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JIM MARTIN-SCHRAMM

## A Lutheran Ethic of Environmental Stewardship

The task of this essay is to sketch out a Lutheran ethic of environmental stewardship. I have structured my remarks around the following questions:

- If heaven is our home, why should Lutherans care about ecological issues?
- Does our Lutheran theological heritage call us to care for the earth and what humans are doing to it?
- Do Lutherans offer a unique perspective in the debates over the interlocking problems of global warming, energy consumption, water availability and usage, the loss of species, and so forth?
- What ethical resources can Lutherans and other Christians bring to debates about environmental stewardship and social justice?

My responses to the first three questions are fairly brief. My response to the last questions is much longer.

### **If heaven is our home, why should Lutherans care about ecological issues?**

This question was first posed to me by the ELCA's Northwest Wisconsin Synod Lay School of Theology when they invited me to give a series of talks on a similar theme. At first I was a little taken aback by the question, but then I realized that it probably is a question many Christians wonder about. What follows are three brief responses to the question. The first comes from scripture:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.... 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." (Rev. 21:1-3)

Barbara Rossing's book, *The Rapture Exposed*, has helped me better understand the book of Revelation and its rich but confusing imagery and symbols. The passage above emphasizes that heaven is coming to Earth. We are not going there, God is coming here. God intends to dwell here, on Earth, "not in some heaven light years away," as Marty Hagen's hymn puts it.

Martin Luther offers a similar response to this question about heaven:

God is wholly present in all creation, in every corner, behind you and before you. Do you think God is sleeping on a pillow in heaven? God is watching over you and protecting you...God is entirely and personally present in the wilderness, in the garden, in the field. ("These Words" 57, 61)

Like the Book of Revelation, Luther here emphasizes the imminence of God's presence on Earth.

Finally, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes the following to his fiancée as he reflects on the relationship of marriage and faith and their future life together:

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I don't mean the faith that flees the world, but the faith that endures in the world and loves and remains true to that world in spite of all the hardships it brings us. Our marriage must be a "yes" to God's earth. It must strengthen our resolve to do and accomplish something on earth. I fear that Christians who venture to stand on earth on only one leg will stand in heaven on only one leg too. (Bonhoeffer and Wedemeyer 64)<sup>1</sup>

I love this last line. These quotations help reorient our focus on Earth, not on heaven. We will never have an adequate environmental ethic if our eyes are always set on heaven rather than on Earth as our home.

### **Does our Lutheran theological heritage call us to care for the earth and what humans are doing to it?**

Absolutely. The Lutheran tradition contains a host of theological perspectives that can and should form the foundation of a robust environmental ethic.<sup>2</sup>

For example, Lutheran perspectives on the doctrine of creation emphasize God as the Creator of all. This theocentric perspective is a much needed antidote to the rampant anthropocentrism among those of us in the Global North. While human beings are created in the image of God (*imago dei*), Luther emphasized that we are not substantially like God because we possess consciousness or reason, but rather because we have the capacity to relate to all of creation with the care and affection of God (Luther, "Genesis," as cited by Hall, 101). The Lutheran theocentric perspective emphasizes that human beings are not set above other creatures but rather are set apart to serve the flourishing of all that God has made. The *dominus* (Jesus) is the model of *dominion*. Our call is to care for our kin.

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The doctrine of the Incarnation similarly challenges the rampant dualism of our era. It insists on the unity of body and soul and cherishes the presence of God in all of earthly reality. Here, laid in a manger, and surrounded by animals, the finite bears the

infinite. Bodies are affirmed, protected, and valued. All bodies. All that God has made has value. We are not fundamentally individuals but rather social and ecological creatures who share in common the goodness of bodily life. We cannot live without each other. We are Earth creatures. We were formed from the dust, and to the dust we will return.

