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Possession Is Nine-Tenths of the Law: Psalm 24, the Environment, and Human Responsibility

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The majesty of Psalm 24 is self-evident to any who read, pray, or sing it. Striking in its all-encompassing vista the psalm offers some probing theological insights at both cosmic and personal levels. Though deeply doxological in its view of God the psalm moves beyond the vision of a praised cosmic warrior,[1] who brings order out of chaos, inviting a thoughtful human response to this reality. The psalm culminates rather paradoxically with an eschatological vision of Yahweh on the move, the one who possesses creation, being welcomed into creation by those who have been created.

A careful reading of Psalm 24 brings to light some significant insights for Christians both individually and collectively as we live in times of climate change, and the resultant environmental issues never before confronted. First, the psalm invites us to explore how we understand God as the agent of creation. Second, it offers a vision of humankind as co-agent (with God) in re-creation. Finally, the psalm reaches a climax where God is envisaged as the agent of the eschaton. Each of these insights implicitly, and at times explicitly, raises questions about our fundamental understanding of the relationship between God, creation, and humankind. From this a clearer vision emerges of a dynamic divine engagement with our world. But we also discover our responsibility as human beings to ensure dynamic human engagement with creation as an expressed response to divine activity. I will also argue that in being aware of this dynamic process we are invited, and enabled, to become fully human as we live, love, and work in relationship with God, ourselves, others, and the environment.

Before exploring the issues identified above in detail, it is important to briefly sketch the possible historical contexts of Psalm 24 and highlight some literary considerations relevant to this exploration. Both

1. Dianne Bergant, "'The Earth is the Lord's': A Biblical Reflection on Psalm 24:1," *Mission Studies* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 1998): 72.

aspects deepen our appreciation of the psalm as a profound liturgical statement, a carefully crafted piece of literature, and also alert us to the psalm's clarion call for human response to both God and the environment.

The genre of Psalm 24 is often identified as an "entrance liturgy"[2] creating an *inclusio* with Psalm 15; as a psalm of the same genre.[3] Gerstenberger prefers the more general classification of "entrance liturgy" over some earlier suggestions and argues for specific cultic contexts.[4] In considering the idea of "entrance liturgy," which now seems generally agreed upon by more recent scholarship, there are those who then want to expand the idea of "entrance liturgy" to include a remembrance of the Ark of the Covenant's entry into Jerusalem.[5] Despite these suggestions, a simple reading of the psalm itself suggests very little concerning its initial, or ongoing, cultic setting. One could suggest an historical allusion with the title *lᵉ dāwîd* although, again, this is not liturgical instruction, and its historical value is arguable. Speculations about specific cultic contexts aside, one issue is clear. The inclusion of Psalm 24 in the Psalter implies *some kind* of cultic usage and significance. While the original setting may be indeterminate, the ongoing employment of this psalm as a part of Israel's cultic practice remains a given. This leads Eaton to conclude that "Such psalms were thus not merely songs incidental to ceremonies, but texts which carried worship forward and unfolded the meaning of the rites."[6] They formed a part of Israel's hermeneutic of life as they attempted to make sense of themselves and their world. The Christian tradition has continued the practice in the case of Psalm 24 by incorporating it into the church's liturgy for Ascension Day.

2. J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms," in *1 & 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms,* vol. 4 of *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* ed. Robert Doran et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 732, 772.

3. Patrick D. Miller, "Kingship, Torah Obedience, and Prayer: The Theology of Psalms 15-24," in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung,* ed. K. Seybold and E. Zenger (Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 279-297. Miller provides a starting point for this kind of study.

4. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, vol. 14 of *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 119. By "entrance liturgy" Gerstenberger has in mind an entrance procession to the Temple. He focuses on the views of Gunkel, Mowinckel and Kraus in particular but surmises that there is scant evidence for concrete conclusions to be drawn.

5. Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 277. Westermann makes the connection between this psalm and 2 Samuel 6.

