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CAN A SANCTITY-OF-HUMAN-LIFE ETHIC GROUND CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY?†

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I. INTRODUCTION: FINDING A CENTRAL CHRISTIAN MORAL PARADIGM

Every religious tradition known to humanity contains numerous ethical imperatives. These emerge from sacred sayings and texts and are elaborated through many years of theological-ethical development as an expression of the effort of faithful believers to live out the demands of the faith with integrity amidst changing historical circumstances.

One aspect of a faith's theological-ethical tradition is usually an intra-scriptural or intra-traditional argument related to the ranking, ordering, or organizing of the faith's moral norms, paradigms, and teachings. This reflects a basic need of believers for guidance in sifting through the faith's many demands for clarity as to its most important requirements. It also reflects a basic human need for order.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain direct evidence of intra-Jewish and intra-Christian (and perhaps Jewish versus Christian) argumentation along these lines. Already in the period of canon formation these kindred faith traditions reflect sometimes fierce arguments over moral first principles. These very arguments inform the Jewish and Christian traditions as these come down to us through the centuries.

One important framing of such an argument in the Hebrew Bible is found in the Book of Micah:

> With what shall I come before the Lord
> And bow down before the exalted God?
> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
> With calves a year old?
> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
> With ten thousand rivers of oil?
> Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,
> The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
> He has showed you, O man, what is good.
> And what does the Lord require of you?

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To act justly and to love mercy
And to walk humbly with your God.[1]

In this text, the prophet sets the demands of the cultic system over against the true "good" of moral living. Despite chapter and verse *within the Torah itself* in which the details of the cultic system are prescribed, for this prophet (and most others), what really matters is a life characterized by the actual practice of the highest moral values of justice and mercy, and by a posture of humility in relation to God.

According to the New Testament, Jesus was asked to offer commentary on the ranking of moral obligations in Jewish Law.[2] His famous answer has long been important for Christian ethics: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."[3]

Writing explicitly to Christian communities, many New Testament writers offer moral exhortations in which they also attempt to clarify the highest and most significant moral obligations of the faith. Often the answer is, again, love.[4] And yet a variety of other options are either proposed or implicitly suggested, as in the moral exhortation sections of Paul's various letters.[5]

Through the centuries and even today, in Christian scholarship and in the preaching and teaching of the churches, arguments or proposals about a central organizing moral norm have continued. Certainly love remains central in most treatments of Christian morality. But it is not difficult to find scholars, pastors, and other leaders who offer other proposals. These include justice, liberation, holiness, righteousness, discipleship, obedience, kingdom ethics, the Golden Rule, compassion, mercy, sacrifice, reconciliation, peacemaking, forgiveness, responsibility, and others. It is hard to argue against any of these moral norms. All reflect aspects of what Dorothy Emmet aptly called "the moral prism."[6] As the brilliant light of scripture's moral demand is refracted through our various interpretive lenses, some of us see certain colors as more brilliant while others notice different ones. No one could argue that the God who

1. *Micah* 6:6–8. All scripture is taken from the NIV.
2. *Matthew* 22:34–40; *Mark* 12:28–31.
3. *Matthew* 22:37–40.
4. *Cf. John* 13:34–35; 1 *Corinthians* 13.
5. Consider *Romans* 12–15, where the moral exhortations include calls to sacrifice (12:1); transformation (12:2); humility (12:3); love (12:9–10, 13:8–10); joy, patience, faithfulness, generosity, hospitality (12:13); enemy-love and peacemaking (12:14–21); respect and submission to governing authorities (13:1–7); moral sobriety and purity (13:11–14); tolerance rooted in unselfish other-regard (14:1–15:4); unity (15:5–6); and so forth.
6. DOROTHY EMMET, THE MORAL PRISM (1979).

inspired the scriptures is uninterested in any of these particular moral norms for faithful living.

