

Comments on: ‘Creation, preservation and dominion’ by Andrew Kulikovsky

Alex Williams

Andrew Kulikovsky has written a challenging series of articles on the subject of Creation, preservation and dominion (part 1, *JoC* 23(1):86–93, 2009, and parts 2 and 3, 23(2):82–95, 2009). There is much that I agree with in what Andrew has written, but the subject matter covers everything, and no one person knows everything, so it means there are big problems in some of what Andrew has written, and it will require much further input from many different people to gain a balanced view. I hope that many others will contribute to a dialogue on this central issue. Quotations from Andrew’s articles are in italics, followed by my comments.

Part 1—God, humanity and the created order

“The kingdom [of God] means God ruling over his people in the material universe. This basic understanding of the kingdom is never changed in Scripture” (p. 88).

Although almost universally believed, this understanding is false. God made man in His own image and likeness and gave us dominion over creation. ‘Image’ is a visual representation such as a painting, sculpture, or today a photograph. To be made in the image of God means that we look like God. All the visions and manifestations of God in scripture portray Him as having human-like characteristics and human-sized dimensions—He is not a cosmic giant that is bigger than the universe, but a father-figure person that we can relate to. We cannot have a father-like relationship with a God who is bigger than the universe. This does not belittle God, it magnifies Him even more that He brings the universe into being by His word and holds it in existence by His word and is bringing it to fulfilment by His word. Yet God is THE uncreated timeless personal spirit being, and ‘human dimensions’ are aspects of creation, so we must be careful in pushing the comparison too far. But Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9) so we cannot dismiss the comparison either.

On the other hand, just as a painting, sculpture or photograph can be an image of someone, it is also not a ‘likeness’ because it is just wood, stone or paper, not a person. That is why God adds ‘and likeness’ to the description. Not only do we look like God, we also have God’s nature. As Seth was born in the image and likeness of Adam (Genesis 5:3) so we are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:28). The best resolution to any difficulties we might have in grasping this is: “No one has ever seen God, but the only-begotten God [Jesus] who is at the Father’s side has made Him known” (John 1:18).

We have never had a proper understanding of man or of God’s kingdom because all our experience is of fallen man. Only Jesus both looked and behaved like God and in his resurrection attained to kingship as ‘son of man’—yet we falsely attribute this to his God nature, not to his human nature. Jesus steadfastly insisted on the title ‘son of man’ when referring to himself and he lived, died and rose again as a man, not as God. He was indeed God, but he emptied himself of his privilege as God to become a man (Philippians 2:6–7) and it was as a man that he died and it was as a man that he rose again from the dead, and it is as a man that he will come again in glory (Matthew 24:30). The first Adam got it wrong and so do we. Jesus was the second Adam who got it right, and so he exercises the God-given dominion that was intended for Adam and Eve. The resurrected Jesus is the first-born of many brethren (Romans 8:29). Those who believe in him are born again through faith in his death and resurrection and we are raised up with him and seated with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). From there we reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6; 22:5). The ‘kingdom of God’ is not God ruling over us as His subjects; it is us raised up in Christ ruling with Him over His creation. Andrew’s view of man is much too low.

“... to believe that the incarnate Christ is ... part of creation ... is theological heresy” (p. 89).

The doctrine of the Trinity sorted this problem out and clearly affirms that Jesus was fully man (part of creation) and fully God (begotten, not made).

“... the idea that human population growth has been detrimental to the flourishing of other creatures is not supported by the empirical evidence” (p. 92).

Also Part 2:

“... extinction ... in most cases ... has been due to overhunting. But many environmentalists and conservationists also blame industrial and agricultural development and urban sprawl because they claim it destroys animal habitats” (p. 87).

To give just one example, in Australia far more species have been sent to extinction by habitat destruction (overgrazing of arid shrublands, clearing of arable, industrial and urban lands) and by introduced predators and weeds, than by overhunting.

