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God's Garden: Christian Environmental Stewardship as Rediscovery of Our Place in the World

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Abstract

Human relationships to the non-human world around us have always been a matter of interest. Such relationships have received a varying amount of attention, and been considered, to varying degrees, the center of human purpose on earth. We have been seen as the masters over the rest of the earth, our garden, with little more than utilitarian self interest to drive conservation of future resources. We have also seen ourselves as a plague upon Earth's perfect garden, to be controlled and separated from the rest of the earth so it might remain healthy. Christian Environmental Stewardship stands in contrast to both positions as it places Adam and Eve in God's Garden, serving it and it serving them as the model for human relationship with the rest of Creation. As such, Christian Environmental Stewardship is a strong model to address our current environmental challenges because it includes us in the Creation and calls us into relationship with the rest of Creation. It is the purpose of this paper to describe how Christian Environmental Stewardship re-discovered a Biblical world view of the Creation as God's Garden and how that was shaped by and provides answers to weaknesses in contrasting models of the world based on the idyllic state of the world being one without the presence of our influence, Earth's Garden, or one based on the utility of Creation for humans, Our Garden.

Keywords: Christian Environmental Stewardship, Religion
Introduction

Human beings have long wondered about our personal and corporate relationship to the world around us (Glacken 1967, Oelschlaeger 1991, Gottlieb 2004). Human contemplation on that relationship has, at one end of the spectrum, placed the world first in that relationship with us as the interlopers in the wilderness; always detracting from the idyllic. Alternatively, at the other end of the spectrum, contemplation has placed the world and its service to us as the focus of that relationship. Christian environmental stewardship offers a distinctively different position, that we and the rest of Creation are bound together in mutual service as residents of God’s Garden. For the purposes of this paper I will therefore define “God’s Garden” as the Christian Environmental position where the ideal is Adam and Eve in God’s Garden with them serving it and it serving them. “Earth’s Garden”, where we are the interlopers, is then defined as the philosophical belief and resultant practices that place human existence as problematic to the rest of the non-human world. The idyllic state in this relationship is earth without human interference. I will also define “Our Garden” as the belief and resultant practices that place service of humanity by the non-human world as the central focus to our existence on earth.

Christian environmental stewardship is not new. However, it has been rediscovered in the last three decades, particularly in response to the same things motivating the other two understandings of our place in the earth; that is profound realization that human beings have an enormous potential to negatively impact the ecosystems of our planet endangering us and the other creatures in the process (Sheldon and Foster 2003). The following is an essay considering the rediscovery of Christian environmental stewardship and the role of the contrasting Our Garden and Earth’s Garden positions in shaping that discovery.

God’s Garden

The earth is the good handiwork of God (Genesis 1). It is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof (Psalm 24:1). The heavens declare the handiwork of the Lord (Psalm 148), indeed, the Creation so expresses God’s power and majesty that humanity is left without excuse when claiming ignorance of God (Romans 1:20). God so loved the world that he gave his only son (John 3:16), that Christ should be firstborn from the dead and through his blood, redeem all things unto himself (Colossians 1:20). We are placed into this world not to destroy it, but to bless and keep it (Genesis 2:15). And God’s spirit sustains the Creation (Hebrews 1:3). These are the foundational tenets establishing the world as God’s Garden and Christian Environmental Stewardship as humanity’s role in that garden. This is a strongly contrasting position to both a utilitarian view of the world as Our Garden and a misanthropic view of the world as Earth’s Garden.

While publications about and discussions of Christian Environmental Stewardship are relatively new, the tenets are ancient and carry with them notions of caring for the earth that might seem more at home in an Earth’s Garden view of the world. However a God’s Garden view focuses not on our interference in the Natural relationships of other creatures, nor upon our right to use other creatures, but rather it focuses on human relationship to a Creator God and to the philosophical beliefs and resultant practices of how we should thus live in right relationship with that God as well as how we should live in right relationship to the human and non-human elements of God’s creation. In the “God’s Garden” position these elements of how we should act
spring from human relationship to the Creator. When we are in right relationship with the Creator and other Creatures the Shalom of God persists. These earth focused elements have persisted within the normal, orthodox theology and praxis Christianity to the present. Yet, such elements have been out of the central focus of Christianity until the environmental crisis of the late twentieth century when they were re-discovered.

Christianity has contained an element of God-commanded concern for the created world, as have Judaism (Troster 1991-1992, Kraftson-Hogue 1998) and Islam (Deen 2004). Indeed, throughout the Old Testament there is no word for “nature” as an entity separate from humanity such the word Nature is used today (DeWitt 2005), nor can humans be fully understood apart from the land (Habel 1995, Kraftson-Hogue 1998, Bruggerman 1977). The very name Adam is to adamah (the ground or soil) as Human is to humus. An important human relationship to the earth is further reflected in Genesis with commands for Adam (and Eve) to keep the garden and tend to its fruitfulness, to live in shalom (Genesis 2:15) with all creation (human and non-human). The Psalmists sing praise for the earth being the Lord’s, not man’s (Psalm 24:1). Judeo-Christian tradition also embodies the concept of human sin affecting the land and God’s redemption healing it for its own sake as well as the sake of the people (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

Foundational concern for all creation is also included in the New Testament with Christ’s redemptive purpose on earth, coming for all things (Greek- ta panta) not just humans (Colossians 1:16-20). Concern for the created world as part of the kingdom of God is further reflected in Paul’s cautionary notes against the Gnostic idea that God was not incarnate in the world (1 Corinthians 15:12-16). It is also explicit in the wording of the Lord’s prayer “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Consider also Mark 16:15 “Go ye into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

Such earthy elements of theology have remained within the Christian church even to the present though often buried in the texts rather than expressed in praxis. They are not new such as Mathew Fox’s modern “Earth Garden” environmental mysticism (Boulton 1990), not old and abandoned doctrines such as Old Testament polygamy, but have been there all along as foundational theological beliefs waiting to be rediscovered. I now present certain persistent “green” elements of Christian tradition in chronological order for the reader’s consideration.

