



Creation, Fall, Redemption

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

C.S. Lewis Institute Senior Fellow

This article originally appeared in the Winter 2009 issue of *Knowing & Doing*.

One of my favorite axioms is, “Nothing is meaningful without a context.” This is especially true with respect to the scriptures. B.B. Warfield argued that unless we understand our faith systematically, that is, in relation to other biblical truths, we lose at least half of the spiritual value of each particular truth we study. Systematic theology is an important discipline. However, there is another helpful way of gaining this larger view. This is by using what has been called the redemptive historical approach—to understand the larger story or using postmodern language—the metanarrative of scripture.

If you had to summarize faith in Christ in a short form, it’s hard to do better than Herman Bavinck: “God the Father has reconciled his created but fallen world through the death of his Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by his Spirit.” Note the words *created, fallen, reconciled, renews, and Kingdom of God*. Note that each of these terms applies to the whole cosmos and not just to individuals.

We could summarize the biblical story in another way: God created the world and it was very good (Gen. 1-2). The fall of Adam and Eve into sin and its impact on the world is described in Genesis 3-11. Then from Genesis 12 to Revelation 22 you see unfolded God’s plan of redemption for his fallen creation. The story starts in a garden (the Garden of Eden) and ends in a city (the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven). If you don’t understand the place of creation, the extent of the fall, and the extent of redemption, and perhaps we could add here, the destiny toward which the whole story drives—the consummation—then we can easily get off track. Let me develop these themes in the rest of this article. (In subsequent *Knowing and*

Doing articles I will look at each of these in a deeper way.)

From the very beginning of Genesis we see that God’s creation is real and good. Seven times God calls that which he made “good.” When he made mankind—male and female—he describes them as “very good.” “God made them in his image and likeness.” There have been many book-length studies on the nature of the image of God. One helpful (but not complete) way of describing the image is, “response-ability.” Adam and Eve were created to respond to God, to each other, and to the creation in appropriate ways. The fall damaged this capacity to respond in every area. We are now alienated from God, alienated from each other, and alienated from the creation. We no longer respond to God, others, or nature in the way we were created to do.

We were also created to “fill the earth and subdue it,” exercising our capacity to rule over the fish, the birds, and the whole creation. The capacity to rule is also described as exercising dominion, developing the potential of the creation around us. Another term for this call is the “cultural mandate.” What starts with ruling over the birds and fish is extended to “caring for and tending the garden” (Gen. 2:15). Very soon (Gen. 4:20-22) various people develop early “technologies” such as “all implements of bronze and iron,” the “lyre and pipe,” tents, and herds of livestock (building, music, farming). It is important to note that when the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven in Revelation, the “tree of life” (Rev. 22:12), the same tree



Art Lindsley

of life that was in the Garden of Eden, is now in the midst of a developed city. The cultural mandate has been fulfilled.

Creation Real and Good

The Bible teaches that creation is real. God made distinct things such as animals, birds, fish, and humans. When theologians talk about God creating “*ex nihilo*” (out of nothing) they are, in part, saying that the creation was not made out of God. This is in contrast to pantheism (all is God), as exemplified in various forms of Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age philosophies. Various New Age authors articulate this “All is One” or “All is God” philosophy in the negative—the principle of “non-distinction.” This means that the distinctions we see in this world between plants, animals, and people are illusory. The distinct world created by God is not real but an illusion.

Creation is also good, according to the Bible. Matter is not evil. Various philosophies throughout the ages have maintained that anything physical or material is suspect. Plato wanted to have his soul delivered from the prison house of his body. He desired our destiny to be a redemption *from* the body rather than redemption *of* the body as scripture teaches. Other groups, such as Manicheans, Dualists, and Gnostics, held similar views. The early church battled earlier versions of these philosophies. For instance, the apostle John is said to have resisted the teaching of Cerinthus, who believed that the divine Christ entered the human Jesus after his birth and departed before his crucifixion. Thus God was not involved with pain, suffering, and death. John says, in contrast, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Church father Irenaeus in *Against Heresies* tells a story he had gotten from Polycarp who knew the apostle John. Polycarp said that John entered a bathhouse and found out that Cerinthus was also there. John came out quickly, saying to his followers, “Let us fly, lest even the bathhouse fall down, because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, is within.”

