Cultivating a Personal Environmental Ethic

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Genesis 1:31 –
God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

John 3:16 –
For God so loved the world...
Environmental Themes in the Bible


- **Creation** (by God, who called it “good” – Gen 1:31)
- **Stewardship** (God gives humans responsibility for creation – Gen 1:28)
- **Provision** (of God for humankind thru creation – Gen 1:29; Mt 5:45)
- **Pleasure** (of God in his creation – Jn 3:16, Rev 4:11)
- **Praise** (all of creation praises the Creator – Ps 69:34; Rev 5:13)
- **Authority** (of God over his creation – Lk 8:25)
- **Witness** (of nature to God’s authority & provision – Acts 14:17)
- **Consequences** (to creation – including humans - for mankind’s wickedness – Rev 11:18)
- **Perspective** (God is above his creation – Ps 113:3-6)
“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
Matthew 6:21
Rare Earth – Our Biosphere

- abundant water
- insulating atmosphere
- protective magnetic field
- perfect distance from the sun
Ecclesiastes
ch. 1, vs. 5-7

Air

Water

Land

Life

The Earth System

M. Ruzek, 1999
Environmental Challenges

- Energy resources
- Water pollution
- Water resources
- Air pollution
- Climate change
- Deforestation
- Loss of biodiversity
Energy Challenges

- Fossil fuels
  - Total = $10^{23}$ Joules
  - Current consumption rate
    = $11.7 \times 10^{12}$ Watts (J/s)
  - Time left = 270 years

- Alternatives:
  - solar, wind, geothermal, hydroelectric, biomass, nuclear?
Water Challenges

- Water pollution
- Water resources
Air Issues

- Air pollution
- Acid rain
Climate Change

- average temperatures are increasing
- widespread melting of snow and ice
- average annual Arctic sea ice extent has decreased by 2.7% per decade in winter and 7.4% per decade in summer over the last 30 years
- mountain glaciers and snow cover have decreased
- average global sea levels are rising temperature increase is widespread; greatest at higher northern latitudes
- land regions have warmed faster than oceans
- increase in intense tropical cyclone activity in the North Atlantic since 1970
Deforestation

1985 1992

TROPICAL RAIN FOREST DESTRUCTION
Southern Amazon River Basin, Rondônia, Brazil
Loss of Biodiversity
Why Protect Other Species?

- Dr. Randy Van Dragt, Calvin College, 2008

- **Anthropocentric ethic:**
  - species are of value to humans

- **Biocentric ethic:**
  - all living things have intrinsic value

- **Deep ecology:**
  - holistic quality of nature

- **Eco-feminism:**
  - nurturing quality of nature
Oelschlaeger’s Dominant Western Social Matrix

- Nonhuman creation has instrumental value only
- Short-term economic interests override long-term concerns
- Environmental risks are acceptable if they are monetarily beneficial
- Environmental risks pose no limits to growth
- Science & technology will ultimately allow us to maintain essential processes of the biosphere within acceptable limits
- The politics of interest will be sufficient to assure the best uses of technology
Why should we care about the Earth?

Ball’s Typology:

- Wise Use
- Anthropocentric Stewardship
- Caring Management
- Servant Stewardship

(Reverend Jim Ball, Evangelical Environmental Network)
Wise Use

Emphases:
- maximize human benefit
- stewardship language
- humans as rulers over creation
- humans to make efficient use of resources
- condescension of humans toward the rest of creation

(Rev. Jim Ball & Dr. Randy Van Dragt)
Anthropocentric Stewardship

Emphases:
• human redemption has implications for the rest of creation
• humans have highest value
• the rest of creation also has God-given value
• leaving resources for future generations
• human arrogance toward creation

(Rev. Jim Ball & Dr. Randy Van Dragt)
Caring Management

**Emphases:**
- Humans are lords and servants of creation
- Cosmic redemption of ALL creation
- Humans made in the image of God
- Human responsibility for creation
- Sustainable use of creation
- Human paternalism toward the rest of creation

*(Rev. Jim Ball & Dr. Randy Van Dragt)*
Servant Stewardship

Emphases:
- God is creator and redeemer of ALL creation
- peace for all creation
- humans are servants, preservers, nurturers of creation
- human uniqueness downplayed
- Christ-like servanthood is stressed
- human responsibility is emphasized over human priority
- human attitude of humility

(Rev. Jim Ball & Dr. Randy Van Dragt)
Oelschlaeger’s Challenge

“I think of religion, or more specifically the church... as being more important in the effort to conserve life on earth than all the politicians and experts put together. The church may be, in fact, our last, best chance. My conjecture is this: There are no solutions for the systemic causes of ecocrisis, at least in democratic societies, apart from religious narrative.”
The REAL Question: “What SHOULD I do?”
A Personal Environmental Ethic

• How we view:
  – God relative to Creation
    • Provider of resources for human use?
    • Creator, Lover, & Redeemer of ALL creation?
  – The Value, Moral Status of Rest of Creation
    • Value as resources for humans only?
    • God-given value as fellow-members of Creation, worthy of Christ’s redemption?
  – Human Role relative to Rest of Creation
    • Users, exploiters?
    • Servants, preservers, nurturers, pray-ers, teachers?
  – Attitude toward Rest of Creation
    • Condescension and arrogance?
    • Humility, appreciation, contentment, delight & care?
References


Further Reading


