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## Protestant Christianity and the Bible as Wisdom for Earth Environmental Stewardship

### Protestantyzm i Biblia jako źródło mądrości w zarządzaniu środowiskiem na Ziemi

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**Abstract:** Since the 1967, after Lynn White Jr.'s seminal article in science, entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," Christianity has received academic and popular criticism, for having, supposedly, served as a major driver for our current ecological crisis. Contrary to White's negative historical account of the role of Christianity in environmental affairs, in this article, I offer a rebuttal by stressing that, actually, Christianity is a major source of wisdom towards building a more sustainable Earth stewardship. White's biggest mistake was not telling apart what Christianity teaches from what self-ascribed Christians think and do about the environment. Christianity itself explains this paradox: People's right and wrong doings are solely the result of their own choices and flaws due to sin, and not because Judeo-Christian traditions or the Bible lack values and principles that are benevolent to the environment. In conclusion, White's views on the interplay between Christianity and Ecology are fundamentally mistaken, mainly for his lack (or dismissal) of a deeper knowledge of biblical principles for environmental stewardship.

**Keywords:** Christianity and Ecology, Bible and Ecology, Lynn White Jr., loving dominion, caring for nature, stewardship

**Streszczenie:** Od 1967 roku, czyli od publikacji przełomowego artykułu naukowego Lynna White'a Jr., zatytułowanego "Historyczne korzenie kryzysu ekologicznego", chrześcijaństwo spotyka się z krytyką zarówno ze strony środowisk akademickich jak i nieakademickich jako rzekoma główna siła napędowa obecnego kryzysu ekologicznego. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą polemiki z tym negatywnym obrazem przedstawionym przez White'a w kwestii roli chrześcijaństwa w kryzysie klimatycznym. Artykuł podkreśla, że w rzeczywistości chrześcijaństwo może być uznane za główne źródło mądrości w procesie wypracowywania zrównoważonych sposobów zarządzania Ziemią. Głównym zarzutem wobec White'a jest to, że nie dokonał on rozróżnienia między nauką chrześcijańską, a samozwańczymi ideami oraz działaniami pojedynczych chrześcijan w obszarze środowiska. Samo chrześcijaństwo wyjaśnia ten paradoks: dobre i złe uczynki ludzi są wyłącznie wynikiem ich indywidualnych wyborów i wad wynikających z grzechu, a nie z braku wartości i zasad sprzyjających środowisku w tradycji judeochrześcijańskiej czy w Biblii. Podsumowując, poglądy White'a na temat powiązań pomiędzy chrześcijaństwem, a ekologią są całkowicie błędne, głównie z powodu jego braku lub odrzuceniu wiedzy na temat wskazówek postępowania człowieka względem środowiska naturalnego zawartych w Biblii.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Chrześcijaństwo i ekologia, Biblia i ekologia, Lynn White Jr., panowanie z miłością, troska o przyrodę, włodarzowanie

## Introduction

Since the publication of “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (White Jr. 1967), charging Christianity with its alleged harmful impacts on the environment has become commonplace both in academia and popular culture. Although well-known, White Jr.’s main thesis against Christianity is worth recalling in this article for the sake of developing the core arguments. According to him, believing the world was created by God, as a “gift or blessing”, for humankind, and also that humanity is the pinnacle of creation, forged an ideology for irrational exploitation of nature. White also claimed that because the Christian idea that life on Earth will come to an end through divine intervention; there would be no reason for attempting to reverse any environmental crisis; after all, God will create a new heaven for those who were spiritually saved by God’s grace. Lynn White Jr., also stated that because, as he claimed, the root cause of environmental degradation in the west was mostly religious (or moral), he argued that the solution lies in reinventing Christianity or replacing it with new spiritualities, allegedly more closely related to nature.

Although deeply biased and flawed, as I will further argue, some of White’s provocative ideas still echo in academia, when it comes to debates on the role that religious values and beliefs may have in shaping people’s environmental perceptions and behavior. I contend that despite White’s continuing influence – mostly for having raised fundamental questions regarding reasonable connections between symbolic and material aspects of reality, he fell short of providing an adequate theological response for the nexus between Christianity and environmental degradation.