Perhaps it is this kind of teaching that Paul addresses in I Tim. 4:1-5:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything

created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

Notice Paul’s strong language of warning: abandon the faith, deceiving spirits, things taught by demons, hypocritical liars, consciences seared as with a hot iron. But what is this horrible heresy that leads to such deplorable results? Essentially it is taking that which is good and acceptable and calling it bad and unacceptable. It is calling right, wrong.

The advocates of the false teaching Paul was speaking of most likely forbade marriage because of a belief that our bodies and our sexuality are evil. They also advocated abstaining from certain foods and were perhaps related to those who warned, “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (Col. 2:21). They focused on what believers could *not* do. The problem was that they said *no* where God said *yes*. They made up rules where God had given no rules; they made up laws where God had left people free. Above all, they denied implicitly (and perhaps explicitly) that God’s creation was good (vs. 4). Note that the apostle regards the creation as real and deeply and radically good. (See also I Cor. 10:23-31.)

The Fall

An essential claim of the Bible is that this is a good world gone wrong. The fall into sin started in the garden with Adam and Eve but has had wide-ranging effects at every level. In Genesis 3 you can see that the first effect on Adam and Eve of the choice to sin was an awareness that they were naked (Gen. 3:7), and they covered themselves with clothes (fig leaves) and tried to hide from God. It was no longer true that they were “naked and unashamed” (Gen. 2:25). When God asked whether they had eaten from the forbidden tree, they shifted the blame. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. Adam even implied that it was God’s fault. He sinned because of “the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me.” So Adam and Eve are not only ashamed of themselves but also alienated from each other and God. Al Wolters says, “Deeply ingrained in the children of Adam is the tendency to blame some aspect of creation (and by implication the Creator) rather than their own rebellion for the misery of their condition.”

The consequences of the fall are spelled out by God to the serpent (Gen. 3:14-15), the woman (Gen. 3:16), and to the man (Gen. 3:17-19). Notice especially that God says, “Cursed is the ground” (vs. 17) and goes on to say how sin will make work difficult. Sin will affect not

only Adam and Eve's personal and corporate lives, but also the whole cosmos. Every area is affected by sin.

God's good creation now can and will be twisted and used for evil purposes. Charles Williams used to say that now everything can be divided into "This is Thou" (the divinely intended use for the creation) and "This not Thou" (the misuse of God's creation). Sex, for example, is God's good creation but can easily be misdirected and abused. Our sexual desires are a good part of our human being and structure but can easily be turned in a way that dishonors God's purpose. We can say, "My will be done," or we can turn around 180 degrees (repentance) and say, "Thy will be done." Just because something can be easily abused doesn't mean that we should prohibit its divinely intended use. An argument against abuse is not an argument against use.

Everything in God's creation has a proper use and a prohibited abuse. We could apply this to drinking alcohol, dancing, eating, possessions, work, sports, or anything in God's creation. Sin affects us individually, corporately, and cosmically. We are now "dead in sin" (Eph. 2:1). It has come to the point that "There is none who does good, there is not even one" (Rom. 3:12). But we also need to say that sin does not annihilate the goodness of God's creation:

The central point to make is that Biblically speaking, sin neither abolishes or becomes identified with creation. Creation and sin remain distinct, however closely they may be intertwined in our experience. Prostitution does not eliminate the goodness of human sexuality; political tyranny cannot wipe out the divinely ordained character of the state; the anarchy and subjectivism of modern art cannot obliterate the creational legitimacy of art itself. In short, evil does not have the power of bringing to naught God's steadfast faithfulness to the works of his hands. (Al Wolters, Creation Regained, p. 57.)

