John Stott on CREATION CARE

'A compelling invitation'
Ruth Valerio

R.J. (Sam) Berry
with Laura S. Meitzner Yoder

A Note from Peter Harris

John's passion for birding and photography is legendary. A lifelong ambition to capture on film the breath-taking sight of snowy owls at their arctic nests was fulfilled in his seventies; other less ambitious expeditions were imbued with the same godly determination. His appreciation of all of creation was an integral part of his love for the Creator and few living things escaped his penetrating gaze and insatiable curiosity. 'Study the birds of the air is not a suggestion of Jesus,' he would say, 'it's a command'! Of the estimated 9,000 or so species in the world, he managed to see almost a third, and often photograph them too, despite his punishing schedule.

Being a birder is not necessarily the same thing as being a conservationist, yet John was both. I think there were two reasons he cared so much about creation care and was able to bring it to the attention of global evangelicalism. He was hardwired with a love of nature in general and birds in particular, but he also put his ideas under the authority of Scripture. I have framed in my office some notes he made very early on, on Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*. He was obviously reading widely early on into the contemporary environmental movement.

He particularly loved Psalm 104, which he said was the first great ecological poem. On the tenth anniversary of A Rocha in 1993, he preached a sermon referring to the exhortation in Psalm 105:1 to 'Sing praise to the LORD and tell of all his wonderful acts.' He said, 'Of course we're used to the idea that we're to bear witness to what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of the world. But the Scripture says we are also to bear witness to the wonderful works of our creator. I hope that we will not be afraid to bear witness to

the Creator as well as to the redeemer.'

'Trusteeship includes conservation,' he wrote. 'The greatest threat to mankind may prove in the end not to be nuclear war, but a peace-time peril, namely the spoliation of the earth's natural resources by human folly or greed.'[1] John was fully persuaded, both theologically and scientifically, of the threat of ecological crisis. He reached the conclusion that for all thoughtful, committed Christians it was right, for example, to buy from companies with ethically sound environmental policies. John had a simple lifestyle. He ate simply, and shopped rarely. His possessions were few and precious since they were mostly gifts from friends around the world. Books lined his walls, but they were in constant use and no doubt circulation too. Also he had written quite a lot of them himself! Buying clothes presented less of a temptation to him, but this English gentleman was always impeccably dressed. We know he owned two suits, both of them light blue and miraculously crease-proof.

John loved A Rocha. More than once he said wistfully, 'If I were two or three decades younger, I'd be doing this with you!' He gave us his unwavering support from A Rocha's inception. He was quick to understand our vision for a Christian Field Study Centre and Bird Observatory as a response to the Creator and an expression of mission, but he made it clear that he would only lend his name to our bright idea if his involvement was active and practical. In reply to my invitation to join the Council of Reference in 1982, he wrote 'Perhaps also I should insist on your inviting me to visit the field study centre and bird observatory in Portugal at the earliest possible moment!!' True to his word, he arrived on our Portuguese doorstep shortly after negotiations began for the purchase of Cruzinha. No centre to visit yet, but he got to know our children, developing a particularly competitive relationship with our four-year-old son who had a broken arm. For the next 25

years, no visit to John ended without a genuine enquiry about his well-being, and a brief prayer for his blessing.

Everyone needs a role model. The apostle Paul invited the Corinthian believers to imitate him, to copy what they saw him do and heard him say. We used to say to our kids, 'Don't do what I do, do what I say!' But John was different; here was someone with a brilliant theological mind, a towering intellect, a highly disciplined devotional life (how many of us get up at 5.00 am to study the Bible whatever time zone we are in?), a practical commitment to the poor, and to the transformation of society through the power of the Gospel, a global ministry – AND a passion for birdwatching in particular and creation care in general. What better role model could we have hoped for?

Peter Harris
A Rocha Founder and President Emeritus

This piece includes some reflections by Miranda Harris first published on www.arocha.org

[1] Stott, John R.W., *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1984), p 115.

JOHN STOTT ON CREATION CARE

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Commitment to nature conservation and Christian mission

Issues Facing Christians Today was published in 1984. The previous year the A Rocha Trust had been established with the twin tasks of nature conservation and Christian mission. Stott shared the aims of A Rocha and was a strong supporter from its early days. Indeed, he helped to draft the five commitments that the growing global movement adopted as it grew beyond its first decade of work in Portugal:

- **Christian** a biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society;
- **conservation** research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world, plus environmental education programmes for people of all ages;
- **community** through commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, to develop good relationships within both the A Rocha family and local communities;
- **cross-cultural** drawing on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world;
- **cooperation** working in partnership with a wide variety of organizations and individuals who share A Rocha's concern for a sustainable world.

In 1983, Reverend Peter and Miranda Harris went to the Algarve in southern Portugal to test this vision. They were seconded to A Rocha by the Anglican missionary agency Crosslinks, which had come to

accept, on scriptural grounds, that mission included the care of creation. In 1986, the trust bought the old farmhouse that became the centre of the work, situated on a peninsula by the Alvor estuary and its extensive salt marshes. The A Rocha staff continue to carry out systematic studies of the birds, insects and plants. They have fought hard to protect the area from development and are the focus of a community welcoming students and others to share their vision.

A Rocha was close to Stott's heart from its beginning. He became a member of its International Council of Reference and took a close interest in its work. A Rocha is now active in twenty countries around the world. The story of its early years has been told by Peter Harris in a book, *Under the Bright Wings* (1993), and its further development in *Kingfisher's Fire* (2008). Stott wrote the foreword (1993, pp. ix–xi) to the first book, repeating his familiar detestation of dualism and separating God's works of creation and redemption:

> Peter [Harris] refuses to compartmentalise Christian discipleship. His overriding concern is to help break down the disastrous dualism which still exists in many Christians between the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material, the soul and the body, as if God were interested only in the former, in the 'religious' bits of our lives, and as if only they deserve to be called 'Christian'.
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> But the living God of the Bible is the God of both creation and redemption, and is concerned for the totality of our well-being. Put another way, the older theologians used to say that God has written two books, one called 'nature' and the other called 'Scripture', through which he has revealed himself. Moreover, he has given us these two books to study. The study of the natural order is 'science', and of the biblical revelation 'theology'. And as we engage in these twin disciplines, we are (in the words of the seventeenth-century astronomer Johann Kepler) 'thinking God's thoughts after him'.
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> Christian people should surely have been in the vanguard of the movement for environmental responsibility, because of

our doctrines of creation and stewardship. Did God make the world? Does he sustain it? Has he committed its resources to our care? His personal concern for his own creation should be sufficient to inspire us to be equally concerned.