As early as 1970, Francis Schaeffer and Udo Middelmann published their book *Pollution and the Death of Man*, providing the first, and perhaps, until now the most comprehensive protestant Christian response ever released, calling into question the harsh critiques made by Lynn White Jr. Their

response pointed out White’s philosophical and theological “blind spots”, mostly his underlying narrative suggesting that one should move towards religiosities entrenched in “pantheism”, “animism”, and the like. They were also able to convincingly argue that, to the contrary, Christianity carries both moral and practical solutions to environmental problems. Schaeffer and Middelmann foresaw what today have been perceived as common-sense conclusions: that all people, non-Christians as well, should never be the destroyers of nature. We should treat nature with an overwhelming respect, as it is God’s work manifested on Earth. Humans may cut down a tree to build a house, or to make a fire to keep the family warm, but we should not cut down the tree just to cut down the tree.

Ever since, much academic literature has dealt with White’s cosmological thesis – which assumes religious faith and thinking to be the root cause of today’s environmental problems. This epistemological choice has stimulated responses from many religions and spiritual traditions from around the world, ranging from Buddhism, Hinduism, Baha’i, Mormonism, Islam to Judaism (Jenkins 2016, 26). Scholars in the field are convinced that if it was not for White’s article in science, there would likely be no clear timeline or beginning of the growing interdisciplinary academic and intellectual enterprise named “Religion and Ecology” (Grim and Tucker 2014). Lately, we have been witnessing a growing interest in Christian Ecotheology, including a focus on Biblical ecological hermeneutics and exegesis; a research area gathering scholars from diverse theological backgrounds, mostly, within Catholicism, orthodox Christianity, and evangelicalism, both from the global north and south (Marlow and Harris 2022).

Commenting on Lynn White Jr.’s impact, Kidwell (2022, 14) hopes that the next half-century of scholarship on Religion and Ecology will bring a series of seminal articles that are not reacting to White’s work, but rather seeking new frames of reference that are not

self-defensive or self-flagellating, but integrative, dynamic and creative. I understand this position; however, I do not completely agree with it. Why does this matter? Because after seeing and experiencing, first hand, some of the cultural impacts of faulty theories, such as the idea that protestant Christianity is intrinsically harmful to the environment, I have concluded that, at least in Brazil; unless someone shows repeatedly, based on solid evidence the opposite – that protestant Christianity is good to the environment, ordinary people, academics in general (and corporate media) will hardly abandon their deeply rooted prejudice.

Let us suppose, for instance, that evangelicals in Brazil (and elsewhere) were in fact consistently against environmental protection; would this pattern prove White's thesis correct? As we are going to see in this article, of course not, given that being at odds with nature protection is not a biblical doctrine, let alone a practice legitimated by any known Judeo-Christian tradition. It has been largely shown by recent scholarship that Christianity is indisputably one of the most significant drivers of pro-environmental thinking and behavior around the world (Sadowski 2020, 8-11).

In this article, I advance the proposition that the Bible is indisputably a major source of ecological wisdom for Earth sustainability. On the one hand, the reflections exposed here are part of the theoretical framework that are informing my own and ongoing research project entitled "The Ecological Footprints of Christianity in Brazil." On the other hand, some commentaries I make in this article also express overarching remarks from the qualitative analysis of this project. In reality, most of the article can be read as an exercise or essay in ecological hermeneutics and exegesis around critical ecological terms and passages addressing peoples-environmental relations in the Bible. I am aware of many controversies around the theme, for instance, the biblical dominion mandate. Likewise, I am conscious of relevant studies which have dealt with

this and other environmentally disputed ecologically-oriented topics in the Bible. However, the goal of this article is to address a few ecotheological aspects in the Bible that are often neglected by critics of Christianity and even by professional Christian apologists. Most aspects I discuss in this article refer to misleading theological perspectives and logical fallacies originating from Lynn White's own interpretation on the ecological impacts of Christianity.

### **1. Humankind dwells in nature, but is not nature itself**

Humans are biologically constituted, however, cannot be reduced to "mere" nature, be it genes, matter and energy and so on. Being formed as *Imago Dei*, spiritual and moral creatures; like it or not, we stand above nature. We share a biological reality, which inescapably attaches us to complex ecological web of relations to other beings and Earth itself. We are spiritual and moral beings who are "trapped" into the beautiful miracle of existing biologically.

Christian faith and tradition advocate that if one reads the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) seeking for a coherent understanding of the role of humans in nature, and that of nature itself for humanity, while asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it will inevitably become clear to the reader that scriptures do not prescribe a list of "do's and don'ts" on the use of the environment; but rather, presents everlasting principles on how people should carry on relationship with each other, as well as with the created world, beyond humanity itself.

