



# ADAM, GRETA AND YOU

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We are in the middle of January. January is an interesting month. It is named after the Roman God, Janus, who was always evoked on January 1<sup>st</sup>. Janus was the god of beginnings, of transitions, and was depicted with two faces. One face looked backward in time, reflecting on the year that was and his other face looked forward to the potential and promises that lay in the future. I always find it fascinating that we often follow similar patterns of thought today.

Just over three weeks ago I finished writing a report for a grant agency that support our classis Hamilton CRC ministry at Mac. They wanted to know what the issues had been on campus this past year. What were people talking about. So, I was doing some looking back, reflecting a little bit about this past semester.

One of the things I mentioned, was that, quite a few people were talking about Greta Thunberg. She was seen in a pretty positive light among the vast majority of students, but yes, a bit of a polarizing figure in the Christian community.

What I also found interesting was another name kept popping up in Greta's wake. Someone who might not be as well know as Greta currently is, but who has had a profound influence on how a lot of people see the connection between Christianity and the environment.

Has anyone here heard of Lynn White Jr.?

White presented a seminal paper in the late 60's. It was later published in 'Science' under the title - "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crises."

His Thesis was simple, yet profound. He argued that the Environmental - or in his words – the Ecologic Crises we are facing is not simply the result of our technological ability to change our environment. But is instead, the result of our Western Worldview.

According to White, the problem we are facing today is a Worldview or philosophical problem.

Whereas Greta says to her credit usually says, “listen to the scientist.” When she does point to things - she typically has a laser like focus on carbon emissions or addresses things like, pipelines etc. ....

White would say that these things are but the surface manifestations of a deeper worldview or presupposition.

For White, what this means is, our problems are not necessarily going to be solved by more technology.

Now of course, science and technology play an important role here, we see that all the time. White however argues, that these things, are still intellectually tethered to this worldview and for real change to occur, it is the underlying worldview that must be addressed.

To quote White “Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is by religion.” He goes on to say. “More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion or rethink our old one.”

So, what is this worldview or religion that White is talking about here?

Simply put, it is the Judea/Christian Worldview drawn from Genesis in the Bible and manifest in the Western European branch of Christianity. According to white, the crisis we are facing, is the result of Western Christians and their descendants being motivated by the powerful creation story we find in Genesis.

There are layers of nuances here and I won't get into them, but to put this in a little bit of a context. White exempts all other branches of Christianity – middle eastern, African and even Eastern European Christianity from this analysis. He sees Eastern Christianity's worldview as distinctly different from Western European Christianity, and yes, he makes a pretty good argument for that. In the western tradition, he sees Francis of Assis, someone he calls the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ. As perhaps, the only influential Christian to have stepped out of his own tradition to critic it through new eyes.

While White recognises that we live in a post Christian age. To him the substance of our current culture remains akin to that of the past. The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant as no new set of basic values has been accepted into our society to displace those of Christianity.

So he points to things like – a non repetitive and linear concept of time – a sense of perpetual progress, of continuing development - these sorts of things to support his argument.

In regard to the source of this worldview - White focuses on two things – the idea of man being created in the image of God and of the concept of Dominion.

These two powerful ideas White argues, propagates a dualism between man and nature and in a sense, licenses man to exploit creation with no limits.

You all know these passages but let me quickly read the main passages he points to:

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>19</sup> Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup> So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

@ So here in all these passages, but especially in the naming which we understand in the ancient world gave the namer a certain authority over what is being named - White says, God gave man dominion over all creation. And I quote

him; “No item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.”

Q. So my question is, is this true? Is there some validity to White’s claim?

Is it the Bible that is the problem here?

Is the Judea/Christian Wv that has held sway in the west for the last 1,600 years responsible for our ecologic crises? Have Christians been at the forefront of those exploiting and degrading creation?

And one more thing. White doesn’t mention it, but another view I have often encounter is, a school of thought, that believes this world is going to be burned up. And that our ultimate destination is heaven – so why give a hoot?

I think there is truth to what White is saying. Christians have definitely done their part and more at exploiting creation.

But – I also think we need to ask ourselves, is this really the mandate we have been given by God? To use his creation as we see fit.

Or, is it more accurate to say, that this mandate may have been improperly interpreted or twisted to serve our own sinful desires?

Obviously, we are not going to answer those questions here. What I would like to do this morning, is take White up on his idea to rethink our old religion. Or more accurately, present a different understanding of being created in the image of God and having dominion.

What are the first four words in the Bible?

“In the beginning God ....

### **Who is God?**

The scriptures start with God the creator, The creator of Heaven and Earth. We understand that God to be - three in one – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is the God that Orthodox Christians follow.

In Genesis and in later passages we learn that God has three distinct hypostases - divine persons, yet are of one “homoousios – which is usually translated essence or substance.

In short - God is Trinitie, a trinity - and these three essences have this amazing relationship with each other.

The great church father, Augustine said, that Love best illustrates the nature of the Trinity. Augustine emphasised that God's love is relational and personal as it is expressed in a diving community of love. I quote - "It cannot be said that God is love, if God is alone. Instead, love resides both in God's nature as a personal being and in relationship to the beloved (Jesus) by love – the Holy Spirit.

