

Charles Haddon Spurgeon's *Book of Nature*

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Abstract: This article explores how C. H. Spurgeon—one of England's most influential Victorian preachers—approached creation both as the Temple of God and as a means of communicating biblical truths. Spurgeon loved nature, however manifested, and for him, the natural world proclaimed the majesty and glory of God. He considered that to despise the creative work of God was, in a sense, to despise God himself. Not only was he captivated by creation, but he also transformed it into vivid parables and interpreted it as a channel for divine messages. The study highlights two key aspects of Spurgeon's engagement with nature. The first part examines how C. H. Spurgeon relates to nature, indicating its role in glorifying the majesty of God while also considering creation as the Temple of God. The second part explores how the images offered by nature become models for the transmission of his teachings.

Keywords: Charles Haddon Spurgeon, nature, creation, sermons

Introduction

The reason I address this topic is C. H. Spurgeon's evident interest in creation, as frequently reflected in his sermons through numerous references and clear associations between the created world and the creation of a new man in Christ (Rotaru, 2010, 7). Although his aim was to present spiritual truths, the way in which he used creation to do this will be emphasized by suggestive examples. Additionally, another reason for exploring this topic is the apparent lack of research in this direction, despite the fact that most of his biographers have briefly emphasized his love for creation. The purpose of this review, therefore, is to suggest at least two concrete directions regarding C. H. Spurgeon's attachment to nature, and to set the general framework for further, more in-depth investigations.

To achieve the first objective, starting from the references to nature, I will try to identify in his sermons and writings the way in which he approached it and the way in which he considered it to glorify God, distinguishing between the original perfect creation and the present, fallen one. To fulfill the second objective, his sermons and writings will be analyzed following suggestive examples of associations between nature and the teachings he transmitted, which will be presented both separately and thematically grouped in order to be able to give a general view of his correlations on this theme.

Nature - Temple of God

C. H. Spurgeon loved nature, whatever its mode of manifestation, and for him "in the great temple of nature, everything proclaims the majesty and glory of God" (Spurgeon, 1912, vol. 58, 373). Therefore, he considered that to despise God's creative work was, in a certain sense, to despise God himself (Spurgeon, 1912, vol.17, 445). He particularly adored stormy weather on the grounds that on such occasions the gates of heaven were opened, and lightning could enable him to look into the unseen (Harmon, 2013, 48). Moreover, when thunder was heard, he saw the voice of God vibrating through it. Dan Harmon, one of those

who wrote his biography, calls him a "child of nature" (Harmon, 2013, 85), respectively a "son of the soil" (Harmon, 2013, 203), explaining how much he loved to visit rural areas to delight in the natural landscape, plowed fields and brown earth. Moreover, it was the smell of dry hay that attracted him to it, although a significant part of his life had to be spent in the metropolis of London, which made him resent the difficulties of the enclosed spaces of the city.

For C. H. Spurgeon, the book of nature has three tabs: the heavens, the earth and the sea (Spurgeon, 1869a, 269), and with the help of the first tab (the heavens) one can observe the beauties of the other two tabs. He therefore believed that when we are to study creation, if we begin with the heavens we begin at the right place. Speaking of the heavenly bodies, especially the sun, moon and stars, C. H. Spurgeon asserted that these witnesses from above cannot be killed or silenced or swayed by the judgments of men, and from their high seats they constantly preach the knowledge of God. For him, these "itinerant preachers of God" (Spurgeon, 1869a, 270-271), in their journey, are either apostles confirming those who obey God or judges condemning those who worship idols. And though they do not speak articulate words, their teaching is illustrated and addresses the eye and the heart. Therefore, C. H. Spurgeon considered that the heathen have no excuse if they do not discover this language of theirs, which cannot be perceived by the human ear.

He esteemed the heavens and especially the sun because, in his vision, no other creature produces so great a joy to the earth as the sun, but nevertheless its glory points to the glory of God, owing to the fact that its light is borrowed from the Great Father of Lights (Spurgeon, 1869a, 271). Along with the moon and the other celestials, in their walk and in the circuit, they make over the whole earth, he judged that no man who lives beneath the furrows of heaven is beyond the bounds of the diocese of these "priests of the court of God" (Spurgeon, 1869a, 271). He saw in them either an accusing Nathan, a warning Jonah, or a threatening Elijah.

Returning to those who consider nature unclean, C. H. Spurgeon held that the earth on which Christ died and gave His body, to those who accept His sacrifice, takes on a new value, becoming a kind of lower heaven or lower chamber of the splendor and brightness of above. Using the argument that to the unclean all things become unclean, he pointed out that those who are not capable of admiring nature or studying its beauties are not conscious of the littleness of their own spirituality (Spurgeon, 1912, vol. 17, 445-446). For this reason, for him, a man strong in grace is able to identify the good in nature, though he recognized that there is evil. For C. H. Spurgeon, nature in itself cannot distance man from God, except in situations where he suffers from certain deficiencies or has a wrong perception of it.

