

## **More**

**“Bless the earth.”**

**Leviticus 24:23-24**

*The Gods Must be Crazy: Faith for troubled times #4*

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### **Creative Intent**

When God created the heavens and the earth light transformed the deep expanses of darkness by the explosion of energy. New stars formed everywhere in an expanding universe, combusting hot and bright. Galaxies – billions of them – organized matter and energy into luminous, spiraling colonies. Comets hurtled through the sky, icy tails tracing their paths as they combusted with the heat of their sun. Some say now that these delivered to the earth key ingredients for the mixture of life.

When God created the heavens and the earth, volcanoes burst gases into the atmosphere. While dry land appeared above the levels of water the first tiny organisms worked tons of oxygen into this new world’s air and the solutions of atmosphere, water, and soil combined to make the earth ripe for that new life to be nurtured, in all its diversity, all of its interdependence, and all of its balance.

When God created the heavens and the earth, this rock spinning and revolving around its source of heat and light grew rich, then, with vegetation and animated life dancing and living and filled with divine grace. And God smiled at all that had creation became. It was good.

Streams bounded from mountain’s glacial heights, passing over the first rocks of high altitude already laden with nutrients and tiny microbes, readying themselves to support fish and waterfowl on rivers’ way to the ocean. Passing along the lowlands they watered the plains and made them rich for grassland and woods and, in time, cultivated fields. Forests took from the soil and the air and the springtime rains, and then replenished the air with rich oxygen. Like them, the creatures and ecosystems were all given their parts to take their portion from the earth, and then give an assigned portion back again – and they fulfilled their roles well.

When God created the heavens and the earth, there was fullness and blessing. There was a design and balance. And it worked. It is stocked with all the resources we will ever need.

Such is God's intent. The earth is filled with the very power of the love God is. As the earth lives, it celebrates the love. It reflects the love. Blessing.

### 32

Blessing, as long as each takes enough and not more. Blessing: as long as each contributes to the blessed balance.

I had a friend who worked his way through graduate school by bussing tables at a restaurant in an upscale hotel. After work one night he told us that a customer was served an elegant plate: a huge portion of a beef prime rib. When he cleared the table in preparation for the dessert entrée he took the plate. One bite had been eaten. The rest was left to be thrown away. (Never mind that he said it wasn't, he was, after all, a grad student!). Can it be that waste is now more a common way of life?

Taking more than enough? Not replenishing as is needed?

8,000,000 trees are cut each month to produce the paper needed for mail order catalogues. Precious metals are at stake in bloody struggles in the Republic of Congo – they wind up in our cell phones; 426,000 are retired and thrown away in the United States every day. Two million plastic beverage bottles are used in the United States every five minutes. 106,000 aluminum cans are used in the United States every 30 seconds. We use 60,000,000 plastic bags every five seconds.<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever driven past a landfill and seen its towering height? Is there any wonder that ski hills are built atop mountains of old trash? What do you think of the politicians' objections to Toronto's trash being imported to Michigan? Have you ever wondered where yours and mine are going?

Have you ever wondered about where we get all that we get before we throw so much of it away? We live in a society that takes a lot.

Big slabs of prime rib: more than is enough. More than is even healthy.

Yet, instead of *enough*, people want *more*. A New York Times reporter once wrote that the number 32 is an interesting number because resources like oil and metals are consumed in places like North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan are consumed at 32 times the rate than they are in the developing world. We also produce wastes like plastics and greenhouse gases 32 times the rate of the rest of the world. He said that people in the third world are aware of this and aspire to live like us. If they can't they become frustrated and hate us. If they can, then more of the earth's resources are used and we all draw closer to catastrophe because the earth doesn't have the resources to sustain that kind of consumption.<sup>2</sup>

Another way of understanding this is that scientists figure it takes about 4.5 acres of land to sustain each one of us. Right now, the world-wide average human use in the world is almost at 5.5 acres, more than we have. But of course, the world's population does not consume at an equal rate. At present, the average American is using what about 23.5 acres can produce. We consume 10 calories of oil for every one calorie of food we eat. If the whole world were to consume at the rate of American consumption, we would need four planets to sustain us!<sup>3</sup>

The gods must be crazy! We are eating up and burning up our planet! I shudder to think what I contribute.

