



Pollution & the Death of Man

Francis A. Schaeffer , Udo Middlemann

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The Bible is clear: mankind was meant to exercise godly domination over the earth. Yet today men mine valuable resources by whatever method brings the greatest profit in the shortest time, leaving the earth ravaged. They hunt and fish for pleasure, not food, leaving animal carcasses behind to rot. They worship self and ignore the God who made them.

The answer to the ecological crises of our day is found only in the glorious truths of biblical Christianity: God created ex nihilo; He is both infinite and personal; we are made in His image and thus have great value in Him; Christ's death brought redemption from the consequences of the Fall (for believing individuals now and for all creation when He returns).

There are indeed serious ecological crises in our world, but, says Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, one of the greatest Christian thinkers of our time: "The Christian who believes the Bible should be the man who--with God's help and in the power of the Holy Spirit--is treating nature now in the direction of the way nature will be [when Christ returns].... God's calling to the Christian now, and to the Christian community, in the area of nature... is that we should exhibit a substantial healing here and now."

A powerful Christian classic--a marvelous theological response to ecological danger signals.

Pollution & the Death of Man Details

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From Reader Review Pollution & the Death of Man for online ebook

Leandro Guimarães says

One of ðe few specifically Reformed approaches to ðe environment.

Sarah Simpson says

Excellent.

Heather N says

This little book completely changed my idea of environmental responsibility. It is a quick read, but it is powerful and incredibly timely, considering Schaeffer wrote it back in 1970. I seriously think it should be read by every Christian who walks our earth and uses its resources.

Alex Stroshine says

It is true that the environmental movement has not been embraced by Christians the same way we have come to fight for traditional values and life, but Schaeffer's "Pollution and the Death of Man" has left a strong impression on me as to how a Christian should regard ecology. While Man has a special covenant with God, a covenant that binds us to our Maker unlike any other flora or fauna on Earth, we all share as members of Creation.

Steve says

Schaeffer 's book was one of the first Christian voices in the discussion about ecology and the environment. Written as a response to charges against Christian theology that claimed it to be a belief system that actually encourages abuse of the environment, Schaeffer did a solid job refuting the wrong thinking of its detractors. The book does start a bit slow, but it gains speed nicely thereafter. Middelman's concluding chapter to the 1992 edition constitutes a needed afterword to Schaeffer's original 1970 book.

John Wilson says

Often, the PC/"Hippie" view of the Earth and ecological issues has been a turn off to the Christian, and so as a reaction against that, the Church has too often dismissed ANY concerns for ecology--not wanting to be drawn into the political morass. But here, Schaeffer reminds the Church that the biblical Christian worldview demands that we as Christians take a stand and get involved. And because of our relationship to the Lord,

and because this is HIS creation, of which we are distinguished stewards, we have a responsibility to love the creation and its creatures as we love ourselves. This does not mean we do not chop down the tree for housing or warmth, or do not use the animal for important resources of food, but that we do so with a self-imposed limitation, bringing honor and aesthetics back to creation. Great book!!

David Sarkies says

Theology of the Environment

2 September 2018

Well, Schaeffer is certainly correct in one point at the beginning of this book, and that is that there has never really been a consistent Christian theology when it comes to the environment and caring for the Earth. In fact, in all the years that I have been to church I have rarely, if ever, heard a sermon where we are confronted with our wholesale destruction of the planet. In fact, there was a general belief in the theory that since the world is slated for destruction, taking care of the environment is a moot point, but then again this also follows the belief that the most important role for a Christian is to take is to basically share the gospel of Jesus, and pretty much everything will flow out of that.

Well, we can certainly see how well that has worked, and I'm not sure if the idea that God is one day going to destroy and remake the world anew gives us the right to basically screw up the environment and leave it as a polluted wasteland. Mind you, there might also be this belief that if we destroy the world then it will bring on the second coming, but I don't think you can really force God's hand in that way – don't worry, I've tried. In fact, I believe that some of the issues that God had with the Israelites had a lot to do with them not taking care of the land in which they were living (among many other things).