But can ecological involvement properly be included under the heading of 'mission'? Yes, it can and should. For mission embraces everything Christ sends his people into the world to do, service as well as evangelism. And we cannot truly love and serve our neighbours if at the same time we are destroying their environment, or acquiescing in its destruction, or even ignoring the environmentally depleted circumstances in which so many people are condemned to live. As by the incarnation Jesus Christ entered into our world, so true incarnational mission involves entering into other people's worlds, including the world of their social and environmental reality.

The gospel itself includes God's creation as well as his work of redemption. Certainly the apostle Paul, in his sermon to the Athenian philosophers, ranged much more widely than we usually do in our gospel preaching. He took in the whole of time from the creation to the consummation, and demonstrated from the truth of God as creator and sustainer of all things the sheer absurdity of worshipping idols made by human hands.

As for methods of evangelism, an activity which Peter Harris clearly and rightly distinguishes from both propaganda and proselytism, he lays his emphasis on the importance of the Christian community. Of course the gospel must be articulated in words. But so deeply alienated are contemporary Europeans from the traditional image of the church, that almost nothing is more important than that people should be able to *see* what we are talking about. In consequence, Peter and Miranda and their four children have opened their hearts and their home to people. They welcome virtually everybody who comes. It has been a costly commitment. The pressures have been relentless. And they recognise that there must be sensible limits to this kind of exposure. Nevertheless, they are determined that the

> gospel of God's love will be given visible and tangible expression at Cruzinha [A Rocha's base in Portugal].
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> Peter's account of the A Rocha odyssey is marked both by humility (although the centre has already had a remarkable influence on the conservation movement in Portugal) and by honesty (he neither exaggerates, nor portrays himself, his family and his colleagues as other than flawed and frail human beings). At times his narrative is also hilariously funny, as he laughs at the vagaries of the human scene and at himself. I hope many people will read his book. They are sure to be enriched by it.
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> It will be evident to readers that I love and admire Peter and Miranda, and enormously enjoyed a recent bird-watching expedition with them in north-west Turkey, as I had also enjoyed some previous birding with Peter in Portugal, west Wales and Morocco. I thank God for their vision, commitment, faith and perseverance, their love for the people they are seeking to serve, and their deep immersion in the Portuguese language and culture. In the developing ministry of A Rocha an exciting, contemporary form of Christian ministry has come alive.

Peter Harris shared Stott's vision for the natural world and became one of Stott's closest bird-watching friends. He has written his own memoir of Stott in a chapter, 'Birding before dawn around the world', in *Portraits of a Radical Disciple*, edited by Chris Wright (2011b, pp. 177–180 and 182–183).

> It had all come as something of a surprise. Despite the fact that rather few British Christians seemed to be taking the known crisis in the world's ecosystems to heart, the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) had decided to sponsor our ornithological trip to southern Sweden, their first environmental initiative. It was I982, and in the face of a certain amount of evangelical muttering, we thought it prudent to recruit some irreproachable theological support. I had only

met John Stott once before, two years earlier, when he had come to bless the graduating class of ordinands and other students from Trinity College, Bristol, but his passion for birding was well known. Given his increasingly direct appeals for contemporary application of biblical Christian thinking, we had some hope that he would give us a sympathetic hearing for our ideas. I was, however, completely unprepared for the fact that he was so immediately interested. John's letters are the kind you keep, and so I still have this letter with the others: 'I am so glad the Falsterbo expedition to watch the raptor migration was such a success – I wish I could have joined you!'

So he never made it on that trip, but he did agree immediately to join the Council of Reference of the A Rocha Trust to which it gave birth. Once again, it was on conditions we had not expected, but which we came to know as characteristic. He wrote:

> I made a decision some years ago that, as a matter of integrity, I would not be on any council of reference unless I was personally involved in the work concerned, and thus able to speak from personal knowledge about it. Indeed, only these last two or three weeks I have declined a couple of invitations on this ground . . . Perhaps I should insist on your inviting me to visit the field study centre and bird observatory in Portugal [A Rocha] at the earliest possible moment!! Will you be coming to London during the early months of the New Year? Then perhaps we could meet and talk and my conscience would permit me to accept your invitation.

We did meet. He did come to Portugal. And it proved to be the start of a friendship and a collaboration that lasted over a quarter of a century, even though it came at a time of his life when he was already deeply committed to many other organizations around the world.

At first we saw our role as perhaps providing the way for John to lay down some of the more major demands of his life.

In doing birding in the spare moments of his travels, he was able to keep his legendary mental powers in gear, but he was then applying it to problems such as how to determine the length of the Bee-eaters' nest hole, rather than the more intractable challenges of whether the Anglican Church was thinking straight about ordaining women bishops, or how evangelical Christian leaders around the world could reconcile their newly recovered social conscience with their convictions about the vital work of preaching and evangelism.

Even our own somewhat spontaneous family life seemed to be a welcome distraction on his first stay with us in our rented accommodation in Portugal. He arrived late one evening when our youngest daughter, Bethan, was just three weeks old, and Miranda's *feijoada* (a Portuguese dish of beans with beef and pork) was about to burn on the stove as John came over the doorstep. Miranda's request, 'Could you hold her a moment?' didn't prove a challenge to this particular bachelor. He simply called on years of baptismal experience and took Bethan in his arms. He showed equal abilities with small children and struck up rapid friendships with all of ours. He developed a series of competitions with our son Jeremy, who at the ripe age of four had just broken his arm by tripping over on the rough track by our house. They culminated in John secretly signing Jem's plaster cast while he slept on the morning John left at his accustomed early hour. I would have come close to burnout if I had ever attempted to keep up with the rhythms of life that were a simple routine for John.

However, John's ease with pre-dawn hours equipped him to be the perfect companion on a series of birding trips over successive years. The trick was to find a place at the end of one of his speaking tours and convene there for a week or so, usually with a couple of other friends, but with only one guiding principle – the birding came first in all the decisions. So the accommodation was frequently lamentable, the food infrequent and occasionally high risk, but John's delight in what he saw and his stamina in getting to the places where

some of the more remote species were to be found made everything worthwhile. We were fortunate that experts such as Rick and Barbara Mearns could come with us to Turkey and Spain, and in the United States Rob and Helen Kelsh were able to join us. Colin Jackson of A Rocha Kenya also had a spectacular week in Ethiopia with John, continuing the tradition, and Ginny Vroblesky of A Rocha USA went down to Belize for another trip. But mostly it was Miranda and I who had the joy of planning an itinerary that would take John out of the stress of his normal travels and into the close study of what he taught us to understand as 'God's book of works' – the companion volume to God's book of words, the Bible, in God's revelation . . .

