CE3530: Christian Education in Relation to Creation  
April 29, 2002 The Rural Environment
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Issues of Creation and Community

- The availability and safety of food
- Environmental Concerns--the sustainability of soil and water, flora and fauna
- The consolidation and monopolistic control in the food system and the economic injustices that follow
- Genetics--cloning--genetic manipulation
- Land ownership and control--the displacement of farmers and communities

In this time of ecological urgency, the considerable collection of biblical texts dealing with earth care ought not to be confined to consideration in academies or learned journals. These texts need to be studied, given a fresh hearing, and then set loose in the world. Rightly understood, they can light some fires, ignite some concern and indicate a direction for our communities, our churches, and our synagogues.


All human wealth depends ultimately on what God has entrusted to us in the immeasurable riches of the earth's crust....This is true, inasmuch as all that we can count as material goods originates from what grows on, feeds on, or is dug out of the soil of our planet. Even in our modern industrial and highly technological world, we depend on the efficient use of well-maintained farmland to keep us fed and clothed while we go about our creation and consumption of wealth in other ways many steps removed from direct contact with the land.


"The people in rural communities you serve are on the front line of perhaps the most crucial global issues now that the Cold War is not an imminent danger--environmental sustainability and food production."

Dr. Richard Austin, environmentalist, theologian, author, 1991
The Creation is Made and Claimed by God the Creator
Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."

Leviticus 25: 23, "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants."

This is a foundational concept to understanding the relationship of God, creation, and people. It permeates all the major categories of Old Testament literature: the Penteteuch, the wisdom literature, and the prophets. Fundamentally, the Old Testament assertion, with various nuances, is that God has created both Land and people and still holds claim to them. Yet God shares responsibility in some way with people for the Land.

Trust: A Biblical Concept of Sharing Responsibility for Creation
A Definition

“…a charge or duty imposed in faith or confidence or as a condition of some relationship…something committed or entrusted to one to be used or cared for in the interest of another.”


“Israel's theory of land, as it is portrayed in the conquest traditions and in the torah provisions, is that the land is assigned to the entire community as a trust from Yahweh.”


“...the ultimate meaning of creation is to be found in the heart and purpose of the creator and that the world has been positively valued by God for itself. It must be valued by the creatures to whom it has been provisionally entrusted.”

God's Claim as Creator
"In the beginning, when God created..."

The whole cluster of words--creator/ creation/ create/creature--are confessional words freighted with peculiar meaning. Terms such as "cosmos" and "nature" should never be carelessly used as equivalents, for these words do not touch the theocentric, covenantal relational affirmation being made. The word "creation" belongs inevitably with its counter word "creator."...The single sentence, "Creator creates creation," is decisive for everything....This governing sentence affirms that the creator is not disinterested and the creation is not autonomous.


DOMINION

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." Genesis 1:26

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. Ps. 8:3-8

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ROYALTY

The ideal model for the relationship between humankind (man and woman) and the earth and its creatures is the king/people relationship. In passages where the same "have dominion" verb occurs, the emphasis is on gentleness and on an active program of caring that results in shalom.

"to till and to keep" Gen. 2:15

These two words describe the dual task of the farmer and of the entire society. From the beginning, alongside the work of tilling has been the responsibility of "keeping" the land. This "keeping" is the same word used to describe the Lord's caring relationship to a city (Ps 127:1) or to a people and an individual (Ps 121). The farmer and the community are called to till the land and to care for it as well.


People as a Part of Creation

adam (human) and `adama (ground)

Gen. 3:19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Deut. 20:19 If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although you may take food from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you?

Deut. 22:6 If you come on a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs, with the mother sitting on the fledglings or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young.

Pedagogical Strategies for Creation Caring in a Rural Context

- Understand the relational nature of the context
  - Be present, listen, learn, build trust first
  - Communicate love of people and place
- Respect that for many people these are first order issues—a matter of life (culture) and living
  - Most are well-intentioned and faithful and have good reasons for what they do even if you do not necessarily agree
- Use narrative well and connect with the story of the people
- Use questions (not declarations) as a form of critique