Now, Schaeffer raises the issue of the Sacred Grove, which in a sense sits side by side with the idea of the brazen image. The way he sees it is that this whole idea of the brazen image is basically taken to the extreme to pretty much ban all forms of religious art. The thing is that I don't have a problem with religious art, and I'm not sure the Bible is really all that condemning of it either. The thing is that it is not so much the art that is the problem, but the reason for which the art is used. Fortunately, governments have stepped in to prevent some churches from basically destroying a lot of the art located within its walls, but surprise surprise, the church then gets up in arms over government intervention, and how they are taking away their freedom of religion (no they are not).

However, it was the sacred grove that I was speaking of, something that was quite prevalent in the era of Ancient Rome. However, due to the idea that the grove was pagan, when the Christians took control of the empire they didn't just start going around and destroying the groves, but they saw all respect for nature as being something abhorrent, almost akin to idolatry. Mind you, this started to change during the Renaissance, particularly with the rise of some of the more modern styles of art. It seems that artists began to appreciate the beauty of nature, and this went even further when Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt created the world's first national parks.

There is also the problem with the modern corporate culture – when profit is the primary motive then pretty much everything else gets tossed to the side. For instance, when new housing developments are established, the developers basically lay waste to the land. The same is the case with pollution, which is why we need clean water and clean air acts. Unfortunately, these pieces of legislation, and the departments that overlook them, seem to be little more than toothless tigers. In the end, such laws are pretty much trumped by the pursuit of profit. In fact, organisations such as the WTO pretty much dominate over all other organisations to the point that any attempt to harm an entity's profit will result in fines and penalties.

Okay, the environment is actually a lot more resilient than we give it credit for – species pretty much learn to survive and adapt, and those that are unable to do so end up dying out. Take our cities for example, where we have literally driven out all wildlife with the exception of rodents. In Australia possums can be found living in parks (and our roofs), and I've noticed that the same is the case with squirrels in London. Ironically, one of the things that I discovered is that apparently the rabbit is also an introduced species to England, apparently brought over by the Normans so that they would have something to hunt. The thing is that creatures, and plants, survive and adapt, and the problem is that this adaptation takes the form of creatures literally becoming a monoculture. Mind you, I'd be concerned with parasites who learn to survive off of oil and other rubbish.

Schaeffer also has this idea of a hierarchy, sort of like God, Human, Animal, Plant, and Machine. Okay, I'm not entirely sure if you can put machine into this hierarchy since it happens to be an artificial construct, but then again many of our plants and animals are also artificial constructs, having been specifically bred by us to provide us with goods and services. Yet, as I have suggested, we aren't the first civilisation to bring wholesale destruction onto the environment – the nation of Egypt, in one form or another, has existed on the banks of the Nile, and that south of the Aswan dam, the banks of the Nile have been an artificial construct since the beginning of civilisation as we know it. There are also suggestions that the Sahara came about through an ecological catastrophe, no doubt due to extensive farming techniques that resulted in the land being stripped bare. A similar thing is happening in Australia where intensive farming techniques are pretty much altering the landscape of an already arid land.

So, this brings me back to the question of Christians and the environment. Well, as I mentioned, I agree that very little is being done by Christians to actually stand up for the environment against the ravages of big business. In a way they are being so distracted by issues such as abortion and gay marriage that they seem to have forgotten that not only do we have just one Earth, but we are also systematically destroying it. The problem is that our neglect of the planet is resulting in millions of people dying of starvation, and water becoming undrinkable and the air unbreathable. In reality this is an issue that goes way beyond being good stewards of God's Earth, to having a destructive effect not only upon those around us, but upon those yet to be born – you know, loving one's neighbour and all that. E-waste is a classic example since a lot of it ends up in third world countries which have literally become garbage dumps, and valuable materials are extracted from the waste using some incredibly toxic processes.

The question then arises as to what can be done, particularly since many of the polluters hold much more sway than what we do. I guess one of the things comes down to our mind set. There is an argument that goes along the lines of 'they do much worse than what we do, so we should keep on doing it'. Well, if everybody thought like that then nothing would change. The thing is that there are lots of things that we can do, such as changing our consumption habits, and doing what we can to recycle. However, one thing is that the church really needs to start taking the idea of caring for our environment much more seriously than what it has been doing in the past. That can easily be done by lobbying the church elders and ministers, and if that doesn't work, then maybe looking for a church that does care about the environment.

John says

In the 1960s, awareness was growing that humanity could have impacts on the planet's life systems that were profound and long-lasting. What did Christian faith have to say about this? A highly influential article by White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (Science 10 March 1967: 1203-1207; available online) set the agenda for eco-theology for the next half century. White argued that Christianity itself bore a heavy responsibility for humanity's destructiveness towards the natural world: "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference".

