

Behaving and believing: the Bible, religion, and the environmental crisis



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Why religion matters...

“The way religions matter in public is not simply as sets of beliefs. They matter because they motivate their members and as communities and networks that enable them to take action... But beyond motivations and networks, religions call the attention of both members and non-members to important themes and questions. These are not just on specifically religious topics. They concern the morality of money and migration, the importance of civility and ethics in the media, the nature of community and the obligations we owe each other, how we should think about race relations and how we should think about sex and gender.” [And, we might add, the environmental crisis...!]

Craig Colhoun, at <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/how-does-religion-matter-in-britains-secular-public-sphere/>

Genesis 1.26-28

(New Revised Standard Version)

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Gen. 1:26-28 NRS)

Influence and changing interpretations

- sense of human uniqueness and distinct dignity (made 'in the image of God')
- inspiring the rise of modern Western science: the human vocation to understand, manage, 'subdue', and control nature for human benefit
- however, in an age of ecological crisis, perhaps problematic?



Lynn White Jr.



- ◆ 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' (1967)
- ◆ This article argues that our Western Christian worldview supports and encourages the exploitation of nature.

‘...[Christianity] not only established a dualism of man
[sic] and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that
man exploit nature for his proper ends... ‘

‘[Western] Christianity is the most anthropocentric
religion the world has seen.’

Christianity therefore ‘bears a huge
burden of guilt’.

Lynn White Jr., ‘The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis’, *Science* 155
(1967) pp. 1205-206.

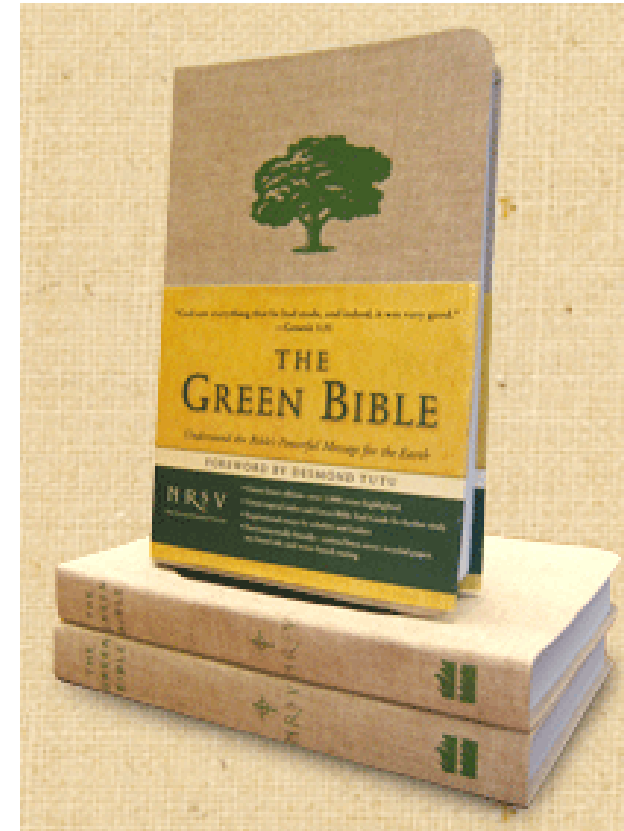
Re-reading Genesis as ‘stewardship’?

“Dominion means responsible stewardship. God gave humans a special role and responsibility as stewards of his creation.”

The Green Bible, p. I-26 (Calvin B. DeWitt)

“our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #116



'The End of the World' and all that?

2 Peter 3.10-13

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.¹¹ Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?¹³ But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

Romans 8.19-23

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Time and telos

“To understand why we currently crave depictions of our imminent demise, it helps — like always — to return to history. Not surprisingly, much of our fascination with wholesale death and destruction can be traced back to the all-time best-seller, the Bible.”

<http://interactive.nydailynews.com/2016/02/why-hollywood-obsessed-with-apocalypse/>



Save souls and not the environment?



“We believe Earth and its ecosystems—created by God’s intelligent design and infinite power and sustained by His faithful providence—are robust, resilient, self-regulating, and self-correcting, admirably suited for human flourishing, and displaying His glory. Earth’s climate system is no exception. Recent global warming is one of many natural cycles of warming and cooling in geologic history.”

The Cornwall Alliance, Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming

← Note the text cited here!

The 'threat' of environmentalism...?

“without doubt one of the greatest threats to society and the church today is the multifaceted environmentalist movement”

“A biblical response to one of the greatest deceptions of our day”

(See further <https://cornwallalliance.org>;
<https://www.resistingthegreendragon.com/>)



Reclaiming the 'end':

Images of new heavens and new earth are reclaimed as images of *transformation not destruction*:

“If the present creation will not be destroyed but renewed, it would seem important to care for it today”. (Thomas Finger)

‘Care for Creation’

(e.g., A Rocha, Ecocongregation)



Peace, William Strutt (1825-1915) [from Teignmouth, Devon!]



Climate Sunday

Climate Sunday

Could your church host a Climate Sunday anytime between September 6 2020 and September 4 2021?

Be part of the biggest mobilisation of churches for climate action ever and join 1000s of churches across the UK to address the climate crisis.

[Join the Eco Church Community](#)

Conclusions

- religious convictions, worldviews, shape attitudes and actions in the world more than we often think – even at the level of our conception of time, the time in which our lives are lived, and our sense that “the end of the world” might be coming upon us.
- religious texts – and the Christian Bible in particular – carry significant legacies through history, are open to a range of interpretations, and are interpreted afresh in light of new challenges.
- our awareness of ecological crisis and unsustainable patterns of human living prompts new ways of understanding the religious traditions that in turn shape many people’s beliefs and actions... At least in the hope that such traditions do not hinder our response to this crisis.