

ECOJUSTICE

A Presentation by

Dr. Christopher Lind

Synod of the Diocese of Niagara

Anglican Church of Canada • November 2007

ECOJUSTICE: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

The late 1960s was a time of great social and intellectual ferment. In North America the desire to address issues of social justice was strong and reflected in political campaigns with slogans like President Lyndon Johnson's "The Great Society" and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's "The Just Society". At the very same time there arose a movement we came to recognize as the ecological movement. This movement was concerned with pollution and the misuse of pesticides, as described for example in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*¹. It was also concerned with the rapid increase in the world's population seen in the 20th century, and the strain this was putting on the Earth's resources. One of the best examples of this concern was expressed by the Club of Rome, an international think tank whose report *Limits to Growth*² was published in 1972.

Activists who focused on issues of poverty and racial injustice often advocated for economic policies that would encourage industrial growth in order to generate increased wealth. Concern for the environment was sometimes absent from this agenda. Activists who focused on issues of smog, birth control and endangered species often advocated against industrial expansion in order to limit environmental damage. Concern for social inequality was sometimes absent from this agenda.

In the Christian Churches both concerns were present but the concern for social justice was much stronger. In 1970 an American Episcopal (Anglican) priest argued that "choosing [to work for] ecology instead of [against] poverty, or vice versa, is to make a bad choice," the way ahead is to choose both.³ Norman Faramelli was working at the time for the Boston Industrial Mission. About the same time, a staff person for the American Baptist Churches named Richard Jones coined the term 'eco-justice' "to mean both ecological wholeness and social justice".⁴ The Presbyterian ethicist William Gibson describes ecojustice as recognizing "in other creatures and natural systems the claim to be respected and valued and taken into account in societal arrangements ... The concern for ecological soundness and sustainability includes but transcends the concern of humans for themselves."⁵

Since that time the concept of ecojustice has been taken up by both religious and non-religious voices. In the World Council of Churches a focus on a "just, participatory and sustainable society" was initiated in 1975 at the Nairobi Assembly. From these discussions emerged the ethical norms of sustainability, sufficiency, participation and solidarity.⁶ This was further developed at the Vancouver Assembly in 1983 with a focus on "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation". The American ethicist Dieter Hessel describes the basic norms of ecojustice as follows:

- solidarity with other people and creatures – companions, victims, and allies – in earth community, reflecting deep respect for diverse creation;
- ecological sustainability – environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable life to flourish, and utilize ecologically and socially appropriate technology;
- sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or "fair" consumption;
- socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good in common and the good of the commons.⁷

Other authors add the norm of equity to Hessel's list in order to reinforce the idea that ecojustice is inclusive of social justice. Some of these themes have been developed by the Lutheran theologian Larry Rasmussen in his *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*⁸. Several denominations have begun making explicit reference to the norms of sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity.⁹ In the Roman Catholic tradition, Pope John Paul II has called for an "ecological conversion".¹⁰ The development of ecojustice in other religious traditions has been chronicled in a multi volume book series *World Religions and Ecology* (edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim) published by the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School and distributed by Harvard University Press.

On the non-religious side, the United Nations was key in promoting a series of events and reports that advanced the issue. In 1972 there was a UN conference in Stockholm on Environment and Development. Then in 1983 the UN convened the World Commission on Environment and Development. It issued a report in 1987 by which time it had become known as the Brundtland Commission after its Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report was titled *Our Common Future*¹¹ and it focused on the concept of sustainable development which it defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This was followed by a conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 that became known as the Earth Summit and followed again by a conference in Johannesburg in 2002 that became known as Rio after 10. The Earth Summit was significant for its Declaration but it was also significant for what was not agreed upon there. A draft declaration of Earth Rights had been prepared for Rio but there were not enough signatories to achieve this goal. In 1994 the former Soviet President Michail Gorbachev and the Canadian Secretary General of the Rio Earth Summit Maurice Strong revived this initiative with early support from the Government of the Netherlands. In 1997 they organized an independent Earth Charter Commission as a kind of People’s Movement. In 2000 the Earth Charter was officially launched, endorsed by non-governmental groups and popular organizations around the world. The Earth Charter effectively elaborates the four ecojustice norms listed above.¹² A summary of the 16 principles is attached in the appendix.

