

Should the Church Love the (God's) World? A Response to the Cape Town Commitment Point Seven

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Abstract

This paper is a response to point seven, sub-points A) and B) of The Cape Town Commitment (TCTC), and attempts to answer the question “is love the proper Christian response to the nonhuman creation, and/or to human nations and culture?” Based on a summary of the concepts of “love” and the “world” in the biblical texts, it is shown that the biblical concept of “love” strongly emphasizes heartfelt and caring commitment for another within human relationships and divine-human relationships. The “world” in scripture can be construed in positive, neutral or negative senses, depending on the term and context, and Christians find themselves both in a fallen creation which awaits liberation and within human nations and cultures in a state of sin and rebellion against God. While the Bible never commands believers to love the nonhuman creation or collective human entities like nations and cultures, Christians may yet appropriate love for God and neighbor through their attentive care of creation and through their contribution to culture in a way that glorifies God. In these ways, Christians may “love” creation and culture, but only in a contingent sense with their foundational love focused on God and neighbor.

Key terms: Christianity, love, world, creation, culture, new creation

Introduction

The seventh point of the 2011 *Cape Town Commitment* (TCTC) is entitled “We love God’s world.”¹ The entry is broken down into five sub-points with the first four reflecting the specific areas of “God’s world” to be loved: A) “God’s world of creation,” focusing on what we might call the natural world; B) “God’s world of nations and cultures,” that is, collective human entities and their characteristics, as well as human creativity; C) “the poor and suffering in the world,” and D) our “neighbors” (to be loved as ourselves). The final sub-point E) warns against the world that is not to be loved, that is, “the world of human and satanic rebellion against God.”

Of all the points in the TCTC, point seven may be the only one that is potentially troublesome. There should be little controversy regarding the call to love the triune God himself, as well as his Word, his people, and even the Gospel and the mission of God, which make up points 1–6, and 8–10. And even within the sub-points C) and D) for point seven listed above, loving our neighbors as ourselves including especially the most vulnerable are clear scriptural commands. However, there are some problems, or at least ambiguities, with the first two sub-points A) and B) since they appear to go beyond the great commandment to love God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36–40). Therefore, in this paper, I seek to put these two sub-points under cross-examination and consider whether the church should indeed *love* the nonhuman created world and whether the church should indeed *love* the world of human expression and creativity that is manifest in human nations and cultures.

To answer these questions, it is first necessary to consider the two prominent terms in the title of point seven— “love” and “world”— within scripture. Both of those concepts have a wide range of meaning both in contemporary and biblical usage and so could possibly be misleading in a short document such as the TCTC. For this reason, I will first survey the biblical usage of these two terms and consider their various nuances and emphases. My goal is to clarify these concepts in order to lay the foundation for finally concluding whether the church is indeed called in scripture to *love* the nonhuman *world* of creation and the *world* of human culture and creativity.

1 This article is an adaptation of a response to point seven of the *Cape Town Commitment* as part of a panel discussion of the Evangelical Theological Association of Croatia, held in Zagreb, Croatia on June 10, 2019.

Looking for “Love” in the Bible

In contemporary English usage the word “love” may characterize various kinds of affectionate relationships between people as well as the affinity one may have for any number of other living or nonliving objects, activities, ideas, and states of mind. It is often conceived primarily as an emotion,² and often as a feeling that either “happen to” someone, like an experience of romantic love, or as a naturally occurring emotional instinct, such as one’s love for their child or family members, or simply as one’s personal pleasure preferences.

While the biblical portrait incorporates some of these same elements, it clearly gives emphasis to “love” that is characterized by virtue and active commitment within relationships, both between humans and between God and humans. In the Hebrew Bible, there are two major terms typically translated “love:” *’ahavah* (verb *’ahav*), and *hesed*. The former term is the more general term for “love” and can cover a wide range of nuances, from romantic love, to love between members of a family, love between friends, love for a nation, love for God, and rarely, the taking pleasure in other objects. God too, displays *’ahavah* for individuals and for Israel as a whole and some scholars view this kind of love as God’s “election-love” (Snaith 1964, 133) or his unconditional and everlasting love (Routledge 2012, 110).

The latter term *hesed*, translated by the ESV as “steadfast love,” includes many ideas, such as love, faithfulness, goodness, mercy, grace, and lasting commitment which has led to a number of different translations. It can be concluded that *hesed* is relational, reciprocal and action-oriented (Routledge 1995, 181–82). Although not devoid of emotion, *hesed* emphasizes a dedicated commitment to care for another. While the concept is commonly used to define committed human relationships, it comes more so to characterize God’s committed covenantal love for his people and their expected responsive love to him. Because *hesed* is such a relational term, it always occurs between people or between God and people, and as at least some scholars see it, always within a covenant agreement, either between people or between God and his people (Snaith 1964, 95; Glueck 1967, 102).