II. The Emergence of a Sanctity-of-Human-Life Ethic

In late twentieth-century Christian ethics, especially in Catholic thought which was then eagerly borrowed by (mainly conservative) Protestants, a new central moral norm emerged: the "sanctity of human life" (or "sacredness of human life"). The impetus for the articulation of this moral norm in much of the Western world in the 1970s was the full legalization of abortion and, secondarily, the reality or possibility of the legalization of "mercy killing," or assisted suicide. Even today the term is often used, either by its advocates or its foes, as applying primarily to those two issues. Those who were opposed to abortion claimed the sanctity of human life as their reason, no one doing so more profoundly than Pope John Paul II.[7] The term was then picked up and used freely by conservative Protestant social activists. Those who were in favor of abortion sometimes sought explicitly to undercut the validity of a sanctity-of-human-life ethic, no one more stridently than Australian philosopher Peter Singer.[8] After a while, many Christians wearied of the association of "sanctity of life" with the Christian Right, culture wars, and the "pro-life movement" and dropped or rejected this particular moral vocabulary for other terminology. Even today most politically progressive Christians shy away from the term.

In my current scholarship in Christian ethics, I am attempting to reclaim the concept of the sanctity of human life while at the same time freeing it of this crippling association with the abortion fight and the culture wars. In my forthcoming book on life's sanctity, I trace a millennia-long historical trajectory for the development of this critically important moral norm. I argue that the idea that every human life has immeasurable, God-given value worthy of the highest respect is actually the culmination of the best of the Jewish, Christian, and Western moral traditions—and a sifting out of elements of those same traditions that fall short of that ideal.

In this sense, it is incorrect to describe the sanctity of human life as a new moral norm. Like the main synagogue in Prague, it is "old new." It is as old as the Genesis concept of the *imago Dei*, and as new as the liberation ethics of the twentieth century. It is as old as the demand to love our neighbors as ourselves, and as new as twentieth century theological personalism, the ethical writings of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas with their focus on I-Thou relationships and the irreducible Other, the post-Holocaust writings of Elie Wiesel and Irving Greenberg on re-sanctifying human life after Auschwitz, Catholic social teaching

7. John Paul II, The Gospel of Life (1995).
8. Peter Singer, Unsanctifying Human Life (2002).

from Vatican II to John Paul II, anti- and post-colonial writing, feminist thought, and the thinking of the leaders of America's civil rights movement.[9] What all of these disparate sources have in common is a profound sense of the majesty and dignity of the human person (each and every person), and a profound resistance to his or her dehumanization and degradation.

Situating the sanctity of human life within these kinds of sources immediately helps to wrench it free from any fixation either on the beginning or the end of life. To the extent that Catholics and conservative Protestants reduced the sacredness of life to the struggle against abortion and assisted suicide, they weakened rather than strengthened their own cardinal moral norm as they undertook their otherwise laudable moral struggle. Both morally and strategically, the best way to argue for the sanctity of human life is to broaden rather than narrow its application. Human life is only sacred if every human life is sacred, at every moment of that life. Therefore, those who are "pro-life" must join their passion to every other movement for human dignity and resistance to dehumanization and degradation.

It is clear to me that my own career as a Christian ethicist has been moving for some time toward this project of unpacking a full-orbed sanctity-of-life ethic as a, or the, central Christian moral norm. My earlier work in developing a Christian ethic centered on the teachings of Jesus and the reign of God[10] and was followed by the elucidation of a consistent pro-life centrist evangelical ethic.[11] These books have been groping toward an *ethical vision* in which God's reign culminates as human beings come to love one another with the only kind of love appropriate to the immeasurable value of the human person beloved by God, and a *political vision* in which our nation's public policies reflect and advance a national commitment to the valuing of every human life as sacred, both here and abroad. Those who truly love God, I have argued, will commit themselves to love their neighbors in this exalted and profound way.

