bird: A Natural History of Who Birds Are, Where They Came From, and How They Live* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008) points out that Darwin grew up in an age "that was brutal, ruthless, competitive, and predominatly commercial, and increasingly atheistic and materialist. All of these attitudes were underpinned and justified by the physical harshness of the world, and a growing body of philosophy and science (422). Thus as others have pointed out, his thesis "was largely inspired by the English economist/cleric Thomas Malthus" who argued that there would soon be more people in the world than could be fed thus locking life into unceasing competition from birth to death (423). Thus competition rather than cooperation became the dominant metaphor for understanding the world.
- 22 Richard Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," *Evangelical Quarterly* 58(1986): 233.
- 23 Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," 236.
- 24 Richard Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," 235–236.
- 25 Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," 237. See also Robert Faricy and Mary E. Jegen, *Wind and Sea Obey Him: Approaches to a Theology of Nature* (Christian Classics), 53.
- 26 Bauckham, "First Steps to a Theology of Nature," 237.
- 27 Sanders, "The Way of Imagination," *The Georgia Review* (Summer 2012): 253.
- 28 For a good introduction to American nature poetry, see Wendell Berry, "Secular Pilgrimage," *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, ed. Ian G. Barbour (Boston: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1973), 132–55. He notes that the "best nature poetry seeks expressly the power to deepen our insight" into our relationship with nature. "It gives us a sense of our proper place in the scheme of things. Its impulse is toward the realization of the presence of other life" 140–141. For extensive analyses of nature poems, see John Felstiner, *Can Poetry Save the Earth? A Field Guide to Nature Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). He suggests that poetry helps us do a "double take" 6. "A poem, like a painting catches life for the ear or eye, still what's ongoing in human and nonhuman nature" 14.
- 29 Nicolson (324) notes how Akenside captures this division in "the Pleasure of Imagination":  
one pursues  
the vast alone, the wonderful, the wild  
Another sighs for harmony, and grace  
And gentlest beauty.

- 30 See Nicolson, chapter 5, “Sacred Theory of the Earth,” 184–224.
- 31 Nicolson, 389–93, points out that few recognized the heritage of eternity and infinity as exemplified by mountains as well as “change and decay as an inevitable part of the permanence of nature” more than Wordsworth:

The immeasurable height  
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed  
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,  
 And in the narrow rent at every turn  
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,  
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside  
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight  
 The unfettered clouds and regions for the heavens,  
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—  
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features  
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;  
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,  
 The types and symbols of Eternity,  
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (quoted in Nicolson, 392-393)

- 32 The former sought to witness to the miracle of life, the other seems to view everything more through the lens of the Darwinistic struggle of eat or be eaten. Jacques Cousteau, “We never attempted to decipher the meaning of life; we wanted only to testify to the miracle of life” *The Human, the Orchid, and the Octopus: Exploring and Conserving Our Natural World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 39.
- 33 See, for example, Jaroslav J. Vajda’s “God of the Sparrow;” G. W. Briggs, “I love God’s Tiny Creatures;” and Stephen P. Starke, “All You Works of God, Bless the Lord;” St. Francis’ “Canticle of Brother Sun” expresses an appreciation to God for His creatures by expressing an appreciation of His creatures. See Roger D. Sorrell’s analysis in *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 129. See also Susan Power Bratton, *Environmental Values in Christian Art* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008).
- 34 Aquinas states that no one creature can fully express the goodness of God, but together they share it as each expresses that goodness in its own way. Fred Van Dyke, *Between Heaven and Earth: Christian Perspectives on Environmental Protection* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2010), 81–82.
- 35 LW 1:49; Again, “we have such beautiful creatures, but no one notices them because they are so common.” Luther in Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2008), 107; WA TR 5:225.11.14; #5539, 1542–43.
- 36 “Introduction,” Hexaemeron, vii–viii.
- 37 Basil seems to describe things in an Hebraic way here that describes how each part fits within the functioning of the whole thus producing a harmonious working of creation. This would be different from a more hierarchical functioning of things that characterizes Platonic thought.
- 38 Basil, Hexaemeron, 53.
- 39 Basil, Hexaemeron, 64–65.
- 40 Basil, Hexaemeron, 125. These may have been the “common cranes” or “Eurasian cranes” as opposed to the Sandhill cranes of North America.
- 41 Basil, Hexaemeron, 130–132.
- 42 Basil, Hexaemeron, 144. For example, swans are given webbed feet and a long neck to “procure the food hidden in the deep water.”
- 43 Basil, Hexaemeron, 141–142.
- 44 “For Luther, God is not to be sought behind His creation by inference from it but is rather to be apprehended in and through it...Because God cannot be seen by man in His naked transcendence, God must wear a mask or veil in all His dealings with men to shield them from the unapproachable light of