Just in Western Australia, there are approximately 3,000 plant species—almost one third of the whole native flora—that are rare enough to be given priority status for conservation, most of them in the southwest where the

most development has occurred. Over 400 of these are in the top category, which means they are on the verge of extinction. It is estimated that at least hundreds of native plant species were driven to extinction by agricultural and urban development in the southwest before scientists ever had a chance to collect and identify them. Many of the rare survivors are now restricted to just a few plants remaining on weedy roadsides, often in danger of being wiped out when the grader widens a road to bring in a larger piece of agricultural machinery. In the past few years I have personally discovered four new rare species of native grasses that each survive in just one or two tiny populations on roadsides or small patches of uncleared land. One of them became extinct in its original habitat in the 1950s when it was flooded by engineering works. All of these extinctions were caused by land clearing (habitat destruction) and weed invasions, and there were accompanying animal extinctions (exacerbated by introduced predators—cats and foxes) together with unknown numbers of microbes and other soil flora and fauna that supported and/or depended upon them.

“... the best way to ensure the survival of any particular species is to find a commercial use for it” (p. 92).

Unfortunately, untold numbers of tiny creatures inhabit the soil and make it a sustainable habitat for life. When the vegetation is cleared for agricultural or urban development, the supporting soil flora and fauna often goes extinct without anyone ever knowing what is there. A better way to ensure survival is to pay the REAL price of land clearing, and use the money to do the research into all the species that inhabit the area, find out what they contribute to the ecosystem, and educate everyone on the importance of ecological sustainability. See comments on ecology in Part 2.

“... a truly biblical worldview sees people as principally intelligent, well-meaning, creative producers and stewards” (p. 92).

This is not the biblical view of mankind, it is a romanticized view no different to the secular ‘renaissance man’ who today has become ‘supermarket man’. The biblical view is that we are all sinners—“There is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:9–18). This especially applies to Christians, who view themselves as righteous by faith in Christ, which causes them to no longer see their actual sinfulness. The author is also being hypocritical because in Part 2, p. 82, he criticizes environmentalists for taking a ‘romanticized’ view of tribal man as the ‘noble savage’. Tribal people usually have a far better understanding of the importance of the land and its ‘lesser’ inhabitants than does supermarket man. Tribal man sees his dependence upon the environment every day, but supermarket man gets everything he needs out of a plastic packet and never sees where it comes from. This fundamental ignorance of supermarket man makes him a far greater threat to the planet than tribal man.

Part 2—Christianity, development and environmentalism

Environmentalists and conservationists are ‘the enemy’

Systematic and repeated use is made of the words ‘environmentalists and conservationists’ to describe ‘the enemy’ of the biblical worldview. I strongly disagree and sincerely hope there are other readers of a similar persuasion. In fact, the author goes so far in this direction, and so far in promoting the fulfilment of human needs over all other concerns, that he portrays supermarket man as a soul-less ‘intellectual ghoul’ concerned only to justify and maintain his comfortable urban lifestyle—one who has never enjoyed any form of life other than his own, who has never been on a bushwalk in spring time, been alone in a wilderness, spent a night in the forest, snorkelled over a coral reef, or even perhaps loved a domestic pet or grown vegetables in his garden. Most people who touch life in these ways cannot help but be touched by it and become concerned for its welfare.

Limited resources (p. 82)

The author condemns the enemy (environmentalists and conservationists) for believing there are limited resources on earth. GoogleEarth is a very convenient way of seeing that the earth is limited. Yes, new resources are being mobilized all the time, but old ones are also being used unsustainably.

“Man, by manifold labours ... compels the creation ... to serve the purposes of human life” (p. 83).

This quote from Francis Bacon, which the author reiterates in his own words as: “making it [creation] serve our needs in more productive and more efficient ways”, is a misinterpretation of the context of Genesis 3:19. God was not there commissioning man to exploit nature for his own purposes—He was stating that the food which Adam was given freely before the Fall would now have to be extracted from cursed ground by laborious toil.