The working definition I have developed for the sanctity of human life has come to be articulated as follows:

> The sanctity of life is the conviction that all human beings, at any and every stage of life, in any and every state of consciousness or self-awareness, of any and every race, color, ethnicity, level of intelligence, religion, language, nationality, gender, character,

9. *See, e.g.*, MARTIN BUBER, I AND THOU (1971); IRVING GREENBERG, FOR THE SAKE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (2004); MARTIN LUTHER KING, LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL (1963); EMMANUEL LEVINAS, HUMANISM OF THE OTHER (2005); JOHN PAUL II, *supra* note 7; ELIE WIESEL, ALL RIVERS RUN TO THE SEA (1996).

10. GLEN H. STASSEN & DAVID P. GUSHEE, KINGDOM ETHICS: FOLLOWING JESUS IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT (2003).

11. DAVID P. GUSHEE, THE FUTURE OF FAITH IN AMERICAN POLITICS: THE PUBLIC WITNESS OF THE EVANGELICAL CENTER (2008).

> behavior, physical ability/disability, sexual orientation, potential, class, social status, etc., of any and every particular quality of relationship to the viewing subject, are to be perceived as sacred, as persons of equal and immeasurable worth and of inviolable dignity. Therefore they must be treated with the reverence and respect commensurate with this elevated moral status, beginning with a commitment to the preservation, protection, and flourishing of their lives.
>
> The belief that human life is sacred flows from biblical faith. In particular, life is sacred because, according to Scripture, God created humans in his image, declared them precious, ascribed to them a unique status in creation, blessed them with unique, godlike capacities, made them for eternal life, governs them under his sovereign lordship, commands in his moral law that they be treated with reverence and respect—and forever elevates their dignity by his decision to take human form in Jesus Christ and to give up that human life at the Cross.[12]

There are many reasons to embrace this ethic as a/the central Christian moral norm. As articulated carefully (though undoubtedly not without error) here, this statement of what the sanctity of life means emphasizes as starkly as possible the *universality* of human moral obligations to other human beings. I have sought to craft language here that emphasizes the length, breadth, height, and depth of human moral obligation to other humans. No one can be excluded, for any reason. From womb to tomb, from home to far away, from friend to foe, all are covered. All must be viewed as sacred (moral *vision*) and treated with reverence and respect (moral *principle*). To each and to all I (we) owe particular moral *obligations*, focusing first on the protection and preservation of their lives and finally, in an open-ended way, to their flourishing in every aspect of what it means for them to flourish as human creatures made in the image of God.

The second half of the definition simply suggests the numerous biblical warrants for this vision of the worth of human persons and our obligations to them. It is not difficult for most Christians to understand why human beings should be viewed and treated in this way when these scriptural warrants are presented. Few Christians today would explicitly reject this vision of our moral obligations. It reflects a kind of exalted theocentric humanism that coheres well with the best of contemporary Christian thinking about persons and the world. If Christian leaders could find ways to motivate more Christians (and others) to live out this

12. DAVID P. GUSHEE, THE SANCTITY OF LIFE: A CHRISTIAN EXPLORATION (forthcoming). This definition is a composite of numerous other definitions along with my own contributions. It could be described as essentially a standard account with certain intensifying elements.

kind of ethic in relation to those they are least inclined to value, it would be a hugely significant accomplishment in the real world.

And yet, it is not at all clear that this kind of Christian ethic is sufficient for addressing the particular challenges created by the ecological degradation of the planet that we face today and into the rest of the twenty-first century. In fact, it can be argued that a sanctity-of-human-life ethic is *part of the problem and cannot be part of the solution.* What a paradox it would be, if the highest expression of a Christian ethic that values human life turns out to be at the same time a source of the ongoing devaluation of the rest of God's creation. Some very thoughtful Christian (and other) moral thinkers have concluded that this is in fact the case, as we shall shortly see. My goal in this essay as a whole is to determine if this is true, if we do need to create a new kind of ethic to deal with the new kind of problems that are created in a context of ecological degradation and potential catastrophe.