Because David, in the nineteenth psalm, praises the revelation of God in nature, after which he praises the revelation of God in His Word, C. H. Spurgeon considered that there was a similarity between the two revelations, they became "two books of the same revelation" (Spurgeon, 1912, vol. 58, 373). This motivated him to apply to Scripture David's observations on nature. For him, he who wrote the second book, i.e., Scripture, also wrote the first, i.e., nature. Consequently, his question was: what right do we have to underestimate the first, since we have become accustomed to esteem only the second? Emphasizing that God cannot be accused of "inferior productions" (Spurgeon, 1912, vol. 17, 446), C. H. Spurgeon considered that we have but to regard all His works as complete masterpieces. And to make this connection more evident, C. H. Spurgeon observed that "there is no quarrel between nature and Scripture," but rather each side illustrates and institutes the other.

Analyzing the present state of creation, C. H. Spurgeon was of the opinion that "it is whole and perfect" (Spurgeon, 1868, vol. 14, 1-2). And though he recognized that it is profaned by the presence of sin, he rejoiced in it because it was created to be "the temple of God" (Spurgeon, 1868, vol. 14, 1-2). He also admitted that it was not the present creation

that God rated as very good, but that it was before man's fall into sin. He used the expression "serpent's mire" to describe the perversion of the original creation. God's curse, including God's curse on creation, he held responsible for the pain and hardships endured as a result of its perversion. Although he observes that thorns and briars are not lacking, and storms and other natural disasters make their presence felt, he nevertheless treats it as God reigning over all and allowing only what he deems necessary to happen.

Although creation has deteriorated and is suffering, C. H. Spurgeon believed that God could not be defeated and would make a new creation on the ruins of the first. For him, the first fruits of the new creation are the spirits of the saints, though their bodies have not yet reached transformation. C. H. Spurgeon hoped that at the resurrection the body would also be restored and that the whole earth would be freed from the curse and covered by new heavens (Spurgeon, 1891, vol. 37, 349-350). Moreover, because he had been interested in science since his youth, he was not concerned with harmonizing biblical texts with scientific research, but rather sought to identify a middle way that would allow fidelity to the biblical text, but also involvement with scientific discoveries (Breimaier, 2020, 177). In his vision, the God of nature is also the God of the Bible, and when the two are read correctly, there can be no conflict, but only unity and profound harmony (Spurgeon 1882, 88), although he admitted that the Bible does not use the language of science, but that of the common man (Spurgeon, 1876, 43).

Nature - An inspiration for communicating the truths of the Christian faith

An event in his life led one of C. H. Spurgeon's biographers (Dalimore, 1999, ix-x.) to believe that Spurgeon was not only enamored of nature, but also managed to transform what he saw in nature into living parables or even perceived them as providentially transmitted messages from above. Godfrey Holden Pike recounts that on one occasion, as Spurgeon struggled to choose the appropriate text for a sermon he was to deliver that evening, he anxiously approached the window. There, on the roof of the house opposite, he noticed several sparrows attacking a solitary canary. Immediately, he associated the passage in Jeremiah 12:9 with what he was seeing and considered it to be the text to address that evening. Based on this text, he preached about the persecutions of God's people, which can be compared to the canary attacked by sparrows. As a result, he declared that if Elijah had been fed by the ravens, the sparrows brought him the text he needed (Pike, 1879, 28.). The author therefore saw in Spurgeon not merely an observer of nature, but one who knew how to use it in the ministry entrusted to him.

Indeed, any attentive reader of Spurgeon's writings will readily observe how frequently he draws upon the natural world to communicate spiritual truths. As animals inhabit every environment, Spurgeon saw a possible hidden meaning in every element of nature, and almost anything in nature was suitable for conveying spiritual teaching. For example, in connection with the very presence of animals in all environments, C. H. Spurgeon believed that God in every place and in every historical period had people who were faithful to him (Spurgeon, 1891, vol. 37, 447-450). Specifically, just as in the barren places of the Alpine ridges wild goats lead their existence, so, too, he considered that in times of persecution there have been people whose feet may be compared to those of wild goats who defy all kinds of dangerous heights. Therefore, in speaking of the crises of the church throughout history, he was of the opinion that however dark the times, the Church of Christ was not in crisis, because there were always people who had spiritual life in them, though sometimes hidden.