Over the years his involvement with A Rocha became steadily greater. He helped us formulate a solid theological basis for the work we were doing, and joined us in several countries to plead with Christian leaders the cause of caring for creation. He wrote articles and forewords for our publications and advised us on the wisdom of different alliances and against potential distractions. I believe his own thinking was able to take shape through the challenge of seeing several of the practical conservation projects that A Rocha people were undertaking in places as diverse as Lebanon, Kenya and Southall in the United Kingdom. He helped us identify some wonderful leaders from the non-Western non-white world, and he made it his business to turn them into what he called 'orni-theologians'.

We will miss him greatly – his gift for close friendship with Miranda and myself, his genuine interest in our family, the welcomes to his tiny London flat to plan the next trip over sandwiches provided by the equally indefatigable Frances [Stott's long-serving secretary], his knowledgeable delight in all he saw that was familiar, and his endless penetrating questions about anything that was new to him. The simplicity of his lifestyle was a constant reminder of his many friends around the world who lived in tough and needy circumstances,

> and whom he always kept in his mind and in his (meticulously organized) praying. He was a great field companion and a true Christian – probably more profoundly converted than anyone else I have known.

Peter Harris was a welcomed bird-watching companion of Stott's for several decades. He was interviewed by Lowell Bliss, the Director of Eden Vigil, a US-based charity that provides help to church planters wanting to learn about creation care. Their conversation was published as a podcast in 2012. Harris takes us to the heart of Stott as human being and orni-theologian but, above all, as a dedicated believer. An edited transcript of Harris's replies to questions put to him by Bliss reads:

> John Stott had a remarkable gift of friendship. He was quite extraordinary that way. A Rocha was blessed over 25 years to have John Stott's friendship, and his support and guidance as well. And I think he formed our theology in a deep way, along with others from around the world. And I know that he retained a very close relationship with a number of A Rocha leaders around the world. He has left a remarkable legacy and we will be seeing the fruits of that for many years to come.
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> I don't think anyone who knew John would describe him as a moderate person. He strove for Anglican moderation, but whatever he did, he did extremely thoroughly, and birding was no exception. He was a very keen bird-watcher. It would be a little unkind to say he was obsessed, but he certainly took his bird-watching with a seriousness that other birders respected and recognize.
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> Our friendship began in 1982. I thought it was prudent to get some theological firepower to cover us in an expedition to the south of Sweden with a group of students from British universities, with the twin aims of watching the migration of birds of prey and studying the Psalms, in the face of some nervousness on the part of UCCF worried that people would worship nature. I contacted John; I think he was amused by

some of the issues that the innocent pursuit of ornithology raised for people. He was somebody who constantly strove to hold all the bits of his life into one whole. And so his relationship with God and his understanding of God as Creator quite naturally gave him a particular kind of joy. Appreciating birds and wild places was quite a straightforward thing for him, something which was instinctive. In fact there is a tradition of Anglican clergymen and bird-watching that goes back at least to the 18th century. Gilbert White of Selborne and many great observers of nature and early scientists were Anglican ministers. But as awareness of ecological crises around the world grew, I think bird-watching moved in John's mind to become something of a missionary and activist issue.

Over the years we joined John in quite a number of bird-watching expeditions. Sometimes it was a simple bribe to get him to speak at one of the A Rocha founding conferences, as he did in Lebanon and Kenya. The deal was if he would do that, usually adding it to an existing programme, then we would go birding afterwards. Or, if he was speaking somewhere in the world and we were able either to get there easily or we were there too, we would put on some days at the beginning or end of his visit. There was an occasion when he was arriving for a speaking tour round the USA just as we were finishing some teaching in Vancouver, and so we agreed to meet in Oregon to take as much ornithological advantage as we could from this happy overlap. Despite his jet-lag, having just arrived from Europe, and having planned the usual 6 a.m. departure for the next day's search for Lewis' Woodpecker, he stayed up until well after midnight, talking over questions about Christian belief that were bothering one of our hosts.

There was also a sense in which my wife Miranda and I sometimes considered it something of a service to call John away from his busy schedule and out among the birds. He drove himself very hard. He would always try to understand those he didn't agree with, and that sort of act of understanding was intellectually and spiritually costly. Everybody writes

about the extraordinary pace of life he used to keep and the discipline he maintained; he was usually up at 4.30 in the morning. On one trip we made to Turkey, he had promised himself he would write for an hour every day. He was writing his commentary on Romans and this meant he had to read around 24 or 25 commentaries, many of which he wouldn't have agreed with but he had to try to understand where people were coming from. A birding trip typically kicks off at about 6 in the morning, which meant he had to get his hour done before then, but John wouldn't accept any compromise on the scheduling. Once we had ended up late the previous evening in a fairly basic hostel. It was cold, and the rather public latrines gave the whole place a pervasively unhealthy smell. When Miranda and I stumbled out of bed around 6 a.m. next morning, it was to find John emerging glowing from his unheated room, wrapped head to foot in a blanket, deeply satisfied by the logic of the apostle Paul and content that his morning's writing had done it justice.

We had some very funny moments together. On that Turkish trip, we were up a mountain trying to find some particular species. Because he started so early, John used to take a half an hour out after lunch regardless of where he was. He called it his HHH ('Horizontal Half Hour'). Miranda and I had wandered off looking for different things, and John was always trying to photograph birds as well. When 2 o'clock came he just dug a hole on the hillside to put his hip in and went out like a light. He woke somewhat prematurely being prodded by a shepherd who thought he had found a corpse. John had this incredible capacity to just deflate out for a half hour completely and then come around.

Another memorable time was an incredibly hot time in Morocco towards the northern edge of the Sahara. We got back to the town where we were staying about nine o'clock in the evening; it was still extremely hot. Neither John nor I had eaten much during the day and he got it into his head that we needed to eat outdoors. He negotiated with the owner of the

only café owner in the village (whose café was in a stuffy downstairs room). The poor restaurateur found himself part of an unstoppable mission to find some ropes from a neighbour and then haul table and chairs up on to the flat roof. We sat under the stars until about midnight. It was fantastic.

Then there was the time when Sunday worship conflicted gravely with raptor migration across the Straits of Gibraltar, the wind having swung to the west shortly after dawn, bringing low-flying Black Kites distractingly close as we went into the church. 'Don't I recognize you?' said the minister musingly and hospitably, as we tried to do a rapid exit after the early service. 'Just visiting bird-watchers . . .' muttered John Stott evasively, pulling down his cap and looking shifty as he tried to avoid recognition, thinking of the inevitable delaying conversation that would ensue.