Consider the mutuality of human and non-human creatures embodied in the modern hymn “All creatures of our God and King” by Francis of Assisi (1225). These following lines are translated from his original work ca. 1225 AD:

   All creatures of our God and King,
   lift up your voice and with us sing,
   Alleluia! Alleluia!
   O brother sun with golden beam,
   O sister moon with silver gleam,
   O praise ye!, O praise ye!
   Alleluia! Alleluia!

   O brother wind, air, clouds, and rain,
by which all creatures ye sustain,
O praise ye! Alleluia!
Thou rising morn in praise rejoice,
ye lights of evening, find a voice!
O praise ye!, O praise ye!
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Consider the creaturely purpose of revealing the Creator God as pointed out by Calvin DeWitt (1994) from Article II, Brevig Confession of Faith, based on Romans 1:20, written in 1561. This confession poses the question “By what means is God made known to us?” It answers:

First by the creation, preservation, and governance of the universe.
since that universe is before our eyes as a most elegant book,
in which all creatures, great and small,
are as letters
to make us ponder
the invisible things of God:
his eternal power and his divinity,
as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20, all things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse.

John Calvin, in 1554 summarized that the custody of Eden was given to man, not that he should destroy it, but that he should frugally use its produce and leave it in better cultivation, more fruitful, than when he received that custody. Thus its fruits would serve humans and human labor would serve and enhance the garden (Sheldon 1992). This idea is one that DeWitt refers to as con-servation, or con-servancy. The “con” of these words means with; thus con-servation in which the human and non-human creatures serve each other as ordained by their mutual Creator (DeWitt 2005).

Ken calls all creatures, human and non-human alike, to praise their maker in The Doxology, (Ken 1674). This implies relationship of the other creatures both with humans who give the imperative to praise, and with their creator whom they know and can praise, and the Creator receives the praise from all.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him all creatures here below,
Praise him above ye heavenly hosts,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
AMEN

John Ray (1628-1705) typifies the early “Naturalists” as he saw his study of the world around him as doing the Lord’s work.
As Ray wrote:

There is for a free man no occupation more worthy and delightful than to contemplate the beauteous works of nature and honour the infinite wisdom and goodness of God.

In two major works written late in his life, The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation (1717) and Three Physico-Theological Discourses (1692), Ray expounded his views of the creation, organization, and eventual fate of the Earth and the life on it. The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation was especially popular and influential; it was translated into several languages, and was reprinted for over fifty years after its publication. Both of these books were based on sermons Ray had delivered at Cambridge. Such deep religious feeling may seem out of place in scientific writing today, but Ray's work actually represented a huge advance for science. Whereas many medieval and later theologians had taught that the natural world distracted people from salvation and should be avoided, Ray affirmed powerfully that Nature was a worthy subject for study and reason; it revealed the very nature of the Creator through his own handiwork. Such activity and valuation of the Creation was therefore pleasing to God.

And later, in 1719, Isaac Watts' hymn Jesus Shall Reign echoes the praise imperative issued to the rest of the Creation in the Doxology in the wording of the Psalmist (Psalm 72)

Let every creature arise and bring
Peculiar honours to our king,
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeats the loud Amen.

Folliot Pierpont's (1864) wildly sung hymn For the Beauty of the Earth (following) indicates a subtle shift in ideas within its first two stanzas; the non-human around is acknowledged as beautiful and directing the observer to praise the Creator, but, the mutuality of creatureliness, expressed in the Biblical narratives and by Francis of Assisi, has been exchanged for a subtle objectification of the non-human creatures. There is no imperative for the Creatures to join us in praise of the Creator.

For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,
for the which from our birth,
over and around us lies;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and starts of light;
Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

In contrast, the first two stanzas of the worship staple by Maltbie Babcock (1901) “This is My Father’s World” where Maltbie extolles the mutual creatureliness as both human and non-human creatures raise their praise of the Creator:

This is my Father’s world,
and to my listening ears,
all nature sings and ‘round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father’s world: I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;
his hands the wonders wrought.

This is my Father’s world,
the birds their carols raise,
the morning light, the lillies white,
declare their maker’s praise.
This is my Father’s world: he shine sin all that’s fair;
in the rustling grass I hear him pass;
he speaks to me everywhere.

These elements of mutuality in the Garden of God have however become masked with time. And by the mid-Twentieth Century the Evangelical position had become one of using the Creation either for sustenance or as a backdrop for salvation (Van Dyke et al. 1993, Bouma-Prediger 2001). This is revealed in the writings of Lowdermilk in response to devastation of eastern forests in the late 19th and early 20th century. Lowdermilk, a forester and hydrologist, wrote an Eleventh Commandment in 1915 (see Sheldon 1992, Nash 1991). As per Sheldon (1992), Lowdermilk suggested:

Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect the hills from overgrazing by the herds, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become sterile and stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall live in poverty or perish from the earth.
Despite such thoughts on conservation, throughout the industrial revolution the focus of Christian thinking and publications was increasingly on the God-human, human-human relationships. God had given us the world as per Genesis 1:28 (inherited in Lowdermilk above) and we needed to care for it as a resource for as many people as possible. This is clarified by the emphasis on conservation in Lowdermilk’s words; Christian thought about the non-human world had shifted from mutually creatureliness and praise to objectification of the non-human creatures through the industrial revolution; a strongly “Our Garden” way of thinking. While our scripture had not changed, our praxis had. Non-human and human neighbors alike had become resources and labor.