The Bible was clearly not written as a scientific compendium on socio-environmental issues. Nevertheless, in the same way that the Bible has inspired philosophers, theologians, and even given rise to the advent of modern science; it contains enough teachings, doctrines and stories to guide Christians (and all humanity) to deal properly with diverse, and oftentimes, unforeseen environmental and social issues. I believe that only by principle-learning approaches,



as exposed in the Bible, we may advance solutions to socioecological problems, because facts change, while principles are kept as doctrine and proven by tradition, providing a framework for ordering priorities, as well as a way for unveiling the hidden meaning of things, and thus, enabling for ethically informed standards for decision-making of current and unforeseen events.

Many scholars have already pursued in-depth analyses of what the Bible and Christian traditions say on the environment (Schaeffer and Middelman 1970; Stoll 2015; Taylor 2016; Sadowski 2020; Kidwell 2022). Scriptures referring to environmental decision-making are too numerous to be exhaustively explored here. Nevertheless, it is worth remembering, for instance, that the Old Testament oftentimes depicts the people of Israel, and also the Gentiles, making both good and bad decisions on the use of land or the treatment of animals. A key aspect is that, the Bible never hides what is considered wrong. To the very contrary, it highlights and tells right from wrong, indicating what is good in God's eyes. The Bible clearly states which principles should be employed to govern healthy and fair relations between us (humans) and the non-human world. For Bible-believing Christians, the main reason for textual authority on ecological matters, lies in the fact that the Lord Himself, the God of Israel is the sole owner of everything He created *ex nihilo*, for His own glory, out of his eternal and immeasurable power (Ps 8:3; 24; 50:10-11; 102:25; John 1:3).

Scriptures also explain our origins, the beginning of good and evil, and the destiny of all creation. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul emphasized that all scripture is inspired by God and useful for ministering the truth, for rebuking evil, for correcting errors, and for teaching the right way to live (2 Tim 3:16). Put simply, the Bible provides a comprehensive worldview by declaring: (1) where we came from, (2) how we should live, (3) what is the meaning of life, and (4) where we are heading to after physical death. As one becomes aware of God's

presence and intervention through history, as much as His promises, it begins to be clear what special place and purpose there is for humanity in nature/creation. In this process, we recognize that performing the role destined for humans requires exercising a loving dominion over other creatures. By acknowledging the biblical meaning of nature and humanity, we feel deep compassion towards other living beings; even though, we simultaneously understand that despite nature's great importance for the Creator (and for humanity), both animals and plants are not the central focus of God's love, care and promises. Most important is that the Lord has called humanity (not only Christians) to care for and properly manage nature.

Mankind inaction and reckless dominion over nature are absolutely unacceptable by the God of the Bible. Realizing that we are not alone on planet Earth, which is home to millions of other magnificent creatures, should be enough to wake us all up to the calling to look after everything that was passed on to humanity (not only to Christians) as blessings from Yahweh, who is the ultimate (and original) proponent of "global sustainability", since all He created was good and perfect, before sin entered the world. Even though one may argue that most texts in the Bible are centered on God's prospects for and promises to humanity, which is true, it is also manifest, to any cautious observer, that Christianity's worldview offers all the necessary and sufficient principles for Earth stewardship.

A key point of contention is the biblical declaration that humans occupy the central position in nature; actually, we are situated above nature, because humanity is the pinnacle of creation, and was made in the image and likeness of God; which in turn, makes us the unique representatives (or ambassadors) of the Creator on Earth. I claim that instead of being a barrier to a proper nature stewardship, nowadays called sustainability, being at the center of the Lord's preoccupation has brought about with it not only

benefits, but rather, the obligation to always carefully manage nature; according to God's principles, not based on our own will. I contend that even those who reject the biblical dominion mandate with contempt, in practice, consciously or not, almost always lead their own livelihoods in various ways exercising dominion over nature, just because it is unavoidable. I will return to this idea.

In Genesis 1:26 it is written that, "God said, let us make man in our image, according to our likeness, and rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every reptile that moves upon the earth." Continuing, in Genesis 1:28, it is also written that "God blessed them [human beings] and 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 animal that moves upon the earth."

