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Environmental Advocacy Makes Strange Bedfellows: A Plea for Lawyers, Scientists, and Theologians to Caucus & Promote Environmental Sustainability

Renee A. Pistone*

I. Introduction

Apocalyptic eschatology is complicated as theologians, scientists, and lawyers debate it.¹ The Bible prophesizes an apocalyptic end with the world plunged into warfare at the Armageddon;² yet, one theologian, Jurgen Moltmann sees the end of the world simply as a beginning.³ Moltmann connects this premise with Christ's death not being Christ's end, since the resurrection brought about a new beginning.⁴ It can be thought of as the myth of the Phoenix rising from the ashes; hence, the best is yet to come, but this theology often leads to unlawful acts of pollution and environmental destruction. From a theological standpoint, an act is unlawful, if it violates God's will regarding human conduct and humanity's dominion over Earth. Theologians agree that God's plan for human morality is set forth in the laws of the *Ten Commandments*.⁵ Hence, the connections between law and theology are logical and profound since our codified laws are rooted in such theological underpinnings; henceforth, the *Ten Commandments* provide a basis for

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1. See Dan Edwards, *A Theological Primer: The Underlying Conventions of Theological Practice*, 53 MERCER L. REV. 1151 (2002).

2. JURGEN MOLTMANN, *THE COMING OF GOD* (Margaret Kohl trans., Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1996).

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. Walter Brueggemann, *A Symposium: The Theology of the Practice of Law: Presentations and Comments: The Endless Task of Interpretation*, 53 MERCER L. REV. 1019 (2002).

modern law.⁶ Today, connections between theology and science are necessary to help explain complacency in the face of environmental abuses. These environmental abuses and the human response of inaction is rooted in Moltmann's theology, which glorifies the future apocalypse to the detriment of our present planetary environment. In short, what is needed to combat Moltmann's ideas are for lawyers, scientists, and theologians to caucus and reach mutual understandings in an effort to promote sustainability (good stewardship of Earth's natural resources).

II. Science and the Role of Dominion

A legal question arises as to how the Creator expects us to rule in dominion over this planet. Through theology and science, humans ponder whether it is lawful to randomly create and to destroy. Advanced scientific technology enables us to exercise our dominion over all earthly creatures and this power creates legal and theological questions. For example, scientific technology has devised many ways to undermine nature; for example, with modern medicine we discovered ways to control production of our food and we can genetically alter produce and animals with little controls on this. In fact, some companies like Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) actually own certain genetic codes for organic plants.⁷ ADM owns a piece of creation, so when farmers need to grow rice, they have to buy seeds from ADM. In short, ADM has an unlawful monopoly.⁸ Therefore, ADM's monopoly, stemming from its scientific developments, has undermined nature leading to the oppression of poor farmers who must pay high prices for seeds.⁹ Here, it becomes clear how theological, scientific, and legal questions are presented concurrently, which further highlights the need for mutual understandings between all three practitioners.

III. Environmental Destruction

Clearly, theological arguments lead to the conclusion that such scientific achievements help us to play God as we copy God's creation process. On the other hand, it is science that teaches us how environmentally destructive our habits are.¹⁰ For example, scientific knowledge helps us understand why our lifestyle is destroying the ozone layer¹¹ when we need the ozone layer to survive. One scientific

6. *Id.*

7. See Profile of Archer Daniels Midland Company, <http://www.coopamerica.org/programs>.

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.*

10. See www.epa.gov/globalwarming/index.html.

11. *Id.*

explanation for ozone layer destruction is called the greenhouse effect which occurs when polluting gases become trapped in our atmosphere heating it and melting polar ice caps.¹² Consequently, our endangered species have been unwitting victims because of our collective behaviors.

So, it can be contemplated, why is Moltmann's apocalyptic theology looking forward to the end-this apocalypse? To answer that question, Moltmann articulates, "we can no longer put up with earthly, limited and vulnerable life, and in our eschatological finality we destroy life's fragile beauty."¹³ More importantly, people rush through life without worrying about environmental sustainability. Worsening environmental problems affect everyone and theologians, scientists, and lawyers have to become aware and prepare to solve problems together.