The church responded strongly to the human cost of such objectification (see Johnson 1990, who describes Adam Smith’s third portion in his treatise on Market Economy. Smith comes to say therein that the market cannot work justly unless its participants “be necessarily Christian towards one another”. See also Sheldon 1989, 1992). Today Christian missions to the poor and downtrodden abound throughout the world. However, the church did not respond directly to the plight of non-human creatures. Indeed, before 1950, Sheldon (1989) reports that there were only nine Christian publications that deal specifically with the human relationship to non-human creation. And, while Christians often used resources frugally and championed conservation of natural resources, they did this not from a basis of faith and deontological ethics but for other reasons (Bouma-Prediger 2001). Indeed, the Church had largely bought into an “Our Garden” model where humans were not only the measure of all things but the measure as well (Bouma-Prediger 2001) with the focus on the salvation of the human soul. Nature, as it were, held no interest for most Christians beyond serving as a stage for the salvation play. This is echoed by the words of a famous Christian, then Secretary of the Interior, James Watt. He said before a committee of the House of Representatives when discussing a piece of conservation legislation “I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns “ (sensu Bouma-Prediger 2001). Yet today there are numerous new books discussing the divine imperative for our concern for Creation annually (Lowe 2009, Brown 2008, Robinson 2006, Sleeth 2006). What sparked the change? What sparked the rediscovery of our relationship with the Creation and the relationship of it to the Creator as mutual members of God’s Garden? What moved a reactionary reexamination of scripture for our connectedness to the rest of Creation that pulled many away from the widely prevailing view of Creation as God’s gift to us to use?

The Rediscovery Begins

First, a transition occurred in the American mindset from use to conservation of resources. By the early Twentieth Century the destructive consequences of resource over-use were obvious. Over-hunting had driven many animals to near extinction, over-harvest had leveled the forests of the eastern United States, and extractive farming practices threatened to destroy the very capacity of our soil to produce food (White 1967, Carson 1962). Out of this chaos sprung the American Conservation movement (Hughes 1975, Fox 1981, Taylor 1998, Everden 1989). This movement focused on wise use of resources. Game Management, Scientific Forestry, and Soil Conservation sought to reverse the damage of overuse. Indeed, it was this very attitude of resource protection and wise use that gave rise to Forestry as a discipline. These conservation movements however did not give intrinsic value to the creatures nor provide any possibility of meaningful relationship
with them (Leopold 1966, Callicott 1990). It was the search for a reason to conserve that compelled Christians to look back to the scriptures themselves.

Secondly, Rachel Carson (1962) lambasted the industrialized world with her publication of *Silent Spring*. This book is the watershed that marked the beginning of the environmental era in America (Sheldon 1992). Though she was immediately attacked as “anti-American” and “anti-progress”, the simple power of her message carried forth. That message was that if the consequences of industrialized pollution could silent the spring chorus of birds in our front yards, then it is likely it can also likely silence the human chorus of our children’s voices next (Cafaro 2002). Carson’s message touched of a wave of environmental concern, concern for the non-human world around us. This concern spawned the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts of 1970 because concern for the environment also benefits people. The Endangered Species Act in 1973 expanded this concern to species for their own sake. The church did not respond immediately to even these messages.

Thirdly, Christianity had become increasingly a target in the public press during the late 1950’s and 1960’s. Lynn White (1967) led the attack on the church for its apparent lack of concern over the environment in his historic paper published in *Science*. That paper was entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”. White blamed the church and the idea of dominion (Genesis 2:9) over the creation as the root of the environmental crisis in the Western World (see also Sheldon 1989). White’s exegesis of the scriptural idea of dominion was incomplete as was his understanding of the “green” elements of Christianity, as was directing the blame totally on the church (Sheldon 1992, Van Dyke et al. 1996). White suggested that Christianity needed to change and become more earth friendly or be replaced by religions that were. Despite it inaccuracies outside the scope of this paper, White’s paper was widely taken up by critic and friend alike (see Toynbee 1974, Nash 1991, Berry 1992). White touched off a maelstrom of Christian Response, with publications from 1900-1950 numbering less than 10 and growing exponentially after White (Sheldon 1989). Despite its inaccuracies, White’s critique gathered momentum and a number of other critics joined in discussing the issues with both Christian doctrine and praxis by Christians (Toynbee 1974, Nash 1991, Berry 1992).

Post-White “Greening” of Christianity contrasted to simply accepting faith merged with Conservation doctrines of the early part of the 20th century. This re-awakening arose primarily in response to Lynn White’s (1967) blaming of the ecologic crisis on Christianity and the subsequent reexamination of the faith from within. It focused on searching out historically accepted normative beliefs and practices within the Christian tradition as a starting point for action rather than using the damaged state of the Creation as a starting point. This rediscovery stared with the Scripture first rather than the state of the world as a degraded resource base. It sees human & non-human creaturely relationships as con-servancy, each serving each other as God ordained rather than one primarily serving the other. And, it includes a tri-lateral relationship emphasis with human-God, human- non-human, and, God- non-human creature relationships within the context of God’s Garden.

Fourthly, as Christians and many others searched for answers in new locations, American acceptance of traditionally Eastern ideas, such as oneness with all things and interconnectedness of all things (Naess 1973, Devall 2001, Ball 1998) caused a strong negative reaction amongst
Christians. While it is rarely stated in this manner, this reactionary drive for a Biblical theology of Creation helped force Christians back to the Biblical basis for environmental stewardship.