John used to talk about 'orni-theology'. I think it was John's term. He was always trying to hold his bird-watching and his theology together. Many people less keen on birds as he was, were in his eyes subjects to be converted. Orni-theology was his language for saying: 'Well, you've been following me on the theology, so now you need to follow on the ornithology as well, and blend the two.' He used to refer to Matthew 6:26 ('study the birds of the air'), which he always said was a command. He didn't see a Christian had any wriggle room there.

One of the chapters in his book *The Birds Our Teachers* was 'The migration of the storks: repentance'. [It also formed the subject of an All Souls sermon on 8 August, 1999, with the text, Jeremiah 8:7 [NIV]: 'Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons. Even the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the law.'] John commented that this could very well be one of the first written mentions of bird migration in all of literature since Jeremiah was writing in the 7th century before Christ. In the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon where we work, you can still see tens of thousands of storks going through on migration, and the prophet Jeremiah would

have been very familiar with this phenomenon. He would have had this clear sense of the birds orientated by God's wisdom. It's interesting that people didn't believe in or understand migration at all until relatively recently; they thought swallows went down into reed beds for the winter, and re-emerged again in the spring. So, Jeremiah wasn't doing badly.

Palestine is a flyway for migrants and it's rather heartbreaking actually to think of the numbers that the people of Jeremiah's times would have seen, compared to what we see now. If you look at Psalm 104, most of the species that are listed there are now gone from the region altogether, and the numbers must be a fraction of what they were. The numbers of migration hotspots now are a fraction of what they were fifty years ago.

Everybody who knew him will tell you that one of the most remarkable things about John Stott was the way that he was constantly taking on new subjects, challenging himself with opinions from the professional worlds that he was in touch with. We had many conversations about key issues in the environmental world. He was always keeping his ideas under revision. He would think about things and reflect on them. He was an extremely good listener and an avid learner. It's not surprising that, as issues became more and more current and more and more in the public space, John was keen to engage with them. He would seek out people expert in their fields and probe their knowledge. I think one advantage was that those people were in return challenged to reflect theologically on what they were doing.

I described John in the book *John Stott: A portrait by his friends* (Wright 2011a) as 'probably more profoundly converted than anyone else I have known.' He was quite fearless in following his understanding of Christ through to its logical conclusions. He didn't hold much back. If you were travelling with him, he would swing his legs over the bed in a determined fashion at half past four in the morning, just to make sure he didn't go back to bed. The guy was remarkably single-minded.

He was trained to have a very questioning mind; he came from a very rigorous academic tradition. C. S. Lewis said of himself, 'You won't see my like again; I'm a dinosaur.' John came from the same generation; its intellectual training was pretty demanding.

That applied also to John's spirituality, although he wouldn't have used the word. It meant he endeavoured to see what was Christlike in absolutely everything: what he ate, when he ate, what he wore, where he lived, the films he watched, the conversations he had, even the birds he watched. He consciously shared his life with people of all ages, and from many different cultures. He's well known for having remained single because he felt he had a particular calling that really wouldn't suit the married life. From the early days of Lausanne he opened himself to the criticisms and perspectives of Christians from the developing world. He had a tremendous integrity. The way he lived privately matched what he said publicly, and that's a fantastic thing when you see it in a Christian leader. I think that was why he was so authoritative. It wasn't that he was in any way dogmatic; it was just that what he said came across with great weight because he was living it, even if he hadn't got all the answers. There was a mixture of conviction and humility in John. That meant people weren't deterred from following him on the same paths.

By the time he wrote *The Radical Disciple* (Stott 2010b), his strength, both physical and intellectual, was clearly waning. That book was very important to him, and not least the final chapter about death and dying. In the book, John set out his path of discipleship – particularly the eight traits he called all of us to also take seriously. The first four are nonconformity, Christlikeness, maturity, and then chapter number four, creation care.

We often talked about the book when we went to see him in his last months. I think he was astonished that, given the urgency of the environmental issues we all faced and given the theological priorities that Scripture gives to creation,

creation care continued to be such an orphan child within the evangelical conscience and awareness. I wasn't surprised he put the creation care chapter so front and centre of what he was writing about in neglected issues. And yet John, one of our greatest theologians of our age, seems to base himself on just two verses: Psalm 24:1: 'The Earth is the Lord's' and Psalm 115:16: 'The Earth He has given to humankind.' I don't think he was trying to build a theology. I have heard him appeal to many other scriptures on creation over the years. His concern in the chapter was to avoid both the deification and the exploitation of nature. He sets out the best way to accomplish this was in cooperation with God. I wouldn't want to put words in John's mouth, but you could say that the affirmation in those two verses was sufficient. It certainly would take popular evangelical culture a long way further than it's gone, because both those affirmations challenge the way that most of us in the Western world live: as though the world is just here for us and for our material satisfaction, while rejecting – or at least marginalizing – the God-given responsibility to care for God's creation.

It's possible for Christians to borrow the narrative of the secular environmental movement, and merely gloss it with a bit of God language. But there are some very significant differences between secular environmentalism and a Christian approach to what we would call the care of creation. One of the most significant things is that the Christian engages in these things first and foremost because he believes that this is something that pleases God, that's coherent with a worshipping relationship of a loving Creator. It has been said that you can't say you love Rembrandt and then trash his paintings. So, Christians care for creation, not because they necessarily believe they are going to save the world or because they believe that this is the flavour of the times, but simply out of their response to a loving Creator. I think John was trying to draw attention to that simple truth and also to the sense that insofar as this pleases God, God himself is working. It is the work of

God's Holy Spirit to call the church to a loving relationship with other people and also to a concerned relationship with creation. This is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit, because it's an extremely difficult work. And if it honours the creation, if it honours the Creator, it's a spiritual path. And in that sense we are cooperating with the Creator.

John repeatedly reminded us that peace with God and Christ extends from the person into their widest set of relationships with other people in the healing of communities. Romans 8 tells us that the whole creation, which is groaning, is waiting for the day when it is drawn into the glorious freedom of the children of God. I don't see how we can ignore that dimension of the gospel.

The scope of the gospel extends to the whole creation. John began his charge to the Third Lausanne Congress, 'we are facing new challenges. For example, there is the spectre of global warming, which adds new urgency to our evangelism'. John was entirely persuaded that climate change was a reality. He was very widely travelled. And anybody who's travelled in the poorer world is not left in much doubt that climate change is happening and that it is now expected to be the biggest driver of people movements globally, the biggest contributor to health issues globally, and certainly the biggest contributor to biodiversity loss globally; it will have profound consequences for human societies. And all of that kind of disruption necessarily poses acute problems and issues to those who are seeking to draw people to understand the love of God in Christ.