Both the Old and New Testament provide a straightforward understanding of the special place humans occupy. It is remarkable that according to the Biblical narrative of creation, upon making other living beings, God saw that it was "good"; however, when bringing mankind into existence, God declared that it was "very good" (Gen 1:31). There is no doubt in the Bible that we are God's special creatures, and, yet, below angels (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:7). Many passages highlight that, in God's "eyes", humans have way more value than any other creatures (Luke 12:24; Matt 12:12; I Cor 9:9).

This previous narrative is the first direct declaration that makes a major linguistic and ontological distinction between humanity and all non-human creatures. The core message conveyed here is that we are not only superior in value but also deeply distinct from other living beings; although we dwell on Earth in biological bodies just like animals or plants. Regardless of the fact that Yahweh values all creation, only humans are moral and spiritual creatures, the true "children" of God, made in His image and likeness. The apostle Paul warned us that

humans are not like animals: "Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another." (1 Cor 15:39).

It is noteworthy that in order to bring plants and animals into existence, making them "living souls", God commands the earth ("erets") to produce such creatures (Gen 1:11; 1:24). The earth ("erets" or "soil"), through which the Lord formed animals and plants, does not correspond to Earth (as in "globe" or "planet Earth"); let alone the usages by deep ecologists, and new agers, when they talk about "Gaia". According to scriptures, Earth is neither an entity/deity nor has it any supernatural powers. Genesis makes it clear that God, through His power and wisdom, used the earth ("soil") to produce life.

Genesis 2:7 reads that, "Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being". In the process, God utilizes only the dust of the soil, not the earth itself ("erets"). In practical terms, dust means ashes, which corresponds to the most fertile part of any soil. The mosaic laws prescribe that after the seventh year of cultivation, any soil under cultivation should rest in order to recover its fertility properties (Ex 23:10,11; Lev 25:14-30). What should amaze us is that such a precise knowledge on soil management was achieved and applied successfully thousands of years before there was any scientific knowledge about soil chemistry. Besides that, to this day, ashes are widely regarded as one of the best natural plant fertilizers. From a theological standpoint, one would argue that by creating man "out of dust", Yahweh intended to symbolically "fertilize" earth with a creature made "out of dust" in His own image.

Contrary to what is clearly stated in the Bible, ecocentric criticism (Washington, Taylor, Kopnina, Cryer and Piccolo 2017, 35-39) continue to erroneously assume that Christian theology draws on the following (false) syllogism: Christianity is

anthropocentric; anthropocentrism is necessarily detrimental to the environment; therefore, Christian believers are careless when it comes to environmental protection. On the one hand, critics are right in affirming that the Bible is mostly concerned with the communion between God and humankind. On the other hand, as we have seen, the Bible clearly states that humankind (specially Christians) must take care of Earth and its biodiversity. How do we conciliate both statements? I argue that there is only one way out to this apparent dilemma: humanity has to exert correct biblical dominion mandate; while rejecting the dominion concept twisted by deep ecologists as well as White's followers.

A careful observation of the scriptures, avoiding "hermeneutic juggling", will reveal deep "socioecological" wisdom, such as we find in the Psalms. To exemplify its endless richness, Nawrot (2023) wrote a full-length article on varying aspects of Bible-oriented human-environmental relations drawing only on Psalm 24:1-2. Psalm 104, with its 35 verses, is another superb illustration of beautiful and profound "ecological poetry" in the Bible. It highlights Yahweh's concern and deep love for all creation, beyond mankind, which includes animals, plants, river, clouds, mountains and the like. But one should beware that the biblical love has very little resemblance with what is being proposed by deep ecologists, ever since Arne Naess (1973).

Throughout scriptures it is evident that God created nature for His own glory, but also for the use, appreciation and benefit of humankind. Nevertheless, the Bible also tells that due to man's sin and fall, this Earth will be destroyed and replaced by God's new plan for humankind. Confirming multiple old testament prophecies and Jesus' own teachings, in Revelation 21:1, the apostle John wrote that he "saw a new heaven, and a new Earth. For the first heaven and the first Earth have passed, and the sea is no more."

## 2. Nature declares the glory of God

Beyond what is extensively recorded in the Bible, I am confident that a careful observation of nature, combined with logical thinking and dialectical reasoning may eventually lead anyone to universal truths; which in essence, is the main task of philosophy (de Carvalho 2012). This task would ultimately take us back to Biblical universal truths about nature and humankind (Pearcey 2004).