**Tenets of a Rediscovered Christian Environmental Stewardship Outlined**


The basic premises of Christian Environmental Stewardship listed in Table 1.

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<th>Table 1. Principles of Christian Environmental Stewardship: God’s Garden</th>
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<td>1. Earth is the Lord’s.</td>
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<td>2. Fruitfulness a blessing for all creatures not to be destroyed because of human sin.</td>
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<td>3. Stewardship is the dominion of keeping and serving human and non-human Creation.</td>
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<td>4. Environmental consequences of sin are real.</td>
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<td>5. Reconciliation and Redemption of all Creation is God’s Providence</td>
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<td>6. Sabbath rest is holy; to remember God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all.</td>
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These ideals have been widely applied serving as the foundational ideals for a number of environmental organizations and are detailed as follows:

**Principle 1- The Earth is the Lord’s**

Contrary to the common conception that God gave the Earth to humans to do with as we please, this foundational principle holds the Earth is the Lord’s (Psalm 24:1) and we are to hold it in trust as stewards for the Creator. The earth has ascribed value because its Creator said it is good (Genesis 1:9, 18, 21, 25, 31). All creatures upon the Earth also praise the Lord, daily pouring out their speech (Psalm 19:1-6) Heavens Declare the Glory, Psalm 148, Isaiah 55:12- all the trees of the field will clap their hands, Job 12:7-9, ask the animals... and they will teach you). And, God upholds the creation to the present day (Hebrews 1:3 “sustaining all things by his powerful word, Job 12:10- in his hand is the life of every living thing). Further, God answers Job (Job 40, 41) that the hippo and the Nile crocodile are the first of His works, to be respected not out of their value to Job (indeed they are both very dangerous with hippo’s killing more people in Africa today than any other animal) but because God made them and pronounced them good (DeWitt 2002).
Principle 2- Fruitfulness is a blessing for all creatures; not to be destroyed because of human sin.

This idea of fruitfulness as God’s blessing for all has its roots in Genesis (vs.1:22-28) where animals are first blessed to fill the earth then God gives that blessing to other creatures. It is further developed in God’s commands to Noah to build an ark and his subsequent covenant with all creatures to never again destroy the earth because of human sin (Genesis 9). DeWitt has termed this “the first endangered species act” (DeWitt 1989).

Principle 3- Stewardship is the dominion of keeping and serving human and non-human Creation.

This principle is the foundational concept of the Christian Environmental Stewardship movement. Genesis 1:28 gives humans dominion over the earth. The Hebrew in this passage is kabesh and redah; very strongly interpreted this would seem to grant absolute power. Yet this is tempered by Genesis 2:15 where the Hebrew abad and shamar are used which mean dominion is a tilling and keeping like one keeps and prunes an already established orchard tree to make it more fruitful (see also Joshua 24:15; Numbers 6:24). As the first steward Adam is Namer (Genesis 2:19-20), implying that knowledge of each kind and each kind’s true identity is necessary for Adam to accurately name and thus care for his fellow creatures as a king. Christ is further developed throughout the Bible as a model for all Adams as the exemplar “King of Kings” who knows and serves his Creatures (see Van Dyke et al. 1996).

4. Environmental consequences of sin are real.

We know this principle empirically (Sheldon and Foster 2003, DeWitt 2003, Wilkinson et al. 1980, 1991). Biblical admonition against elimination of other creatures is found in Isaiah 5:8-“woe unto you who join house unto house and field unto field until you live alone in the land.” God’s covenental relationship with Creation is eluded to in Isaiah 24:4-6 (the covenant is probably that referred to in Genesis 9); Hosea 4:3 decries the results of our disobedience of God’s laws; Jeremiah 2:7, 12:4 give the negative consequences of our disobedience; Ezekiel 34:18 gives strong admonishment not to pollute & destroy the sustainability of Creation; cultural and social degradation are linked with environmental degradation in Leviticus 25:17, 23, 28; Jeremiah 8:7, Isaiah 24:4-5; Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (see also DeWitt 2004); and lastly, Revelation 11:18 states the destroyers of the earth will be destroyed.

5. Reconciliation and Redemption of all Creation is God’s Domain

Even in the Old Testament, healing of the land is connected with the healing of the people’s relationship with the Creator God. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21). In the New Testament John 3:16 says God’s love is for the whole world as the Greek used there is kosmos for all things. Colossians 1:16-20 states that Christ is the redeemer and reconciler of all things (Greek is ta panta, all things) while Romans 8:18-28 states that all Creation waits in eager expectation for redemption of the sons of men and the subsequent service of redeemed humanity to the rest of creation. Revelation 21-22- the redeemed Creation includes plants, water in city of light
6. Sabbath rest is holy: to remember God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all.

More than an antiquated religious idea, the Sabbath is central to the creatures of Creation. God created on the first six days, calling them good. But, on the seventh day he rested and called it Holy (Genesis 5:1, 26:14, 32, 35). It helps humans function better, takes the burden off of creation for forcing it to meet our whims (DeWitt 1994, 1991; Van Dyke et al. 1996). The Sabbath and Jubilee are for the benefit of all creatures (Exodus 23:6, Leviticus 25:1, 26:14, 32, 35). Sabbath rest is probably one of the most ignored of all stewardship ideas today.

Proponents of Christian Environmental Stewardship see these six tenets, phrased in various fashions, as central organizing principles to their lives on earth. Criticism launched from inside the movement (Santmire 2003) has called for decentralization of these principles; of movement of them from the center of one’s beliefs and processes to part and parcel of a larger call for Christians to focus on God’s kingdom (Santmire 2003) with piety and service to other people being virtues (Bouma-Prediger 1998). Yet, a principle hallmark of Christian Environmental Stewardship is that it is still “God’s Garden” we tend. The yield and the base of production both belong to him. And, the ultimate redemption of that Creation as well as us is the provenance of God alone. Christian Environmental Stewardship is the “God’s Garden” model.