However, even in the case of *’ahavah*, what might be called “unconditional” love when referring to God’s love (Routledge 2012, 110), the vast majority of cases describes this love between people or between God and humans. In the few instances where the objects of love are not God or humans, the love only pertains to

2 It is notable that the Cambridge online dictionary (Accessed March 16, 2020. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/love>) defines the verb “love” first as romantic and sexual attraction, and the noun “love” first as “a feeling.”

a personal pleasure preference,³ affinity for certain human characteristics, either positive or negative. Or Israel's love of foreign ways, foreign nations, and foreign gods, an idea especially prevalent in the classical prophets, who often describe Israel or Judah as metaphorically having foreign lovers, a relationship which is always deemed negatively (Jer. 2:25, 33; 3:1; 22:20–22; Lam. 1:2, 19; Ezek. 16:33–37; 23:5–22; Hos. 2:5–15). The Old Testament (OT) scriptures only command love for God (Deut. 6:5) and love for other people, in particular neighbors within the covenant community (Lev. 19:18), and foreign sojourners (Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:18–19). While the Israelites were commanded to love foreign *people* sojourning among them, their affection or desire for their *love* for foreign *entities* and their *ways* (i.e., their cultures) is always viewed negatively, principally because they were intricately bound up with false worship.

The OT wisdom literature, as well as much prophetic discourse, routinely denounces love of human pleasures (Prov. 21:17), wealth (Eccl. 5:10), transgression (Prov. 17:19), deceit (Ps. 52:3; Zech. 8:17), the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21), and other such vices, behaviors and abstract ideas such as evil (Ps. 52:3), while affirming the love of God's decrees, testimonies, promises and commandments (Ps. 119), and justice, as well as abstract ideas such as truth and peace (Zech. 8:19), and human traits like knowledge (Prov. 12:1), discipline (Prov. 12:1), purity of heart (Prov. 22:11), and other virtues. Perhaps these texts could imply that insofar that human communities or cultures uphold and affirm the latter characteristics while disapproving and denouncing the former, such human cultural expressions could be "loved." But it is better concluded that it is the ideas and virtues themselves, which are extensions of God's own character or rooted in his created order, that are loved in a metaphorical sense.

There are very few instances where some aspect of the natural world is said to be "loved." It is reported that King Uzziah loved the soil (2 Chron. 26:10), which is given as the basis for his prolific building and agricultural development. While royal building activities may have been viewed as a "sign of divine blessing" (Dillard 1987, 208), the narrator appears to make no judgment regarding the "love of soil" so that it seems to be merely a statement of personal pleasure in a particular kind of work, rather than a virtuous commitment to the environment. Jeremiah 8:2 indicates that Jerusalem's leaders loved the heavenly bodies. But this is clearly a negative judgment, as the heavenly bodies here represented false gods whom were thus wrongly worshipped by those condemned by the prophet (cf. Deut. 4:19; 17:3).

There can be no doubt that the OT scriptures deem the nonhuman creation as very good (Gen. 1; cf. Jer. 31:35) and worthy of admiration (Job 38–39; Ps. 104), the care and management of which is given to humankind as a divine mandate

3 For example, Isaac's love for a certain kind of food as reported in Genesis 27.

(Gen. 1:28; 2:15). Moreover, it is clear that God himself cares for his creation even after the fall (Gen. 7–9; Jonah 4:11), admires it himself (Job 38–39; Ps. 104:31), and sovereignly rules it to bless his covenant people (Deut. 7:13–14). Finally, the OT scriptures throughout affirm YHWH as the creator of heaven and earth, by whose sovereign power all things exist and to whom belongs all things (Ex. 19:5; Ps. 89:11; see Moo and Moo 2018, 64–65). However, despite all this, there is never an explicit command to love the nonhuman natural world. Even the grandeur of creation that is admired serves to stimulate praise for the creator himself, not the creation (Ps. 8:3–4; 104:1–2). The overwhelming emphasis of the OT scriptures is that love is to be shown by humans to God and to other people.

In the Greek New Testament, the same basic principles hold sway, though now conditioned by the new covenant in Christ. The vast majority of references in the New Testament are also exhortations toward love for God, love for neighbor, and love between believers within the Christian community, almost always expressed with the Greek *agapē* (verb *agapaō*), or less frequently with the verb *phileō* (noun *philia* only in James 4:4).⁴ These two terms are often differentiated by scholars. In general, the latter refers to affinity in familial and friendly relationships, or fondness for things, without a “clear religious emphasis” (Günther and Link 1986, 2:538), and in the NT a “love for people who are closely connected, either by blood or by faith” (Günther and Link 1986, 2:542). *Agapē*, however, which is the Greek term used to translate the Hebrew *’ahavah*, is according to Stauffer (1964, 1:37) a love which freely chooses and commits to its object rather than being determined by existing covenantal or familial ties or other natural affinities. In this way it may correspond to the Hebrew *’ahavah*, which it consistently translates in the LXX, as an elective love. However, this should not be taken to mean that *agapē* is only a choice and action based upon that choice. As Carson (2000, 646) argues, Paul’s use of the term in 1 Corinthians 13 shows that *agapē* is “more sweeping than . . . mere commitment to the good of the other,” implying that it must incorporate some element of feeling.