IV. A Reason for Complacency in the Face of Environmental Abuse

Accepting Moltmann's notions about the end times often leads to complacency as people focus on these happy apocalyptic scenarios because God re-creates a new pure Earth. This scenario may help us get through life, but it's also harming us. Even though we know Christian theology, like science and law, are very complex,¹⁴ there are some theologians who claim to hold the absolute truth and they are not living life to its fullest. Rather, they focus on the signs that signify the end times.¹⁵ Dutifully, they point out anything as a sign of the end times, which for them, is consistent with prophecies.¹⁶ Yet, they may not realize that it is not God bringing about these horrible signs (severe weather patterns, wars, or extinctions). Hence, it's humanity's dominion over Earth and our exercise of free-will in choosing destructive behaviors such as pollution, which is an unlawful act. Further, scientists link human dominion as a major cause of our ecological problems. Scientists and lawyers would say that, it's not up to humanity to help bring about the apocalypse due to carefree polluting and rampant environmental destruction. Surely, no theologian, scientist, or lawyer should applaud news of another animal extinction because it means we are coming closer to the apocalypse.¹⁷

12. *Id.*

13. Moltmann, *supra* note 2.

14. MARJORIE SUCHOCKI, *GOD CHRIST CHURCH* (Herder and Herder, revised ed. 1999).

15. *See* Moltmann, *supra* note 2.

16. Biblical end times signs are recorded by the Apostle John in *Revelation*. Also, the gospel of *Matthew* prominently contributes to the shaping of Christian apocalyptic eschatology.

17. *See generally* Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition*, in HESSEL & RUETHER, *CHRISTIANITY & ECOLOGY*, 3-2, Harvard Edition 2000.

Moltmann's apocalyptic eschatology teaches that in the end, God will create a new Heaven and Earth the (New Creation). Those who pray for the apocalypse should be certain God will forgive our planetary abuses. Henceforth, it is only through divine forgiveness that God creates a brand new Earth (a heavenly kingdom on earth).

Theologian and scholar, Thomas Aquinas argues that we cannot know all God's mysteries. In short, we can only walk by faith.¹⁸ Scientists wonder what if our planet cannot sustain us and God does not return in time? Scientific technology advises that humans need to preserve Earth. As current data suggests there is no other life sustaining planet in our solar system.¹⁹ Earth is the perfect planet for humanity. Surely, every generations' theologians argue whether God will return during their life time.²⁰ Scientists would implore theologians like Moltmann to consider whether we can afford to trash this planet in anticipation of God's renewal; meanwhile, lawyers file lawsuits in an effort to stop planetary abuses. All three practitioners: the theologian, the scientist, and the lawyer are using their talents in different ways to problem solve when they should be collaborating.

Moltmann's "happy" apocalyptic theology is potentially dangerous to us and to our planet²¹ as Christian theology teaches that we wait with joyful anticipation of the apocalypse since it will result in the New Creation. For many Christian theologians, these are exciting theological points to consider. Lawyers and scientists, however, have a duty not to lose sight of their daily lives and our planet's welfare. Further, Moltmann's approach leads to haphazard environmental destruction since people may become enthralled with his brand of apocalyptic eschatology. Later on, such loyal adherents will forget one basic fact which is: truly, we do not know when the end times will occur.

Scientists explain that as polluting and destructive humans, it is our industrial lifestyle which corrupts our eco-system. Our ecosystem is now uninhabitable for certain plants and animals. Theologians continue to ponder the question whether this destruction angers our Creator. After all, our once harmonic ecosystem has been transformed into a state of unpredictability; for example, everything is unbalanced with record level sea levels. Furthermore, cyclical weather patterns (now out of sync) lead to a longer and more severe hurricane season and the ocean's temperature is directly linked to powerful hurricanes and tornado

18. AN AQUINAS READER (Mary Clark ed., Fordham Press, 2000).

19. www.nasa.gov.org/.