This is a conversation that should be with those who are qualified to talk about the issues. We need Christians who are working in climate science to be honest with us about what their data show and their conclusions show. We need those who are taking issue with some of these things to be clear about why they are doing that, because what we're hearing from Christians in the poorer world is that climate change, infrequent weather patterns, acute weather events, all of the things that the climate scientists have been talking about for

> decades now, are happening in their lives and causing enormous suffering. And so we do need to have this debate conducted between those who are able to talk about this from their professional background. And I don't think that's what has happened. I often feel the Internet acts as an amplifier of discord, because we don't sit down and spend time with each other and realize that our brothers and sisters are our brothers and sisters even if we don't agree with them.

Stott was the archetype and exemplar of an orni-theologian. He took every opportunity to preach the gospel and he took every opportunity to watch birds. His delight in seeing remote species of birds easily overcame the difficulties of the travel and basic conditions of the excursions. In his foreword to the American edition of *John Stott: A portrait by his friends* (Wright 2011a), David Neff, the editor of *Christianity Today* recorded that when he mentioned that his parents lived in the birding mecca of the American southwest, Stott told him he had been there three times. In return, Stott clearly delighted in ministering to the bird-watching community, and particularly to the A Rocha Trust. In October 1989, he gave the below keynote address, 'The biblical imperative', at the conference 'Caring for God's world' organized by A Rocha in collaboration with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (then known as Christian Impact). It was published as A Rocha Occasional Paper No. 2. As noted above, it is an expanded version of the 'biblical perspective' section of the 'Creation care' chapter in *Issues Facing Christians Today*. It is his clearest exposition of our responsibility as Christians for the environment. Stott began with the same two affirmations that were at the heart of *The Radical Disciple* chapter on creation care.

The biblical imperative

> My assignment is to attempt to expound the biblical imperative for environmental and ecological concern. There are two major biblical doctrines which together constitute this

imperative and which have been neatly captured in the title for this conference – 'Caring for God's world'.

The first doctrine is that the world belongs to God. He is the Creator. It is God's world. The second is that he has committed it to us, so that we are responsible for caring for God's world. We are the caretakers of the environment. So the first doctrine is about God and the creation, while the second is about us and about his delegation to us of ecological responsibility.

1 The creation by God

Many of us when we come to church on the Lord's Day delight to affirm the first section of the Creed – *We believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth*. In saying this we affirm our faith not only in the fact that he is the Creator of all things, but that he is the Almighty, meaning the ruler of all things that he has made. This affirmation is common to all Christians who look to the Bible for their authority and who belong to the tradition of historic Christian orthodoxy. All true Christians are 'creationists' irrespective of whether they think the created earth is young or old and irrespective of whether they think that some form of evolutionary process was involved in the creative activity of God.

We must strenuously resist all attempts to narrow the definitions of 'creation' and 'evolution' in such a way as to make then mutually exclusive, so that if you believe in creation, you cannot believe in evolution and vice versa. Neither of these two words must be hijacked in the interests of a particular pressure group, either 'creation' by six-day creationists or 'evolution' by secular evolutionists. The doctrine of creation does not necessarily mean a six-day creation and the theory of evolution does not necessarily mean a process of random development by modification in which there is no room for God. All Christians believe that God is the Creator of all things, whatever mode or process he employed.

But I want to go beyond that in a way that may be a little less familiar to some of you. In affirming that God is the Creator

and Ruler of all things, we need to develop a *trinitarian* understanding of his creative work; we are not only creationists, we are also trinitarians. We are very familiar with the truth that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were together involved in our redemption. I think of 1 Peter 1:2, we 'have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his Blood.' There in one verse at the beginning of Peter's first letter is a plain reference to the part played by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in redemption. But we must also recall that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were together involved in the creation, and are involved in the conservation of the natural order as well.

So let us look at the part played by the three persons of the Trinity.

a) God the Father

We can say with Jeremiah 'Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm' (32:17). Similarly, the psalmist ascribes the creation to the fingers and hands of God (8:3, 6), But what in these texts is attributed to his arm, hands and fingers is elsewhere attributed to his bare Word as expressive of his creative will, 'He spoke and it came to be' (Psalm 33:9).

Very different was the grotesque concept of Creation prevalent in the Ancient Near East, such as the Babylonian Creation epic known as *Enuma Elish* with its crude and puerile polytheism. It describes the original struggle between Cosmos and Chaos. It dates from about the second millennium B.C. and was solemnly recited at the turn of every year. In the beginning, it says, nothing existed except the male deity Apsu, the begetter, and the female deity Mummu-Tiamat, the Mother Goddess. Together they formed a watery chaos and brought forth other gods who misbehaved disgracefully and fought one another in endless celestial battles. In the course of time Apsu was murdered in his sleep and Marduk (tall, handsome and powerful)

with four eyes and four ears, the loftiest of the gods, resolved to avenge Apsu and attack Tiamat.

> *'Then joined issue Tiamat and Marduk, the wisest of the gods. They strove in single combat, locked in battle. The Lord (Marduk) spread out his net to enfold her. The evil wind . . . he let loose in her face . . . He released the arrow and it tore her belly. It cut through her intestines, splitting her heart. Having thus subdued her, he extinguished her life. He cast down her carcass in order to stand upon it . . . The Lord trod upon the legs of Tiamat. With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull. He split her like a shellfish into two parts. Half of her he set up and ceiled it as the sky. The other half became the foundation of the earth.'*

Then in the end Marduk proceeded to create from other parts of her body the stars, the mountains and human beings.

Some foolish secularists say that they find remarkable parallels between *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1, which makes me wonder if they have read either. It is a relief to turn from this crude polytheism with its unseemly battles between immoral gods. In the noble ethical monotheism of Genesis 1, the Creation is attributed to God's sovereign Will and Word. This is the place of God the Father in the Creation.

b) God the Son

We are very familiar with the central place occupied by God the Son in the redemption of human beings, but we need to see that he occupies a central place in creation and conservation too. Colossians 1:15–17 sums up his creative work in four propositions:

First, God the Son is the agent *through* whom the Creation was brought into being. Three times this truth is asserted in the New Testament. In the first, 'For through him all things were created.' (Colossians 1:16a). Secondly 'All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that

has been made' (John 1:3). And thirdly he is the Son 'through whom he made the universe' (Hebrews 1:2).