The tension between advocates of social justice and advocates for other communities of the Earth has not gone away. Campaigners for greater social equality remain concerned about what they see as attempts to restore ecological balance on the backs of the poorest people. At the same time, advocates for ecological integrity remain suspicious that any attempt to address social inequality before environmental destruction, rather than together, means that fundamentally, the rest of Creation remains outside our intellectual and moral universe. As the German protestant theologian Jurgen Moltmann put it,

“What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves. It is a crisis of life on this planet As far as we can judge, it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth.”¹³ As the Canadian Catholic Bishops put it “The cry of the earth and the cry of the poor are one.”¹⁴

For myself, I have become convinced that the developing concept of ecojustice can be a way forward, beyond the false dichotomy of social justice vs. ecological justice, as long as it is understood as a term that can include both human suffering and the groaning of the Earth. One of the projects that has helped lead me to this conviction is the Earth Bible Project from Australia.¹⁵ Under the leadership of Dr. Norman Habel, a biblical scholar from Flinders University in Adelaide, five volumes of essays have been published. These essays are by scholars the world over, all responding to six hermeneutical ecojustice principles. These are not ethical principles or principles of social organization. Rather these are principles for interpreting sacred texts. The use of these principles to guide biblical interpretation are an attempt to overcome the effect of other ideas, namely, the separation of humanity from nature that was embedded in the 18th century intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment.

Speaking as someone who comes to this debate after decades of involvement in issues of social justice, I can say that the movement to an Earth-centred consciousness¹⁶ is as profound a challenge as I have encountered. Working with the ecojustice principles of the Earth Bible Project has been helpful in understanding just how profound a challenge that is. Of course, adopting the language of ecojustice does not end all debates. It signals a profound shift in thinking and makes new solutions possible. Instead of thinking the environment is merely the backdrop for the central human drama and a resource for its continuation, an ecojustice approach centres human life and activity within the web of all life and activity.

A formal secular definition of justice would be to give to everyone that which is their due. In contemporary Christian theology, another way of thinking about justice is to understand it as ‘right relationship’. An ecojustice approach understands right relationship in terms of all the

communities of the Earth, giving all of them their due. It doesn't automatically resolve the question about the nature of these relationships but it does claim that all life has moral value and therefore a claim on humans as moral agents.¹⁷ Again, from a Christian point of view, all Creation comes from God and all Creation bears the marks of God.

Creation gives witness to the Creator (Acts 14:17) and makes plain God's power and nature (Rom 1:19-20). Right relationship is a foundational principle for all Creation, not just for humans. From this point on, no question of justice considered by humans can ignore the claims of the rest of Creation for right relationship.