One of the hallmarks of the Lutheran tradition, however, is a robust doctrine of sin. Despite being created in the image of God and being saved through Christ's death on the cross, Luther believed that all human beings remained in bondage to the powers of sin, death, and the devil. This notion that human beings are both saints and sinners (*simul iustus et peccator*) yields a realistic view of human nature that forges a middle way between naive idealism and cynical pessimism. Even in Luther's day this awareness of sinful behavior extended well beyond the individual into the systems, powers, and structures that shape human behavior and thus influence all of life. This Lutheran emphasis on the pervasiveness of sin enables and requires us to look carefully at the laws and policies that wreak havoc on ecological systems and jeopardize the welfare of all who are poor and vulnerable.

While the notion of being both a saint and sinner has the potential to yield a paralytic ethic, the Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith empowers Christians to live out their vocation. We are not justified by our works to "save the planet." Instead, our justification by grace through faith empowers us to make our faith active in love through the care and redemption of all that God has made.

### **Do Lutherans offer a unique perspective in the debates over the interlocking problems of global warming, energy consumption, water availability and usage, the loss of species, and so on?**

I don't think Lutheranism offers an absolutely unique perspective in these debates, but I do think Lutherans can stress four vital Christian insights.

*First*, our theocentric worldview combats the rampant and destructive anthropocentrism among the privileged and powerful who assume that all of creation is for their benefit and exploitation.

*Second*, our incarnational theology repudiates destructive dualisms that skew a holistic understanding of life and are often conjoined with a logic of domination to justify men in charge of women, one race in charge of another, owners in charge of workers, and humans as masters over nature.

*Third*, our belief that Christ exists in community counters the excessive individualism of modern industrial culture and points to the fundamental reality that we are utterly interdependent upon the health and well-being of all below us on the food chain.

*Fourth*, our accountability to God leads us to care about the welfare not only of present generations but also of future generations even though our economic and political systems are happy to dump current social and ecological costs on future generations.

### **What ethical resources can Lutherans, through their ecumenical ties, bring to debates about environmental stewardship and social justice?**

Lutherans have helped to develop ethical resources via our work in and engagement with the ecumenical community.<sup>3</sup> Christians in the World Council of Churches (WCC) have been wrestling with the nexus between social justice and environmental issues for decades. In fact, it was the WCC that elevated the concept of sustainability to a social norm when it challenged its members and the international community in 1974 to create a “just, participatory, and sustainable society” (Rasmussen, “Doing Our First”).

Faced with the prospects for nuclear war, rapid population growth, deepening poverty, and growing environmental degradation, members of the WCC began in the 1970s to consult the sources of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience to develop various ethical resources to grapple with complicated and interconnected problems related to social justice and environmental well-being. In 1979, a WCC conference on “Faith, Science and the Future” identified and gave explicit attention to four moral norms: sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity (Albrecht, Shinn). In 1983, the sixth assembly of the WCC encouraged all of its member communions to use these norms in their pursuit of “justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.”

Then, in 1984, the WCC was one of the first organizations in the world to call attention to the dangers of global warming with the publication of *Accelerated Climate Change: Sign of Peril, Test of Faith*. This study demanded an integrated and two-fold response. First, it distinguished between “the luxury omissions of the rich” and the “survival emissions of the poor.” It emphasized that social justice is key to any strategy to combat climate change. Second, it noted that related environmental problems reveal that nature has become a “co-victim with the poor.” The statement declared that “Earth and people will be liberated to thrive together, or not at all.” Quite presciently, the WCC also emphasized that “we must not allow either the immensity or the uncertainty pertaining to climate change and other problems to erode further the solidarity binding humans to one another and to other life” (12-13, cited in Rasmussen, “Doing our First”).