The creation of the world was a particular preoccupation for him and was always used as a model for the transmission of his spiritual teachings. He therefore saw creation as a model for the new creation, with reference to the new birth (Spurgeon, 1875, 493-495).

He regarded God's methods of shaping the old creation as showing His ways in perfecting and preparing His people, who thus become new creatures in Christ Jesus. And as God first created light, so God sends light into the soul of man, as His first blessing, showing man his own innocence in the impossibility of escape by his own power (Rotaru, 2005a, 35-156). That same light, according to the vision of C. H. Spurgeon, reveals to him God's way of salvation, needing only faith. As mysterious as the way in which light was created, before the appearance of the sun or the moon (as means of its transmission), was the way in which the light of God penetrates the soul of man, removing misunderstanding and giving divine clarity and assurance. What C. H. Spurgeon completes is that light, once brought in, cannot be removed by anyone.

Also, for him, the way God created the world (Rotaru, 2005b, 112) is identical to the way God creates new life in Christ. If then God said, "Let there be light!" and it was, then the darkness in human life would automatically disappear when He commands it. The conclusion of C. H. Spurgeon was that just as Adam benefited by God's breath of life, so the sinner benefits by God's receiving new life. As the darkness did not resist God's command, so the sinner will capitulate to the divine command (Nettles, 2015, 216-217). And just as before creation the earth was desolate and empty, marked utterly by chaos, through the new birth, God borrows nothing from the old man, but makes an entirely new one. He does not repair or even add anything new to what was old, but, on the contrary, builds by his word an entirely new being (Spurgeon, 2009, 1-2).

Furthermore, analyzing the creation of the world out of nothing, C. H. Spurgeon argued that we too, even if we cannot normally guarantee the success of something by our own strength, must trust in God, who by the act of creation calls us to look to Him (Spurgeon, vol. 8, 1862, 423-426). Therefore, he believed that in the moments of life, when only faith in Him sustains us, the creation of the world out of nothing must help us not to leave our place, but to remain faithful to God. It also pointed out that although we are sometimes alone in the activities carried out, God, when He made the world, was also alone and becomes, again, through the act of creation becomes an example for us. Moreover, while every craftsman needs tools, God is no exception. For this reason, Spurgeon encouraged man not to rely on his own strength, but always to call on God's help, no matter how great his own shortcomings. What Spurgeon was suggesting is that each one must impart the Word of God in his own way, but sincerely, clearly and powerfully (Rotaru, 2012a, 5). This is because, he was emphasizing not the manner of delivery but rather the power that accompanies God's words.

Animals were also a preoccupation for him, becoming living models for our spiritual journey. Pointing to the link between man and nature, Spurgeon pointed out that some animals are superior to us in that they are better able to withstand periods of drought and do not depend so much on sowing and harvesting as we do, or even do not need the protective measures we do. Specifically, he was pointing to our dependence on water, on nature after all, demonstrating that without the resources the earth provides, we would not exist (Spurgeon, 1889, vol. 35, 625-632.). This dependence he used to show how weak man is without the intervention of God's help. Moreover, he compared sinful man who begins to feel the need of God's help, a need which he or others had not felt before, to the desperate cry of the thirsty animal in its desperate desire to quench its thirst caused by lack of water.

The rain and the need for water were also touched upon in order to show that all the labors of the spiritual farmer are in vain unless the rain comes down from Christ. In pursuance of this, he asserted that even if one's heart were as withered and withered as Aaron's rod, yet, if Christ should rain upon it, it would bud, blossom, and bring forth almonds (Spurgeon, 1869b, vol. 3, 104). Speaking of the positive consequences of God's passing through the midst of mankind and commenting on Psalm 65:11, C. H. Spurgeon pointed out that, in comparison with the conquering kings of old who left famine or

devastation in their wake, the King of Kings enriches the earth wherever he passes. Drawing on the Jewish metaphor of the clouds seen as God's chariots, he emphasized that when he moves, the rains fall on the earth leaving behind God - as the bearer of them - life and joy (Spurgeon, 1869b, vol. 3,106).

Even tree buds were for C. H. Spurgeon the bearers of valuable information. He compared them to the moment when the grace of God produces in the human heart a desire for change, causing him to set gracious purposes and holy resolutions (Spurgeon, 1895, vol. 41, 197). And though man cannot yet demonstrate complete perfection (Rotaru, 2016, 29-43), yet he tends toward something more. Thus, he criticized those who discouraged beginners by comparing them to birds that peck at the buds and thus do the garden much harm. At the same time, he urged those at the beginning to keep growing in order to reach full fruiting. For him, one more bud could signify the moment when, if there were only one Christian left in the world, the church would grow again from it, just as from one seed, in time, many grow.