Back in the First Century the Apostle Paul said it. He said, "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God."<sup>4</sup> It isn't a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries American problem we are seeing here. The numbers are worse, but the problem is the same. Paul concluded: sin that separates people from God is not just a personal matter; it imperils the earth.

It's not that God is out of control. It's that people are. Point to government policy and accuse corporations for their products. Yet, I have a notion that those big-picture concerns are simply results of the expectations, appetites, and attitudes of the consumers. If there were no market for them, the products would not be made. Remember the prophecy of Pogo: "We have met the enemy and he is us."<sup>5</sup>

All nature groans and looks forward to its own redemption which will happen when humankind is redeemed. It will happen when we are start acting like we are children of God.

Lush mountains and flowing streams, rich plains and abundant seas: all this belongs to God. That, I think, is the first thing that we, all of us, have to get straight. For too long the peoples of the world have acted like all this is just for us. We get to use it up. If a resource is valuable, then it's ours to use up and fight over. If a creature is deemed a nuisance, it's our right to simply destroy its whole species without considering how we might need it.

Why not spray the land with DDT to rid ourselves of mosquitoes? Why not fly our helicopters over packs of wolves, hunting them down from the air and ridding them from the earth?

Perhaps the *why not* is not so much a matter of our convenience as it is that they, as a total species, are not ours to destroy.

The teachers of the Law of Israel said, "The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely...The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants." The ancient Israelites discovered this when they realized God had saved them: the land they were given was still not theirs. It belonged to God. God made it. God placed them in it in a miraculous way and so they could not sell it off forever, and neither could they treat it in any way like it didn't belong ultimately to God.<sup>6</sup>

*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.*<sup>7</sup> Live like you are privileged to live in a palace that belongs to someone else. Live like the earth belongs to God. That's the first imperative step out of crisis.

### **Stewardship**

Laura and I have a friend who lives in Chicago, the first person in the city to own a home that has been taken completely off the electrical grid. He uses solar-generated electricity instead. When we visited him a few years ago he took us to see his work in progress: a 1984 Toyota quarter-ton pickup truck, stripped down, re-painted, with the gasoline-powered engine replaced by an electric motor. On the truck bed was 1,500

pounds of batteries. The truck would have a range of about 60 miles with a top speed of 80. He now uses it exclusively for city driving. The batteries are recharged from electricity generated by solar power. No fossil fuel resources are used for his transportation. When he travels outside the city, he uses the trains or the bus.<sup>8</sup>

It may be inconvenient. Yet, our friend has learned that enough is enough and that the earth is worth making an effort to save. Perhaps he has ventured from the crowd of those who pillage the earth to become one who blesses it.

And so may you and I bless the earth. May you be thoughtful about what and how often you drive, make the effort to recycle, make choices about the food you eat. May you encourage leaders to make policies that bless the earth. May you accept that you don't have to get everything you want, only what's enough, so others can have enough, too. May we live as we were taught in Scouts: to leave the place better than we found it. Our children may appreciate us for it. They may even think we were saints.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures were cited by Brian McLaren in a critical issues workshop at the 2009 Pastor's Conference, sponsored by Zondervan Publishing, on February 10, 2009 in San Diego California. The statistics are graphically depicted by the artwork of Chris Jordan, [http://www.chrisjordan.com/current\\_set2.php](http://www.chrisjordan.com/current_set2.php).

<sup>2</sup> Jared Diamond, "What's Your Consumption Factor?" The New York Times, © January 2, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, McLaren.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8:19

<sup>5</sup> Walt Kelly. Pogo, 1971. As described on the web site, "I Go Pogo".

[http://www.igopogo.com/we\\_have\\_met.htm](http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Book of Leviticus," The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary vol. I. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1994. p 1172.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 24:1

<sup>8</sup> For an article written about our friend, John Berton, see "The City of Light", *The Old Farmer's Almanac*, 2002 edition. Dublin, N.H.: Yankee Publishing Incorporated. Copyright 2001. pp 137-138.