I suggest the following questions as a way to help unveiling God-humans-nature relations without drawing exclusively on Bible narratives. Nevertheless, to even consider these questions, as a common ground, one must take theism as a premise, as opposed to materialistic ones. Could God create human beings below animals and plants, and yet mandate that all humanity take care of nature? For the sake of simple logic, absolutely not; afterall, irrational and amoral beings cannot, by definition, look after moral, spiritual and rational creatures like humans. It turns out that there is no alternative: (1) we either let nature take its course, even if it prevents the flourishing of life and human societies – due to various weather conditions, hurricanes, landslides, cold, heat, mosquitoes and so on; or (2) we exercise some kind of control (dominion) that interrupts natural processes that tend to expel humans from most "purely" natural habitats; that is, those places on Earth without human interference.

Another set of important questions include one about whether God could have created nature for nature's own sake without humanity? To provide a quick response, it is a simple no; unless God decided beforehand that there should be no deep spiritual communion between God Himself and creation. Afterall, if God had created nature for nature itself, without humans, one of the unavoidable questions that follow is: who then could enjoy nature's beauty and splendor, besides God himself? In other words, what would be the point of an artist creating astonishingly beautiful paintings if the art is put away

from other humans, the only creatures hard-wired to love beauty? In other terms, why would an engineer design a car that no one could ever drive? And, finally, could God have created nature for Himself only? Yes, absolutely. However, if this was the case, why then would God make Man in His image and likeness, while declaring us as the only “garden keepers” among billions of other creatures? I believe that these and other difficult questions may take us to a unifying answer, which considers the idea that without Man, the creation of nature by God would seem improbable and meaningless, at least from a biblical and philosophical standpoint.

### **3. The value and meaning of nature in the Bible**

One aspect oftentimes neglected by secular and ecocentric critiques towards Christianity is the fact that, although animals and plants are neither spiritual nor moral beings such as humans, all creatures have value beyond utilitarianism, simply because they were created and made “good” by God. Although no one has ever seen non-humans acting spiritually, the Bible says that animals and plants, not only will take part in the new creation, but will also eternally praise the Lord, along with humans and angels (Ps 150:6). In this regard, Revelation 5:13 is noteworthy: “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

The Bible is clear in stating that animals are valuable to God, and from this derives the need for man to care for them with zeal. As stated in Proverbs 12:10, the Lord attributes virtue to the man who takes care of his animals: “The righteous care for the needs of their animals, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.” In addition to their use value in human work and food, if animals were not precious to the Lord, not only would God not have created them with extreme beauty and in abundance, but

neither would He have employed them for atoning sacrifices. We should remember that in the Old Testament, forgiveness of sins of those who repented and confessed them, accompanied by reconciliation with God, was done through the sacrifice of an innocent victim – the victim was an animal, figure and symbol of the crucified Christ (Lev 1-7; Heb 9:19-28).

Before we proceed, we should keep in mind that since Jesus’ self-sacrifice on the cross, any ritualistic animal killing has been banned in Christianity. Interestingly, in Brazil, there are afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé, well-known for its colorful and music rituals, in which animal sacrifices play an important role as ritual offerings to orishas, and yet, it is only Christianity that continues under scrutiny, for supposedly being at odds with animal welfare, and nature at large.

### **4. The meaning of nature in the Bible**

Having pointed out the major aspects of human-environment relations in scriptures, now I turn to a brief exegesis of “nature” in the Bible. When dealing with environmental issues, natural resources or nature – nowadays understood as a part of the Earth that is not created by man, the Bible’s authors employed numerous terminologies. Among these are words translated from Hebrew and Greek as: creatures, creation, living beings or souls, wild animals, animals, plants, reptiles and birds. However, it is extremely relevant to note that nature as a noun (“fusus”) does not appear in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the word nature (“fusus”) occurs 14 times, scattered over 11 verses (Rom 1:26; 2:24; 27; 11:21; 24; 1Cor 11:14; Gal 2:15; 4:8; Eph 2:3; James 3:7; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:12). The word nature may still occur (depending on the Bible version) in translations of the adjective “fusikos” (Rom 1:26, 27; 2 Pet 2:12) and the adverb “fusikōs” (Jude 10).