IVF (in vitro fertilization) is an advance over infertility (p. 83)

In my view, IVF allows infertile couples to pass on their genetic defects to their descendants. Given God’s often repeated concern for ‘widows and orphans’ I believe a more godly approach to infertility is to promote adoption and fostering.

“Environmentalists and conservationists have ‘no conception of the role of human intelligence in the creation of economically useable resources’” (p. 83).

This sweeping condemnation is clearly false, given that many are well educated and are often specialists with

international reputations. If the author truly believes this then he is the ignorant one. An important element missing from the whole article series is the fact that it is only the rich that can afford to develop existing natural resources and create new ones. They therefore have an obligation to share their wealth with the poor, but Andrew has entirely overlooked these obligations of justice, mercy, compassion and service. In contrast, as the next quote shows, much wealth is created at the expense of the poor. The wealthy will pay the full price on judgment day.

Open-cut mining is a safe and efficient method of extracting natural resources (caption to figure 1)

Most of the copper, lead, zinc, cadmium and silver we use in daily life comes from the mining of sulphide ore deposits that, since their exposure to the air, are now oxidising and leaching toxic acid wastes into river systems all over the world. Take a look on GoogleEarth at the Ok Tedi copper mine near Tabubil in western Papua New Guinea. The Ok Tedi river is a ribbon of blue winding through pink sand. The pink sand is tailings from the mine, and the blue is copper sulphate dissolved in the water. Copper is toxic at a million or more times less than the concentration at which it turns water blue. It has killed everything in the 1,000-kilometre river, and its toxic blue plume then sweeps down through the Fly River and spreads into all the estuaries in the Gulf of Papua.¹ The copper will continue leaching out of the open pit and the tailings and

continue killing everything in the waterways for centuries after the mine is closed and the profits have been spent by those who could afford to buy shares in the company and could afford to buy and use the copper. But the price paid for that copper on the world market does not include the human and environmental cost of the catastrophe. That price is being paid by the countless villagers who live along the river and the untold number of species affected, reaching centuries into the future. Blue rivers flowing through pink sand likewise scar the Amazon basin, but the problem is far more extensive than one can see from space.

The cheapness of coal likewise does not include the true cost to the biosphere. We can afford to consume natural resources like these on an unprecedented scale only because we do not pay the real cost. That is now changing, thanks to the efforts of ‘the enemy’—environmentalists and conservationists. Andrew seems to be completely unaware of the (in)justice issues involved in the mining industry, and has omitted any reference to the rich being obliged to share their wealth with the poor.

“In agriculture, the development of chemical fertilizers and more efficient methods of irrigation have enabled farmers to radically improve the productivity of fertile land” (p. 84).

In the Western Australian wheatbelt, productivity of the land has dropped as the result of agricultural development. It now only produces one crop of winter wheat per year and then lies barren and sunbaked throughout the long