In fact, theologians have often regarded sin as a parasite on God's good creation. You could have good without evil being present. But you couldn't have evil without good because nothing is intrinsically, inherently, or ontologically evil. Thus, redemption can (and does) eliminate from the creation the effects of the fall in all areas. Creation can be restored and cleansed from the consequences of sin.

Redemption

Creation is real and very good. The Fall impacts all areas of God's creation. It shouldn't be surprising that

redemption is applied to all areas of life as well. However, this insight has been missed by most evangelicals. The focus on personal or individual redemption, which, of course, is foundational, has overshadowed corporate or cosmic redemption.

Certainly we should not minimize God's work in our personal lives. Christ died for us, rose for us, reigns in power for us, and prays for us (Rom. 8:34). God foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies each one of us (Rom. 8:30). The Spirit causes us to be born again, moves us to be more holy, and empowers us for ministry. There is so much to consider here. But we must take care not to miss the full extent of Christ's work of redemption.

What is the full extent of redemption? In Acts 3:21 it says that the prophets spoke about a time when there would be a "restoration of *all things*." Col. 1:20 says that the Father's pleasure and purpose through the cross was "to reconcile *all things* to Himself." In Romans 8:19-12 it says:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also, we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Note that the accent of verses 19 to 22 is on the impact of the fall on the creation and the fact that it will participate with us in redemption. It will be "set free" (vs. 21) from its "corruption" just as we will.

Another interesting fact is that there are two Greek words for *new*. One is "neos" (meaning totally new) and the other "kainos" (meaning renewed). Almost every time the Bible uses the word new for new birth, new self, new creation, new heavens and new earth, guess which word is used? You're right; it's "kainos" – renewed. God will not throw away the creation but renew it. Wolters says, "God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made."

Implications

We should rejoice in God's creation and enjoy it. C.S. Lewis has Screwtape the demon say about God:

He's a hedonist at heart . . . He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are 'pleasures forevermore' . . . He's vulgar Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long . . . sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it's any use to us.

Many Christians have prohibited use of God's creation because of the possibility of abuse. That has made Christians seem to be life-denying, perpetuating a kind of joyless self-denial. The kingdom of God is not opposed to life but to sin. Christ-centeredness is not opposed to the creation, but to the Fall. We should be life-affirming and creation-enjoying.

We do need to be aware of the twist that is part of every area of life. Work is good but we can work obsessively and with wrong motives. Politics can bring forth good laws and bad laws. We need discernment to see the divinely intended purpose for the structure of things while fighting against the twisted direction that dishonors God saying "my will" or "our will" rather than "Thy will be done."

We need to be those who participate in God's purpose to redeem all things. Abraham Kuyper said that there is not one inch of creation where God does not say, "Mine." When we work to extend God's kingdom (his rule and reign) or to bring Christ's Lordship to bear in our work, we are being obedient to him and working to bring God's kingdom to "earth as it is in heaven." We also participate as God gives us success in God's redemptive plan for the cosmos. Al Wolters sums up this emphasis on creation, fall, redemption:

(1) Creation is much broader and more comprehensive than we tend to think. (2) The fall affects that creation in its full extent. (3) Redemption in Jesus Christ reaches just as far as the fall."

Three books that are most helpful on this subject are: Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*; Michael Wittmer, *Heaven is a Place on Earth*; and Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*.

Art Lindsley is a Senior Fellow with the C.S. Lewis Institute, where he has served since 1987. He and his wife, Connie, and their two boys, Trey and Jonathan, make their home in Arlington, Virginia.

© 2009 C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE
8001 Braddock Road, Suite 300 • Springfield, VA 22151
703/914-5602
www.cslewisinstitute.org

C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE
Discipleship of Heart and Mind

*In the legacy of C.S. Lewis,
the Institute endeavors to develop disciples who can
articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ
through personal and public life.*