6. John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: Continuum, 2005), 126.

Questions about cultic setting and the literary form of Psalm 24 have generated much discussion. A superficial reading of it suggests a rather disjointed amalgam of three disparate sets of ideas. The way in which this psalm evolved into its final form is unclear. However, we now have a literary whole and are left to make sense of the content *as a whole*. Mays addresses the issue at length and reaches the conclusion that "there is, however, a theological unity."[7] In doing this, he reminds us that the psalm is presented as a whole in the text we possess and should be read as such. So, in summary, it is fair to say that Psalm 24 forms the basis of a significant liturgical act in ancient Israel and possesses a theological unity from which a number of practical implications can be drawn.

One final word of explanation is needed before we examine Psalm 24 in detail. I have used the title, "Possession is Nine-Tenths of the Law," for this paper. This is a familiar saying in many parts of the world. Put simply, it suggests that if you *have something in your possession* you have a much stronger legal claim to it than someone who simply *claims to own it*. My reason for using this particular title is that I see the principle of divine ownership clearly undergirding the whole of Psalm 24. The psalm begins at this point, and my reading of it requires that the principle of divine ownership be held as a foundation to anything else the psalm goes on to say about the world, humankind, and the relationship between them and God. I hope to reflect and maintain this fundamental understanding as we navigate our way through Psalm 24.

Yahweh as agent and owner of creation (Ps 24:1-2)

There can be no doubt that God, in this case, identified by use of the divine name Yahweh, is designated as both the agent behind and the owner of creation.[8] The use of the divine name here is notable. It is not

7. James Luther Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 153. He then describes how he sees this theological unity in the content: "Each of the parts of the psalm expresses a basic assumption that is integral to the entire Bible, and, so, to Christianity. First is that God has created the world and, therefore, is its Lord. The second is that we have to appear before God to be questioned, how it stands with our righteousness. The third is that God comes to hisown and seeks entrance." I am not fully convinced of Mays' second point based on this Psalm despite the fact that the idea appears in other sections of Scripture.

8. Michael Goulder, "David and Yahweh in Psalms 23 and 24.," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 4 (June 2006): 470. Goulder draws an interesting comparison between the opening to this psalm and the opening of Psalm 23 noting that Psalm 23 emphasizes "Yahweh's providential guidance"while Psalm 24 emphasizes Yahweh as "creator and owner."

the more generic term *)ēl* but rather the Tetragrammaton indicating that the psalm is specifically designating Israel's god as creator and owner.[9] However, the idea here of Yahweh as agent and owner of creation is not predicated so much on the identity of this god.[10] Rather, it is predicated on what this god did in the act of creation. Vos observes the careful use of language in verses 1 and 2 saying that, "The use of poetic strategies serves to emphasize that the earth and the world are Yahweh's *carefully ordered creation* [italics mine]."[11] This, of course, presents a contrasting view to commonly held beliefs in the Ancient Near East about the dangerous unpredictability of the seas and their perceived threat to human beings.[12] Bergant is even more forthright in her understanding of the divine imagery of a god who orders creation here in Psalm 24 calling God the "omnipotent . . . cosmic warrior."[13] While the psalmist's vision of Yahweh may be a contrast, or even a polemic directed towards existing ancient world beliefs, it also clearly emphasizes the psalmist's desire to affirm that Yahweh, Israel's god, is both the agent behind and owner of creation.[14] Mays concludes that "the [statement that the] Lord is owner is an intentional denial that anyone else is."[15] Ownership is not only exclusive to YHWH but is also all-encompassing. Wolf and Gjerris describe this all-encompassing divine ownership as one which reflects the "integrity" of creation or "an interpretation of the world which sees the world as a whole."[16] The link is pregnant with significance for people of faith in today's world.

Contained within the psalm's affirmation, declaring Yahweh as creator and owner, is the presence of an interesting linguistic nuance. Gerstenberger makes the observation that the psalm begins with the preposition l^{e} which expresses the idea that "The earth . . . and all that is in it,

9. Contrast this to Psalm 19 which addresses similar issues but prefers the use of *)ēl* when speaking of God in relation to creation. It is only when the psalmist begins to raise the concept of *tôrâ* that the language shifts to YHWH.

