

WHO TAKES CARE OF US? Richard L. Smith

I recently watched the newest version of *Cinderella*. An interchange from the opening scene between the child and her mother intrigued me. Read what they said:

Mother: Do you still believe that they understand you?

Cinderella: Don't they, Mother?

Mother: Oh, yes. I believe that animals listen and speak to us if we only have the ear for it. That's how we learn to look after them.

Cinderella: Who looks after us?

Mother: Fairy godmothers, of course.

Cinderella: And do you believe in them?

Mother: I believe in everything.

Cinderella: Then I believe in everything, too.

Cinderella asked her mother a very important question: Who takes care of us? If we take care of the animals, then who looks after human beings?

This is a critical question: Who *is* taking care of us? (And, note that I mentioned "who," in contrast to the naturalistic worldview.) From the perspective of the biblical worldview, however, it is more precise to ask: *Who* is taking care of us?

The Bible does not affirm, of course, the existence of or care by fairy godmothers. The biblical worldview presents God as the creator and owner of all. The scriptures portray Him as a divine householder or economist who cares for His property, so to speak. Human beings are tasked with preserving and developing nature's resources for the good of all and the glory of God.

Moreover, even though the world as we know it is diseased by sin, the divine economist set every aspect of creation in its proper place and sustains it. Psalm 104 is a hymn to the God who cares for us in very specific and particular ways. Here are a few excerpts:

He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved...The mountains rose, the valleys sank down to the place that you appointed for them. You set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth. (vs. 5-9)

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills; they give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. (vs. 10-11)

You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart. (vs. 14-15)

He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting. You make darkness, and it is night, when all the beasts of the forest creep about. The young lions roar for their prey, seeking their food from God. When the sun rises, they steal away and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening. O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. (vs. 20-24)

Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great...These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. (vs. 25-30)

The Psalm teaches several important facts about the created world we enjoy and presuppose:

He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved: God built His house securely and maintains the laws of nature for His purposes and according to His wise counsel.

He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting: This passage speaks of the regularity of nature and echoes Genesis 1.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys... You cause the grass to grow: The divine economist provides everything that creation needs in all of its specificity and detail, despite the corrosive effects of sin. God knows what human beings and nature needs to thrive.

In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures: Contrary to the naturalistic or pantheistic worldviews, this world is a creation.

When you take away their breath, they die... When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground: The householder creates, sustains, and brings all life to its end. This speaks of God's power and sovereignty over all that He made.

Finally, what should be our response to the divine economist, God?

Paul argued in Romans, verse 4, that humans manifest, unfortunately, an unjustified sense of entitlement for themselves and over the natural world. He wrote: "Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" The verb, "presume on" (*kataphroneō*), conveys the nuances: "expect more than you have a right to," "take advantage of someone" or "take for granted." To presume on God signifies an attitude of unjust expectancy. Sinners believe they *merit* the kindness of God, *despite* their sin. The self-referential human thinks that God is *obligated* to do good to His rebellious servants.

In this way we completely miss the intended purpose of God's kindness through creation. His mercy is *not* intended to provide a safe context for mankind to sin with impunity, but rather for repentance. His kindness does *not* mean He approves of mankind's parasitical use of His benefits and resources. Rather, as Paul argues God's kindness *obligates* the undeserving rebel to repent and serve God only.

So, we should carefully consider God's blessing in our lives through the "riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience." Think about what we should be thankful for, what we enjoy, and what we are good at (our gifts and talents). As Paul said: "For he did good by _____?" or "He satisfied your hearts with _____?" (Acts 14:17) Explore how God's kindness is designed to lead us to repentance. Talk about the implications of the biblical view of God: Does it make sense to use (presume on) His grace to live in sin and rebellion? Or, is it wiser to "honor him as God" and "give thanks" (Rom 1:21)?

Because *God* takes care of us!