Moreover, the two Greek loves appear to be used synonymously in certain cases (John 3:35; 5:20; 21:15–17), so that Carson (2000, 646) cautions against making too great a distinction.⁵ Brown (1986, 2:548–49) likewise surmises that

- 4 There are two other Greek terms for “love” not found in the NT: *erōs* (*eraō*), which might be summed up as “world seeking satisfaction wherever it can” (Stauffer 1964, 1:37), but which is most well-known as romantic or sexual love and passion; and the verb *stergō*, referring usually to the love between parents and children, or other hierarchical relationships (Günther and Link 1986, 2:539). The latter is evident in the NT only in a compound expression in Romans 12:10.
- 5 As Carson notes, in 2 Sam 13, the LXX uses both *agapaō* and *phileō* to describe Amnon’s incestuous rape of Tamar, where one might expect *erōs*.

in NT usage the distinction of *phileō* from *agapaō* “is not strictly adhered to” (for example see Luke 11:43 and 20:46), although there are instances where the original meaning is maintained (Matt. 10:37). Therefore, in what follows, I will treat all NT texts translated “love” without distinguishing between the Greek terms, an approach which is satisfactory for the general aims of this paper.

Jesus’ teaching reiterates the principle emphases of the Hebrew scriptures: love for God and neighbor (Matt. 22:34–40 // Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27), and that between his disciples (John 13:34–35), emphases that are confirmed in the remaining NT books (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; 1 Thess. 4:9; James 2:8). However, Jesus goes even further, calling for love even for one’s enemies (Matt. 5:43). This development is consistent with the life and ministry of Jesus himself, who loved even those who would take his life and is an extension of God’s covenant love for Israel that already in the OT knew no bounds, even when Israel was disobedient.

However, where the objects of love are not God or other people, the narrated judgments are largely negative, so that “where *agapē* is obviously directed toward things . . . the very use . . . is intended to make it plain that here love is directed to the wrong ends, i.e. not towards God” (Günther and Link 1986, 2:543). People should not be lovers of money (Matt. 6:24; Luke 6:13; 1 Tim. 6:10), their own pleasures (2 Tim. 3:4), own honor (Matt. 6:5; Luke 11:43; John 12:43), nor “darkness” (John 3:19). Sometimes, these negative judgments are set off against positive exhortations to love God (2 Tim. 3:4), or certain virtues (2 Thess. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:2). One interesting point of comparison is the love of self, which can be deemed positive (Matt. 22:39; Rom. 13:9) or negative (John 12:25; 2 Tim. 3:2), depending on whether the love of self is exalted above God and others (negative), or rather put in its proper perspective in relation to love for God and one’s neighbor (positive). This observation evinces a significant principle about love in the Bible: love of God is always primary and foundational, followed by love for other people and one’s own self accordingly. Again, however, there is no imperative, nor positive construal of an indicative love for neither the nonhuman creation nor human national entities nor cultures. Rather, there are multiple commands *not* to love *the world* (2 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 2:15).

Seeing the “World” in the Bible

Like “love,” the word “world” in scripture entails multiple meanings and nuances, so that the phrase “God’s world” used in the TCTC is not without difficulties. In the Hebrew scriptures, the merism “heaven and earth” (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 31:17; Jer. 33:25) represents the totality and order of all that God has made (Waltke 2001, 59), which he possesses (Gen. 14:19–22), and which itself even praises him (Ps. 69:34). Other terms for “world” include *heled* (“world”) and more often *tevel* wi-

thin the poetic literature which means something like dry land or solid earth, the world as a single entity (Wright 1997, 272–73), or the “circle of the earth within the ancient near eastern cosmology (Fabry and van Meeteren 2006, 558). These terms thus focus on the world as God’s creation, although Isaiah (for example 13:11) especially refers to the *tevel* as that which will be judged by YHWH. The Hebrew *erets*, while sometimes mentioned in tandem with *tevel* (Ps. 90:2; Jer. 51:15), nevertheless means something closer to “inhabited land,” rather than the solid world in totality. The Old Testament does not appear to use “world” in the sense of an entity in opposition to God, but rather the creation of God, which he sovereignly rules, possesses and upholds (Ps. 50:12; 89:11; 1 Chr. 16:30), which, however, is also subject to his judgment (Ps. 96:13; Isa. 26:9).⁶

In the New Testament, there are numerous ways of expressing the various ideas behind the English word “world,” some of which are positive, neutral or negative with reference to the world’s relationship to God. The idea of “world” may be expressed by four different relevant Greek terms and one phrase: *kosmos*, translated “world;” *aiōn*, sometimes translated “world;”⁷ *oikoumenā*, also translated “world;” *ktisis*, translated “creation;” *gē*, translated “earth;” and, as in the OT, the merism *ho ouranos kai hē gē*, “heaven and earth.”