Schaeffer's book, first published in the early 1970s, was perhaps the earliest evangelical response to White - at that time few evangelicals showed much awareness of ecological issues. (A brief personal observation. When I became a Christian in about 1973 I devoured Schaeffer's works, and they were mind-expanding - opening my eyes to art and literature and general culture and ecology and much beside. He had his ears and heart open.) The book reprints White's article in full, so that readers can engage with it on its own terms.

The book begins with a personal example about DDT in birds' eggs, and formulates ecological questions in terms of "pollution" (remember, this is just after "Silent Spring") - living peaceably on the earth without damaging it. Picking up on White, Schaeffer asks what fundamental ways of thinking shape the way that humanity treats the natural world. Is Christianity the problem? He does not defend Christian practice - indeed, one of the most memorable things about the book is its passionate indictment of the ugliness and shallowness of much Christian practice, its false spirituality which despises the body and the earthly. But rather than taking a pantheistic turn, Schaeffer argues that a right Christian theology will honor the natural creation without worshipping it: "Christians, of all people, should not be the destroyers. We should treat nature with an overwhelming respect... Saint Francis' use of the term 'brothers to the birds' is not only theologically correct, but ... to be thought of ... to be practiced ... to be *felt* as I face the tree, the bird, the ant.... If I love the Lover, I love what the Lover has made."

A basic question about all of Schaeffer's thought is whether "getting our worldview right" is really as important or as effective as he believed. The last paragraph of the book begins, "When we have learned this - the Christian view of nature - then there can be a real ecology; beauty will flow, psychological freedom will come, and the world will cease to be turned into a desert." Strong words. At any rate I think it can be said that how we worship forms who we are. If our worship articulates the understanding of and joy and awe in creation that suffuses this book, we will become people who are closer to God and who more deeply respect what God has made.

Melissa Travis says

What can I really say beyond: Francis Schaeffer, always brilliant! This is an essay Schaeffer wrote back in 1970 at the height of the hippie version of the environmentalism movement. He argues that environmentalism was originally an evangelical Christian movement promoted by the likes of J.R.R Tolkien, but the cause was "highjacked" by political radicals in a spirit of pantheism rather than Christian stewardship. Very eye-opening and enjoyable read.

Matt says

This is a great book especially for its time. I would dare say that most Christian thinkers today are still not where Schaeffer was in 1970. He was definitely a prophetic thinker, quite ahead of his time.

Although this is a quick read, it gives you much to think about and is thought provoking. He argues against a care-free attitude and practice towards nature that is so common in Christian circles because "it's all going to burn one day anyway." He mainly interacts with two articles by Lynn White and Richard Means which are actually reprinted in the appendix for the reader. Most would agree that if action is to be taken to care for nature it must come from your beliefs, i.e., religion. You don't act on what you don't believe in. So, many at this time were suggesting Pantheism as the best religious belief to engender care for nature. If you are one

with all things, then you will care for it. Schaeffer critiques this with a few points including that this is just egoism (protection of self motivating) as well as a discussion of universals and particulars and how it doesn't work.

He promotes a biblical view of ecology which states that we should care for and respect nature because God created it. This alone gives it value. While we are created in the image of God and are above nature, we also share a commonality with nature - both are created. We share the fact that we are creatures of God. A few other points he touches on is that the biblical view is actually more consistent than an evolutionist trying to protect nature as well as that Christians should be treating nature in the direction of how it will be when it is renewed at the new Creation. He uses the parallel that we do the same things in our Christian lives. We don't say "It doesn't matter how I live, I will throw my life away because Christ will change me when he comes back." Schaeffer believed that Christians should have a substantial healing and restorative impact on nature and that to not have this impact actually denies who we are as Christians.

There are many more gems in this book, some of which I will put in my quotes section. I definitely feel this is a book which should not be ignored today. It takes it out of the political realm of Democrats vs. Republicans and puts it directly into your lap as a Christian.

Jeremy says

Christianity has the answer to our ecological problems. Schaeffer argues against the western tendency to look towards the pantheistic east in this regard. I agree with his claim that Christians have had sub-Christian answers to the ecological problem. We have the basis within our worldview to do better.