10. Again this is in contrast to Psalm 19 where no reason is given for God's glory being declared by creation.

11. Cas J. A. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 1st ed. (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2005), 144.

12. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 144. Vos goes on to discuss this perception at some length.

13. Bergant, "The Earth is the Lord's," 72.

14. James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 120. He explores, in some detail, the idea of this psalm presenting a polemic against existing perceptions of creation, gods, power and control in the ancient world.

15. Mays, *Psalms*, 120.

16. Jakob Wolf and Mickey Gjerris, "A Religious Perspective on Climate Change," *Studia Theologica* 63, no. 2 (December 2009): 130-131.

the world, and all who live in it" (NRSV) can be equally well expressed as "to Yahweh" or "for Yahweh."[17] Translated either way the implication is that while Yahweh is the *agent of* creation, creation is also relationally *connected to* Yahweh and/or creation is *for* Yahweh. Gersenberger goes on to make the point that it is unusual syntax to place the preposition before the subject.[18] With this nuance the psalmist has expressed two underpinning concepts for the Israelite world view. First, that creation should be viewed primarily as being "for Yahweh," and not Yahweh being viewed primarily as "for creation." Second, accepting the principle that creation exists "for Yahweh" as the owner, implies some kind of ongoing divine interest and engagement with creation.[19] A worldview underpinned by these two principles challenges an anthropocentric view of creation. Such a view would include any claims to outright ownership of, and unmitigated anthropogenic destruction of, creation by humankind.

In light of the relational connection between Yahweh and creation expressed in Psalm 24, one might well ask the question, "How does this relationship function?" Clifford suggests that "nature is more than just the object of human duty . . . and it is not solely a vehicle for God's glory to be displayed [but] God working through and with nature to communicate with human beings."[20]

If creation is to be viewed as "for Yahweh," as suggested by the opening statement of Psalm 24, and Yahweh is relationally connected with creation, communicating through it as Clifford suggests, then humankind is left with an important question to answer. Are we listening to what creation is saying about God, humankind, and our relationship with God, and the integrated creation of which Wolf and Gjerris speak?[21] A further question might be, "What is God and creation together saying to humankind?"[22]

17. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 117. It should be noted here that we are speaking of the first verse in English versions (Evv) of the Bible rather than the Masoretic text (MT) which considers the title to be the first verse.

18. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, 117.

19. This is based on the concept that by owning something the owner is, self-evidently, concerned with and interested in that which is owned. This principle, in relation to God, is clear throughout both Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

20. Paula Clifford, *'All Creation Groaning': A Theological Approach to Climate Change* (London: Christian Aid, n.d.), under "What We Believe," http://www.christianaid.org.uk/images/F1429PDF.pdf (accessed April 4, 2011). The preface is dated June 2007. Cf. Psalm 19:1-6.

21. Wolf and Gjerris, "A religious perspective on climate change," 130-131.

22. David Cohen, "Journey to Center of the Heart: Psalm 19 as Transformance," in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, ed. David

So here is the paradox of a divine being beyond creation, and yet the divine presence in creation comes into sharp focus. Psalm 24 concurrently expresses a transcendent view of God *over creation* and an immanent view of God in ongoing relationship *with creation*. Perhaps in a general way, Mays responds to the questions posed above saying, "the one who is beyond our world is the final truth and meaning to all that is in it."[23] From here then, we journey into the territory of human response to God and the environment on the basis of understanding Yahweh as the agent and owner of creation.