In Augustine's definition, God is relational. And he is not just in relationship with himself, but he is in relationship with every aspect of His creation, upholding it every second of every day.

In fact, God is so personally involved in his creation, that relationship is so strong, that he even participated in our humanity through Jesus Christ. Something we just celebrated last month.

I really cannot get my head around all that stuff, but yes – it is pretty cool, deep but cool.

So, why is this important for us? Because we are made in the image of God!

If we look at Augustine's understanding of God - what does that mean?

It means = we are made for relationships.

So, in the beginning God – created ... God creates the cosmos and the earth, and the plants and animals and finally humankind – the image bearer of God.

One way some theologians have looked at this is through the lens of four fundamental relationships. Remember God is relational – One theologian I read said we were made from a relationship for relationships.

**1). So what are these relationships** - First of all, we were created to have this wonderful warm, intimate relationship with God. Can you imagine what it must have been like to walk with God in the cool of the evening. And there is more. As we saw - we were originally given a job to do on earth. And the understanding was - we could not do that job properly unless we were in a good relationship with God.

**2). Second, we** are called to have a good, healthy relationship with ourselves. When we had this discussion at All Things before Christmas, the first example that came to my mind was from the movie the Help. Has anybody here seen that? I remembered this nanny looked after this little girl, and everyday she would say this line to the little girl, and get the little girl to say it to herself. “I am kind, I am smart, I am important.” I thought that was so beautiful. The nanny was trying to empower this child, this little girl to see herself positively. To have a good self image.

We are in relationship with ourselves. We need to reflect on our lives. We need to look after ourselves physically, we need to live in such a way that we love ourselves. In the Gospel of Mark, a scribe asks Jesus which Commandment is most important. Jesus begins with **the Shema**, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

I find that people usually focus on the loving your neighbour part of that, but what is implied - is that we also love ourselves.

**3).** But yes, as Jesus points out, we are made for relationship with our neighbour. Each other. We are made to have relationships with people around us. If we do not have relationship with people – we will shrivel up emotionally and physically. We don’t really become the people God wants us to be.

**4)** And finally, we were made for relationship with what? What is the final thing we were made for relationship with ...? We were made for a relationship with Creation.

As we heard in our reading earlier we are given a position of authority over creation and are mandated to develop it. And yes, there are those words, dominion and subdue.

But there is more. Let’s have a quick look at Genesis 2:7

<sup>7</sup>Then the Lord God formed a man<sup>[a]</sup> from the soil and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

I have limited Hebrew but one thing I do know is that – **Adam which means man, is formed from Adamah – soil.** Even the word play here suggest a kind of a familial relationship – we come from the earth. We come from the soil. Our very existence depends on the health of our soil and water. We must care for it as we care for a beloved family member.

And something which we also often miss is, Genesis 2:19.

<sup>19</sup> Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.

**God had also formed out of the ground (the Adamah)** all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. We both come from and are connected to/ dependant on the Adamah. Maybe Francis of Assis was on to something there.

If there is one thing, I would like you to take away from our service this morning it is the word - interdependence - White argued that these passages showed the stark separation between man and creation, it seems to me that these scriptures passages actually highlight our connectedness, our interdependence with creation. We are part of creation.

And so, following these interesting soil genealogy passages, there is a vocational passage. Where was Adam placed? What was his job? He was to be a gardener, or a farmer.

In Genesis 2:16 it says “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Other translations will say things like cultivate it and be the steward of it or preserve it. One of the take always here – is that work is good – we were created for work. It has dignity. But also – and for our purposes here this morning - we see that in addition to cultivating it, we are to take care of it. Be stewards of it. To keep it.

The word keep comes from the Hebrew word shamar, which is also used in the Aaronic blessing. “The Lord bless you and keep you.” When Rita, or someone else uses that blessing, that does not mean that they want God to keep you under glass like I used to keep my insect collection. Preserved and sterile . This keeping is life fulfilling – its about vitality and beauty. In regard to keeping the garden, it means that we make sure that the creatures under our care live with proper

connections to other members of their species and to their natural habitat and with the soil and water they need to sustain them.

This is the kind of rich and full 'keeping' that the Bible talks about.

So, in addition to being wonderfully woven together, we were also crafted to be involved in all these relationships – God, Ourselves, each other and his creation – amazing.

### **Relationships Fall**

A beautiful picture – yes - but as we well know something happens.

What happens? The fall.

God had told Adam and Eve “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you will die.

God has given them everything. He loves us. Wants the best for us – puts us in a garden and said this is all for you but don't eat from that tree. Trust me.

So, what happens. We broke that trust.

It says that the great deceiver, Satan, disguised himself as one of God's good creatures, a serpent and convinced us – Adam and Eve to break our trust with God.

God is holding out on us. God made something special, but He doesn't want us to have it. I want that. I want to try that. So, they take some fruit and eat it. And it says - she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. He was with her – they were together.

They ate of the fruit – they broke their trust with God – the corner stone, the lynch pin relationship – the relationship that held all these other relationships together.

