

# Ecotheology 101

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Believe it or not, Christianity has been blamed for the earth-destroying tendencies of modern society. (*The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* by Lynn White. 1967. Science 155: 1203-1207.) The idea is that by placing humans at the pinnacle of Creation, and the rest of Creation under our dominion, the Judeo-Christian tradition sets the stage for an exploitative relationship with Earth. An absent God—one who does not live in the trees, or the waters, or the earth, but is removed to Heaven—further compounds a tendency to think that our treatment of the biosphere need only be utilitarian. But is this really what the Gospels teach?

In Genesis, it is abundantly clear that God had other plans in mind. First of all, after each act of creation, God declares that “it is good.” (Genesis 1:10, :12, :18, :21, :25) This would seem to suggest that desecration of God’s Creation is counter-indicated for people of faith. Secondly, after the Flood, God establishes a covenantal relationship between Godself, Humankind, and Creation. “I am establishing my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you...” (Genesis 9:9-11) Even the name, Adam, is taken from the Hebrew word, *adamah*, meaning earth. The first human was named “earthling!”

When we look to the Biblical concept of Shalom, often inadequately translated as “peace,” the threefold covenant between God, Humankind, and the Creation becomes even clearer. Jesus clearly instructs us to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40) as a primary expression of our commitment to follow his teaching. Because the covenant includes the Creation, it has been suggested that we must include all of Creation in our consideration of how we treat the most vulnerable among us. (Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997 ISBN 0-8006-3076-9) This would include endangered species, coral reefs, the Amazon basin, and the biosphere itself. It would also include the poorest people on the planet, who produce much less of the damage than those with greater access to resources, and who already disproportionately bear the burden of declining ecosystems, scarce resources, toxic waste, and rising seas. Not only does Christian earth stewardship help to mitigate issues connected to racism, poverty, and sexism, but one of the biggest contributors to violence on the globe is disputes over increasingly scarce resources such as arable land, water, and fossil fuels.

Paul reminds us that “...the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s.” (I Corinthians 10:26, Psalms 24:1) The mandate “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5) with Jesus’ reminder, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18). Love of God entails love of God’s Creation. In the words of William Penn, “It would go a great way to caution and direct people in the use of the world, that they were better studied and known in the Creation of it. For how could Man find the Confidence to abuse it, while they should see the Great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part thereof?” (William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude*, 1692)

Creation care is a spiritual discipline that expresses of our commitment as people of faith. It requires all our heart, soul and might.