Humankind as co-agents of re-creation (Ps 24:3-6)

For people with a Judeo-Christian heritage, the view of God espoused by the opening verses of Psalm 24, together with many other sections in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, ought to evoke a response. The psalmist anticipates this response by moving dramatically from the cosmic vista of verses 1 and 2 to the hands, heart, and soul of the person of faith. The action of "going up" and "standing" in verse 3 echoes the practice of the community going up to the Temple in Jerusalem, which symbolized the presence of Yahweh amid the faith community. The Temple was a place of worship and sacrifice, which is possible within the context of a covenantal relationship. It was a place where sins could be forgiven, and thanks could be expressed. Brueggemann views the poetic images of clean hands and a pure heart together with the idea of going up to the Temple in terms of *tôrâ* obedience saying that "they [Psalms 15 and 24] suggest that only the obedient persons may enter into God's presence. But it is important to recall that this spirituality reflects only a *well-oriented community* [italics mine]."[24]

It is arguable whether a "well oriented community" is *all* that Psalm 24:3-6 reflects. Nevertheless, Brueggemann's concept is nonetheless helpful. If the community of faith becomes well oriented towards Yahweh in the context of cultic practice within the Temple, then this can serve as a motivator to live differently outside the Temple. Mays makes the observation that, "What has been made holy is marked off from everything else by its identification with God."[25] His observation high-

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J. Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 15-35. In this chapter I explore the issue of God's communication through creation in some depth.

23. Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*, 153.

24. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 42.

25. Mays, *Psalms*, 121.

lights the relational connection between Yahweh and creation (in this case, specifically with humankind), and also the prerequisites for those, who not only exist within covenant relationship with God (a given in the broader context of Psalm 24), but have also been set apart *for* Yahweh to accomplish Yahweh's purposes in the world. McCann makes the astute observation that "praise involves 'activity' as well as 'identity.' Indeed, it is impossible and undesirable to separate these concepts too sharply."[26] Another way of conceptualizing McCann's idea is that the people envisaged in Psalm 24 will act according to their identity as opposed to their actions creating an identity for them.[27]

Out of the affirmation of identity found in Yahweh's presence and the re-orientation experienced by the community through cultic practice the motivation to live differently emerges, acknowledging that while the Temple is at the centre of the community of faith, it is not the place where the people live. The Temple was a place to go up to and also a place to return from into everyday life. But is affirmation of identity and re-orientation the only things carried down from the Temple? The answer to this is yes and no! Verse 5 is rather ambiguous in its language. Below is the Hebrew followed by my first translation which reflects the majority of English versions. The second is my more literal translation. I would argue that the translation captures both the Hebrew and the broader context of the verse in Psalm 24:

- יִשָּׂא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה וּצְדָקָה מֵאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעוֹ׃
- He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from the God who saves him.
- He will carry[28] blessing from the Lord and rightness[29] from the God who saves him.

The ambiguity in the Hebrew means that each English attempt above presents quite a different stance for the person of faith. The first

26. J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 71.

27. This is a fundamental understanding of the nature of covenant in the Hebrew Bible.

28. The verb *nāśā* is more naturally translated "carry" or "bear" given the imagery of hands and the actions of lifting up (same verb 2x) in v.4.

29. John Goldingay, Psalms (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2006), 360. Goldingay argues convincingly against the translation of *ṣedeq* as "vindication" and prefers "mercy" (as expressed in the LXX). Although this is helpful my usage of "rightness" better reflects the idea of Brueggemann's "well oriented community (cf. n. 21). Notwithstanding its shortcomings as a plain English translation the concept of "rightness" is helpful in this context.

reflects one who *receives in* Yahweh's presence, while the second reflects one who *carries from* Yahweh's presence. Perhaps the ambiguity is appropriate in that both apply. However, given a covenantal understanding which is founded on identity *and* activity, as expressed above, I suggest that the second reading is more appropriate. Goldingay reinforces this view by concluding that, "Blessing characteristically refers to God's involvement in the everyday recurrences of life, making it fruitful."[30]