Across the Bible, the word “nature” is used in different contextual meanings, for example: (1) to refer to the essence of human



beings and our sinful nature; (2) the holy, perfect, and unchanging nature of God; (3) the biological nature of human beings and other living beings (male and female); (4) place of birth (someone's place of birth); and, finally, (5) the way we currently use when referring to living and non-living parts of creation: plants, animals, rivers, lakes, and so on. It is noteworthy that the use of nature in the Bible hardly carries the meaning commonly found either in today's academia or in public discourse. In fact, nature as it appears in current environment and sustainability science debates occurs only twice in the entire Bible: "For all nature, both wild beasts and birds, both reptiles and sea creatures, is tamed and tamed by human nature" (James 3:7) and; "But these, like wild animals that follow nature, made to be captured and killed, blaspheming what they do not understand, will perish in their corruption" (2 Pet 2:12).

### **5. Dominion is inevitable even for unbelievers**

The word "dominion" occurs around 15 times across the Bible, usually carrying the following contextual meanings: to rule, dominate, and tread down, to have control of, power over, and so on (Humphries, Humphries, Manam, Godon, and Sule 2015, 113-114). As Wilson (2019, 31) put it, taken wrongly, these definitions seem to give mankind a blank check to do as we please without dealing with the consequences. However, supreme authority and absolute ownership do not mean there is no accountability or no consequence for our actions. We can own a car but still get a speeding ticket, ruin the engine by not changing the oil, or wrap it around a tree trunk by driving drunk.

Contrary to what critics have alleged, the dominion mandate in the Bible has never meant that man should subjugate nature for spurious ends, out of cruelty, a propensity for destruction, or a wish to wield power (Jones 2009, 25).

There is huge historical contention surrounding the word "dominion" (Scully 2002).

Try it for yourself. Start a casual conversation by stating that the dominion mandate is universal, inevitable, and a logical consequence of the fact that there are humans in the world. Then, suggest to your interlocutor that it is also a biblical principle, good for both humans and nature. If you are not scolded as a religious fundamentalist, it is very likely that at least you will hear as a weak "counter argument" that the problem lies in separating humans from nature. As a matter of fact, it is very unlikely that any positive and proper account of the term "dominion" will appear, besides ready-made phrases. Taking for granted that biblical anthropocentrism is inherently bad for the environment is a faulty idea, since, as I have already pointed out, some sort of governing nature is unavoidable for survival and human flourishing; therefore, there is no alternative, but exercising a loving mastery over nature.

Wilson (2019, 102) enlightens the debate by stressing that Christians can indeed act wrongly towards the environment. However, he also asserts that Christian teaching cannot be charged with any current environmental problem. Thus, Lynn White Jr. and his followers, who suggest that we should pursue a post-Christian view of nature are fully misleading. They have also failed to observe a universal problem posed by the Judeo-Christian tradition: there is an incurable "disease" of the soul, a permanent wickedness attached to every human heart; that is, the root problem it is not the dominion mandate, capitalism, science or technology, but man himself. Even the most dramatic errors produced by mankind (wars, famine, genocide) are not solely the result of bad governance or poorly designed institutions, although they play a major role in shaping society, but above all, mistakes of all kinds are mostly a consequence of the sinful hearts of man.

On the same token, faulty and misleading behaviors toward nature can hardly be directly associated with "religious beliefs". The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau

(1712-1778) has famously constructed the noble savage ideal, which posits that individuals are born essentially good, until society and institutions strip them away from their innate purity (Rosseau 2001). Contrary to this ideal, according to Christianity, all people have sinned and “there is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10). Consequently, as I have stressed before, environmental degradation and social injustice are to be blamed on people’s own wrong doings – whether Christian or pagan, not in the workings of any given institution, let alone religious ones.

In contributing to the debate between those who defend ecocentrism (rights for nature approaches) in opposition to anthropocentric views (environmental justice approaches), Jenkins (2016) argues that there is a lot more going on between these two extremes. He calls attention to the fact that one can find a variety of intermediate ideas and practices, which are way more nuanced than it has usually been portrayed. I contend that although Christianity leans more towards the anthropocentric position, it at the same time does not situate itself exclusively on a “far-right utilitarian spectrum” as many would put it, that is, nature is worth preserving only because of its usefulness for mankind. At a first glance, even if it seems contradictory, I believe that biblical Christianity is exactly the middle ground which Jenkins has pointed out, for it considers the need for nature stewardship, not nature worship; since beyond utilitarianism, God has declared nature (creation) to be beautiful and good in itself.