The “heaven and earth” merism functions in many cases similarly to its usage in the OT as a way of expressing the present, all-encompassing creation of all existence apart from God (Matt. 5:18; 24:35).⁸ *Gē* by itself is quite common, corresponding to the Hebrew *erets*, and, depending on context, could refer to the earth as a whole, a particular land, or simply to the soil or ground (Painter 2013, 1014–16). Likewise, *Ktisis* reflects the natural world of God’s creation, now fallen and prone to corruption, but awaiting restoration (Rom. 8:18–23), inclusive of mankind only in the sense that man is part of the natural creation (Mark 10:6; Col. 1:23). *Oikoumenā* refers to the entire inhabited world including people (Matt. 24:14; Rom 10:18), but exclusive of the heavenly regions or netherworld (BDAG 699). Although the *oikoumenā* may be deceived (Rev. 12:9) and suffer (Luke 21:26), it seems to be the object of evil rather than a representation of

6 The term *adamah*, translated “ground” can also connote the land in totality with the phrase “face of the earth” (Isa 23:17).

7 While *aiōn* is sometimes translated “world” (i.e. Matt 13:22; Mark 4:19), the term literally means “age” and should be viewed from the perspective of the two ages of the Jewish apocalyptic worldview. In this sense, *aiōn* has some correspondence with the idea of “world” as the systemic sphere hostile to God in this present time period before the consummation (see below).

8 Not all uses of these two nouns are merismatic, sometimes they function antithetically (Matt 6:10; 16:19; 18:18). For a helpful discussion of this distinction especially with regard to the Gospel of Matthew, see Pennington (2009, 163–215).

evil itself. Each of these expressions, with their particular nuances, refer to God's creation and thus function in a neutral, or even slightly positive sense (esp. Rom. 8:18–23) with regard to their relation to God.

Kosmos too can refer to the natural creation, the world of habitation (Rom. 1:8), or the whole of humanity in a neutral sense (1 Cor. 1:28; 1 Cor. 14:10; Col. 1:6) as well as representing all of the created universe as a whole (Rom. 1:20; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3). However, much more commonly it designates the ways of humanity in a very negative sense (2 Cor. 7:10; Gal. 4:3), or stands for sinful humanity as a whole (Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:20; 1 John 2:16, and many more), the current sinful age (Eph. 2:2), existence under the authority of Satan (1 John 5:19), a kingdom opposed to the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15), or anti-God spiritual reality (1 Cor. 2:12). The bulk of NT usage clearly pits the *kosmos* against God. And yet, the *kosmos* representing sinful human beings, or perhaps the physical creation as a whole, is that which God loves (John 3:16–17) so that he sent Christ to redeem and save it (Rom. 11:15; 1 Tim. 1:15).⁹

On one hand, scripture acknowledges and proclaims God's ultimate possession and rightful rulership of all that exists as its creator, redeemer, and eschatological restorer (Isa. 37:16; Matt. 11:25). But on the other hand, scripture also recognizes the fallenness of man (Gen. 3) which has left lasting effects on the very creation itself (Rom. 8:18–23), as well as God's permission of the temporary rule of worldly kingdoms which stand opposed to him (Ps. 46:6; Isa. 10:10; 23:17; Dan. 7–8), and the "powers and authorities," i.e. supernatural powers (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:1; 2:2) that work themselves out systematically within human governance and culture. Thus, when the NT refers to this current *aiōn*, or age, it is sometimes translated as "world" (see note 7 above), referring to the current systemic, collective rebellion against God by humans and spiritual powers that has brought the created order into a state of fallenness, disease and death (Luke 16:8; John 9:32; Rom. 12:2; Gal. 1:4). This temporary state is perhaps at its most conspicuous in the narrative of Jesus' temptation where the devil claims he possesses the "kingdoms of the world" (Matt. 4:8–9; Luke 4:5–6) an idea which is closely linked with the apocalyptic viewpoint such as found in the book of Daniel (10:13; 12:1). By the end of Matthew's Gospel, the risen Jesus proclaims that he in fact possesses "all authority on heaven and earth" (Matt. 28:18–20),¹⁰ but his strategy of actualizing this authority is through disciple-

9 In relation to love (*phileō*), Brown (1986, 2:548) reasons that the Gospel of John "characterizes love according to whether the world is viewed as God's creation, or as the sphere of enmity towards God." Where the former notion holds sway, "creaturely love" is legitimate (John 11:3, 36), but where the latter is in view, love for the world is the same as hatred for God (John 15:19).

10 The function of "heaven and earth" in this passage might be best thought of as the uniting of the antithetical realms of heaven and earth rather than simply as a merism. See Pennington (2009, 210–11).

making, or the building of his church even within this present (sinful) age, until the age to come. In the letter to the Ephesians, Christ is presented as seated triumphantly above the worldly powers as a present reality (Eph. 1:21), but these powers nevertheless continue to have influence within the current evil age (Eph. 5:16; cf. Gal. 1:4), or “this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12).

Perhaps for such reasons, the emphasis in NT scripture seems to be on warning God’s people to not conform to this world (*kosmos*), within the current age, rather than loving it.¹¹ Paul writes that Demas deserted him because he “loved this world” (2 Tim 4:10), clearly a reference to the return to the Greco-Roman way of life, set off and opposed to Christ’s church (cf. Eph. 2:11–12). John writes not to love the world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15), and James warns against friendship with the world (James 4:4). In these instances, it is clear that the love of world means giving one’s highest affections and loyalty to the realm of human creation and power that is associated with anti-God spiritual forces rather than to the true, creator God, loving the world not for the purpose of its redemption but because of a desire to conform to its standards and revel in its pleasures.