Bouma-Prediger (2001) shares the following from Sittler (1970), it expresses the God’s Garden model philosophy in its most strict interpretation:

…it is difficult but possible to get men to understand that pollution is biologically disastrous, aesthetically offensive, equally obviously economically self-destructive and socially reductive of the quality of human life. But it is a very difficult job to get even Christians to see that so to deal with the Creation is Christianly blasphemous. A proper doctrine of creation and redemption would make it perfectly clear that from a Christian point of view the ecological crisis presents us not simply with moral tasks but requires of us a freshly renovated and fundamental theology of the first article whereby the Christian faith defines whence the Creation was formed, and why, and by whom, and to what end.”

Thus in the God’s Garden model to abuse the Garden is to also sin against its Creator. The Garden remains the Lord’s and while it provides for us and we provide for it but the purpose of the whole is to bring praise to the Creator.

Earth’s Garden

In contrast to Conservation (with wise use being the focus), another alternative non-Christian movement also increased momentum. That was the movement to see meaning in the wilderness, the Creation apart from humans, as an intrinsic good within itself. Writers like Thoreau (1980(1862) and John Muir (1913) were at its forefront (Fox 1981) And, during this time we began to set aside new sacred places that seemed untouched by human hands. Such places were National Parks and later Wilderness Areas. These were Eden without Adam. While they did serve an important conservation function, they also objectified the creatures and made the ideal a separation of human and non-human creatures deeply entrenched in the American mind. This was not the Native American connectedness to the land, indeed our National Parks do not allow
hunting of any kind so that we might not interfere with “natural” processes and thereby have a reference for how things should be. And, as such our parks ensure people take only pictures and leave only footprints- interacting with the natural only in a voyeuristic way. Table 2 below summarizes the principle views of this movement.

Table 2. Principles of the Earth’s Garden
1. Wilderness is an ideal state, one that does not include humans.
2. Earth is a being, even a God, more than the sum of its interconnected parts.
3. Environmentalism is the protection of species, each with intrinsic value, and the protection of Wilderness.

Henry David Thoreau (1980) wrote that in wilderness lies the preservation of the world. By this he means the inspiration of the wild, of the untrammeled, of the place of testing. However it has come to mean more than that. In the most recent iteration, the Man and The Biosphere Programme (http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=4801&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) uses an “Earth’s Garden” model of the world to structure nature reserves with the core virtually untouched by humans, a buffer zone of moderate interference around that, and then the rest of the human impacted world outside of that. Such models are seen as the only hope for preservation of the species involved with sustainable development in them based on ecotourism and sustainable development around the core based on agriculture. While UNESCO hopes to save species and eliminate poverty through this model, the reverse can often happen such as it did in Kenya with implementation of no-hunting in the country. The result was that poverty increased, animal populations outside of parks were eaten into oblivion and artificially high populations in parks caused tremendous habitat damage; and the cycle continues (Machena 2003).

Within this framework, all organisms are thought to be connected (Naess 1973, Devall 2001) even to the point that one superorganism emerges from them all that is greater than the sum of the parts (Lovelock 1988). The philosophical study of these connected parts of the whole is referred to as Deep Ecology or Deep, Long Term Ecology (Naess 1973, 1987, and Bouma-Prediger 2001). Its tenets are Buddhist in origin- where the goal of enlightenment is to surrender the self and become one with everything. Right relationship is one lived out with this oneness in all things. Matthew Fox (Boulton 1990) worked to bring this mysticism into Christianity but was re-buffed as his was not based upon Biblical tenets that have been seen as central to Christian belief. Evangelical resistance to Christian Environmental Stewardship has often come from connecting these views (wrongly) to Christian ideas about loving and caring for Creation (VanDyke et al. 1993, Campolo 1992, Lowe 2009). And, in my opinion, Evangelical resistance has also come a deep seated fear that accepting a scriptural “co-creaturliness” for all things also means accepting scientific evolutionary common ancestry for all living creatures. This view has also been seen as untenable because it tends to separate people out of the creation and thus not allow the poor to use the natural world to meet acute needs, even to the point of being described as fascism of the rich on the poor by some authors (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997). Gould (1990) says this “We must squarely face and unpleasant historical fact. The conservation movement was born, in large part, as an elitist attempt by wealthy social leaders to preserve wilderness as a domain for patrician leisure and contemplation...We have never entirely shaken
this legacy of environmentalism as something opposed to immediate human needs, particularly the impoverished and unfortunate.”

Lovelock (1988) does try, as Leopold (1966) did before him to develop a model of citizenship in this community which includes human and non-human alike. This model citizenship may indeed help humans to better care for their non-human neighbors. But, the highest goal of this citizenship is to be a “plain and simple” citizen of the land and not impact one’s creaturely neighbors (positively or negatively) through one’s living.

However, my purpose herein is not to thoroughly critique this biocentric “Earth’s Garden” model. Rather, it is to demonstrate that such tenets that are similar to eastern mysticism and thus helped to spur a reactionary investigation of the Bible for stewardship ideals and, that it is the linking of Biblical ideals of oneness with other creatures and interconnectedness of creatures that stops many Christians from understanding and accepting Christian Environmental Stewardship as Godly model of living.

Our Garden

In contrast to mystifying the whole, the Our Garden model separates us from the rest of the natural world and leaves no room for value in it other than human related value. We become not only the measurer of the world but the measure as well (Bouma-Prediger 2001). There is no more spiritual in the most extreme form of this view.