Second, God the Son is the heir *for* whom the Creation exists. 'All things were created through him and for him' (Colossians 1:16b). So he is Creation's goal as well as its source; its end as well as its beginning. This is reiterated in Hebrews 1:2, that God appointed his Son 'heir of all things'. This one truth should be enough to make every Christian a conscientious environmentalist. If the universe, especially planet earth, is destined by the Father for the Son, and will one day be given to the Son, how can we presume to squander or spoil his inheritance?

Third, God the Son is the integrating principle *in* whom the universe coheres. 'He is before all things and in him all things hold together.' (Colossians 1:17). Again, the Son is 'sustaining all things by his powerful word' (Hebrews 1:3). The same word of God by whom the Universe was brought into being, continuously holds it in being and prevents it from falling apart.

Fourth, God the Son is Lord *under* whom the Creation is in subjection. He is 'the firstborn over all creation' (Colossians 1:15). The expression means not that he himself was the first created being, but that he had the right of the first-born over the Creation itself. For he is 'before all things . . .' (not only in time but also in rank).

Indeed it is in the man Christ Jesus that the cultural mandate to subdue the earth is fulfilled. Thus, meditating on Genesis 1, the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 8:6, 'You (God) made him (man, male and female) ruler over the works of your hands; and you put everything under his feet.' Later the writer to the Hebrews, also meditating on Psalm 8, wrote 'Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him [that is under his feet], but we see Jesus . . . crowned with glory and honour' (Hebrews 2:8, 9). Similarly in Ephesians 1:22 we read that God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

Thus, even while human beings fail adequately to fulfil the environmental mandate which they have been given, Jesus Christ does not fail. For he is the agent, the heir, the sustainer and the Lord of the environment. He is the second Adam, the head of the new Creation, who exercises his sovereignty over it.

This truth that Creation is 'through', 'for', 'in', and 'under' Christ should give us a new attitude to the Creation.

c) God the Holy Spirit

The first indirect reference to the Trinity in the Bible occurs in the first three verses of Genesis. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters'; indeed it was God the Father through the word (the Son) and the Spirit who together reduced the primeval chaos into a cosmos. Thus 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; all their starry host by the breath (or spirit) of his mouth' (Psalm 33:6). Similarly '. . . when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust, when you send your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth' (Psalm 104:29, 30).

It is a really wonderful truth that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were together involved in the creation of the world and are together involved in its control and conservation. They brought it into being: they hold it in being. Then one day they will liberate it from its present bondage to decay and invest it with the freedom of the glory of the children of God. There will be a new heaven and a new earth, a renewed universe which will be suffused with the glory of God, and of which the glorified body of Jesus is the pledge.

2 The delegation to us

It is interesting to ask the question 'To whom does the earth belong?' for Scripture appears to give two contradictory answers. First, 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1), and secondly 'The highest heavens belong to the

Lord, but the earth he has given to man (male and female)' (Psalm 115:16). So does the earth belong to us or to God?

The only possible biblical answer is that it belongs to both. It belongs to God by creation and to us by delegation. We have been given the enormous privilege of caring for God's world. Not that he has handed it over to us in such a way as to relinquish his own rights over it, but that he has delegated to us the responsibility to preserve and develop the earth on his behalf. God remains the landlord; we are his tenants. God remains the owner; we are his stewards, and it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

Let me now remind you of Genesis 1:26–28. First came the divine resolve 'let us make man (male and female) in our image . . . and let them rule [have dominion] over the earth and its creatures'. This was followed by the divine action 'So God created man (male and female) in his own image . . . and said to them . . . 'fill the earth and subdue it'. Thus the divine image and the earthly dominion belong together. Indeed our dominion over the earth is due to our likeness to God. God has set us human beings in between himself as Creator and the rest of the natural creation, both animate and inanimate. In one sense we are part of nature, because we share its dependence on the Creator. But in another sense we are distinct from the rest of creation because we have been given responsibility for it. Physiologically we are like the animals, morally and spiritually we are like God.

There is no question, then, of human beings behaving like Prometheus who, in the classical myth, stole fire from the gods. There is no question of our invading God's private territory and wresting his power from him. No, human research into the natural environment and human resourcefulness in developing tools and technology, domesticating animals, farming the land, extracting minerals from the earth, damming the rivers, and harnessing energy are all legitimate fulfilments of the primeval command to subdue the earth. God created the earth with fantastic animal, vegetable and

mineral resources and God has authorised us to use these resources, provided that we use them for the common good including our posterity.

3 Relations between man and nature

How does Scripture envisage the relationship of human beings to nature? My answer is that, in the light of the truths that God created the earth and has delegated its care to us, we have to avoid two opposite and extreme views into which some people have foolishly lapsed, namely the deification of nature and the exploitation of nature, in favour of a third and better way which I will call cooperation with nature.

1) **Deification**. There are many ways in which human beings have divinized or deified 'nature' and to some degree worshipped it. Pantheists identify the Creator with the Creation and regard everything that exists as a part of God. Animists populate the natural world with spirits (e.g. the spirits of the forests, the rivers and the mountains) and believe that these spirits are quickly offended if we trespass into their territory and then need to be placated. Buddhists regard all life (not just human life) as sacred and therefore as inviolable. Next, contemporary believers in Gaia, the earth goddess, who are part of the New Age movement regard nature as invested in some mysterious and inexplicable way with its own intrinsic and self-perpetuating mechanisms with which we must not interfere.

In his book *Gaia*: *A new look at life on earth*, published in 1979, Jim Lovelock argues that the earth 'constitutes a single system, made and managed to their own convenience by living organisms. We all know that life here is only made possible because of the right balance of gases in the atmosphere, but what we do not realize is that this balance is maintained not by chance [nor, he might have added, by a Creator!] but by the very process of life in itself' (1979, p. 249). In other words, the earth is a single self-regulating system which 'inexplicably' maintains the right level or balance of oxygen and methane.

Gaiaism is the mystical or religious strand in the Green Movement today. It is a kind of sophisticated Pantheism in divinizing nature as if it were responsible for itself and regulates itself.

Now Scripture rejects all these confusions which are derogatory to God the Creator. It insists on distinguishing between the Creator and his creation. It tells us to respect nature because God made it and it has therefore its own integrity, but not to reverence nature as if it were God and inviolable. So the de-sacralizing or the de-divinization of nature, which is the recognition that nature is creation and not creator, was an indispensable prelude to the whole scientific enterprise, and is essential to the development of earth's resources today.

If we reject the extreme of the divinization of nature, we must also reject the opposite extreme, namely the exploitation of nature. This is not treating nature as if it were God, but regarding ourselves as if we were God and free to do what we like with nature.