In the OT, as shown above, the same principle is at work with regard to Israel’s relationship with her neighbors. It is interesting to note that in the OT, while God commands Israel to love the foreign sojourners who seek refuge within Israel, He also reproves Israel for taking foreign “lovers,” clearly a metaphor for loving foreign *ways* which included the worship of false gods through idolatry and the debauchery often associated with it (i.e. Num 25). One might come to the same conclusion from the NT writings. Believers are warned not to love the world (*kosmos*), as the realm opposed to God often linked with rebellious spiritual powers and false worship, but yet are called to love the sinful people within the world even if they are their enemies.

The TCTC, however, appears to reverse this emphasis in point 7, including only a 4-line paragraph in sub-point E) to the “world we are not to love.” Yet it is precisely this meaning of “world,” i.e. those human institutions, cultures and structures which lie outside the church and reflect the hostile posture towards God, that is most often in view in the New Testament.¹² With regard to nonhuman creation, Romans 8:18–23 and other passages make clear that God does indeed intend to restore his initially good creation, now subject to corruption because of sin, into a new creation, based on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It nevertheless remains that the emphasis of love in scripture is love directed first

11 In the texts within this paragraph, the relevant term is *kosmos*.

12 With regard to ruling authorities, some texts (Matt 22:21; Rom 13:6–7) affirm respect for and obedience to political institutions as God-ordained means of keeping order, but there is not suggestion of loving these authorities, as institutions.

to God and then to other people, never explicitly to the nonhuman creation or collective human entities or cultures.

Should the Church *Love the World* of Nonhuman Creation?

There are influential streams within evangelicalism that are at least semi-gnostic in their view of the created world, who see little to no value at all in the world around us, and look to “heaven” as a place of escape for bodiless humans after death, rejecting or ignoring the scriptural teaching on new creation and resurrection. On the other hand, in the current cultural *zeitgeist* Christians must also guard against a sentimental or pantheistic love for the natural world, which the TCTC rightly cautions against in point 7A arguing that Christians are rather to care for the creation because it belongs to God. That is, Christians’ love for creation must be contingent upon their primary love for God. Again, while scripture does not explicitly command believers to love (nonhuman) creation, humankind is nevertheless given a clear mandate in Genesis 1–2 to tend the garden and rule the creation which God had made “very good.” According to Moo and Moo (2018, 51), God’s assessment at the beginning gives all of creation an intrinsic value. In addition, as has been shown above, the wonder of God’s creative power and the beauty of his creation is expressed through many biblical texts, especially in the Psalms. Clearly, a denial of the goodness of creation cuts against the very heart of biblical theology and God’s identity as the creator. To not care for what God made and declared to be of high value is to not love God himself, and in direct violation of the commands given to the first humans in Genesis 1–2.

But are Christians really to directly “love” the nonhuman creation? Although scripture celebrates the beauty of creation, it does so in a way that directs praise to God, not to the created things themselves. Psalm 104, a poem that magnificently shows the beauty of creation and God’s delight in it (cf. Prov. 8:30), both begins and ends with explicit praise for God himself, not his creation. We must therefore emphasize that talk of love for creation must be explicitly contingent on love for God the creator lest it become idolatrous. Love in the Bible is an action word that espouses both feeling and commitment to God or another person. Consequently, the Genesis mandate to rule over what God has made—though this command has been disastrously interpreted at times—should show foundationally that *acts of caring for creation are ways in which God’s people show love for God* since the link between love for God and obedience to him are widespread across the canon of scripture (Ex. 20:6; Deut. 7:9; Neh. 1:5; Dan 9:4; John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 5:2; 2 John 6).

It is also helpful to remember that we humans are a *part* of creation. While the creation of humans is clearly portrayed as the crowning point of all of creation in

day 6 in Genesis 1, humans are yet made on the same day as other land animals (Gen. 1:24–31) and made “out of the dust” (Gen. 2:7). In Romans 8:18–23, Paul shows how the creation overall is intricately connected to humans, as the creation itself groans in longing for the “sons of God” to be revealed. The restoration of humanity from its sinful fallen state thus has repercussions for all of natural creation, and this points us to the reality of new creation. Eschatologically speaking, a better recognition of the value of God’s creation and the created order in the present will help Christians recognize the future goal of new creation; a new heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; Rev. 21:1). While we may not be able to precisely define the new creation in full and how it is similar to or distinct from the current created order, the resurrection of Jesus offers a pattern of *both continuity and discontinuity*. Just as resurrected humans, like the resurrected Jesus who is the first-fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20), will still be embodied humans but with a mysterious expansion of power and possibility within a human body fully animated by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 15: 35–49), so too will the nonhuman new creation be characterized by continuity and discontinuity. If one is awed by the creation of God now, the beauty and power await in the new world will truly be astonishing.