What might this "blessing" and "rightness," which is carried from the Lord, look like? I suggest that it ought to have reflected the character of the god Israel worshipped. So, what did "blessing" and "rightness" look like for the god Israel worshipped? This question, in part, takes us back to the imagery of Yahweh's dominance over the seas and rivers found in verse 2. Given the ancient world fear of the seas, as mentioned above, this divine dominance could be viewed as an ordering of chaos. In fact the imagery echoes, the first creation account: "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Gen 1:2, NRSV).[31] Again the idea of a god ordering the chaos is unique to Israel and their belief in Yahweh. LeMon states that "Israel's testimony that *Yahweh* created order from chaos stood in direct opposition to myths of other ancient Near Eastern peoples."[32] The kind of language and imagery here is indicative of divine power and control *over* creation. While it may not be difficult for some to envisage God with this kind of influence over creation, any description of human beings as co-agents with Yahweh acting with power and control over creation evokes some strong responses.[33] Habel, for example, classifies Genesis 1 where it speaks of "subdue" and "have dominion" as "grey texts" which remain difficult to understand and even more difficult to enact.[34] As a counter view Le Mon argues that "God's creation is also an act of ordering, and it is *incumbent upon God's*

30. Goldingay, *Psalms,* 360.

31. As a further example, Job 38:8-11 also express the idea of order from chaos in the context of creation.

32. Joel M. LeMon, "Psalm 24," in *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, ed. Roger Van Harn and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 106.

33. Micah Challenge, "Theology of Climate Change," May 2009, 7, http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/assets/pdf/Theology-of-climate-change.pdf, (accessed December 20, 2010). Here the writers seem to view the concepts of "subdue" and "have dominion" (Gen. 1:28) as pejorative and re- define the role as "gardeners."

34. Norm Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (ATF Press, 2009), 7.

people [italics mine] to promote the order God establishes."[35] It is a fair observation by Habel that historically this "incumbency" has often been misunderstood and abused by people of faith and others.[36] But should we, on this basis, dismiss the whole idea of humankind taking a co-agent role with Yahweh in re-creation?

One response to this question is captured well by Hauerwas and Willimon when they observe that "We can only act within that world which we can see. So the primary ethical question is not, What ought I now to do? but rather, How does the world really look?"[37] Following on from this, the next question could be, "What *should* the world look like?" For people of faith this question takes us back to God and *God's view* of how the world should look.[38] Reifsnyder says "It is the psalmist's conviction that ethics flows from and depends on our perspective on reality. Clear-sighted understanding of who God is and confidence in God's reign shape the psalmist's ethical choices."[39]

The logic proceeds as follows: through relationship with God human beings progressively discover what God is like and how God originally intended creation to function. From this, the "blessing" and "rightness" is discovered for the self and for the whole of creation. This is then carried by the individual and the community of faith into the world as a mandate to bless and re-orient creation (rightness). Through such process, people of faith act as co-agents with Yahweh in re-creating what God originally intended for both humankind and the rest of creation. Admittedly this kind of human power and control (reflected in the terms, "subdue" and "have dominion" found in Gen 1:28) is open to abuse and has been abused historically. Nonetheless, the examples of abuse do not invalidate the ideal.

The psalmist clearly states in verse 6 that "This is the generation who seeks him [God]." The universality of the descriptor cannot be ignored here.[40] While the vision of God and God's people may begin with Israel it certainly does not end there. In keeping with the opening to Psalm 24, the co-agency of God with humankind is not limited to ethnic groupings with God's ultimate goal being for the whole of humankind to carry "blessing" and "rightness" into creation.[41]

35. LeMon, "Psalm 24," 106.

36. Habel, *An Inconvenient Text*, 7.

37. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 88.

38. E.g. Genesis 1 and 2; Isaiah 61; Matthew 5; Revelation 21 et al.

39. Richard W. Reifsnyder, "Psalm 24," *Interpretation* 51, no. 3 (July 1, 1997): 286.

40. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 146.

41. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 146.

