

Calvin DeWitt: A Mentor for Creation Care

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As a new Christian, I discovered God in his word, but also between the covers of Christian books. Brother Lawrence introduced me to prayer. J. I. Packer taught me about God's character. C. S. Lewis showed me the power of a Christian's imagination. Madeleine L'Engle demonstrated the life of a Christian artist. These in-print mentors (and many others) were as crucial to my discipleship as my flesh-and-blood mentors were.

Now that God has nudged me about caring for his creation, I read as much as I can about that subject. After devouring many "green" books, I searched for some written from a Christian perspective. Actually, the list of Christian environmental tomes is growing, but many Christians still hesitate to embrace environmental issues because they don't want to seem alarmist or "New Age." Another mentor has taught me that Christian earth-stewardship should flow from our faith as both an urgent call to action and an act of worship.

Calvin B. DeWitt, scientist and evangelical Christian, has written several books about earth-keeping, but I have found one to be particularly helpful. *Earth-Wise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* equips individuals and groups to explore environmental issues in depth. It includes discussion questions, workshop and worship resources, an extensive bibliography, and a section at the end entitled "Stumbling Blocks to Creation Care and Keeping," geared especially for Christians who

are reluctant to "go green."

While this book succinctly explains the biblical and theological bases for creation care, I like it the most because DeWitt gives me permission to, well, *hug trees*. I grew up with a deep affection for nature, but after I became a Christian, I wondered if I was slipping into pantheism, or nature worship, when I found inspiration in green spaces (or that other people would think I was!). DeWitt puts my mind at rest. He writes in the introduction, "While [*Earth-Wise*] is a response to environmental issues, its *root*—and the *root* of my vocation—comes from my delight in God's creation. My motivation is summed up pretty well by Psalm 111:2: 'Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.' What a wonderful world God has given us!"

DeWitt is professor of environmental studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and helped found the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies. Despite the author's academic and scientific background, *Earth-Wise* is a practical, optimistic book; DeWitt wants to motivate his readers, not overwhelm them with bad news. He's no Pollyanna, however; his chapter on the "Seven Provisions for Creation," a description of earth's amazing ecosystems and what they teach us about God, is balanced with the "Seven Degradations of Creation," a description of damage caused by human activity.

DeWitt bases his information on

peer-reviewed or "refereed" literature—primary research that is less panicky than what's found in the popular press and much more authoritative. While he dwells more on solutions than problems in this book, his descriptions of global warming, habitat destruction, and species extinctions—among other issues—are more than sobering. He writes, "It's becoming clearer that instead of seeing creation as 'a beautiful book...to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity' [Belgic Confession, Art. 2]...many people in our culture in the past couple of generations—including Christians—have tended to shift toward thinking of creation as a 'bag of resources' to be used."

Unlike many secular environmental writers, DeWitt doesn't scare his audience into stewardship. He's writing from the perspective of faith in a loving God. He writes, "Gloom and doom are not necessary components of the message about caring for creation. Frightening ourselves into action is far less preferable than caring for creation out of gratitude and love for God."

The difference between Christian and secular environmentalists, I've observed, is hope. DeWitt is hopeful, but he takes the message seriously and urges us to do the same. He asks, "As for being called an alarmist, is it wrong to sound the fire alarm when a building is burning? In many cases today it may be necessary to sound the alarm." ■

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