

## **Food for Thought Article: “Whose World Is It?”**



The Bible gives four answers to the important question of “Whose World Is It?” which I would like to consider in this article: -

It is God’s world, he created it

It is Our world, we are to care for it

It is the Devil’s world, he has corrupted it

It is Christ’s world, he has conquered it

### **1. It is God’s world, he created it**

The Bible opens with the majestic words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). So, God exists and has always existed. No one created him; he is the creator of the universe. He is the eternal God who was, is now, and shall be for evermore. There is no place here for atheism or agnosticism.

God is the eternal creator. Throughout Genesis chapter 1, God speaks and through his creative word, day by day, step by step, he shapes and fills the world. Finally, it is fit for habitation by creatures that uniquely bear God’s image and likeness – human beings.

Another revelation in this chapter is that God is a fellowship of three persons (the Trinity) and all three are involved in the creation process. We have God; we have the Spirit of God; and we have the Word of God, Jesus.

It is interesting that the Hebrew word used for God in Genesis chapter 1 is not the singular ‘El’ but the plural ‘Elohim’. So, we always have a plural noun for God but always with a singular verb. For example, “In the beginning God (plural) created (singular)”; and God (plural) said (singular) etc. It’s not good grammar but it is theologically correct!

Although God is a fellowship of 3 persons, there is only one God. There isn't a multiplicity of rival gods warring against each other for supremacy (as in the Babylonian creation myths). There is, therefore, no room here for polytheism.

God is also distinct from his creation; he is not identical to it. God is entirely separate from his creation. He sustains it but is separate from it. So, there is no room here for pantheism ~ the belief that everything is God.

Genesis chapter 1 also reminds us constantly that God and his creation are good. "And God saw that it was **good**" is a repeated phrase culminating with "God saw all that he had made, and it was **very good**" (verse 31). God regards something as good or very good when it fulfils the purpose for which he created it.

As Christians then, we believe that "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters" (Ps. 24:1&2). "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1). "By his power he made earth. His wisdom gave shape to the world. He crafted the cosmos" (Jer. 51:15 – The Message).

## **2. It is Our world, we are to Care for it**

Having made humankind uniquely in God's image and likeness, they/we are then given the responsibility of populating the earth, caring for all the creatures and cultivating the ground (Gen. 1:26-30).

Genesis chapter 2 (which should begin at 2:4 not 2:1!) retells the story of creation but from more of an earthly, human perspective. It even has a geographical location, and, in the Garden of Eden, the mandate is again "to work it and take care of it". Gardeners' world!

Adam is also invited by God to name all the animals (Gen. 2:19-20). Naming, in the Bible, carries with it the idea of 'having authority over'. Lastly in this chapter, male and female are differentiated from each other. Why? As an antidote to loneliness, so that they can support one another, complement one another, and so they can reproduce. (Gen. 2:20b– 25)

So, as Christians, we believe that "The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to the human race." (Ps. 115:16)

"You made them (human beings) rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet; all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild; the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea....." (Ps. 8:6-8)

What though have we done with the responsibility we have been given?

Positively, scientific discovery has brought us many benefits. Improved yields from disease resistant crops; the eradication of some human diseases; increased life expectancy for many; improved telecommunications; fast travel around the globe etc. But alongside these advances there has been widespread and destructive exploitation of the earth's natural resources.

The most traded commodity, by far, in our world at the present time is crude oil. It is the lifeblood of the global economy powering transportation, heating and electricity generation and is the raw material for countless industrial and consumer products. In second place is Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG).

Neither of these two products are mentioned in the Bible but many things are, including trade in gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, silk, ivory, spices, wine, olive oil, wheat, livestock, bronze, iron, marble and people trafficking (Rev. 18:12&13)

So has our number one traded commodity, crude oil, been a blessing or a curse. What do you think? Opinions differ.

Come with me to the province of Alberta in Canada and to the town of Fort McMurray in the northeast of the province. [The details which follow here, of what took place at Fort McMurray, are taken from the book "Fire Weather – A True Story From A Hotter World" by John Vaillant, Sceptre, 2024.]

It is the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1967 and the day for the official opening of the "Great Canadian Oil Sands" (GCOS) Company. The Company is there because underneath the forest floor around Fort McMurray is a massive bitumen deposit the size of New York State. Bitumen is a thick, viscous petroleum-based hydrocarbon. This 'Oil Sand', as it's called, is 10% bitumen, 5% water and 85% solids, (principally quartzite one of the hardest minerals in the world). As you can imagine, to convert this substance into crude oil, which can be piped, requires complex extraction and transformation processes.