In sum then, the middle section of Psalm 24 presents a vision of humankind working as co-agents with God in re-creating what God originally intended. This co-agency, however, is not something which begins with, nor is it entirely dependent on, humankind; it begins with, and is ultimately dependent on, God. As human beings grasp the character, nature, and vision of God, they carry the blessing and the "rightness" of God into a world desperate for restoration. In Craigie's words, "the motifs of order and chaos are transformed into moral concepts, *good* and *evil*."[42] It behoves people of faith to know the difference between good and evil and to live ethically and morally in relation to the environment. However, it is fascinating to observe that Psalm 24 moves beyond the vision of humankind as co-agents with Yahweh in re-creation to present Yahweh as the agent of the eschaton.

Yahweh as agent of the eschaton (Ps 24:7-10)

The final section of Psalm 24 combines a sense of occasion, proclamation, and imminence primarily by employing an antiphony between imperatives and interrogatives and emphatically reinforcing the opening verses of the psalm creating a theological *inclusio*. However, even a cursory examination of verses 7-10 reveals intrinsic qualities of incongruity and oddity in the antiphony.

The incongruity is found most distinctly in the predicate to the imperative found in both verses 7 and 9: "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! *that the King of glory may come in* [italics mine]."[43] Why would it be stated "*that the King of glory may come in* [italics mine]"? Has the psalm not already affirmed that the earth and all that is in it is "the Lord's"? But the incongruity harbors a mystery. While the psalm does clearly affirm Yahweh's *ownership of* all creation and does affirm Yahweh's *power over* all creation, a role for humankind is evident in opening the gate to divine presence *in* creation. Vos states that "In the psalm, God stands outside the gate, not as a threat but as a welcome arrival. He is seeking access to the centre of his own world – the sanctuary from which, blessings are disseminated to all parts of the world."[44]

42. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, vol. 19 of *Word Biblical Commentary,* gen. ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 212.

43. The NRSV, here, assumes the jussive form of *bō)* along with TNIV, ESV, NJB, TNK *et al*. Interestingly the NET translation renders *bō)* as an imperfect. This is also allowable due to the fact that the verb here as there is no unique shortened form for the jussive. Interestingly the NET translation concurs with the LXX on this point.

44. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 144.

Vos's observation captures the essence of Psalm 24 as an expression of worship within the cultic construct of ancient Israel. The imperatives can be viewed as recognizing the reality of divine presence in the form of a liturgical "welcome" by the community of faith.[45] Does this suggest that divine presence and activity in creation is contingent upon humankind opening the gate and welcoming the King of glory? That question cannot be answered categorically. It is part of the mystery. However, the question does underscore the concept of human co-agency identified above. Divine entry into creation, at least as perceived from a human perspective, comes first and foremost through the acknowledgement of Yahweh by the faith community.

An oddity is also present at the close this psalm in the form of a repeated question. "Who is this?" Surely the psalm has already clearly indicated that *this* is "the Lord." But the response to the question presents us with fascinating images of the *nature* of this Lord. Mays, in his commentary on the Psalter, notes the uniqueness of the title "king of glory" linking it to the use of "God of glory" found in Psalm 29:3. In both cases the psalms clarify this concept with images of a divine warrior in battle.[46] Goldingay concludes that these kinds of questions are "often . . . a question about the world's security."[47] So, where is security found in an insecure world for people of faith? Vos states categorically that the "emphasis fall[s] on the identity, the glory and the might of Yahweh."[48] These are significant observations. The psalmist emphasizes clearly that creation is primarily "to Yahweh" or "for Yahweh." The primary relationship for God is between creation and Godself. God is willing to work with humankind in re-creation but there is a divine prerogative beyond this partnership, which will culminate the re-creation.[49]

While we are presented with an incongruity and an oddity in verses 7-10, which initially may be confusing, they can be viewed as expanding the purview of the community of faith beyond the present to see this "king of glory" as the initiator of the eschaton. In employing the

45. This can be experienced in many Christian communities of faith where the Holy Spirit is "welcomed" through song, prayer or other means even though the New Testament clearly affirms the presence of the Spirit with the church gathered.