So, what happened? It says their eyes were opened. What is the first thing they saw when they opened their eyes? They saw they were naked. And now they saw themselves differently.

The eating of the fruit is called original sin. I have heard of this moment being called – original shame. Their relationship with themselves had changed.



They hear God waking in the garden in the cool of the day. How would they have reacted before eating of the fruit? I can imagine them running to be with him. But what do they do now? They hid from him. That relationship damaged. Not only shame, but now guilt.

And when God confronts Adam. Who told you, you were naked? What does he say – she gave it to me. Yes, right Adam. Relationship three on the ropes. We seem to be on a bit of a roll here. What was the last relationship?

What happens there? God tells Adam in Genesis 3:17-19.

“Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat food from it  
all the days of your life.

<sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you,  
and you will eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food  
until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are  
and to dust you will return.

Broken, broken, broken, broken – So, are we living in a broken world?

No, we are not. We just celebrated Christmas

Paul says that through his death and resurrection, Jesus has reconciled us to God. God was not going to throw away the creation he loved and called good. The creation he was in relationship with, the creation he continued to uphold, and since we could not reconcile ourselves to God, heal that relationship on his own, God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, the key relationship, in this list of relationships has been mended. Not fully, because we live in what is called the Parousia, which means - “arrival” or “advent.” You know we celebrated Advent before Christmas. Well we are actually still living in Advent. The time when the kingdom is here, but not yet fully here yet.

What is important is that Christ has come and has bridged the gap between us and our creator.

Christ - the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam came to heal, to bind up, the relationship the first Adam fractured.

So, what does that mean about the rest of the relationships on our list?

Well they are not going to be completely healed until Christ returns, but we can start work on them. You might want to think about these if you are the sort that likes to make new years resolutions.

**Ourselves:** We can, and should start working on ourselves. Paul says we do the things we don't want to do, but through Christ, I can start doing the things I want to do and should do. I can try to be a better man.

**Neighbours:** I can work on being a better neighbour. More caring, more compassionate. I can work on my relationship with other human beings.

**And Creation:** Relationship four.

Paul says two things that I think bear on this period we are in.

In Romans 8:19 he says "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children or sons of God to be revealed." In verses 22-24 he says "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth ..."

Creation has been waiting and groaning since the fall, for the sons of God. To do what?

To do what Adam did not do. What was Adam called to do? To look after the land. To look after creation. To look after creation in the way it was originally meant to be looked after. Creation has been waiting to flourish in the way it was originally intended to flourish and for that, it needs the sons and daughters of God.

Just like God brought Adam forward to look after his creation – we are to be involved in its reconciliation. Doesn't that make sense, that since we pulled creation down, that now we have a part to play in heal it.

Paul says that the whole world is groaning, as if it is having labour pains. What happens after the labour pains set in. They increase – the pain increases but after that - comes new life.

Let me note something I find interesting. Where did the fall take place? In a garden. Where did Jesus's journey to the cross begin. In a garden – in the Garden of Gethsemane at the foot of the Mount of Olives. Where was Jesus resurrected? In a garden. Has anyone here seen Rembrandts picture of the resurrection?

In John, it says Mary thought Jesus was the gardener. And we think in our heads – she is all upset, and she is wrong.

Mary wasn't wrong. Jesus, the new Adam, the new Gardner has come! He loved his world and us, too much to abandon it to the weeds and decay.

I love how Rembrandt catches this idea in his painting of the resurrection. Rembrandt portrays Jesus as a gardener.

Not only do you see Jesus wearing a gardener's wide brimmed hat, but if you look closely, you will also see the spade in his hand and the pruning shearers tucked into his belt.

If you are looking into the future and are in need of a goal or resolution to focus on, consider joining Christ in his work of reconciliation in the four areas I have outlined. Work on you're your relationship with God. Work on your relationship with yourself, with your neighbours and work on your relationship with this beautiful gift of creation.

One final thing.

I have often talk with students who are convinced that this world is going to end. That it will just be consumed in a fire. That this a world of tears and is not our home. That heaven is our ultimate destination.

We are heaven bound and once there we will be reunited with all our loved ones. And I am going to be able to fly. As someone who often listens to country songs on the radio, I can tell you that that is the theme of almost every country song that mentions Heaven in its lyrics.

And yes, quite a few church songs as well. I can understand why they feel like that – it is a mess out there. There is a lot of pain and perhaps that pain is increasing. But I don't see scripture saying that. If scripture says anything it says that Heaven is going to come here.

That there is going to be a resurrection. That we will be restored, and Gods physical creation will be fully restored. We are called to image a God that loves his physical creation.

Talk about humbling yourself. We follow a God that became a human baby. He took on flesh - became matter for us. He drank breast milk. He needed his diapers changed. He grew up.

Next week we celebrate communion. The Jesus we worship - broke bread – the physical symbol of life and said this is my body – and he ate it and invites us to eat it and drink wine – in remembrance of him.

We Christians should be at the forefront of the environmental movement.

Why – because the scriptures tell us who we are. They tell us that we are image bearers and stewards of this earth and those same scriptures say that one day the true owner is going to return, and ask us what we have done with his present, his gift.

Michael Fallon