- His majesty.” And so “every creature is His mask.” *Ideo universa creatura eius est larva*. WA, XL, 1, 174, 3 [Gal 2:6]. Quoted in Ralph Bohlmann, “The Natural Knowledge of God,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34(December, 1963), 729.
- 45 Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther’s Works (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 1:15.
- 46 Basil, Hexaemeron, 54.
- 47 “Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility,” in *Evocations of Grace*, ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 80.
- 48 Basil, Hexaemeron, 113.
- 49 See Richard Louv on what he calls the nature deficit syndrome in *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (New York: Algonquin, 2008) and *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age* (New York: Algonquin, 2012).
- 50 See Joel Kurz’s introduction to the thought of Wendell Berry, “Getting Our Bearings: Wendell Berry and Christian Understanding,” in the *Concordia Journal* (Summer 2010): 263–275.
- 51 Wendell E. Berry NEH 2012 Jefferson Lecture “It All Turns On Affection,” 3. <http://www.neh.gov/about/awards/jefferson-lecture/wendell-e-berry-lecture>
- 52 Stephen R. Kellert, “Aldo Leopold and the Value of Nature,” *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*, eds. Richard L. Knight and Suzanne Ridel (London: Oxford, 2002), 136
- 53 LC II, 22; K–W, 433.
- 54 LC II, 21; K–W, 433.
- 55 Cf. LC I, 21; FC SD II, 9; LW 19:53–55.
- 56 Luther observes that “it appears here what a great misfortune followed sin, because the earth, which is innocent and committed no sin, is nevertheless compelled to endure a curse...” (LW 1:204). More specifically, “God’s practice has always been this: Whenever He punishes sin, He also curses the earth.” (LW 1:99). Luther has a view of history of decline does not take place all at once. If this is true for human history, it is true of nature as well. “After sin all these things were marred to the extent that all creatures and the things which were good at first later on became harmful on account of sin. Even the sun and the moon appear as though they had put on sackcloth. Moreover, later on there was added the greater curse through the Flood, which utterly ruined Paradise and the entire human race.” (LW 1:90). “The curse was made more severe through the Flood” (LW 1:205). Nicolson suggests that where Luther sees the entire earth as changed by the curse and Flood, Calvin sees the current earth as relatively the same earth as God created at the beginning, 97–99. See Nicolson’s account of how theologians wrestled with whether the vast, irregular, and wild features of nature in the eighteenth century were part of the curse on sin or in fact part of God’s providence and design, 184–270.
- 57 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 224.
- 58 Holmes Rolston III, “From Beauty to Duty: Aesthetics of Nature and Environmental Ethics,” in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, 333.
- 59 2002 Hope Publishing Co. Smith’s hymn follows a nice creedal structure.
- 60 Curt D. Meine, “Moving Mountains,” *Aldo Leopold and the Ecological Conscience*, eds. Richard L. Knight and Suzanne Riedel (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.
- 61 Aldo Leopold, *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold*, ed. Luna B. Leopold (London: Oxford University Press, 1993), 165.
- 62 “The Joyful Environmentalists,” *Christianity Today* (June 2011): 33.
- 63 It was inconceivable to most that extinctions could occur until the last couple centuries. See Mark V. Barrow, Jr., *Nature’s Ghosts: Confronting Extinction from the Age of Jefferson to the Age of Ecology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Luther reflects on this as well: “But I think that even if someday a species should perish (but I doubt that this can happen), it would nevertheless be replaced by God” (LW 1, 52). Later in his Genesis commentary, he reflects on Zephaniah 1:3 (see also Isaiah 13:19–22), where God threatens to gather up the fish of the sea and the birds of the heaven. Luther observes, “Similarly, in our age many streams have fewer fish than they had within memory of our ancestors. The birds are less abundant, etc.” (LW 1:99).
- 64 Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, 131.

