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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2337k6s9>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(21)

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Publication Date

2005

DOI

10.5070/G312110591

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Does Untouched Nature Contribute to Famine? Bibliographic Essay, Part 1

W. Ted Johnson

Scottsdale Public Library, USA

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The "value vote" played an important role in the 2004 presidential election in the United States. It was surprising and gratifying to find environmental issues listed by some conservative groups as moral issues during this campaign. However, these groups approached the moral issue of the environment differently.

Chuck Colson failed to list the environment at all in his list of the top 10 moral issues facing America on the BreakPoint website, even though the environment offers a more direct relationship with a known moral standard than other items on his list, such as education or the media (Colson, 2004). That standard is the Bible and Mr. Colson refers to it frequently. The Bible clearly teaches that people are responsible for caring for the environment. Violating biblical teaching is immoral. Therefore, the environment is an obvious moral matter. Logic offers yet another standard. If it is morally wrong to steal from a neighbor, it is no less morally wrong to steal from future generations by exploiting the environment for immediate profit. Similarly, it is immoral to take another's life. What difference does it make if that life is lost with a bullet to the heart or by knowingly polluting the land to the point that many lives are lost, such as the asbestos industry as described in the book "An Air That Kills" (Schneider & McCumber, 2004). Religious differences aside, until we elevate environmental issues to equivalency with other moral issues, real environmental appreciation and improvement will elude us.

The National Association of Evangelicals, on the other hand, affirmed that: "God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the Earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part. We are not the owners of creation, but its stewards, summoned by God to 'watch over and care for it' (Genesis 2:15). This implies the principle of sustainability: our uses of the Earth must be designed to conserve and renew the Earth rather than to deplete or destroy it" (National Association of Evangelicals, 2004).

Wayne Grudem, of Phoenix Seminary, along with a host of other religious leaders took a very different approach. While they acknowledged the moral aspect of the environment, they suggested that natural resources have value only to the extent they are developed for direct human benefit. In fact, they believe that public policy based on the idealism of "untouched nature" hinders wise development of the earth's resources and contributes to

famine, starvation, disease, and death among the poor. They go on to say that the Bible does not view "untouched nature" as the ideal state of the earth, but expects human beings to develop and use the earth's resources wisely for mankind's needs (Grudem, 2004).

Interestingly, the Bible refers to the Garden of Eden as "very good" and this affirmation must be one of the earliest references to "untouched nature" ever recorded. Whether or not God was being merely idealistic there or when He spoke to Job about all the examples of "untouched nature" for use by non-human elements of creation, it is clear that Dr. Grudem needs to take a closer look at the Book he cites with regard to environmental issues (Johnson, 2000). It is just as clear that a better understanding of the causes of famine from the ancient past to the present would be worthwhile and that is the purpose of this column.

It is hypothesized that untouched nature will not be cited as a factor contributing to famine, based upon a review of selected sources from the bibliography below. Part two of this column will appear in the next issue of the *Electronic Green Journal* as a bibliographic essay analyzing these sources to determine the cause and effect relationship between untouched nature, politics, and famine. Gaining a better understanding of the interplay between these factors may save lives and foster wider efforts to protect untouched nature, as intact ecosystems demonstrate their ability to prevent famine, starvation, and disease among the poor.

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