20. This view was paramount in the writings of St. Paul who urged early Christians that Christ's return was especially imminent.

21. McDaniel, *A Place in Creation: Ecological Visions in Science, Religion, & Economy*, Toronto: United Church Publishing, 1992.

formations.²² Scientists conclude that warmer African costal waters will continue to result in more dangerous life threatening hurricanes.²³

This polluted world is now a newly formed demented creation because of our dominion over earthly creations. Our planet has evolved into a fragmented unbalanced place that is different from the original pure Earth.²⁴ Surely, God's plan did not intend for a bird to get black oil on its wings as it fished, as these twisted deviations happen because of our greed for oil, and the negligence actions that cause such oil tanker spills.²⁵ Now, our newly evolved planet is the major deviation from the original cosmic creation and instead of creatures flourishing, they are dying.²⁶ In essence, our planet is dying and we are responsible for the acceleration of its death. Theologians can tie these events to prophesies, scientists can explain the destruction, but lawyers are in a unique position to stop the destruction by using the legal system. To that end, more community action and cooperation is needed amongst theologians, scientists, and lawyers to stop the ill effects of global warming and rainforest destruction.²⁷

V. Nash: A Modern Theological View

Modern Christian theology written after Moltmann includes how the Apocalypse anticipates the destruction of the biosphere.²⁸ In fact, Nash, a theologian, calls environmentally conscious Christians to mobilize to help ease our planet's destruction. Nash calls Christians to employ the virtues of sustainability, adaptability, flexibility, relationships, frugality, equality, solidarity, and bio-responsibility.²⁹ Next, Nash describes the six environmental sins as: multiple forms of pollution, resource exhaustion, ozone depletion, excessive population growth, and economic mal-distribution.³⁰ Hence, the results from our six environmental sins looks like a new version of planet earth. Sadly, it has become a less diverse world with extinct species that grows increasingly warmer.³¹

22. www.nationalweatherservice.gov.

23. *Id.*

24. www.greenpeace.org.

25. *Id.*

26. *Id.*

27. Shamara Shantu Riley, *Ecology is a Sistah's Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism*, in *THE SACRED EARTH* (Carol Adams ed., Continuum, New York, 1993).

28. Nash, *Six Environmental Sins and Six Environmental Virtues*, *RESPONSE* (February 1997).

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. James H. Cone, *Whose Earth is it Anyway?*, <http://www.crosscurrents.org/cone.htm>.

There still appear to be some Christians who are not mindful enough about saving the environment and may be unwilling to cooperate. The question arises how come all Christians are not environmental activists, given Christian reverence for God as Sovereign and Creator? Further, if Christians love God should we not cherish what God creates. Christian doctrine teaches that a new heaven and a new earth will be re-created at the end. Hence, some Christians are interpreting that to mean that we can do whatever to our planet. In fact, to those Christians, Earth's ecological destruction is not bad as it brings us closer to the end (when God returns).

VI. Advocacy Roles for: Scientists, Lawyers, and Theologians

Therefore, scientists, lawyers, and Christian theologians, in particular, need to care about global warming, pollution, and the depletion of natural resources. There are Christian theologians asking what can be done about these problems. Many Christians are organizing worldwide to institute and continue recycling programs. They are trying to find alternative resources for energy. For example, Christians are now buying hybrid cars that burn less fossil fuels. More things are now produced from recycled materials. Certain countries are trying to curtail their production of harmful gases.³² Next, what is the church doing about this? Many churches recycle on an institutional level. Historically, religious views about the environment and creation did matter.³³ Educational programs at seminaries include components about Christianity and the environment. Many church leaders are standing with organizations and lawyers worldwide to educate the world about environmental destruction.³⁴

Finally, violent changes in the weather patterns due to an increasingly warmer ocean has caused serious disturbances in the balance of the ecosystem.³⁵ Our industrialized lifestyle with the proliferation of polluting gases has formed a hole in the ozone layer.³⁶ The ozone layer protects our planet from harmful sunrays with the polar ice caps stabilizing our ecosystem's temperature.³⁷ Sadly, this delicate

32. www.nature.com.