On the day of the opening of GCOS, Ernest Manning, Alberta's Premier at the time, said: "It is fitting that we gather here today to dedicate this plant not merely to the production of oil ***but to the continual progress and enrichment of mankind.***" (Italics mine). Manning was a graduate of Calgary's Prophetic Bible Institute and the host of an evangelical radio show called 'Back to the Bible Hour.'

He saw the Lord at work through the growth of the petroleum industry.

The Great Canadian Oil Sands company banner, draped behind him as he spoke, displayed a bucketwheel with the words “MAN DEVELOPS HIS WORLD” emblazoned around the top of it. These bucketwheels, on caterpillar tracks, were amongst the largest machines on earth at that time. They were ten stories tall, weighed 2,400 tons and each bucketwheel could excavate 100,000 tons of earth per day. They worked round the clock and their monstrous teeth glowed red hot from the friction as they gouged out the surface Oil Sands.

Let's move forward now 49 years to the 2nd of May 2016. Five miles outside of the still young petro-city of Fort McMurray, now at the centre of the multi-billion-dollar petroleum industry with a population approaching 80,000 and sometimes called Fort McMurray, a small wildfire flickers and then starts to spread rapidly through the surrounding Boreal (Sub-Arctic) Forest. By noon the following day it had expanded to nearly 2000 acres.

Fort McMurray is in a beautiful location. The Athabasca River flows through it and it is surrounded by a mixed forest of balsam poplar, aspen, and black spruce trees. Of these three, black spruce is the most numerous and the most volatile; firefighters call it 'gas on a stick'.

Within hours, Fort McMurray was overtaken by a regional apocalypse that drove serial firestorms through the city from end to end. In total, nearly 100,000 people were forced to flee, 2,500 homes and other structures were destroyed, 2,300 square miles of forest were burned up and the fire belched 100 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere.

They are not sure how the fire started but it spread rapidly due to climate change. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> May the air temperature was 33 deg. C and, after a very dry winter with low humidity, everything was tinder dry. It was the biggest natural disaster Canada had seen.

Let's move forward to today. Canada is now the 4<sup>th</sup> largest producer of crude oil in the world (after USA, Saudi Arabia and Russia). In 2024, 60% of Canada's oil came from Oil Sands and it is reckoned that there are sufficient Oil Sand reserves to produce 164 billion barrels of crude oil into the future (these reserves put it in 3<sup>rd</sup> place behind Venezuela and Saudi Arabia).

Open pit (Surface) mining is still used where Oil Sands lie within 70-75 metres of the surface. Steam Assisted Gravity Drainage (SAGD) is used for deeper Oil Sands and a newer technology, Direct Contact Steam Generation (DCSG) is being deployed. Although this newer technology is attempting to lessen the

environmental impact, considerable environmental issues remain i.e. high CO2 emissions, large water use, large gas use, land disturbance and tailing ponds that store sand, water and chemicals used in processing.

**I suppose the question we must ask ourselves is: ‘How can we achieve a proper balance between harnessing natural resources and preserving the environment, or does the accumulation of wealth trump everything?’**

According to the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), the oil industry provides 450,000 jobs, accounts for 20% of Canadian exports and between 2022-24 generated \$116 billion in taxes and royalties for governments nationwide. In 2024, Canada produced 5.9 million barrels of crude oil per day.

But this is only a fraction of the oil the world consumes each day. The figures are staggering. We consume approximately 102 million barrels of oil per day (37 billion per year) and this is expected to rise to around 106 million barrels per day by 2029 driven by transport, industry, and petrochemical sectors.

Most people (not all) believe that the CO2 produced by the burning of fossil fuels (like oil, petrol, diesel, coal, natural gas) is the main cause of global warming. CO2 has a strange property ~ it allows visible light from the sun’s rays to enter the earth’s atmosphere, but it impedes the transmission of infrared radiation from the earth into outer space. This produces a ‘greenhouse’ effect which is responsible for global warming.

CO2 in the earth’s atmosphere has risen from 280 parts per million (ppm) pre-the industrial age (1750), to 430 ppm today (2026). This represents a considerable increase (54%) in a relatively short space of geologic time (276 years).

Another factor impacting CO2 levels is deforestation. Trees absorb CO2 and emit Oxygen. However, by 2022, 26% of the Amazon rainforest (the largest in the world) had been deforested or highly degraded. Trees have been cut down so the land could be used primarily for cattle ranching (beef and leather), farming (soybeans, palm oil) and logging (especially for hardwoods).

And what about pollution due to plastics?












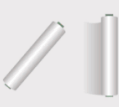












Plastics are a by-product of the petroleum industry. Petroleum provides the raw hydrocarbons used to create polymers like polyethylene, polypropylene and polystyrene.

More plastic is being produced year on year with output expected to triple by 2060 according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD).