It should be kept in mind that, according to Paul in Romans 8, this new world should not be understood as completely new and discontinuous with our current natural world but rather refers to God’s “very good” creation—currently subject to the bondage of decay—being set free “to obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21, ESV). To care for natural creation is thus to care about the creation that God will in fact set free, the creation that we creatures are a part of (Moo and White 2014, 114), which when renewed will include the redemption of our own bodies (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:21).

Furthermore, *care for the created world is also an act of love for our neighbors*. As Moo and Moo (2018, 186) state, “creation” includes the “surroundings in which people live,” which “have a huge impact on their well-being.” To put this crudely on a small-scale level, would we not all agree that we would certainly *not* be loving our next-door neighbors if we disposed of our trash over the fence in their child’s sandbox? On a large scale then, it is reasonable to conclude that we should be conscientious of how our treatment of creation affects our neighbors near and far, future generations, as well as our own selves. Still, Moo and Moo (2018, 185) maintain that while love of neighbor is important in our treatment of the created order, “Christians ultimately care for creation not because of our own self-interest or even out of love for others, but because the creation is God’s.” This principle may be illustrated by our own experience, even if imperfectly. We may admire and have affinity for some object lovingly made and belonging to a loved one for the qualities that it possesses in itself, but our acts of loving care for

that object are based at their core in the love we have for our loved one, not the object itself, however beautiful or useful. To love the object rather than the loved one who created it and gifted it to us would be a terrible distortion. We “love” the object because we love the person, and so it is an extension of our primary love, it is a *contingent love*, or as TCTC (7A) states, “the logical outworking of our love for God by caring what belongs to him.”

Therefore, we may answer the question in the title positively if by “love” of the nonhuman creation we mean something like *an attitude of commitment to the created physical world which results in acts of attentive care of it and affinity for its beauty and usefulness, that are rooted in and contingent on our primary, committed relational love of God and associated love of neighbor*. But Christians must always understand such loving acts to be deeply rooted in and motivated by our primary love for God, the creator of heaven and earth, in worshipful response to his everlasting covenant love for us in Christ.

Should the Church Love the World of Human Culture?

The crucial question of how God’s covenant people should relate to the wider world of nations and cultures has been present from the time of biblical Israel until now. On one hand, Christians can sometimes display a tendency to isolate from their wider culture and communities, an attitude often found together with the semi-gnostic view of creation noted above, or to treat their own culture or sub-culture as somehow superior to others. On the other hand, some expressions of Christianity go so far in accommodating the larger culture that hardly any distinction can be discerned between the church and that culture. Christians must therefore carefully navigate between the Scylla of semi-gnostic isolation and escapism which undervalues God’s created order and the theological mandate to be salt and light in the earth, and the Charybdis of compromise with the spirit of the age and the corresponding spiritual powers which scripture associates with the world of spiritual rebellion against God.

Sub-point B) of TCTC point 7 states that we are called to love “God’s world of nations and cultures.” the nonhuman creation itself shows forth the effects of the fall—violence, disease, death, corruption—these effects in the biblical narrative are consequences of human sinfulness, not that of the nonhuman creation. Humans, as a corporate unity, thus not only show forth effects of the fall but are guilty of this state of affairs themselves. And so, loving other human beings outside of Christ involves loving that which is in a state of sin and rebellion. But is loving human nations and cultures the same as loving one’s neighbors, but only in a collective sense? God promised Abraham that in him He would bless “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3), and this theme of Israel mediating YHWH

to the nations is extended through the prophetic writings (Isa. 2:2–4; Jer. 4:1–2; Zech. 8:20–23), and comes to its full expression in the new covenant in the Messiah Jesus (Matt. 28:16–20; Acts 1:8). However, any sense of love within this biblical theological promise would appear to be towards the *people* of these nations, with the eventual goal of their coming in submission to the God of Israel, and not a love of the national entities themselves represented by their political and cultural expressions. As with the world of nonhuman creation, there are no scriptural commands to love collective human-built entities, and in fact, as has already been demonstrated above, in the current age God has temporarily allowed the nations and kingdoms of the earth function under the rule of diabolical power.¹³

Even more difficult is the attempt to understand how Christians might actually love culture(s).¹⁴ Try as we might, we will not find the word “culture” in our translated Bibles. That is because it is a relatively new term as applied to human society. One of the best concise definitions of “culture” is that offered by Robert Redfield (1941, 132):¹⁵ “In speaking of ‘culture,’ we have reference to the conventional understandings, of act and artifact, that characterize societies. The ‘understandings’ are the meanings attached to acts and objects . . . as they have become typical for members of that society by reason of intercommunication.”¹⁶ We may add to this definition the insights of Vanhoozer (2007, 26), who suggests these “works and worlds of meanings” are results of what humans freely choose, not what they do by instinct.¹⁷ These observations helpfully distinguish “cultures” from people themselves. A culture is not a human being nor even a group of people but rather the collective set of understandings and meanings a group of

13 There is one NT text where love for a nation is described. In his Gospel, Luke reports that the Jewish elders in Capernaum pleaded with Jesus to help a Roman centurion because “he loves our nation,” *agapa gar to ethnos hēmōn* (Luke 7:5), a love ostensibly shown through the building of a synagogue. Evidently the centurion was a God-fearer who displayed his love for the Jewish people, and likely their God, through this act of giving. The narratorial judgment here seems unsurprisingly positive. But, it is difficult to imagine the situation in reverse: a positive narratorial judgment on a Jew or early Christian who would love Rome by constructing a pagan temple. Such an action would certainly be condemned.