33. Laurel Kearns, *The Context of Eco-theology*, in BLACKWELL COMPANION TO MODERN THEOLOGY, (Gareth Jones Malden, eds., Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

34. *See generally*, THE CARE OF CREATION: FOCUSING CONCERN AND ACTION, (R.J. Berry ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).

35. Jim Motavalli, *Feeling the Heat: The World Wakes Up*, ENVIRONMENTAL MAGAZINE, Mar. 26, 2006 at ____, available at <http://www.emagazine.com/view/?3136&src=>.

36. *Id.*

37. AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH (Lawrence Bender Productions, Released Aug. 31, 2006).

balance that God ordained when the universe was created has been seriously disturbed and corrupted by humanity's dominion over creation. This is an urgent problem because the effects of our destructive behaviors are being felt right now.

The theological question is whether dominion equals ecological accountability. Yes, nature's hierarchy appears to be deliberate so that humanity would be accountable as it seems like God's intention was for humanity to protect and preserve the earth. Things, unfortunately, have not turned out that way. Conversely, the question arises, could dominion justify ecological irresponsibility? No, it's very unlikely, since science shows us that nothing in nature is meaninglessly destroyed, rather nature is renewed in cycles. For example, most organic forms are renewed.³⁸ We can create composts because organic matter changes into valuable fertilizer that fuels creation of food, it is cyclical.

Also, the seasons change in cyclical patterns as Summer is not destroyed but changes into Fall, it renews. Scientific research and observations tell us that most things are dependent on each other,³⁹ for example, we depend on insects to help us care for plants and animals and we need plants to oxygenate our atmosphere.⁴⁰ Plants are vital to life and serve as humanity's food and healing sources. This system of nature appears to be deliberate and ingeniously constructed and since we have begun to tinker with it, breaking it down, scientists reveal some harmful effects which are termed global warming and ozone depletion.

Moltmann would agree that God gave humanity the privilege of dominion over creatures and it should not be abused. Theologians interpret the Bible creation accounts, and explain that God considers creation good.⁴¹ Depending on the view, God is seen as creating order from chaos. If that is how it all happened, then we are devolving back into the chaos once again. Our efforts to play God and to re-create that chaos are surely misguided. In short, humans may not do whatever they want with the power of dominion.

Humans are given dominion which also means we are at the top of the food chain. Maybe that has more to do with physical capacities, like our brain size and less to do with our leadership abilities. Therefore, God's ordination of humans at the top, further enables us to control our environment. Hopefully, this intended appreciation of Earth would lead humanity to safeguard it. Interestingly, views of Earth from space do not

38. <http://www.liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/News/2001/News-AutumnalEquinox.asp>.

39. *Id.*

40. Jim Motavalli, *Climate Counterattack: For Global Warming Skeptics*, U.S. Senate Committees are Bully Pulpits, ENVIRONMENTAL MAGAZINE, June 25, 2006, at ____, available at <http://www.emagazine.com/view/?3247&src=>.

41. *Genesis* 1:28-31.

have any boundaries;⁴² hence, when we look at photos of Earth taken from space, it's as if we are viewing the planet and our lives, as God truly intended them to be.

Perhaps, God had to take the risk of giving us dominion as there was no other way to ensure humanity's free will. We had to be given dominion over creatures. Clearly, this was a high price for God and the earth to pay. Just look at what we have done to our planet and to each other. Certainly, we can be at the top of the food chain without destroying everything below it. Humanity should be cautious about racing to the end of the world, even if it's, a new beginning. Therefore, Moltmann's theology, though well intentioned, appears to be confounded by Christians who hope for the world's end, or as Moltmann describes, *The Coming of God*. Finally, this brand of theology is a barrier that needs to be overcome so theologians, scientists, and lawyers can caucus using their individual talents and specialties to promote sustainability.

42. <http://nasa.gov>.