Seeing the world as a materialistic phenomena, Naturalism as it were, is quite old in western thought (Glacken 1967). Philosophers such as Thales of Miletus (585 B.C.), strove to attribute all events to natural causes rather than to the results of divine action. This includes the atomists who sought to see all things as results of the physical action of “atoms”, even extending this to the gods themselves being composed of atoms (Epicurus 341-271 B.C). It is not a far stretch to go from this to an idea that the earth and all that is therein has no intrinsic meaning. Such is the value at the heart of western materialism (Everden 1989). Bouma-Prediger writes about Worster’s (1993) comments on Smith:

“Though born and raised in the seaside town of Kirkcaldy, Scotland, Smith “seems to live his entire life oblivious to the nature around him. He set out to revolutionize the study of human economics in total disregard of the economy of nature.” Smith believed that a system of “natural liberty” in which every person is free to pursue his own interest in his own way is in harmony with our own acquisitive human nature. Smith (like Locke before him) argued that the natural world has not intrinsic value or value irrespective of its usefulness to humans; rather, “a thing of value has value only when and if it serves some direct human use (value in use) or can be exchanged for something else that has value (value in exchange).

As such, Worster (1993) and Bouma-Prediger (2001) argue that Smith is the first and archetypical modern materialist. In this context best use is the most utility for the most people. Stewardship is wise use, with disciplines such as Scientific Forestry, as well as Game Management, Agronomics, and etc... Even Christians bought into this to some extent- wise use,
best use for humans was indeed praise to God. Consider again the words of Lowdermilk as per Sheldon (1992), Lowdermilk suggested:

Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect the hills from overgrazing by the herds, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become sterile and stony ground and wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall live in poverty or perish from the earth.

More recently Christian Critics outside the Stewardship movement have missed the Biblical call for stewardship (Wright 1995, Brown 2008, Lowe 2009). Their attempts have been to co-opt the movement’s momentum and re-craft its messages based solely on human good. Calvin Beisner is chief among those seeking to “un-green” stewardship. His website for the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (see below for link) speaks for itself in misunderstanding the links between environmental degradation, such as global warming, and the degradation of the poor. Such co-opting voices are in the minority.

“Yet for some time, a growing chorus of voices has been attempting to redefine traditional Judeo-Christian teachings on stewardship, and ultimately, our duties as responsible human beings.

These advocates are passionate about the environment. Unfortunately, their passion is often based on a romantic view of nature, a misguided distrust of science and technology, and an intense focus on problems that are highly speculative and largely irrelevant to meeting our obligations to the world’s poor.”

Basic tenet’s of the Our Garden philosophy include the following:

**Table 3. Principles of Our Garden, Anthropocentric Environmentalism**

1. Earth is ours.
2. Resources are to be used wisely, leaving some for contingencies and future generations. Our self interest, as a species guides this. Where biology plays a role, it is for preservation of the cannon fodder for evolutionary processes and for preservation of ecological processes that benefit humans.
3. Value of other organisms is derived by what we use them for, e.g. food, fiber, education, companionship.
4. Stewardship is seen as misguided as we can’t really save anything in a geologically meaningful timescale.

Rachel Carson (1962), as mentioned earlier, really helped set the environmental issues of the mid-twentieth century in an immediate and personal context (Cafaro 2002). As I wrote earlier in this paper, her message was if the consequences of industrialized pollution could silent the spring chorus of birds in our front yards, then it is likely it can also likely silence the human chorus of
our children’s voices next. Carson’s message touched off a wave of environmental concern, concern for the non-human world around us. This concern spawned the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts of 1970 because concern for the environment but primarily as it benefits people. The Endangered Species Act in 1973 expanded this concern to species for their own sake.

Murdy (1975) helps us understand the goal of an anthropocentric environmental ethic is to provide for the welfare of humankind and, via enlightened self interest in sustaining the ecological systems that support us, to sustain the earth. He and others argue that such enlightened self interest is the only real basis for human care about the natural world. Stephen J. Gould (1990) argues that the golden rule of such care for the world is to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. While such an interpretation of the Golden Rule may produce actions that benefit the environment through benefitting humans, and, as Gould argues well, our helping the Creation will not indeed save it, Christians must reject this as a basis for action in the world.

Gould further dismisses Christian Environmental Stewardship with the following 2 statements:

1. That we live on a fragile planet now subject to permanent derailment and disruption by human intervention;
2. That humans must learn to act as stewards for the threatened world.

Gould is right in part. We cannot change the ultimate fate of the Creation, death. However, we may choose to maintain it in a rich state and thereby maximize the chances we preserve the ecological systems that allow us to live in comfort. However, in not acting to care for things we learn to not care. And, in not acting, Christians should also realize they have passed on an opportunity to be like the creating God who cares for us. We are to act as stewards regardless of the outcome and leave redemption of the Garden to God (VanDyke et al. 1993, DeWitt 1991, Brown 2008). It is also a reaction against this value only for the sake of humankind that helped fuel the search for Christian Environmental Stewardship in the Bible rather than derive it as a need of the harmed creation around us.

Other Christian Views

Though evangelicals have been involved in environmental stewardship (Wilson 1998, Ball 1998), it is the critique from within their ranks that has drawn more conservative evangelical leaders into a distinctly Christian view of environmentalism, placing humans’ relationship to the Creator and Redeemer clearly at the center of our relationships to both humans and non-human creation; care for the Creation, such care for the Creation is largely to support continuance of the God-Human relationship. This “Greening of Evangelicals” is what is referred to by Harden (2005) though it is often an extension of evangelical tenets and the practical ideals of Conservation. In part, acknowledgement of this shift in the movement has led to the singing of the Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility by the National Association of Evangelicals; representing 50,000 member churches and over 30 million evangelicals. Signatories of this include evangelicals such James Dobson and Billy Graham. Harden (2005) writes
"The environment is a values issue," said the Rev. Ted Haggard, president of the 30 million-member National Association of Evangelicals. "There are significant and compelling theological reasons why it should be a banner issue for the Christian right."