46. Mays, *Psalms*, 121. The phrase "king of Glory" is only found in this exact form in this psalm.

47. Goldingay, *Psalms*, 357.

48. Vos, *Theopoetry of the Psalms*, 142.

49. The imagery of divine warrior used here should not be interpreted as suggesting a form of violence but, rather, one which emphasizes the power of the this divine warrior to bring creation to its intended culmination as a strong human warrior might ultimately impose his/her will on an enemy.

imagery of divine warrior in these final verses together with the imagery of verses 1 and 2, we encounter a god who both initiated and will ultimately culminate creation.[50]

Holding such a perspective on creation placed Israel in a unique situation. It is a tension and a tenuous tension at that. The tension found in Psalm 24 lies in a recognition of divine activity in co-agency with humankind while at the same time wanting to acknowledge the way in which divine power transcends that of humankind. It is a tenuous tension because Israel could have been tempted to view this divine warrior as one who would impose the divine will on creation irrespective of human response. In this case Israel could consider their responsibility to creation abrogated in the light of irresistible divine will. However, this does not appear to be the case, at least in terms of covenant, where human responsibility encompasses care and concern for all of creation.[51] A second temptation may have been for Israel to take up their responsibility of caring for creation as a way of trying to manipulate Yahweh to provide for them. Although perhaps attractive to Israel, given their Ancient Near Eastern cultural context, there is little, if any, evidence to suggest that care for creation was ever used as leverage for divine favor.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the temptations and the tension inherent between divine and human wills, the ideas were ensconced in the cultic practice of ancient Israel in psalms, such as Psalm 24. The repeated use of a psalm like this in the liturgy reinforced both divine prerogative and the importance of human responsibilities before Yahweh. Craigie summarizes this well when he concludes:

> [T]he kingship of the Lord is not merely a religious affirmation—it is the basis for worship and praise. Those who worship are those who recognize the kingship, who accept the rule of the sovereign God. But the genius of the psalm lies in the linking together of cosmological belief and historical experience. . . . From the perspective of cosmology, the world is created and thus represents order; that order was established by God the king. But historical experience, characterized by war and conflict, suggests a

50. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The God I don't understand : reflections on tough questions of faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 166. Wright contrasts an ancient world understanding of eschatology and some contemporary Christian views suggesting that the expected coming of Christ, for Christians, should be viewed as "believers welcoming their Lord on his return to his rightful place as Lord and King of the whole earth." This New Testament image reinforces this concept of Yahweh, as agent of the eschaton, as creation is culminated in a decisive and definitive manner.

51. E.g. Leviticus 25:4-7. It must be acknowledged here that there may well have been a divergence between covenant requirements and the actual practices of the people in this regard.

> different reality, namely that the world is marked by chaos. The psalm offers a resolution of the dilemma . . .[52]

For Craigie then, the resolution of chaos is firmly and ultimately within the domain of divine action. Hence, Yahweh is the God of the eschaton. However, this does not, by definition, preclude the co-agency of humankind with God in moving towards a complete re-creation, which will ultimately be an eschatological reality as we are "invite[d] to enter the extraordinary new world of God's reign."[53]

I would now like to conclude with some reflections on the responsibilities we have to the whole of creation as people of faith based on the exploration of Psalm 24. While I am reflecting on the issues from a primarily Christian perspective, I also acknowledge the importance of this text to the other two great monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam, humbly suggesting that some of the implications from the text may well relate to people of those traditions as well as they live out their faith in response to God.

Reflections

In a faith context, it is clear from Psalm 24 that any discussion of the environment begins and ends with the clear understanding that God is the one who brought creation about, and the one who has ultimate ownership of the whole; possession is nine-tenths of the law. On this basis, it must be acknowledged that responses to the environment by people of faith cannot exclude God from considerations. The psalm also precludes a view, which might allow people of faith, to abrogate their responsibility to the environment. If God owns all creation, and we are God's people, then caring for and conserving the environment is a natural corollary. While people of all faiths and people of no faith might share a concern for the environment, Psalm 24 provides a clear articulation of why people of faith *should care*. Morrison puts it well when he suggests that

> The world must take responsibility for the well-being of the environment. But my problem is precisely this: we are focused on an object rather than

52. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 214.
53. McCann, "The Book of Psalms," 774.