Footnotes

- ¹ Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962.
- ² Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens, Rome: Club of Rome, 1972.
- ³ Norman Faramelli, "Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice" *Andover Newton Quarterly*. 11 (Nov. 1970) 81-93; reprinted in Richard E. Sherrell, *Ecology: Crisis & New Vision* Richmond: John Knox Press.
- ⁴ William Gibson, "Introduction to the Journey" pg. 10, n.2, in Wm Gibson (ed.) *Eco-justice – The Unfinished Journey*. New York: SUNY Press, 2004.
- ⁵ Gibson, p. 34.
- ⁶ See Paul Abrecht (ed.), *Faith, Science and the Future Geneva*. World Council of Churches, 1978.
- ⁷ Dieter T. Hessel, "Eco-Justice Ethics", e-published by the Forum on Religion and Ecology, May 8, 2007, at <http://environment.harvard.edu/religion/disciplines/ethics/eco-justice.html>
- ⁸ Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996; see also David Hallman's *Spiritual Values for Earth Community*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000.
- ⁹ See for example, Presbyterian Eco-Justice Task Force. *Keeping and Healing the Creation*. Louisville: Committee on Social Witness Policy, Presbyterian Church (USA), 1989; Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice*. Chicago: Division for Church and Society, 1993.
- ¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, General Audience, 17 January 2001, No. 4; Sister Marjorie Keenan, RSHM, *From Stockholm to Johannesburg: An Historical Overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment*. 1972-2002, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican City, 2002, p. 75.
- ¹¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- ¹² See www.earthcharter.org
- ¹³ Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*. Mineapolis: Fortress Press 1993 [1985], p. xiii.
- ¹⁴ Social Affairs Commission, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, "*Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative*". Ottawa: CCCB, 2003.
- ¹⁵ www.webofcreation.org
- ¹⁶ Some theologians refer to this as an Earth centred pneumatology "that experiences God's spirit immanent in creation as the power of life-giving breath (*ruah*), the Wisdom (*logos*) continually working to transform and renew all life and the love that sustains it. Biblical images portray the Spirit as "a healing and subversive life-form—as water, light, dove, mother, fire, breath... wind". See Mark Wallace, "The Wounded Spirit as the Basis for Hope in an Age of Radical Ecology," in *Christianity and Ecology*, eds., Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard/CSWR, 2000), 51–72.
- ¹⁷ A good resource for studying environmental issues from this perspective is James B. Martin-Schramm & Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.

APPENDIX

Earth Charter Principles

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.
3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.
5. Protect and restore the integrity of Earth's ecological systems, with special concern for biological diversity and the natural processes that sustain life.
6. Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach.
7. Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth's regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.
8. Advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired.
9. Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.
10. Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
11. Affirm gender equality and equity as prerequisites to sustainable development and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity
12. Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment supportive of human dignity, bodily health, and spiritual well-being, with special attention to the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities.
13. Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.
14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
15. Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
16. Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

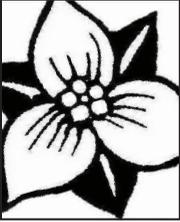
ECOJUSTICE

Circles of Theological & Biblical Reflection

General Instructions

1. In your group allow every person to read the biblical text quietly to themselves.
2. Once this has been done, read the text aloud, changing voices every 10 verses.
3. Review the introductory paragraph that provides a background to the biblical text.
4. Review the questions that have been prepared to draw out the connection with the Ecojustice Principle under discussion.
5. Invite one person to respond to the questions without interruption.
6. Invite another person to respond without interruption and continue the process until everyone in the circle has had a chance to respond once.
7. Once you have gone around the circle once, open the floor to further conversation from anyone who wants to speak.
8. Near the end of your time together, please make some time to respond to the following questions: What difference has it made to you to try and read the Bible from an Earth centred perspective? How do you evaluate the 6 Ecojustice Principles? What principles would you add or subtract?
9. There will be some time at the end of this process for groups to share reflections with the whole Synod. If there has been an important insight shared, or suggestion about how this process might be adapted in a parish, please note it for sharing with the whole Synod.

¹ Taken from the EARTH BIBLE project, Norman C. Habel, Series Editor, Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press. Published in Canada and the USA by The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio.



Principle #1: THE PRINCIPLE OF INTRINSIC WORTH

The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.

Introduction

The purpose of the first Ecojustice Principle is to challenge our assumption that the Earth only has value when it performs some sort of service for human beings. This kind of value is called “instrumental value” because it turns Earth into an instrument for our use and pleasure. If the Earth has “intrinsic value” then it is valuable even if humans do not exist.

Questions for Principle #1

1. What are the parts of Creation that God calls ‘good’?
2. Are these things good because that is what God calls them or are they already good and God recognizes their goodness?
3. According to 1 Timothy what condition needs to apply to our relationship with Creation?
4. What dualism is present in 1 Timothy and how does this dualism affect the question of our valuing of the Earth?

Primary Biblical Reading: Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 [NRSV]

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the

night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

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.’