Some of the participants in these WCC conversations were also engaged in ethical reflection about various policy issues in their own countries. Presbyterians in the United States addressed issues related to energy policy in a comprehensive policy statement adopted in 1981, *The Power to Speak Truth*

*to Power*, which was developed further a decade later in 1990 when the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (PCUSA) approved a major study on environmental policy entitled *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice*. In 2008, the PCUSA’s 218th General Assembly approved *The Power to Change: U.S. Energy Policy and Global Warming*. The document utilized the ethic of ecological justice and the related moral norms of sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity to assess United States energy options and to formulate related policy recommendations.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) drew, in part, on the work of the WCC and the PCUSA as it developed a series of social statements on various issues beginning in the early 1990s. The ELCA’s statement on environmental issues in 1993 emphasized that justice “means honoring the integrity of creation, and striving for fairness within the human family.” It also called on members of the ELCA to “answer the call to justice and commit ourselves to its principles—participation, solidarity, sufficiency, and sustainability” (“Caring for Creation”). All four of these principles are referred to in the ELCA’s 1995 statement on peace issues (“For Peace”), in the ELCA’s 1999 statement on economic justice issues (“Economic Life”), and in the ELCA’s 2011 social statement on genetics (“Genetics”). The latter study claims “these four principles could be said to articulate a core ethics of ‘faith active in love through justice’ for ELCA social policy” (30).

While the ELCA has utilized the four dimensions of justice that emerged from WCC discussions in the 1970s, the National Council of Churches has developed the notion of an ethic of ecological justice that emerged from reflection on United States energy policy among Presbyterians in the 1980s. Today the National Council of Churches’ “Eco-Justice Program” enables “national bodies of member Protestant and Orthodox denominations to work together to protect and restore God’s Creation.” The program defines eco-justice as “all ministries designed to heal and defend creation, working to assure justice for all of creation and the human beings who live in it” (National Council).

I have used the ethic of ecological justice and its related moral norms to conduct an ethical assessment of energy options and climate policy proposals (Martin-Schramm). This ethic addresses human-caused problems that threaten both human and natural communities and considers both human and natural communities to be ethically important. The word *ecological* lifts up moral concern about other species and their habitats; the word *justice* points to the distinctly human realm and human relationships to the natural order. The remainder of this essay explores the concept of ecojustice in greater detail and traces the biblical and theological foundations for sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity in Jewish and Christian traditions.

## An Ethic of Ecological Justice

The ethic of ecological justice is a biblical, theological, and tradition-based ethic that emphasizes four moral norms: sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity.

### *Justice*

The norm of justice used in the title of this ethical perspective is an inclusive concept. Its full meaning is given greater specificity by the four norms of sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity. Justice is, however, a norm in its own right with a distinct history in Christian ethics and Western philosophy. In Christian traditions justice is rooted in the very being of God. It is an essential part of God's community of love and calls human beings to make fairness the touchstone of social relations and relations to other species and ecosystems. Justice is not the love of Christ (*agape*). Justice involves a calculation of interests. Justice has a more impersonal quality than love because social groups are more its subject than individuals. Nevertheless, justice divorced from love easily deteriorates into a mere calculation of interests and finally into a cynical balancing of interest against interest. Without love inspiring justice, societies lack the push and pull of care and compassion to move them to higher levels of fairness. Love forces recognition of the needs of others. Love judges abuses of justice. Love lends passion to justice. Justice, in short, is love worked out in arenas where the needs of each individual are impossible to know.

Justice in Christian thought is the social and ecological expression of love and means a special concern for the poor, a rough calculation of freedom and equality, and a passion for establishing equitable relationships. The ethical aims of justice in the absence of other considerations should be to relieve the worst conditions of poverty, powerlessness, exploitation, and environmental degradation and provide for an equitable distribution of burdens and costs. The moral norms of sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity help to flesh out more fully what an ethic of ecological justice might entail.

### *Sustainability*

Sustainability may be defined as the long-range supply of sufficient resources to meet basic human needs and the preservation of intact natural communities. It expresses a concern for future generations and the planet as a whole, and emphasizes that an acceptable quality of life for present generations must not jeopardize the prospects for future generations.