14 The topic of Christianity and culture of course deserves much more space than I can offer here and the literature on the subject is immense. Classic works on the subject include Newbigin (1986), and especially Niebuhr (1951), whose work is revisited by Carson (2008). In Croatian, see the recent work by Šimić (2018).

15 Cited in a briefer version in Carson (2008, 2).

16 In current discourse, the idea of “engaging” culture is quite prevalent, but even the editors of a recent work entitled *Engaging Culture* question whether “culture” is something that one can really “engage,” as if one were a neutral outsider (Chatraw and Prior 2019, 21). Rather, they explain that we are all immersed in culture, i.e. whether we recognize it or not.

17 For more recent definitions, see Chatraw and Prior (2019, 24).

people freely choose and share, which are associated with (or perhaps expressed by) what they do and make. With this in mind, it can be asserted that one can love another person, and even a group of people together while at the same time rejecting and expressly not loving some or many aspects of their “culture.”

Within biblical and other ancient texts, “culture” can thus be discerned in the shared meanings people have with regard to their traditions, religions, social customs, literature, art, and symbols. As been shown above, there are no instances in scripture where God’s people are commanded to love the ways of life or traditions of such collective cultures. In the OT, loving and adopting the ways of foreign nations led to sin and idolatry and was strictly prohibited.¹⁸ In the NT, believers are warned not to love the “world,” the notion of *kosmos* discussed above which we now more aptly link with the realm of human power structures, nations and cultures.

The study of the ancient contexts of scripture related to both testaments shows that neither biblical Israel, nor second temple Judaism, nor early Christianity existed in a cultural vacuum. That is, their particular cultures were already immersed within the different cultures of their time and place within which they were to maintain faithfulness to God.¹⁹ Therefore, within the early church certain aspects of what we would now call “culture” could be discarded and rejected, or admired, adopted or transformed, depending on how those aspects conformed to the teaching of the Gospel. Christianity is, as prominent African theologian Lamin Sanneh (2015, 1) cogently argued, a translated faith, which from its beginnings relativized aspects of its root Hebrew culture while promoting others and rejecting aspects of Gentile cultures while destigmatizing others. No cultural meanings in act and artifact could thus be wholesale adopted but those acts and artifacts which could be adopted or transformed within the Christian way of understanding could be appropriated in service of the Gospel (Acts 17:28). As a matter of course, the authoritative teaching of the OT scriptures, and the teaching of Jesus and the apostles were the determining factors, and no one cultural expression could therefore be understood as, in itself, somehow superior to others, even

18 Certainly, as Chatraw and Prior (2019, 36) point out, the biblical story as a whole must be considered. Within the context of the exile, for example, complete separation was hardly possible, and so Jeremiah 29 instructs Jews to establish themselves *within* Babylon, to build homes and families and to seek the good of the city where they have been exiled. Of course, Jeremiah is not instructing the exiles to capitulate to Babylonian culture and religion, and Jewish history itself is an example of a group of people who became apt at guarding the essential aspects of their way of life even while flourishing in a foreign nation. In many ways, the situation of the exiles in Jeremiah foreshadows the kind of tensions which Christians would also face as the church expanded in different nations around the world.

19 Even ancient Israel must be understood within the larger ancient near eastern culture context (see Walton 2018). See especially Hurtado (2016) for early Christianity’s encounter with Greco-Roman culture.

the Jewish one that formed the roots of Christianity (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:10–11). Indeed, Jesus harshly criticizes the Jewish leaders' exaltation of "the traditions of men" over the revealed commandments of God (Mark 7:1–13).

In an example from the 4th century, Jaroslav Pelikan (1993, 18–21) points out the ambivalence of the Cappadocian fathers with regard to the classical Greek literature and philosophy in which they were culturally reared. On one hand, they could refer to Homer's "demonic myths," while on the other hand admirably cite him or being Christian Neoplatonists themselves, could nevertheless vehemently warn against violating Christian truth with such "heathen philosophy." While there may have been an admiration and even affinity for aspects of the cultural tradition, this could hardly be viewed as love in the biblical sense. Cultures, after all, are not people, and the shared meanings of cultures outside of Christ can only be positively appreciated and appropriated in a limited sense, or otherwise negatively rejected.