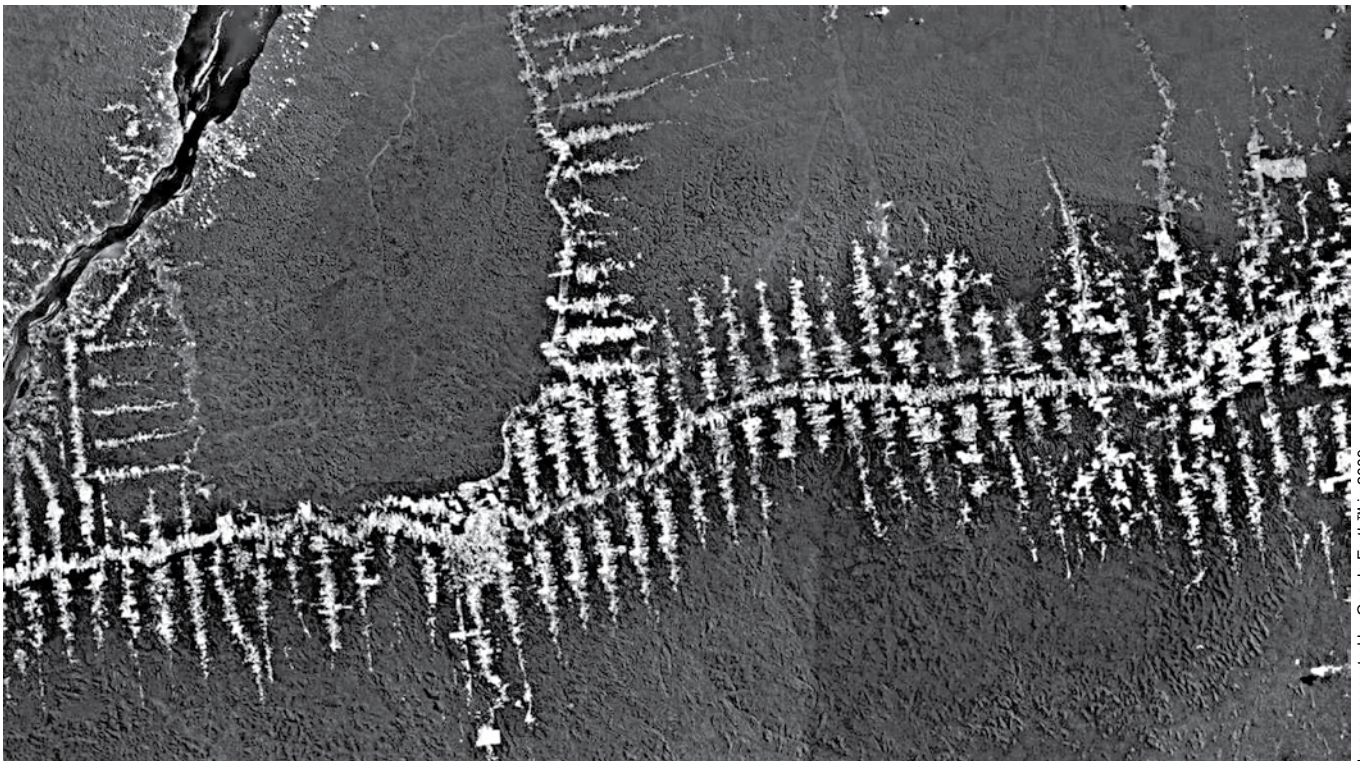


Image generated by Google Earth™ in 2009

Clearing of rainforest for agricultural development is proceeding at an unprecedented rate in Brazil's Amazon basin. The non-cleared areas are all virgin forest and the developments all branch from the bull-dozed road network.

dry season, while adjacent woodlands (east of the famous rabbit-proof fence) remain productive all-year round. The native woodland creates its own climate, which can be seen on some days as cloud cover that stops at the rabbit-proof fence. Saline groundwater has risen and encroaches upon the wheat fields since the trees were removed. Farmers trying to restore their livelihoods and boost their productivity are replanting trees and perennial native species in an attempt to restore what they had previously destroyed. Likewise, irrigators throughout the vast Murray-Darling region of eastern Australia are lamenting their loss of productivity and the destruction of their river system. No one yet has a solution to this national disaster. Australia's agricultural wealth in these regions has been created by unsustainable exploitation, not by God-given dominion.

"... deforestation ... has undoubtedly happened in the past" (pp. 84–85).

Virtually every country with tropical rainforest is under siege by unsustainable and often illegal deforestation to feed the insatiable demand for timber worldwide. DNA fingerprinting techniques are being developed to trace protected species in the timber trade. In the Amazon, rainforest is being cleared at an unprecedented rate for agricultural development. Forests create climate and when exploited beyond their capacity the climate goes with them.