Sustainability is basically good stewardship and is a pressing concern today because of the human degradation of nature. It embodies an ongoing view of nature and society, a view in which

ancestors and posterity are seen as sharing in present decisions. Sustainability precludes a shortsighted stress on economic growth that fundamentally harms ecological systems and any form of environmentalism that ignores human needs and costs.

There are several significant biblical and theological foundations for the norm of sustainability. The doctrine of creation affirms that God as Creator sustains God's creation. The creation is also good independently of human beings (Gen. 1). It is not simply there for human use, but possesses an autonomous status in the eyes of God. The goodness of matter is later picked up in Christian understandings of the Incarnation and the sacraments (see McFague 172 ff.; Ruether).

Psalm 104 is a splendid hymn of praise that celebrates God's efforts at sustainability: "When you send forth your spirit...you renew the face of the ground" (Ps. 104:30). Similarly, Psalm 145 rejoices in the knowledge that God gives "them their food in due season" and "satisfies the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15-16). The doctrine of creation also emphasizes the special vocation of humanity to assist God in the task of sustainability. In Genesis the first creation account describes the responsibility of stewardship in terms of "dominion" (Gen. 1:28), and the second creation account refers to this task as "to till and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). In both cases the stress is on humanity's stewardship of God's creation. The parable of the Good Steward in Luke also exemplifies this perspective. The steward is not the owner of the house

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**"The doctrine of creation also emphasizes the special vocation of humanity to assist God in the task of sustainability."**

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but manages or sustains the household so that all may be fed and have enough (Luke 12:42). The Gospels offer several other vivid metaphors of stewardship. The shepherd cares for the lost sheep. The earth is a vineyard and humanity serves as its tenant.

The covenant theme is another important biblical and theological foundation for the norm of sustainability. The Noahic covenant (Gen. 9) celebrates God's "everlasting covenant between God and every living creation of all flesh that is on the earth." The biblical writer repeats this formula several times in subsequent verses, as if to drive the point home. The text demonstrates God's concern for biodiversity and the preservation of all species (Gen. 9:16).

It is the Sinai covenant, however, that may best reveal the links between the concepts of covenant and sustainability. Whereas the prior covenants with Noah and Abraham were

unilateral and unconditional declarations by God, the Sinai covenant featured the reciprocal and conditional participation of humanity in the covenant: “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God...then you shall live....” (Deut. 30:16). Each of the Ten Commandments and all of the interpretations of these commandments in the subsequent Book of the Covenant were intended to sustain the life of the people of God in harmony with the well-being of the earth (Exod. 20-24).

At the heart of the Sinai covenant rested the twin concerns for righteousness (justice) and stewardship of the earth. Likewise the new covenant in Christ is very much linked to these twin concerns as well as to the reciprocal relation of human beings.

In Romans 8:18 the whole creation suffers and in 8:22 “groans in travail.” But suffering, according to Paul, does not lead to despair. “The creation awaits in eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19), and “in this hope we are saved” (Rom. 8:24). Suffering, as in the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross, points beyond to the hope that is already partially present. Part of this hope is a return to the good stewardship of Genesis 1 and 2 before the Fall in Genesis 3.

### *Sufficiency*

The norm of sufficiency emphasizes that all forms of life are entitled to share in the goods of creation. To share in the goods of creation in a Christian sense, however, does not mean unlimited consumption, hoarding, or an inequitable distribution of the earth’s goods. Rather it is defined in terms of basic needs, sharing, and equity. It repudiates wasteful and harmful consumption and encourages humility, frugality, and generosity (Nash, “Revival”).

This norm appears in the Bible in several places. As the people of God wander in the wilderness after the Exodus, God sends “enough” manna each day to sustain the community. Moses instructs the people to “gather as much of it as each of you need” (Exod. 16). The norm of sufficiency is also integral to the set of laws known as the jubilee legislation. These laws fostered stewardship of the land, care for animals and the poor, and a regular redistribution of wealth. In particular the jubilee laws stressed the needs of the poor and wild animals to eat from fields left fallow every seven years (Exod. 23:11). All creatures were entitled to a sufficient amount of food to live.