2) **Exploitation**. Christianity has been unfairly blamed for widespread environmental irresponsibility. Many of you will know the writings of Lynn White and Ian McHarg. Lynn White (1967) described Christianity as 'the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.' Keith Thomas (1983) in his book *Man and the Natural World*, subtitled *Changing attitudes in England 1500–1800*, agrees that some Christian preachers in Tudor and Stuart England did interpret the biblical story in a breathtakingly anthropocentric spirit, implying that man's authority over the natural world was virtually unlimited. In the 17th century, for example, bear-baiting and cock-fighting were defended by reference to the dominion which God had given to man. But during the period 1500 to 1800, changes took place in the way in which human beings perceived the natural order. They came to see it in terms of stewardship. Lynn White postulated that the Judeo-Christian tradition was responsible for the environmental crisis. In an article in *Science* in 1967, entitled 'The historical roots of our ecological crisis,' he wrote

'Christianity . . . not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends; Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt'.

This attack by Lynn White was continued by Ian McHarg, Chairman of the Department of Landscape Architecture in the University of Pennsylvania in the United States. In his book *Design with Nature* (1969) he wrote that the Genesis story 'in its insistence upon dominion and the subjugation of nature encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in man rather than those that are deferential and creative'. Indeed, he goes on, 'if one seeks licence for those who would increase radioactivity, create canals and harbours with atomic bombs, employ poisons without restraint and give consent to the bulldozer mentality, there could be no better injunction than this text . . .' (i.e. Genesis 1:26–28). Then in his Dunning Trust Lectures of 1972/3 Ian McHarg traced Western man's attitude to the natural world to what he called 'three horrifying lines' in Genesis 1 about man's dominion. He wrote 'If you want to find one text of compounded horror which will guarantee that the relationship of man to nature can only be destruction . . . which will explain all of the destruction and all of the despoliation accomplished by western man for at least these two thousand years, then you do not have to look any further than this ghastly calamitous text.'

How shall we respond to White and McHarg? We have to say that they have misquoted, misapplied and manipulated Scripture to their own purpose. It is true that the Hebrew verbs used in Genesis 1 are forceful. The verb translated 'to have dominion' can mean 'to tread upon' or 'to trample on'; it is paraphrased in Psalm 8:6 'you put everything under his feet'. It is also true that the verb 'to subdue' is used of subduing enemies in warfare and even enslaving them. But it is an elementary principle of biblical interpretation that words have to be understood not by their etymology but by their context (i.e. how each author uses them). The context of Genesis 1 and 2 makes it

plain beyond doubt that the kind of dominion God intended human beings to exercise was a responsible dominion, for God himself created the earth and then committed its care to us. It would be absurd to imagine that having arranged for its creation, God would then arrange for its destruction. No. The dominion he gave to human beings is one of stewardship.

My purpose in defending Genesis is not to exonerate all Christians (for some are to blame), but rather to exonerate the Bible from the accusation that it encourages the destruction of the environment. It does not. So we reject these two extremes, divinization and exploitation and instead we seek to develop a third and better way that I will call *co-operation*.

3) **Co-operation**. In order to grasp the co-operation that God intends between himself and us, we need to remember the distinction between 'Nature' and 'Culture'. Nature is what God has given us; culture is what we do with it, for example agriculture, horticulture and apiculture. Nature is raw materials; culture is commodities and manufactured goods prepared for the market. Nature is creation; culture is cultivation.

The beautiful truth is that God has deliberately humbled himself to make this divine–human partnership necessary. Of course having created the world he could have retained its conservation in his own hands. Having planted a garden, he could also have caused it to bear fruit. But he deliberately condescended to make us collaborators or co-workers with himself. He created the earth, but told us to subdue it. He planted the garden, but put Adam and Eve in it to 'work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2:15). This is rightly called 'the cultural mandate', the mandate or commission to human beings, not only to conserve the environment but to develop its resources for the good of all.

I wonder if you know the story about the Cockney gardener who was showing a pastor round his most beautiful herbaceous border at the height of the summer. The pastor, as pious pastors sometimes do, was waxing eloquent about the glories

of Creation and the wonders of the Creator until the gardener got fed up because no credit was being given to him. So he turned to the pastor and he said, "You should 'ave seen this 'ere garden when Gawd 'ad it to 'imself".' When God had it to himself, it was a wilderness. It was the gardener who had transformed it into a garden. The Cockney's theology was correct. A garden is neither exclusively the work of God nor exclusively the work of human beings, but the product of both. And without a human cultivator every garden would quickly degenerate back into a wilderness.

We usually emphasise the necessity of God's part in the transaction, and at Harvest Festivals give all the Glory to God.

> 'We plough the fields and scatter the good seed
> on the land,
> but it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand.'

It would be equally correct, however, to lay the emphasis on our part. So I venture to give you a new verse for the same hymn.

> 'God plants the lovely garden and gives the fertile soil,
> but it is kept and nurtured by man's resourceful toil.'

God calls us to a privileged partnership with himself. It is a noble thing to be called to cooperate with God for the fulfilment of his purposes, and to transform the created order for his glory and for the pleasure and profit of all.

I end with a final thought or appendix. It is possible to overstate this emphasis on human work in the conservation and transformation of the environment. The climax of Genesis 1 is not the creation of man the worker but the institution of the Sabbath for man the worshipper; not our toil (subduing the earth) but the laying aside of our toil on the Sabbath day. For the Sabbath relativizes the importance of work. It protects human beings from a total absorption in their work as if it were

> the be all and end all of their existence. It is not. We human beings find our humanness not only in relation to the earth, which we are to transform, but in relation to God whom we are to worship; not only in relation to the Creation, but in relation to the Creator.
>
> It is the Sabbath which pinpoints the difference between the Marxist and the Christian views of work and of man. Marxism sees man as *Homo economicus*, whose destiny is to be productive; Christianity, however, sees man as *Homo adorans*, whose destiny is to worship. Worship, not work, is the summit of human activity. At the same time this is to some degree a false distinction. For God intends our work to be an expression of our worship, and our care of the Creation to reflect our love for the Creator. Only then whatever we do, in word or deed, shall we do it to the Glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Stott spent much of his writing time in south west Wales. He shared something of this experience in a Sunday Worship Radio 4 broadcast from the Hookses on 18 April 2004, which was hosted by Nick J. Page:

> I've been coming down here for 50 years – drawn mainly by the magnificent scenery and by the rich variety of birds, especially of course sea birds. Offshore are the islands of Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm and these islands are world-famous bird sanctuaries. Indeed, this whole area is part of the Pembrokeshire National Park, and because of its wildlife it has recently been designated an 'SSSI' – that is, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Looking across the bay and the headland beyond to the open Atlantic is a view of spectacular beauty, which prompts me (as I'm sure it would also prompt you) to worship the God of creation.