The size of the problem is massive. More than 500 billion plastic bottles are used every year around the world. And take straws as another example. Most straws are made from a plastic called polypropylene and more than 500 million of them are thrown away every day in America. In theory, polypropylene is recyclable but in practice very little of it is. Recycling is a costly business ~ a process which involves collection, sorting, cleaning, grinding into flakes, melting and forming plastic pellets which can then be upcycled into new products.

Better to choose metal, bamboo or paper straws.

Do you know your plastic codes i.e. which plastics are recyclable and which aren't?

Plastic Codes								
CODE	 PETE	 HDPE	 V	 LDPE	 PP	 PS	 OTHER	
PLASTIC TYPE	Polyethylene Terephthalate	High-Density Polyethylene	Vinyl	Low-Density Polyethylene	Polypropylene	Polystyrene	Other plastics	Biodegradable plastics
EXAMPLES	Water bottle, Soda bottle, Peanut butter container.	Milk container, Shampoo bottle, Motor oil bottle	Detergent container, Clear food packaging, Piping.	Plastic food wraps, Squeezable bottle.	Yogurt container, Ketchup bottle, Syrup bottle.	Disposable plate & cups, Meat trays.	Baby bottle, 5-gallon water container	Bio-based plastic bottles
								
RECYCLABLE?								

However, just because something is marked as being 'recyclable' doesn't mean it is being recycled. Here in the UK, maybe 15-20% of recyclable plastic is recycled ~ the rest is either burned in incinerators, goes to land fill or is exported.

The more plastic we use, the more it finds its way into our rivers, seas and oceans. Greenpeace reckon that up to 12.7 million tonnes of plastic enters our oceans every year.

Micro-plastics are pieces of plastic that measure less than 5 millimetres. Some arise from plastic bags that have fragmented; others are in the clothes we wear and come out in the wash e.g. acrylics. Sometimes they are added to cosmetics e.g. nylon-12, whilst microplastic beads are purposely used in facial and foot scrubs for exfoliation. What is sure is that microplastics are now being found everywhere: in the food chain, in animals, humans, rivers and oceans etc. And then there are nano-plastics, (less than 1 micro-meter in size). These have even been found in bottled water!

Some think plastic pollution is the greatest manufactured disaster facing us ~ bad for the environment and bad for our health.

In view of God's mandate for us to take care of the world, I find all this a very disheartening picture. We can, however, help by making sure we ourselves are not contributing to the problem, by lobbying our governments, and by supporting those organisations who are seeking to promote biodiversity, improve the environment and move towards a safer and more sustainable future. How bothered we are about environmental issues is likely to depend on whether we have a theology of creation, or not. It could be that we are only concerned with 'saving souls' whereas God, throughout the Bible, is also concerned with the welfare and renewal of the whole of his creation.

Psalm 19 is an invitation to engage with creation, to allow God to speak to us through his creation: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge" (verses 1&2).

It is so easy for us to become disconnected from God's creation. We don't dig our potatoes from the soil but collect them in plastic bags; we can't hear birdsong because of traffic noise; we spend more time looking at our screens than at the skies.

But the root cause of the problem is our disconnect from God himself: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away" (Hosea 4: 1b-3).

So the second answer to the question "Whose World Is It?" is that it is our world, we are to care for it, but sadly, often do not.

### **3. It is the Devil's World; he has Corrupted it.**

John Eldridge in his small booklet 'Epic – The Story God is Telling' writes: "I am staggered by the level of naivete that most people live with regarding evil. They don't take it seriously. They don't live as though the Story has a Villain. Not the devil prancing around in red tights, carrying a pitchfork, but the incarnation of the very worst of every enemy you've met in every other story. Dear God – the Holocaust, child prostitution, terrorist bombings, genocidal governments. What is it going to take for us to take evil seriously?"

William Blatty who wrote the 1971 occult horror novel, The 'Exorcist' (which later gave rise to 5 occult horror films) said, "As far as God goes, I am a non-believer...but when it comes to the devil – well that's something else.... the devil keeps advertising.... the devil does lots of commercials".

C.S. Lewis in his book 'Mere Christianity' writes, "One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talked so much about a Dark Power in the universe – a mighty evil spirit who was held to be the Power behind death, disease and sin.....Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees.....this is a universe at war".

Jesus took the Devil seriously. He described him as 'the ruler/the prince of this world' (Jn. 12:31; 14:30). The apostle John wrote that 'the whole world is under the control of the evil one' (1 Jn. 5:19).

Paul has an interesting observation: he sees people who are not Christians as having had a whiff of Satanic anaesthetic; they have been seduced and sedated by the Devil and need to 'come round' from their intoxication. (See 2 Tim. 2:25&26).

We need to have a clear understanding of how the Devil operates and to help us in this, let's look at some of the names and titles given to him: -

"The Satan" – This means he is the adversary. He opposes God and his people.