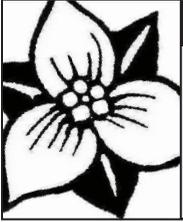
So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Supplementary Biblical Reading: 1 Timothy 4: 1-5 [NRSV]

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God’s word and by prayer.

Resources: Norman Habel, “Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1, pp. 34–48 in *The Earth Story in Genesis*, (Earth Bible Vol. 2) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, published in Canada and the USA by The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio; Paul Trebilco, “The Goodness and Holiness of the Earth and the Whole Creation (1Timothy 4.1-5)”, pp. 204–220 in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, (Earth Bible Vol. 1) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.



Principle #2: THE PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival.

Introduction

The second Ecojustice Principle challenges us to understand Earth not as a dirt covered rock circling the sun, but as a community of life dependent on one another for our existence. All organisms which breathe, inhale and exhale the same air that we do. We trade oxygen and carbon dioxide with our neighbourhood forest. For many centuries most people, including most Christians, have thought of humanity as being higher, greater, more valued than the rest of Creation. This hierarchical attitude has also infected relationships among humans.

Questions for Principle #2

1. In the reading from Proverbs, what is the significance of Wisdom's gender?
2. What is Wisdom telling us about the relationship between humanity and the rest of Creation?
3. How is the figure of Wisdom enhanced or altered in the letter to the Romans?
4. What's the connection between Wisdom and God?

Primary Biblical Reading: Proverbs 8 [NRSV]

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
'To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right;
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
They are all straight to one who understands
and right to those who find knowledge.
Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold;
for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
I, wisdom, live with prudence,
and I attain knowledge and discretion.
The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
I have good advice and sound wisdom;
I have insight, I have strength.
By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
by me rulers rule,
and nobles, all who govern rightly.

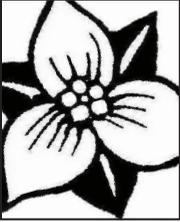
I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honour are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.
The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

'And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favour from the LORD;
but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death.'

Supplementary Biblical Reading: Romans 8: 19-25 [NRSV]

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 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. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 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. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Resources: Brendan Byrne, "Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8.18-22", pp. 193-203 in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, (Earth Bible Vol. 1) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.



Principle #3: THE PRINCIPLE OF VOICE

**Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice
in celebration and against injustice.**

Introduction

With the second Ecojustice Principle we considered Earth as a Community of Life. With the third Ecojustice Principle we have the opportunity to consider Earth as a Community of Subjects who have the capacity to speak. In philosophy we learn to distinguish subjects from objects. Subjects are capable of communicating, of acting and of forming intentions. Earth is not a human subject. However, as a community of life, Earth has a collective identity and a collective voice, capable of rejoicing in delight and groaning in sorrow. In order to hear the voice of Earth, we have to listen for it. Maybe the voice of Earth is a little bit like 'body language' – a communication without words; or maybe it is like the language of whales and other animals. They do communicate. We just have to learn their language!

Questions for Principle #3

1. In the 12th chapter of Job, what can the birds of the air and the fish of the sea teach us?
2. How will we know what we have been taught?
3. Can we retrieve the voice of Earth from passages like Psalm 148? What is it saying?
4. In your experience, how has Earth raised its voice? Was it praising God or resisting an injustice?

Primary Biblical Reading: Job 12 [NRSV]

Then Job answered:
'No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.
But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?
I am a laughing-stock to my friends;
I, who called upon God and he answered me,
a just and blameless man, I am a laughing-stock.
Those at ease have contempt for misfortune,
but it is ready for those whose feet are unstable.
The tents of robbers are at peace,
and those who provoke God are secure,
who bring their god in their hands.

'But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the LORD has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.
Does not the ear test words
as the palate tastes food?
Is wisdom with the aged,
and understanding in length of days?