In Christian scriptures sufficiency is linked to abundance. Jesus says: “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Jesus rejected the notion, however, that the “good life” is to be found in the abundance of possessions (Luke 12:15). Instead, the “good life” is to be found in following Christ. Such a life results not in the hoarding of material wealth but rather in sharing it so that others may have enough. Acts 1-5

reveals that this became the model for what amounted to the first Christian community in Jerusalem. They distributed their possessions “as they had need (Acts 2:45). Paul also emphasized the relation of abundance to sufficiency: “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough” (2 Cor. 9:8).

The norm of sufficiency is also supported by biblical and theological understandings of wealth, consumption, and sharing. Two general and not altogether compatible attitudes dominate biblical writings on wealth and consumption. On the one hand there is a qualified appreciation of wealth, on the other a call to freedom from possessions that sometimes borders on deep suspicion (Hengel). The Hebrew scriptures generally take the side of appreciating wealth, praising the rich who are just and placing a high estimate on riches gained through honest work.

Both sides are found in the teachings of Jesus. The announcement of the coming community of God carries with it a call for unparalleled righteousness, freedom from possessions, and complete trust in God. The service of God and the service of riches are incompatible (Matt. 6:24; Mark 8:36, 9:43-48, 10:17-25; Luke 12:15, 8:14, 11:18-23, 19:1-10). Jesus himself had no possessions and prodded his disciples into the renunciation of possessions and what later has been called “holy poverty,” that is, poverty that is freely chosen as a way of life (Matt. 8:20; Mark 1:16, 6:8f.; Luke 9:3, 10:4).

On the other side Jesus took for granted the owning of property and was apparently supported by women of means (Luke 8:2). He urged that possessions be used to help those in need (Luke 6:30, 8:2f., 10:38f.). He was fond of celebrations, talking often about feasts in the community of God.

The biblical witness on consumption follows much the same pattern. The basic issue has been between self-denial and contentment with a moderate level of consumption (Hengel). The side of self-denial evolved into the monastic movement of later ages. The way of moderation is expressed well in I Timothy 6:6-8: “There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and cannot take anything out of the world; but if you have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”

Sharing is an implication of neighbor love, hoarding a sign of selfishness and sin. Jesus repeatedly calls his disciples to give of themselves, even to the point of giving all they have to the poor. He shares bread and wine with them at the Last Supper. Paul in several letters urges Christians elsewhere to share with those in the Jerusalem community.

Sufficiency and sustainability are linked, for what the ethic of ecological justice seeks to sustain is the material and spiritual wherewithal to satisfy the basic needs of all forms of life. They

are also linked through the increasing realization that present levels of human consumption, especially in affluent countries, are more than sufficient and in many respects are unsustainable. Only an ethic and practice that stresses sufficiency, frugality, and generosity will ensure a sustainable future.

Finally, the norm of sufficiency offers an excellent example of how human ethics is being extended to nature. The post World War II stress on economic growth has been anthropocentric. Economists and politicians have been preoccupied by human sufficiency. The anthropocentric focus of most Christian traditions reinforced this preoccupation.

With increasing environmental awareness, however, this preoccupation no longer seems appropriate. And while other species are not equipped to practice frugality or simplicity, indeed to be ethical at all in a human sense, the norm of sufficiency does apply to humans in how they relate to other species. To care is to practice restraint. Humans should be frugal and share resources with plants and animals because they count in the eyes of God. All of creation is good and deserves ethical consideration. The focus on sufficiency is part of what it means to practice justice.

### *Participation*

The norm of participation likewise stems from the affirmation of all forms of life and the call to justice. This affirmation and this call lead to the respect and inclusion of all forms of life in human decisions that affect their well-being. Voices should be heard, and, if not able to speak, which is the case for other species, then humans will have to represent their interests when those interests are at stake. Of course, how far to extend moral considerations to other species is a controversial issue. So too is the issue of moral significance (Nash, *Loving Nature*, 179 ff.). Participation is concerned with empowerment and seeks to remove the obstacles to participating in decisions that affect lives.