Laura Cole says

This book is a good reminder of the way Christianity views nature. We believe in a hierarchy that makes humanity more valuable than the rest of the creation, but this does not mean that we can abuse the rest of creation; instead we are called to be good stewards and care of it. Schaeffer exhorts Christians to seek beauty and protect nature. The book also explores pantheism and why a lot of people are turning to this belief in order to protect creation.

I gave this book three stars because I found it to be reiterating things I already knew, but it is a good reminder.

Andy Hickman says

Francis A. Schaeffer, "Pollution and the Death of Man: A Christian View of Ecology." (1970)

Courageous and provocative polemic arguing for a greater response from the Church to take action against

the injustice of pollution.

QUOTES:

This is something we must always be careful of. Words have two meanings, the definition and the connotation. The connotation goes on no matter what you do with the definition. Modern man destroys the definition of religious words, but nevertheless likes to cash in on their connotation/ motivation force. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 2)

Pantheism eventually gives no meaning to any particulars. In true pantheism unity has meaning, but the particulars have no meaning, including the particular of man. Also, if the particulars have no meaning, then nature has no meaning, including the particular of man. A meaning to particulars does not exist philosophically in any pantheistic system, whether it is the pantheism of the East or the "paneverything-ism" in the West, beginning everything only with the energy particles. In both cases, eventually the particulars have no meaning. Pantheism gives you an answer for unity, but it gives no meaning to the diversity. Pantheism is not an answer. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 2)

...the hippies of the 1960s did understand something. They were right in fighting the plastic culture, and the church should have been fighting it too... More than this, they were right in the fact that the plastic culture - modern man, the mechanistic worldview in university textbooks and in practice, the total threat of the machine, the establishment technology, the bourgeois upper middle class - is poor in its sensitivity to nature... As a utopian group, the counterculture understands something very real, both as to the culture as a culture, but also as to the poverty of modern man's concept of nature and the way the machine is eating up nature on every side. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 2)

A man who begins to take a pantheistic view of nature has no answer for the fact that nature has two faces: it has a benevolent face, but it may also be an enemy. The pantheist views nature as normal. In this view, there is no place for abnormality in nature. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 2)

The beginning of the Christian view of nature is the concept of creation: that God was there before the beginning of the space-time continuum and God created everything out of nothing. From this, we must understand that creation is not an extension of the essence of God. Created things have an objective existence in themselves. They are really there. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 4)

Christianity believes that God has created an external world that is really there; and because He is a reasonable God, one can expect to be able to find the order of the universe by reason. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 4)

If God treats the tree like a tree, the machine like a machine, the man like a man, shouldn't I, as a fellow-creature, do the same -- treating each thing in integrity in its own order? And for the highest reason: because I love God -- I love the One who has made it! Loving the Lover who has made it, I have respect for the thing He has made. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 4)

The man who believes things are there only by chance cannot give things a real intrinsic value. But for the Christian, there is an intrinsic value. The value of a thing is not in itself autonomously, but because God made it. It deserves this respect as something which was created by God, as man himself has been created by God. (Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man, Ch. 4)

Ryan Jiorle says

This is a quick read that starts with how solving the "problem of ecology" (older phrase for environmental abuse and degradation) cannot occur with a secular or pantheistic mindset. The author begins with a critique of two essays, which are included at the end as appendices: one that claims Christianity is responsible for society's widespread neglect for ecological health, and another that calls for explorations of morality to include man's relationship with nature, not just to one another. He then goes on to discuss why Christianity offers a consistent and long-lasting justification for environmental stewardship, despite that many thinkers claim the exact opposite. His writing is not always particularly clear, and there are a handful of tangents that break up the main themes of the chapters. However, Schaeffer offers a very solid rationale for a Christian environmental ethic, grounding his arguments in the essence of creation and humankind's position as creature's made in God's image. This is a worth a read for anyone interested in environmentalism, whether you are a Christian or not, as it makes many generalized points that do not apply to just Christianity and its tenets.

John says

This is a good, short book concerning man's dominion over the earth. Schaeffer writes out of concern for the destructive forces of modern man upon the earth. He sees the destructive elements in our culture emanating from materialistic Darwinism, not from Christian theology as many argue. This was written in the late sixties, so while dated in that sense, the foundation is there for Christians to learn from and to build upon. This is excellent and highly recommended.