- 65 “On Cranes and Culture,” *Christian Science Monitor* (September 17, 1954): 22.
- 66 Holmes Rolton III, *Environmental Ethics: Duties and Values to the Natural World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 158.
- 67 Fred van Dyke, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2012), 223–224.
- 68 “The Joyful Environmentalists,” 32
- 69 See Travis Scholl’s “Triduum,” *Lutheran Forum* (Winter 2008), 25.
- 70 LW 1, 66. Nicolson notes that Calvin especially stresses that the problem lies with man and not creation. In other words, “man is unable to appreciate nature because of his lapsed condition.” Quoted in Nicolson, 98.
- 71 Johannes Schwanke, “Luther on Creation,” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 90; LW 1:39; 6:24–25.
- 72 Martin Luther, *Luther Werke*, WA 30, II: 87, 6–9; 88:5–6, 10–11.
- 73 Bayer, *Theology of Luther*, 109, 107.
- 74 Quoted in Bayer, *Theology of Luther*, 111. Sermon of May 25, 1544 on 1 Corinthians 15:36ff; WA 49:434.16–18. Luther sees in God’s work in creation—such as bringing forth birds from the water—testimonies to God’s power to raise us from the dead.
- 75 Quoted in Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 108 (WA TR :1.574.8–19; No. 1160).
- 76 LW 1:21–22; on Genesis 1:3–5.
- 77 Schwanke, “Luther on Creation,” 85.
- 78 See Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 103–105, and Schwanke, “Luther on Creation,” 84–89.
- 79 Bayer, *Martin Luther’s Theology*, 103–104.
- 80 “Now the entire creation in all its parts reminds us of the curse that was inflicted because of sin. Nevertheless, there have remained some remnants of the former blessing, namely, that the earth is, as it were, forced to work hard to yield those things that are necessary for our use, although they are marred by thorns and thistles, that is, by useless and even harmful trees, fruits, and herbs, which the wrath of God sows.” (LW 1:204).
- 81 The world is charged with the grandeur of God.  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil.  
Crushed. Why do men then now not wreck his rod?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
- And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And through the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings. (Quoted in Felstiner, 95–96.)
- 82 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 222.
- 83 See Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: How a New Generation is Restoring the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2010) for examples of Christians working to restore beauty in urban areas.
- 84 Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, LW 1:67
- 85 Scott Ickert, “Luther and Animals: Subject to Adam’s Fall?” in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, eds. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (London: SCM Press, 1998), 93.
- 86 Ickert, “Luther and Animals: Subject to Adam’s Fall?” 93.
- 87 N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 231.
- 88 In this regard, see Paul Raabe’s letter, “Plant a paradise,” to the St. Louis Post Dispatch:

“In St. Louis, many dilapidated buildings have been vacant for years—empty stores, warehouses and factories. They are eyesores and invitations to drug deals and criminal activities. To be sure, modern urban areas need to ‘pave paradise and put up a parking lot’... Studies show that green space affects the local community in many positive ways. With economic incentives, perhaps some property owners would consider plowing under a parking lot and planting a paradise.” [http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/editorial/article\\_3d56d966-9bb2-5c2b-a2cb-7dd6a6838f9a.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/opinion/editorial/article_3d56d966-9bb2-5c2b-a2cb-7dd6a6838f9a.html)

89 See <https://www.savingcranes.org/whooping-crane.html>.

90 Berry, “Damage,” in *What Are People For* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 7.

91 This is not to say that there shouldn’t be preferences or priorities for us. One might contribute to hunger relief before contributing to the saving of an endangered species. But one might do the latter before spending money on entertainment or frivolous purchases that we only throw away a few days later.

92 Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 224

93 Rolston, “From Beauty to Duty,” 333.

94 Coleridge words are, “wedding Nature to us.” Quoted in Felstiner, 39.

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