The norm of participation is also grounded in the two creation accounts in Genesis. These accounts emphasize the value of everything in God's creation and the duty of humans to recognize the interest of all by acting as good stewards. Through their emphasis on humanity's creation in the image of God, the writers of Genesis underline the value of human life and the equality of women and men.

The prophets brought sharp condemnation upon kings and people of Israel for violating the covenant by neglecting the interests of the poor and vulnerable. They repudiated actions that disempowered people through the loss of land, corruption, theft, slavery, and militarism. The prophets spoke for those who had no voice and could no longer participate in the decisions that affected their lives (Amos 2:6-7; Isa. 3:2-15; Hos. 10:12-14).

With Jesus comes a new emphasis, the kingdom or community of God (Mark 1:14-15). While the community of God is not to be equated to any community of human beings, it nevertheless is related. It serves as a general model for human communities and is to some degree realizable, although never totally.

The community of God has its source in a different kind of power, God's power of love and justice. This power alone is capable of producing genuine and satisfying human communities and right relations to nature's communities. The community of God cannot be engineered. Technology, material consumption, and economic growth may enhance human power, but offer little help in developing participatory communities. Reliance on these powers alone can in fact make matters worse by creating divisions.

Jesus also stressed the beginning of the community of God in small things, such as seeds that grow. He gathered a community largely of the poor and needy. He gave and found support in a small inner group of disciples. In this day of complex technologies, large corporations that dominate globalization, and mammoth bureaucracies, Jesus' stress seems out of place to many. In their pell-mell rush to increase the size and complexity of social organizations and technological processes, humans are missing something, however. For effective community and participation, size counts and must be limited in order for individuals to have significant and satisfying contacts.

The concern for the poor evident in the Gospels is another support for the norm of participation. Without some semblance of justice there can be little participation in community. Extremes of wealth and poverty and disproportions of power create an envious and angry underclass without a stake in the community. Equality of worth, rough equality of power, and political freedom are prerequisites for genuine communities.

In the early church small communities flourished. The Jerusalem church, while poor, had a remarkable sense of sharing. Paul's letter to the Romans contains perhaps the most ideal statement of community ever written (Rom. 12). He also talked about the church as the body of Christ. It has many members, all of whom are united in Christ. Differences between Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free are unimportant (Gal. 3:28). He repeatedly used the Greek word *koinonia*, rich in communal connotations, to describe the house churches he established.

All this is not to romanticize the early church. There was enough conflict to avoid sentimentalizing the notion of participation. It is difficult, the more so in industrialized societies even with their full range of communications, to achieve participatory communities. A multitude of decisions each requiring expert technical judgments and having wide-ranging consequences must be made in a timely way. Popular participation in decisions, especially when

there is conflict as there is in environmental disputes, can paralyze essential processes. Expedience often results in the exclusion of certain voices and interests. Impersonal, functional ways of relating become easy and further reduce participation.

The norm of participation calls for a reversal of this trend. At minimum it means having a voice in critical decisions that affect one's life. For environmental problems it means having a say, for example, in the selection of energy and resource systems, the technologies these systems incorporate, and the distribution of benefits and burdens these systems create. All this implies free and open elections, democratic forms of government, responsible economic institutions, and a substantial dose of good will.

Finally, there is the difficult problem of how to bring other species and ecosystems into human decision-making. In one sense they are already included since there is no way to exclude them. Humans are inextricably part of nature, and many human decisions have environmental consequences that automatically include other species and ecosystems. The problem is the large number of negative consequences that threaten entire species and systems and ultimately the human species, for humans are dependent on other species and functioning ecosystems. The task is to reduce and eliminate where possible these negative consequences. One reason is obviously pragmatic. Humans are fouling their own nests. Beyond this anthropocentric reason, however, it helps to see plants, animals, and their communities as having interests that humans should respect. They have a dignity of their own kind. They experience pleasure and pain. The norm of participation should be extended to include these interests and to relieve pain, in effect to give other species a voice. Humans have an obligation to speak out for other forms of life that cannot defend themselves.