C. H. Spurgeon also used the alternation of the seasons as a model to explain the changes in the life of faith that the believer experiences (Spurgeon, 1895, vol. 41, 193-195). For him, if spring begins with rains that prepare the ground, so the work of God's grace reaches into the human heart to soften it and to make it capable of the seed to be planted there. He noted that although periods of rainfall are labeled as undesirable, though they benefit the soil so much, the unpleasant experiences in our lives can do us great good in the long run. He also observed that the manner of manifestation of divine grace differs from man to man, just as the type of rainfall differs. Continuing to speak of the image of rain, he pointed out that although in excess it is harmful, God's grace will never destroy, just as God himself has pledged never to destroy the earth with water. He also deplored the hearts of those who did not accept the Word of God, comparing them to the rock which, although it benefits from the rain, the latter runs off and is not absorbed.

Remaining in the area of alternations, the passing of days and nights one after the other, for him, could suggest the rapid passage of time or the changing nature of earthly things (including the brevity of joy or pain) or our inability to recall in detail how this time has passed or even the imminence of eternity. In Spurgeon's view, this day-night oppositional relationship may suggest several truths, among which I recall: "Day bids us labor, and night reminds us to prepare for our last home; day bids us work for God, and night invites us to rest in Him; day bids us seek the endless day, and night warns us to escape the eternal night" (Spurgeon, 1869a, vol. 1, 270-271). Thus, these remarks, though non-homogeneous refer to the difference between the lower and the higher, with the exhortation to focus on prioritizing the kingdom of God in our lives.

However, a central place in C. H. Spurgeon has been occupied by the sun which lights and warms the whole earth, and which in his vision represents Jesus (Spurgeon, 1869a, vol. 1, 272), dwelling in the midst of revelation, dwelling among men in all his brightness. Rejoicing, as the Bridegroom of His church (Rotaru, 2012b,5), He reveals Himself to men, and, like a champion, wins to Himself a people. He is making a circuit of mercy, blessing the remotest corners of the earth; there are no wanted souls, however degraded and depraved, to be denied the cozy warmth and blessedness of His love. In the end, even death itself will feel the power of His presence, and revive the bodies of the saints, and this fallen earth will be restored to its spotless glory.

Conclusions

From the analysis above, it is evident that C. H. Spurgeon had a deep love for nature and regarded its primary purpose as being the glorification of God. For this reason, he sought to use all that creation provided for the glory of God. In the first part, therefore, we have

analyzed C. H. Spurgeon's love of nature as the Temple of God, the value he attached to creation, and his own model of approach. I showed that his model placed great value on the heavens as the first and headmost leaf in the book of nature. In addition, I have mentioned the esteem in which he held the existing creation, especially in the light of its connection with God as Creator (Rotaru, 2005c, 295-324), namely with Jesus Christ, whose blood flowed on this earth. In the second part, we have shown how present are the references to nature in the argumentation and explanation of the biblical teachings transmitted. In his view, the whole of creation has something to pass on to humanity, although its voice is often unrecognized by humans. The inability to identify the revelation transmitted by creation he attributed to spiritual immaturity. For Spurgeon, nature was as precious as Scripture, because God as the author and sustainer of both cannot be contradicted or denied. Moreover, he was firmly convinced that God would restore the present creation to its former state. For him, the apparent contradictions between the different versions of science and the biblical writings were not capable of destabilizing his belief, since any inadequacies he considered to be due to the language used or to other strictly formal matters. As a result, he saw a strong connection between science and Scripture.

As shown throughout this analysis, Spurgeon's ability to associate elements of nature with spiritual truths gave his message a distinctive character. While he sometimes offered multiple interpretations, his ultimate aim was to put creation as much as possible at the service of the Gospel. This repeated use of nature as a model for the truths he conveyed may suggest once again how concerned he was with nature's treasure. Although his own model for interpreting elements of nature may undergo adaptations and modifications, in general, his interpretations demonstrate the skill with which he was able to bring to life some of nature's poses, as well as the skill with which he found the right images for the teachings he transmitted. I believe that those elements of nature that best fit his doctrinal preferences were the most worn.

This study invites further investigation into the role of nature in the life, theology, and ministry of C. H. Spurgeon. Future research might trace the ways in which he was influenced in his theological writing and ministry by his rural origins, as well as by his special attraction to nature—an attraction that seems to have been both inherited and cultivated along the way. Another line of inquiry may be C. H. Spurgeon's consistency—specifically, his consistent use of nature as a means of communicating spiritual truths. In addition, because his sermons are imbued with examples from nature, novel associations can be identified that may inspire both nature lovers and those who wish to use examples from nature in communicating biblical truth.

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