### **Final thoughts**

Along this article, I have argued that contrary to superstitious, distorted and sometimes malicious understandings of the role Christianity plays in environmental stewardship, mostly deriving from Lynn White Jr’s work, and the push from ecocentrists and deep ecologists, recent scholarship on Christian Ecotheology, as well as in-depth analytical thinking have revealed

philosophical and major historical contributions from Judeo-Christian traditions that enhance peoples-nature relations. And, most importantly, without having to give up human exceptionalism.

Indeed, the Bible represents the most ancient and comprehensive “manual of principles” that have oriented peoples from all walks of life to properly engage with creation, caring for it without worshiping it. The Bible teaches that one of the ways to glorify and worship the Creator is by taking care of His creation, according to the principles revealed in scriptures. As I mentioned in the beginning of this article, although not a compendium on socioenvironmental sciences, the Bible carries within its core, unchanging, fundamental and pioneering messages on environmental stewardship. I contend that the Bible is the most significant source from where humanity can surely derive a powerful eco(ethos) to drive what is today known as global sustainability.

The idea of man as the center of all things is not a Christian idea, but rather a consequence of secular humanism. For Christianity, God is the center of all things. For this reason, God has commanded mankind to both receive the blessings of nature and to carry the responsibility of taking care of it, once a perfect garden. As I have discussed, dominion refers to someone’s responsible control, although limited, over other beings, objects, or processes. God has endowed mankind with this capacity and obligation.

I have argued that if humanity abolishes the responsibility to take care of nature, which is inexorably interwoven with the dominion mandate, we are all in serious trouble. Indeed, we are left with only one choice, which is similar to making a living on no more than what is portrayed on the famous TV show, “naked and afraid”. On this TV show, viewers watch participants trying to live off land – naked and with only a few rudimentary survival tools. They are supposed to dwell and thrive in the most remote ecosystems on Earth. After seeing this TV show a couple of times, I realized

that it is either “fake news” or the real deal; actually, a “reality check”: the crude consequences of people attempting to “get back to nature”, while giving up modernity, technology, steady agricultural food supply, cheap and abundant energy, clean water, vehicles, health assistance, shelter, and so on and so forth. The end result is always the same: most participants give up along the way, and the winners always lose much weight as well as body strength, overall health, mental sharpness and so on. This situation illustrates what will inevitably happen to any society without some level of dominion over creation. In these circumstances, mankind would live miserably, or die out, at the mercy of a careless and intemperate “mother nature”. It is common sense in Environmental Anthropology that every relation between us and nature is mediated by culture (Steward 1972), and, as I have demonstrated, these relations always require some level of dominion over nature.

Let me finish with some examples of what I call the “dominion mandate imperative”. What decarbonizing the global economy would mean, if not an anthropocentric attempt of mastery or dominion over nature? Is there any historical record of a more ambitious effort of man’s dominion over nature than trying to control environmental variables such as global temperatures? What about agriculture, which can be seen, at least in part, as plant domestication or dominion over soil-plant-climate interactions? Could we survive without controlling nature for food production? What could happen to humanity, if physicians gave up on medicine, and the ability to prescribe cures to diseases? Should we stop mowing garden lawns and let them grow as they “wish”? Do not we agree that having a simple hair cut means having dominion over nature, even if it is only a small aspect of our own biological make up? Do not we have ownership rights over our pet, be it a dog or a cat? Is not that a form of loving dominion?

When a shaman from an Amazonian indigenous tribe calls upon “the spirits

of the forest”, asking for favors, he is trying to act upon environmental and biological entities through supernatural forces, in order to have them “follow orders”. Ultimately, shamans believe that they are capable of controlling the local ecology and so on through a sort of “magic”. To a certain extent, this kind of ritual falls within the same category of scientists attempting to decarbonize the atmosphere to control global temperatures; except for the fact that the former depends on the supernatural, whereas the later appeals only to “science” and technology; ultimately, both are trying to “domesticate” nature.

In conclusion, the Bible reveals that humanity is no mere epiphenomenon of nature; on the contrary, humankind is the result of the intention and purpose of a caring God who, despite his love for humanity, does not tolerate, and will judge those who destroy nature out of greed and vanity (Rev 11:18), as well as those who protect nature for improper and sinful reasons, such as those who have exchanged the proper worship of the true God for the worshipping of creatures (Rom 1:21-31).

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