He shared four of his 'orni-theology' lessons, and then gave this commentary on degradation and creation care:

> It's really impossible to thank God for the blessings of his creation without at the same time remembering our responsibility to care for it. Down here in Pembrokeshire we are constantly reminded how fragile our living environment and its biodiversity are.
>
> Just along the coast on the 15 February 1996, the huge tanker *Sea Empress* was grounded at the entrance to Milford Haven, which has a great reputation for cleanliness. More than half her cargo of 136,000 tons of oil was spilled. It was the third-largest oil spill ever in British waters. Being February it was fortunately still two to three months before the colonies of sea birds would occupy their nesting sites on Skomer and Skokholm islands. Nevertheless, it was a major disaster, polluting many miles of beautiful coastline and killing thousands of birds, especially Common Scoters and Guillemots.
>
> Over against such horrors, we need to listen again to God's original intention for us. Some critics of Christianity try to fasten the blame for ecological disasters on God's instruction to us to subdue the earth and rule over its creatures. But really this is a serious misuse of the biblical text. It is absurd to suppose that God would first create the world and then hand it over to us to destroy it. No, our God-given responsibility is one of stewardship – that is, of caring for God's creation.

The eight areas that Stott regarded as marking a radical disciple were nonconformity, Christlikeness, maturity, creation care, simplicity, balance, dependence and death. But joining them was his commitment to and proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord. At the Keswick Convention in July 2007, Stott gave his final public address, 'The model: Becoming more like Christ' (2007b). In it he declared the result of a lifetime's reflection:

> God wants His people to become like Christ. Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God . . . [He gave reasons for believing this was indeed God's will, and then concluded] I have spoken much tonight about Christlikeness, but is it

> [Christlikeness] attainable? In our own strength it is clearly not attainable, but God has given us his Holy Spirit to dwell within us, to change us from within. William Temple, Archbishop in the 1940s, used to illustrate this point from Shakespeare.
>
> > It is no good giving me a play like *Hamlet* or *King Lear* and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it – I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it – I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like this. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like His.
>
> So I conclude, as a brief summary of what we have tried to say to one another: God's purpose is to make us like Christ. God's way to make us like Christ is to fill us with his Spirit. In other words, it's a trinitarian conclusion, concerning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To Stott, 'creation care' was part of this, and in no way alien or additional to it. In *The Radical Disciple* (2010b, pp. 51–59), Stott expands on the traits that mark the mature disciple, which can otherwise be described as the fruit of the Spirit. This has already been referenced above on a number of occasions. Stott's chapter on creation care in *The Radical Disciple* repeats the arguments set out at greater length in the chapter in *Issues facing Christians Today*, but it is significant because it sets it out as an integral component of discipleship, not merely as one of a number of challenges facing the Christian believer. All the traits characteristic of a radical disciple are the fruit of the Spirit. Creation care can be regarded as the sword of the Spirit, which completes the armour of the Christian described by Paul in Ephesians 6:13–17.

> In May 1999 I was privileged to take part in a day conference in Nairobi on Christians and the environment. Sharing the

platform with me were Dr Calvin DeWitt of Au Sable Institute, Michigan, and Peter Harris of A Rocha International. Participants that day included both leaders in the Kenyan Government and representatives of churches, mission organizations and NGOs. The meeting received wide publicity. It was evident that creation care is neither a selfish interest of the developed 'north', nor a minority enthusiasm peculiar to bird-watchers or flower-lovers, but an increasingly mainline Christian concern. Soon afterwards, an Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation was published [see Appendix 2], and the following year a substantial commentary appeared, edited by R. J. Berry and titled *The Care of Creation* (IVP, 2000) . . . It is a noble calling to cooperate with God for the fulfillment of his purposes, to transform the created order for the pleasure and profit of all. In this way our work is to be an expression of our worship since our care of the creation will reflect our love for the Creator . . .

Reflecting on [our knowledge of] environmental hazards, one cannot help but see that our whole planet is in jeopardy. *Crisis* is not too dramatic a word to use. What would be an appropriate response? To begin with, we can be thankful that at last in 1992 the so-called Earth Summit was held in Rio and made a commitment to 'global sustainable development'. Subsequent conferences have ensured that environmental questions have been kept before the leading nations of the world.

But alongside these official conferences several NGOs have arisen. I will mention only the two most prominent explicitly Christian organizations, namely Tearfund and A Rocha . . . Tearfund, founded by George Hoffman, is committed to development in the broadest sense and works in close cooperation with 'partners' in the Majority World. The wonderful story of Tearfund has been documented by Mike Hollow (2008) in his book *A Future and a Hope*. A Rocha is different, being much smaller. It was founded in 1983 by Peter Harris, who has documented its growth in two books: *Under the Bright Wings* (the first ten years) and *Kingfisher's Fire* (bringing the story

up to date). Its steady development is remarkable, as it now works in twenty countries, establishing field study centres on all continents.

It is all very well to give our support to Christian environmental NGOs, but what are our individual responsibilities? I leave Chris Wright to answer the question, what can the radical disciple do to care for the creation? Chris dreams of a multitude of 'Christians who care about creation and take their environmental responsibilities seriously':

> They choose sustainable forms of energy where possible. They switch off unneeded appliances. They buy food, goods and services as far as possible from companies with ethically sound environmental policies. They join conservation societies. They avoid overconsumption and unnecessary waste and recycle as much as possible.
> (Wright 2006, p. 412)

Chris also wants to see a growing number of Christians who 'include the care of creation within their biblical understanding of mission':

> In the past, Christians have instinctively been concerned about great and urgent issues in every generation . . . These have included the evils of disease, ignorance, slavery and many other forms of brutality and exploitation. Christians have taken up the cause of widows, orphans, refugees, prisoners, the insane, the hungry – and most recently have swelled the numbers of those committed to 'making poverty history'.
> (Wright 2006, pp. 412–413)

I want to echo Chris Wright's eloquent conclusion:

> It seems quite inexplicable to me that there are some Christians who claim to love and worship God, to be disciples of

> Jesus and yet have no concern for the earth that bears his stamp of ownership. They do not care about the abuse of the earth, and indeed by their wasteful and overconsumptive lifestyles they contribute to it.
> (Wright 2006, p. 414)

'God intends . . . our care of the creation to reflect our love for the Creator'.
(Stott 2000, p. 9).

'To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it' (Deuteronomy 10:14 [NIV 1984]).