### *Solidarity*

The norm of solidarity reinforces this inclusion as well as adding an important element to the inclusion of marginalized human beings. The norm highlights the communal nature of life in contrast to individualism and encourages individuals and groups to join in common cause with those who are victims of discrimination, abuse, and oppression. Underscoring the reciprocal relationship of individual welfare and the common good, solidarity calls for the powerful to share the plight of the powerless, for the rich to listen to the poor, and for humanity to recognize its fundamental interdependence with the rest of nature. The virtues of humility, compassion, courage, and generosity are all marks of the norm of solidarity.

Both creation accounts in Genesis emphasize the profound relationality of all of God's creation. These two accounts point to the fundamental social and ecological context of existence.

Humanity was created for community. This is the foundation of solidarity. While all forms of creation are unique, they are all related to each other as part of God's creation.

Understood in this context and in relation to the concept of stewardship in the Gospels, the *imago dei* tradition that has its origins in Genesis also serves as a foundation for solidarity. Creation in the image of God places humans not in a position over or apart from creation but rather in the same loving relationship of God with creation. Just as God breathes life into the world (Gen. 7), humanity is given the special responsibility as God's stewards to nurture and sustain life.

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“Creation in the image of God places humans not in a position over or apart from creation but rather in the same loving relationship of God with creation.”

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In their descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry, the gospels provide the clearest examples of compassionate solidarity. Jesus shows solidarity with the poor and oppressed; he eats with sinners, drinks from the cup of a gentile woman, meets with outcasts, heals lepers, and consistently speaks truth to power. Recognizing that Jesus was the model of solidarity, Paul used the metaphor of the body of Christ to emphasize the continuation of this solidarity within the Christian community. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, Paul stresses that by virtue of their baptisms they are all one “in Christ.” Thus if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor. 12:26). It would be hard to find a better metaphor to describe the character of compassionate solidarity.

The norm of solidarity also finds its home in a theology of the cross. The cross is the central symbol in Christianity. It points to a God who works in the world not in terms of power *over* but power *in, with, and under*. This is revolutionary. It upsets normal ways of conceiving power. God suffers with all living things that groan in travail (Rom. 8). In the words of Jesus: “The last shall be first, and the first shall be last” (Matt. 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). The one who “was in the form of God...emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:6-7). The implication is clear. Christians are called to suffer with each other and the rest of the creation, to change their ways, and to enter a new life of solidarity and action to preserve and protect the entire creation.



## Conclusion

These four moral norms sketch the broad outline of an ethic of ecojustice. In my view, these resources offer a sophisticated ethic to grapple with social and environmental issues that are intertwined. They also offer a common moral vocabulary with which to engage in ethical reflection and public discourse about these issues. One does not have to be a Christian to agree that sustainability, sufficiency, participation, and solidarity are all moral goods that should be maximized in policy discussions. And yet, all too often these debates quickly boil down to a cost-benefit analysis of what is economically cost-effective or politically expedient. Christian ethics requires consideration of a broader range of values and a deeper sense of accountability to God.

## Endnotes

1. For a rich discussion of Bonhoeffer's earth-affirming faith, see Rasmussen, *Earth Community Earth Ethics*, 295-316.

2. I do not like the conventional distinction between social and environmental ethics because I think it perpetuates a dualistic way of thinking that separates nature from culture and denies the integrated nature of all reality. I prefer to talk about an ethic of ecological justice which seeks to integrate the fields of social and environmental ethics.

3. The second half of this essay is adapted from my book, *Climate Justice: Ethics, Energy, and Climate Policy*, 26-36. Used with permission from Fortress Press.

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