"Implementing environmental and conservationist policies [will] result in the suffering and death of millions of human beings" (p. 85, repeated on pp. 88–89).

Not a single example is given of what the author is repeatedly referring to, so this alarmist statement is nothing more than a dangerously inflammatory and irresponsible 'straw man' argument.

"Environmentalists also claim that pesticides, herbicides and heavy metals are poisoning the food chain, and that chemical preservatives and radiation from atomic power plants, electric power lines, television sets, microwave ovens, and other electrical appliances cause cancer and other detrimental health problems" (p. 85).

Perhaps Marie Curie and the luminous dial painters didn't die from exposure to radium, thalidomide didn't create deformed babies, asbestos didn't cause asbestosis and mesothelioma, mercury didn't cause Minamata disease, DDT isn't dangerous to wildlife, the Bhopal and Chernobyl explosions had no environmental impact, the International Commission on Radiation Protection is wasting its time, likewise environmental protection authorities, therapeutic goods and food safety watchdogs.

"... the needs of human beings surpass the needs of any other creature or plant" (p.87).

This attitude is diametrically opposed to Jesus' attitude towards dominion: "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45;

Philippians 2:7). As the comments on ecology below reveal, human welfare is crucially dependent upon the welfare of other creatures. A careful reading of Genesis 1–2 would have revealed this before anyone understood the principles of ecology. The Law of Moses abundantly provided practices designed to support the needs of all the inhabitants of the land, their livestock, and the land itself, not just those humans who are rich enough to exploit natural resources and build manufacturing plants and power stations and to benefit from their products.

"... to what extent have extinctions been caused by human activity? ... The fossil record is full of extinct creatures ... that had little or no contact with human beings" (pp. 87–88).

The whole point of the great Flood was as a judgment upon the sinfulness of all humanity (Genesis 6).

"... [the disappearance of extinct species] has had no measurable impact on the earth or any human community" (caption to figure 3).

Humans cannot eat chemicals directly from the environment, as microbes and plants can, nor can we breathe our own used air or drink our own wastewaters. We are entirely dependent upon enormously complex networks of many different kinds of life that not only produce food for us, but break down and recycle our waste products and recreate air, soil and water for us to re-use over and over and over again.

But the biosphere is a vast and resilient life-support system ONLY because of its species diversity. There is a positive correlation between diversity and stability in ecosystems because when one species becomes extinct in a diverse ecosystem, there are others that can take over its role. However, as each species is lost, so the resilience of the whole system becomes one species closer to collapse. Species-poor ecosystems are generally very unstable and human monocultures (single-species crops) are so prone to pest and disease plagues that they require constant management to maintain their productivity.

Every species that becomes extinct anywhere on earth degrades the quality of the biosphere in the same way that every atom of iron that goes rusty eats away the integrity of the steel structures we have built our modern societies upon and every mutation passed on to our offspring degrades our species' genome.

It is easier to understand these fundamental principles of ecology if we use an analogy from space travel.

The first space laboratory—Skylab—was never meant to be a sustainable living environment. When a tank of drinking water was used up, it would be filled with human waste. When all the tanks were used up, Skylab was trashed. This is analogous to the way we live on earth at present—unsustainably.

However, when we set out for Mars, we shall have to travel in a completely self-contained and sustainable living environment. We shall have to drink our own waste water, breath our own waste gases, and reuse our food production

spaces over and over again indefinitely. We shall have to carry a large number of species with us to provide a variety of foods, together with microbes and other creatures that recycle organic matter and create healthy air, soil and water for growing food. We shall have to design manufacturing processes that can sustainably reuse and recycle our raw materials over and over again. We shall have to develop an economy in which each person shares equitably in both the costs and the benefits of 'having dominion over our living space'. In short, we shall have to create a small-scale Earth-like environment to live in. This is the kind of world that is possible, if we are prepared to pay the real price rather than the market price, and spread the cost equitably amongst all people.