In October, the association's leaders adopted an "Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" that, for the first time, emphasized every Christian's duty to care for the planet and the role of government in safeguarding a sustainable environment.

"We affirm that God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part," said the statement, which has been distributed to 50,000 member churches. "Because clean air, pure water, and adequate resources are crucial to public health and civic order, government has an obligation to protect its citizens from the effects of environmental degradation."

Several other Christian organizations have environmental stewardship or creation keeping as their central focus. They include Evangelical Environmental Network, Academy of Evangelical Ethicists and Scientists, Creation Care Studies Program, Restoring Eden, Educational Concerns for Hunger, and, Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies. Weblinks follow the reference section of this article.

Other Faith Views

Other faith traditions have also re-discovered their own “green elements”, seeing environmental stewardship as a command from God (Deen 2004). Links to these sites follow at the end of this article. And an excellent survey can be found at the Harvard Divinity School Center for Study of World Religions, Ecology site summarizing papers presented their over the course of three years from 1996-1998. A classic quote describing the re-discovery of such ideas is expressed on the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life’s website (see link after article)

"PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT IS A MITZVAH!

Protecting human health and the diversity of life is a value emphasized in Torah, Talmud, and rabbinic literature throughout the ages—beginning with the commandment in Genesis for Adam and Eve to serve and protect the Garden of Eden.

I’m Jewish—why haven’t I ever heard about a connection between Judaism and the environment?

Many Jews haven’t. Despite the richness of Jewish teachings related to our responsibility to protect the environment, few Jews have been introduced to them."
Interfaith coalitions have also grown in scope and importance. Amongst the newest is the Noah Alliance and Prince Phillip’s ARC (Alliance on Religion and Conservation). Amongst the most longstanding is the National Religious Environment. From their website (link below):

“In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, interest in addressing the environmental crisis began to grow exponentially within diverse fields of religious life.

Senior religious leaders met throughout 1991 and 1992 amid increasingly urgent concern about environmental conditions. Appreciation for what could be a distinctively religious contribution also grew as ancient teachings were seen to have powerful relevance to contemporary challenges.

Establishment of the Partnership was approved at the highest levels of denominational governance in late 1992. Rarely had agreement been reached across so broad a spectrum on so specific a program. And in October 1993, with staff based at national offices of participating faith groups, the Partnership set about its work.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, elements of environmental concern, better understood as “stewardship of” and “commands to care for” the non-human creation, have long existed in Christianity. These traditions have been re-discovered in the last thirty years particularly in a reactionary response to both an overly biocentric model of the world as “Earth’s Garden” and an overly anthropocentric model of the world as “Our Garden”.

As such, these re-discovered ideas are a strong basis for understanding how humans have been called to participate in the creation. They have also served as powerful motivators for interfaith coalitions with care of God’s creation. These traditions call not for wise use out of enlightened self-interest, or preservation of creation apart from human presence. Instead they call for a God-commanded “con-servacy” of stewardship in which humans serve all of creation and the rest of creation in turn serves us. They are not traditional religions with inserts of Green ideas, but rather hold elements rediscovered in traditional Christian canons that are quite environmentally friendly. It is such religious concepts that hold substantial promise for human endeavors as we approach the world of tomorrow.

The God’s Garden model answers the principle problems of the Earth’s Garden in it places the ultimate value in God and places humankind in the Garden, not as passive observers in a “hands off” park but as active and valued participants who can have real contributions for shaping the future of the garden. It answers the Our Garden problems of humankind not having any real sense of relationship with other creatures while the God’s Garden yet serves our needs and we it by design. The reactionary re-assessment of scripture and church tradition leading to Christian Environmental stewardship thus stands uniquely apart from other modes of interpreting our being in this world and has benefitted from reacting against un-Christian elements in both during its formation.
Literature Cited


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**Organizations**

The Following are a series of “faith-based” environmental organizations. Textual descriptions following their web site address are quoted from their own web pages. My intention is that this list shows the larger inter-faith partnerships first, the evangelical Christian coalitions and Jewish coalitions second, and, the larger academic educational organizations last. These sites feature many links to other organizations. I have excluded traditional faith related colleges and their environmental educational programs only in the interest of space. Many such programs can be found at the institutions referenced by the coalition educational organizations following.

**Interfaith Partnerships**

**Alliance of Religions and Conservation**  
http://www.arcworld.org/

ARC is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. We help the religions link with key environmental organizations – creating powerful alliances between faith communities and conservation groups. ARC was founded in 1995 by HRH Prince Philip. We now work with 11 major faiths through the key traditions within each faith.

**National Religious Partnership for the Environment**  
http://www.nrpe.org/

Guided by biblical teaching, the Partnership seeks to encourage people of faith to weave values and programs of care for God’s creation throughout the entire fabric of religious life:

- Liturgy, worship and prayer;
- Theological study, the education of future clergy, and of the young;
- The stewardship of our homes, lands and resources;
- Protecting the lives of our communities and health of our children;
Our social ministry to the poor and vulnerable who have first and preferential claim on our conscience; and
Bringing the perspectives of moral values and social justice before public policymakers.

We worship and obey our loving God by serving God's good creation in neighborly love and in the assurance of God's covenant "between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations" (Genesis 9:12). Finally, we seek as well to offer and will eagerly discuss the insights of scripture, moral teaching and social values, especially as they have come from sustained social struggle and solidarity with those who have reached fresh freedom to serve the common good.