‘With God are wisdom and strength;
he has counsel and understanding,
If he tears down, no one can rebuild;
if he shuts someone in, no one can open up.
If he withholds the waters, they dry up;
if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land.
With him are strength and wisdom;
the deceived and the deceiver are his.
He leads counsellors away stripped,
and makes fools of judges.
He looses the sash of kings,
and binds a waistcloth on their loins.
He leads priests away stripped,
and overthrows the mighty.
He deprives of speech those who are trusted,
and takes away the discernment of the elders.
He pours contempt on princes,
and looses the belt of the strong.
He uncovers the deeps out of darkness,
and brings deep darkness to light.
He makes nations great, then destroys them;
he enlarges nations, then leads them away.
He strips understanding from the leaders of the earth,
and makes them wander in a pathless waste.
They grope in the dark without light;
he makes them stagger like a drunkard.

Supplementary Biblical Reading: Psalm 148 [NRSV]

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights!
Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars!
Praise him, you highest heavens,
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
He established them for ever and ever;
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.

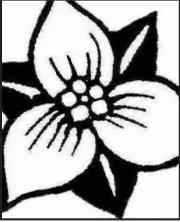
Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his glory is above earth and heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his faithful,
for the people of Israel who are close to him.
Praise the LORD!

Resources: Norman Habel “Earth First: Inverse
Cosmology in Job” pp. 65-77 in *The Earth Story in
Wisdom Traditions*, (Earth Bible Vol.3) Sheffield, UK:
Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.



Principle #4: THE PRINCIPLE OF PURPOSE

The universe, earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design.

Introduction

Earth may be a community of life but it is also a complex of interacting ecosystems. These systems appear to interact according to a design or purpose. Not everyone agrees on what the purpose is. Some say the purpose is evolution while others say the purpose is to praise God. The mysterious ways of this purpose continue to evoke wonder in poets and prophets and even pedestrians. If Earth has a purpose, it seems unlikely that destruction is its destiny. Is it possible that human devaluation of Earth community causes us to be insensitive to the role of Earth in God's overall design? Can we recover a sense of this purpose from our own sacred scriptures? [In the Hebrew Bible, the words "heaven and earth" can also be translated "earth and sky". As well, angels can be interpreted as messengers of the Divine.]

Questions for Principle #4

1. According to the writer of Revelation, is God seeking a restoration or a transformation?
2. What are some of the characteristics of the new heaven and new earth promised in Revelation and in Isaiah?
3. In your home community, what would a new heaven and new earth look like?

Primary Biblical Reading: Revelation 21: 1 – 22: 5 [NRSV]

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal. It has a great, high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width; and he measured the city with his rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits by human measurement, which the angel was using. The wall is built of jasper, while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth cornelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. People will bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations. But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there any more. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

Supplementary Biblical Reading: **Isaiah: 65: 17-25 [NRSV]**

For I am about to create new heavens
and a new earth;

the former things shall not be remembered
or come to mind.

But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I am creating;

for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy,
and its people as a delight.

I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and delight in my people;

no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,

or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;

for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,

and one who falls short of a hundred
will be considered accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;

for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labour in vain,
or bear children for calamity;

for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well.

Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

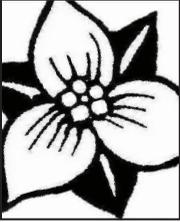
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;

but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

They shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain,

says the LORD.

Resources: Duncan Reid, “Setting Aside the Ladder to Heaven: Revelation 21.1-22.5 from the Perspective of the Earth” pp. 232-245 in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, (Earth Bible Vol. 1) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; Anne Gardner, “Ecojustice or Anthropological Justice? A Study of the New Heavens and the New Earth in Isaiah 65.17”, pp. 204 - 218 in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, (Earth Bible Vol.4) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.



Principle #5: THE PRINCIPLE OF MUTUAL CUSTODIANSHIP

Earth is a balanced and diverse domain in which responsible custodians can function as partners, rather than rulers, to sustain a balanced and diverse earth community.