"Father of lies" – The Devil is a liar; a purveyor of 'fake news'; a stranger to truth.

"Evil one" – Evil is always personalised; it doesn't exist apart from evil spiritual beings and evil human beings.

"A Murderer" – He was a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44).

"A Deceiver/ an Angel of light" - He is a master of disguise.

“Apollyon” – This means destroyer (Rev. 9:11). The Devil is the original vandal.

“Accuser” – “For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God, day and night, has been hurled down.” (Rev. 12:10)

“Tempter” – Who doesn’t know the power of temptation? (For more on this, see my ‘Food for Thought’ article on ‘Overcoming Temptation’).

When our son was at secondary school, he had a friend whose ambition was to become a professional wrestler. After he left school, this friend went over to America to develop his skills and see how wrestling operated there.

When he came back, he told our son that a lot of the top wrestlers seemed to be Christians and many of them gave their testimony before the bout started! One of their favourite verses was John 14:30 where Jesus tells his disciples that the devil, the prince of this world, is coming but “he has no hold on/over me”!

However, all Christians, whether we recognise it or not, are wrestlers. We are in a wrestling match with the devil and the contest is very real. Paul reminds us, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12 – King James Version).

But when we say it is the devil’s world, we need to be clear about how much power he actually has. He is not omniscient, omnipotent or omnipresent, like God is. The only power the devil has is what God allows him to have and how much we give him in our lives through sin and rebellion. If we give the devil a foothold, that can eventually become a stranglehold. Paul warns specifically against three things that can give the devil a foothold in our lives ~ lying, anger and stealing (See Eph. 4:25-28).

Whose world is it? It is the Devil’s world, he has corrupted it

#### **4. It is Christ’s World, he has Conquered It.**

Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble/distress/pressure/tribulation. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (Jn. 16:33). In the world we have trouble; in Christ, we have peace.

But how did Christ overcome/triumph over, the world? In a phrase, ‘by his blood shed on the cross’.

It is through the Cross that the powers and authorities were defeated: 'having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.' (Col.2:15)

It is through the Cross that holiness was achieved: 'we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Christ once for all.' (Heb. 10:10)

It is through the Cross that death was defeated: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory... thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.' (See 1 Cor. 15:54-57)

It is through the Cross that forgiveness of sin is possible: 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.' (Heb. 9:22b)

It is through the Cross that the price of redemption is paid: 'In him we have redemption through his blood.' (Eph. 1:7a)

It is through the Cross that reconciliation is achieved: 'But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.' (Eph. 2:13)

And it is through the Cross that, one day, 'creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.' (Rms. 8:21). The Cross is good news for creation.

Christ was victorious, an overcomer, because of his perseverance, his endurance, and because he learned obedience through suffering. As his disciples, we are also called to be victorious overcomers like him.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss Catholic priest and theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar said: "It is to the Cross that the Christian is challenged to follow his Master: no path of redemption can make a detour around it."

It is clear from Jesus' words to the seven churches in Asia Minor in the book of Revelation, that the rewards of salvation are only for those who are victorious. This is a word, I believe, that churches need to hear today.

To the church in Ephesus Jesus says: 'To the one who is **victorious**, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.' (Rev. 2:7)

To the church in Smyrna Jesus says: 'Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your **victor's** crown'..... 'The one who is **victorious** will not be hurt at all by the second death.' (Rev. 2:10-11)

To the church in Pergamum Jesus says: 'To the one who is **victorious**, I will give some of the hidden manna.' (Rev. 2:17)

To the church in Thyatira Jesus says: 'To the one who is **victorious** and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.' (Rev. 2:26)

To the church in Sardis Jesus says: 'The one who is **victorious** will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels.' (Rev. 3:5)

To the church in Philadelphia Jesus says: 'I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who is **victorious** I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.' (Rev. 3:11-12)

To the church in Laodicea Jesus says: 'To the one who is **victorious**, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was **victorious** and sat down with my Father on his throne.' (Rev. 3:21)

### **Summary.**

As we look at pictures of the world hanging majestically in space, it is legitimate to ask, 'Whose World Is It?' We can be reassured by the Biblical answer that it is God's world, he created it; it is Our world, we are to care for it; it is the Devil's world, he has corrupted it, and it is Christ's world, He has conquered it.

Finally, a personal question! What perfume, aftershave, body spray or other deodorant are you wearing today?

Let's make the following our fragrance of choice, 'Thanks be to God who leads us, wherever we are, on Christ's triumphant way and makes our knowledge of him spread throughout the world like a lovely perfume!' (2 Cor. 2:14 – J B Phillips, New Testament in Modern English).

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George Irving – June 2026

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