Noah Alliance
http://www.noahalliance.org/
The Noah Alliance is a new collaboration of Jewish, Evangelical, Protestant, and other religious community organizations, and individual people of faith, that are concerned about the protection of endangered species and biological diversity.

Academy of Evangelical Ethicists and Scientists
see http://www.noahalliance.org/
Among its nearly 70 members, the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists includes scientists and ethicists that have been consulted by evangelical leaders, other Christian leaders, and leaders of Jewish and other religions over three decades. Membership in the Academy is restricted to evangelical scientists and ethicists who have earned the highest degrees in their disciplines and who are actively engaged in their fields of expertise in research, college and university teaching, and public service. The Academy also contains a Council of professional scientists and ethicists that are distinguished by having made very substantial contributions to the professional primary refereed literature.

Evangelical and Jewish Coalitions

Evangelical Environmental Network
http://www.creationcare.org/
EEN is a unique evangelical ministry whose purpose is to "declare the Lordship of Christ over all creation" (Col. 1:15-20). EEN was formed because we recognize many "environmental" problems are fundamentally spiritual problems. EEN's flagship publication, Creation Care magazine, provides you with biblically informed and timely articles on topics ranging from how to protect your loved ones against environmental threats to how you can more fully praise the Creator for the wonder of His creation.

Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life
http://www.coejl.org/index.php
Protecting human health and the diversity of life is a value emphasized in Torah, Talmud, and rabbinic literature throughout the ages—beginning with the commandment in Genesis for Adam and Eve to serve and protect the Garden of Eden.
COEJL seeks to expand the contemporary understanding of such Jewish values as *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) and *tzedek* (justice) to include the protection of both people and other species from environmental degradation. COEJL seeks to extend such traditions as social action and *g'milut hasadim* (performing deeds of loving kindness) to environmental action and advocacy. And *shalom* (peace or wholeness), which is at the very core of Jewish aspirations, is in its full sense harmony in all creation.

**Restoring Eden**

http://www.restoredden.org/

Restoring Eden makes hearts bigger, hands dirtier and voices stronger by encouraging Christians to learn to love, serve and protect God's creation.

Restoring Eden is not a traditional ministry - we are less about membership and programs, and more about a conversation and a community that lives out the biblical mandate to "speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves" (Proverbs 31:8) as advocates for natural habitats, wild species and indigenous subsistence cultures.

**International Educational Organizations**

**Au Sable Institute for Environmental Studies**

http://www.ausables.org

Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies provides university-level courses with transferable credits to over 50 colleges and universities, the framework and services for sustainable community-building, environmental education and restoration for school children and adults, facilities for community and environmental organizations, community and regional conferences and retreats, and outreach services. We do this in the Great Lakes Forest of northern Michigan, Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest, north of the Everglades, East Africa, and South India.

**Creation Care Studies Program**

http://www.creationcsp.org/index.html

The Creation Care Study Program is a high-caliber academic semester abroad connecting Christian faith with the most complex, urgent global issues of the coming decades. Two programs during both fall and spring semesters: one in Belize, Central America and one in the South Pacific (New Zealand and Samoa).

**Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization (ECO)**

http://www.echonet.org/

A Not-for-profit Christian organization located on a demonstration farm in North Fort Myers, Florida. Our vision is to bring glory to God and a blessing to mankind by using science and technology to help the poor. We strive to provide ideas, training, information, and seeds critical to those working in agricultural development in third world countries.

**Other Religions**
Harvard Divinity School Center for Study of World Religions, Ecology
http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/research/ecology/index.html

The Religions of the World and Ecology conference series, hosted by the Center for the Study of World Religions, was the result of research conducted at the Center over a three-year period (1996-1998). Conferences involved the direct participation and collaboration of some seven hundred scholars, religious leaders and environmental specialists from around the world.

These conferences were organized by the Center for the Study of World Religions and cosponsored by Bucknell University and the Center for Respect of Life and Environment of the Humane Society of the United States.

Islam, Science, Environment, and Technology.

from SECTION ONE: A General Introduction to Islam's Attitude Toward the Universe, Natural Resources, and the Relation Between Man and Nature

The approach of Islam toward the use and development of the earth's resources was put thus by' Ali ibn Abi-Talib, the fourth Caliph, to a man who had developed and reclaimed abandoned land: "Partake of it gladly, so long as you are a benefactor, not a despoiler; a cultivator, not a destroyer."16

This positive attitude involves taking measures to improve all aspects of life: health, nutrition, and the psychological and spiritual dimensions, for man's benefit and the maintenance of his welfare, as well as for the betterment of life for all future generations.

[T]he aim of both the conservation and development of the environment in Islam is the universal good of all created beings.

Harvard Forum on Islam and Ecology
http://www.hds.harvard.edu/cswr/research/ecology/

Excerpt from Plenary Address by Seyyed Hossein Nasr at Harvard Divinity School, Center for Study of World Religions' conference on Islam and Ecology, May 7-10, 1998

Although there is an environmental crisis in the Islamic world today as a result of the onslaught of modernization, Islam as a religion teaches a view of the environment based upon the harmony between humans as God's vice regent on earth and nature as a reflection of God's Wisdom. Classical Islamic civilization demonstrated on many levels this harmony based on Qur'anic teachings which need to be resuscitated in light of present day needs to encounter the frightful effects of the environmental crisis.

Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences
http://www.ifees.org
IFEES networks world-wide with NGOs, international organizations, academic bodies and grassroots organizations and invites collaboration from organizations and individuals from all persuasions who are also dedicated to the maintenance of the Earth as a healthy habitat for future generations of humankind as well as other living beings.