Introduction

Many people today recognize that the language of humans having dominion over the earth has translated in practice into human habits that have been destructive of all Earth communities, including human communities. Even the language of stewardship, which is now so common, retains within it the idea of humans 'ruling over' nature on behalf of God understood as an absentee landlord. The 5th Ecojustice Principle uses the language of custodianship to emphasize a mutual partnership between humans and the other Earth communities. We recognize each other as kin. Each feeds and sustains the other as their contribution to the partnership. As we strip away our tendency to see ourselves as privileged rulers of Creation, can we recognize within Scripture alternative Earth-affirming traditions that view humans as custodians of a sacred Earth and even Earth as a custodian?

Questions for Principle #5

1. The word 'dominion' refers to the property of a feudal lord and also to governance. How is the image of humans having dominion in one part of Genesis different from the image of humans as those who till and keep the Garden, in another part of Genesis?
2. In the reading from Job, how does God describe humans in relation to the rest of Creation?
3. In your home community, what are some examples of kinship among the various Earth communities?
4. Where have you see Earth taking care of humanity?

Primary Biblical Reading:

Genesis 1: 26-31 & Genesis 2: 8-15 [NRSV]

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.'

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

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.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

...

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Supplementary Biblical Reading: Job 38 [NRSV]

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:
‘Who is this that darkens counsel
by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone
when the morning stars sang together
and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

‘Or who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb?—
when I made the clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped”?

‘Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
so that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.
Light is withheld from the wicked,
and their uplifted arm is broken.

‘Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

‘Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
Surely you know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

‘Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

‘Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no one lives,
on the desert, which is empty of human life,
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?

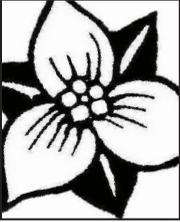
‘Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoar-frost of heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

‘Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?
Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you establish their rule on the earth?

‘Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
so that a flood of waters may cover you?
Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go
and say to you, “Here we are”?
Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,
or given understanding to the mind?
Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cling together?

‘Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?
Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?

Resources: Norman Habel, “Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You?” Challenging the Mandate to Dominate” pp. 179 – 189 in *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions*, (Earth Bible Vol.3) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.



Principle #6: THE PRINCIPLE OF RESISTANCE

Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

Introduction

Biologists and ecologists claim that not all the ecosystems of Earth are fragile, even though they all have limits. Earth has a remarkable capacity to survive, rejuvenate and restore itself and its kin. We saw in Romans 8 that Creation groans with labour pains. Can Earth also resist the injustice it suffers from the actions of humanity? If we remove our anthropocentric bias, can we hear and see Earth's resistance recorded in our sacred texts?

The book of Revelation has a style of writing different from the other books of the Bible. It is called 'apocalyptic' literature because it seems to suggest that Earth is heading toward a catastrophe, or apocalypse. Certainly this is how Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins interpret it in their "Left Behind" series of novels. The language of Revelation is as different from Paul's Epistles as science fiction is from the local newspaper. In the passage below, it will be important to know that the Dragon is an image used to portray the Roman Empire. Roman Emperors routinely described themselves as being gods descended from heaven whose mission was to rule the whole earth. Captured territories were commonly depicted as women, bound and submissive. The New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing argues that the word commonly translated as 'Woe' in this text is more accurately translated as 'Alas!'

Questions for Principle #6:

1. This passage describes the resistance of Earth communities to the Roman empire 2000 years ago. Is the age of empire past or do we have empires today?
2. What price does Earth pay for empire today and where do you see evidence of that cost?
3. In your home community do you see evidence of Earth's resistance to injustice?

Biblical Reading: Revelation 12 [NRSV]

A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming,
‘Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Messiah,
for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down,
who accuses them day and night before our God.
But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony,
for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.
Rejoice then, you heavens
and those who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
for the devil has come down to you
with great wrath,
because he knows that his time is short!’

So when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. Then the dragon took his stand on the sand of the seashore.

Resources: Barbara Rossing, “Alas for Earth! Lament and Resistance in Revelation 12” pp. 180 – 192 in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, (Earth Bible Vol.5) Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002. For a video of Prof. Rossing lecturing on the book of Revelation go to the webcast at: <http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/education/?institute-2007&p=schedule&s=telecast>