In the new covenant, there is no ethnicity or nation representing God's people, and as such, all Christians throughout the world are necessarily a *part* of human culture and particular human cultures, and in some measure contributing to its development, whether by active or passive means. Since culture, as we have seen, is a set of shared meanings, Christians are not called to love their culture so much as to contribute to it in ways that glorify God (Matt. 5:13–16), both as they make disciples within it, but also as they contribute to the continually growing and changing sets of shared meanings within that particular people group(s), while not compromising the truth of the Gospel. This is not to suggest that the goal of the Gospel is total cultural transformation in this age, since total transformation can only be wrought by God in full in the new creation of the age to come. However, the Holy Spirit-led church is to be the anticipatory manifestation of the new age within the present evil age in its interaction with people and their cultures (Eph. 5:15; Col 4:5–6). Christians must therefore recognize they are already *part* of culture and that they are therefore responsible to contribute to it and shape it in light of the Gospel (Newbiggin 1986, 129).

That Gospel is the message of God reclaiming his kingship over creation through the redemptive love of Christ for sinners through his life, death and resurrection. Moreover, this salvific work of Christ is available to everyone, whatever their nationality, race, gender or cultural background; all are "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). Yet scripture is clear that the nations and their ways are to be brought under the disciplining authority of Jesus (Ps. 2:8; 94:10; Matt. 28:19). Here, nations (Greek *ethnē*) might be best understood as "all of humanity" (Nolland 2005, 1266), not individual nations as collective wholes. While the process of making disciples from all nations must be driven by the same kind of self-giving love for people *from* all nations that is patterned in the self-giving love of Christ, those

nations and cultures *as collective wholes* cannot be loved in the biblical sense of elective, committed and heartfelt relationship to other persons, since these wholes themselves are not persons.²⁰

The TCTC does provide a warning in point E) against the sinful, satanically influenced world that should not be loved, but I am not sure the document goes far enough in expressing the difficulty of this issue. Which aspects of human national, ethical or political/ideological culture can be rightly appreciated, appropriated and *loved* by Christians and which cannot? All humans are created in the image of God, and all humans are in sin and active rebellion against God apart from the grace of God. Subsequently, there are elements of God's truth, beauty and wisdom within each culture, though each human culture apart from Christ is in sinful rebellion against God.²¹ To reiterate, loving a "culture" cannot mean loving a group of people, but rather loving their shared, created meanings of life expressed in act and artifact. Christians cannot love such shared meanings when they are antithetical to God's revelation. But Christians are called to love people from all nations and cultures. Indeed, Jesus' radical call to love one's neighbors, even if they are enemies, and to love the most vulnerable, even when they cannot repay that love (Luke 10:25–37), focuses our love on human beings *because* they are made in God's image. This is a distinctly gospel-shaped love that transcends the natural love of human beings.

In sum, Christians are only directly commanded in scripture to love their neighbors from all nations and cultures, but not the collective manifestations of those nations and cultures themselves. However, similarly to how a contingent love of nonhuman creation was described above, we may construe a *contingent love* of nations and cultures as a *heartfelt attitude of commitment and accompanying acts that contribute to the development of one's nation and culture in accord with the Gospel, and an affinity for those aspects of the culture that reflect the be-*

20 I do not mean here to suggest that people cannot or should not "love," in the more metaphorical sense, certain cultures, or aspects of cultures, i.e. certain traits, characteristics, etc. But this kind of "love" is more akin to fondness or personal preference, rather than the kind of elective, committed, action oriented biblical love that TCTC refers to in an imperative sense. However, even in cases of such fondness or personal preference, there is always the danger of the development of an idolatrous love or allegiance, particularly when a nationalistic "love" becomes too fervent. On the other hand, Christ does not call people from the nations into a bland conformity. God will certainly redeem many aspects of various human cultures to blossom in the beauty of his new creation.

21 I cannot here deal with the question of whether a culture can be "Christian" (see Eliot 2014). But even if it could, I don't believe Christians should love that "culture," but rather God and fellow believers within that culture. In so far as one conceives of any particular culture as "Christian," the temptation to idolize it would be strong indeed, and such idolizing would result in overturning the very thing which made it "Christian" in the first place.

auty and wisdom of God's created order as they are manifest in human creativity, rooted in, and contingent on our primary, committed relational love of God and associated love of neighbor.

Conclusion

In continuity with the revelation of the OT scriptures, Jesus commands both love for God and for one's neighbor, stating that on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37–40). The inseparability of love for God and neighbor is quite clear in scripture though sadly often ignored. Jesus' teaching that one's neighbor might even be one's enemy must shape the Christian view of the world. While Christians must resist intimate relationships that pull them into sin, they must nevertheless remain steadfast in the mission of the Lord, to love all human beings as their neighbors, recognizing that they too are made in God's image. Clearly, the Christian love for neighbor may not always be reciprocated, and a love predicated on God's love and the desire for others to fully know God's love may even engender a negative response from the larger culture, but Christians must persist in love as followers of Jesus. In conclusion, love of both the nonhuman creation and human creativity expressed in nations and cultures can at best be *contingent loves that flow out of a deep love for God and other people*. It is essential that believers understand the overarching narrative of scripture, which teaches that the church, united with the risen Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is God's anticipatory community of the new creation and new age within the present fallen creation and present evil age of spiritual rebellion. The world is ultimately God's, and he is bringing it to full restoration and renewal in Christ.

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Treba li Crkva voljeti (Božji) svijet? Odgovor na sedmu točku Capetownskog iskaza o predanju

Sažetak

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