Let's now imagine that hidden away in a tiny crevice that the engineers overlooked is a virus that was not on the approved list of species. Imagine that it gets out and begins to infect our food-producing, air-renewing, water-cleaning, and soil-conditioning species. One by one our species list gets shorter and shorter. Eventually it gets down to just one, *Homo sapiens*. We cannot feed ourselves or recycle our wastes and so we too very soon become extinct.

"God ... will protect His creation and provide for all that we need, because it is part of His universal plan of salvation" (p. 89).

This self-satisfied benediction upon supermarket man's future success in continued development seems to me to be urging us towards building with 'wood, hay and straw' that will be burned up in judgment (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). Where is the prophetic call to provide justice for those dispossessed and disadvantaged by development, for the rich to share what they have with the poor, the warning that the rich will find it impossible to enter the kingdom of God, and the call to serve rather than exploit?

God subjected the whole creation—not just humans—to frustration, futility, suffering and death because of our sin, and the creation's liberation from bondage will not come except via our salvation (Romans 8:18–21). Supermarket man is not heading in that direction, but in the opposite direction.

Vast numbers of non-human created beings surround God and worship Him day and night (Revelation 4:6–9). They worship Him because they love Him, and they love Him because He loves them (1 John 4:10). There are four animals amongst them, right in close within His inner circle. The word used to describe them is the ordinary word for an animal. There are many other references in scripture to God's love and care of his non-human creatures (e.g. all the animals were brought to Adam as prospective companions; creation rejoices at God's redemption of mankind; Jesus affirmed God's care for sparrows and lilies of the field). However, reprobate humans have no part in this divine intimacy.

Only a proper understanding of whom and what God loves can guide us into a proper understanding of dominion.

Part 3—A Christian approach to environmental issues

It is unfortunate that this final article in the series focused entirely upon the climate change issue because there is so much more to ethics and the environment than climate change. This is, however, consistent with the earlier neglect of wider issues, including ecology, justice, the long-term cost of human development, God's love for His non-human creatures, and our obligation to serve and to share.

Most of the deficiencies in this series of articles can be traced back to a faulty view of man, which leads on to a faulty view of dominion and of the kingdom of God. It also suffers from what appears to be a complete lack of understanding of the sinful nature of Christians and our need to use the gracious means that God has uniquely given us to deal with sin. Development is a creative activity that can be carried out with skill and ingenuity to produce spectacular results. The profit motive is completely consistent with God's promise of fruitfulness. But the sinful nature of man must be dealt with constantly; otherwise development becomes corrupted like every other thing that fallen man touches.

I would like to urge readers to rethink this foundational issue of dominion, as I shall do, and rethink the implications for the gospel, Christendom, and the environment. Biblical creationists are in a unique position today, as no generation before us, to rebuild Christendom from its true foundations in Genesis.

References

1. From above, a clean river flowing through tropical forest should look black with an irregular green fringe. The dark colour is decaying organic debris (mostly leaves) on the river bottom, seen through clear water, and the green fringe is overhanging vegetation growing on the river bank. The lack of the green fringe on the Ok Tedi river shows that the adjacent vegetation as well as the aquatic life has been killed.

Alex Williams received a B.Sc. in botany from the University of New England, an M.Sc.(Hons.) in radioecology from Macquarie University, and is an elected member of the Australian Institute of Biology. He has diplomas in Christian studies from Tabor College and Bible College of South Australia (in missiology), and a Licentiate in Theology (with distinction) from the Australian College of Theology. During 20 years in environmental research, he became the Australian representative to the United Nations in his field, and produced for them a two-volume multi-authored monograph on the environmental behaviour of radium. He then spent seven years in mission work and is now an honorary botanist at the Western Australian Herbarium in Perth. He is a regular contributor to *Creation* and *Journal of Creation* and co-author of *Dismantling the Big Bang*.