> a subject. The work of caring for the environment depends first on the love of one's neighbour and in more hidden ways, on the love for God.[54]

The subject is always God. Genesis 1:1 affirms this with the resounding announcement, "In the beginning God." Everything else flows from this reality. A focus on God as the subject has the additional effect of challenging an anthropocentric view of creation. It reminds humankind what we are and what we are not. As David Suzuki said in a radio interview in 2010, "We are trying to be gods but we don't know how to be gods."[55]

If Psalm 24 ended at this point, it could be tempting to leave the fate of the environment and everything else in the hands of the creator. After all, if God is the agent and owner, why would any form of human responsibility or response be necessary? Here lies the mystery with which this psalm attempts to grapple. A divine-human partnership is imagined where we, as divine image-bearers,[56] carry blessing and a mandate to put the world right, *together with God*. As people of faith, we care for the environment *because* God cares. The way in which we care for the environment should reflect God's creative activity woven through the fabric of Scripture. From a Christian perspective, Spencer argues that, "Christians should care for creation because it has an eternal destiny in Christ: it will be transformed along with our own bodies in the new creation, and the work we do now to shape and to care for the world is of eternal significance."[57]

This is a profound statement of substance for the present and hope for the future. While some might argue that we need to care for creation for the sake of generations to come (and this is most certainly a meaningful response), people of faith have an added horizon of "eternal significance." The role of humankind as co-agents in restoring creation is clear from Psalm 24 and is found throughout the pages of both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures.

54. Glenn Morrison, "Thinking Otherwise: Theology, Inculturation and Climate Change," *Australian eJournal of Theology* no. 16 (January 1, 2010): 5, http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theo_article/69, (accessed December 20, 2010).

55. Mornings with Margaret Throsby, "David Suzuki" (10:05 am, December 15, 2010), ABC Classic FM, MP3 audio file, 40:07, http://www.abc.net.au/classic/throsby/stories/s3090417.htm (accessed December 20, 2010). See also David Suzuki, *The Legacy: An Elder's Vision for Our Sustainable Future* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2010).

56. Nick Spencer, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, illustrated edition. (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 81. Taking up the idea of being image-bearers Spencer categorically states, "Why care? Because it is part of what it means to be human."

57. Spencer, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, 75.

This leads us to reflect finally on the conclusion to Psalm 24 and the idea of Yahweh as the agent of the eschaton. In considering this idea, the words of David Suzuki quoted above echo strongly "We are trying to be gods but we don't know how to be gods."[58] While there is most definitely a role for humankind play as co-agents with God, Psalm 24 clearly affirms that ultimately creation's emergence and creations destiny lie with God. While we work with God, we are not God. There are some tasks that only God can complete. This is the tension that was present for ancient Israel and persists today for people of faith. The question is, "Do we fall to the temptation of abrogating our responsibility and wait for divine intervention or do we take seriously the mandate embedded in the creation stories to work with God in bringing order out of chaos?" We are called to respond to this question both individually and collectively. Spencer captures the tension Christians live with when he concludes by saying, "Christians are called to live in a way that announces the future kingdom of God, and to model the reality that, at least in part, the kingdom of God is here already, while realizing that it will be brought about completely by the decisive intervention of Christ's return."[59]

In an emphatic manner, Psalm 24 presents a fresh vision for the faith community demonstrating that divine concern for, and engagement with the world, is fundamentally God's prerogative. However, the outworking of this divine prerogative is invitational. It sounds a clarion call for the Church to reflect on what a truly divine-human partnership looks like in our world. Psalm 24 reflects both liturgical and missional actions as the Church embraces the spiritual, sociological, and environmental challenges confronting us in the twenty-first century. All that remains is the challenge to embrace this narrative as both gathered and scattered communities living out our faith in recognition of our role *with* God in creation.

58. Throsby, "David Suzuki," (accessed December 20, 2010).
59. Spencer, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*, 94.