III. Problems of a Sanctity-of-Human-Life Ethic for the Care of Creation

Without pretending to offer a complete list of the possible problems and limits of a sanctity-of-human-life ethic for ecological ethics, I suggest and will briefly elucidate the following problems.

First, the sanctity ethic as articulated here sharpens our sense of the immense value of the human person, but offers no account even of the existence, let alone the value, of other beings. We are trained to see human beings (each and every human being) as the pinnacle of creation, the height of God's creative work, and the center of God's concern when it comes to the affairs of this planet—and, indeed, of the entire universe. Even the broad sanctity ethic proposed here still focuses the entirety of its attention on human beings. It is different from narrower versions only in the breadth of its concern for the whole human family and the flourishing of each person everywhere at every stage of existence. The drama of salvation history remains the question of the response of the human being to God our Maker and Redeemer; the drama of ethics remains the question of the response of the human being to other human beings.[13]

As for the existence of other sentient beings, and the creation itself, this account of life's sanctity remains silent. At least in Western Christianity we have lacked even the language to discuss that which goes beyond and yet includes both the vertical and the horizontal, the divine-human and human-human dramas. An earlier generation might have spoken of God's relationship with the angels or the heavenly court. They disappear here. And no mention is made of fish, squirrels, or dolphins, or of trees, rivers, air, or crabgrass. A sanctity approach does at least push Christians

13. Richard A. Young, Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions 48 (1994).

to pay attention to ethics and not just theology, to how people are treated and not just whether they believe in Jesus, but it does nothing to raise the visibility of the millions of other creatures with whom we share the created order, or the created order itself in which we and these many other creatures live and move and have our being.

Even when Christians do move in the direction of a theology of creation and the other creatures, a common theological move is quickly to sharpen the ontological distinctions between human and non-human creatures. The first step in this direction in many theologies (popular or scholarly) is to define the content of the *imago Dei* through some delineation of the ways in which human beings and only human beings are made in God's image. Often this is done through the specification of certain capacities of the human that are set against the lack of capacity of other creatures. Only humans, we say, can reason, or plan, or create, or love, or invent and speak languages. Only humans have a "soul" that can relate to and love God. This is sometimes called "human exceptionalism," or criticized as human egocentrism, or speciesism, and it goes deep in Christian thought.[14] Imagine how different our view of the world would be if our teachings about creation emphasized all that we shared in common with other creatures instead of all that makes humans different. Instead, our tradition tends to emphasize human uniqueness and superiority in fateful ways.

This move toward a capacity-based construal of the divine image is also susceptible to empirical attacks from those who propose or show that the distinctions between the reasoning, creative, emotive, linguistic, relational, or even spiritual capacities of humans against the higher mammals, for example, have been overdrawn. We end up risking a core element of our theology of creation (and even salvation) with every new discovery about the surprisingly advanced capacities of other creatures.

This is one very good reason, by the way, for us to follow the suggestions of a number of biblical scholars that the image of God should be understood in terms of our unique *responsibilities*, not our unique *capacities*.[15] We image God as we bear God's delegated authority to care for the Earth and its creatures. This emphasizes our unique power and responsibility in the Earth, rather than our increasingly tenuous claim to have unique capacities. Again, it might be helpful here to be reminded of the existence in biblical thought of other entities, some even "higher" than us, such as the angels, to repopulate our theological imaginations

14. On the problem of "exceptionalism," see the excellent discussion in ANNA L. PETERSON, BEING HUMAN: ETHICS, ENVIRONMENT, AND OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD 28–50 (2001).

15. *E.g.*, CLAUS WESTERMANN, CREATION (John J. Scullion trans., SPCK & Fortress Press 1974) (1971).

with a planet and universe full of diverse forms of life, and to some extent to de-center humanity from our vision of the created order.

One consequence of defining the *imago Dei* in this better-than, over-against paradigm is the implicit or explicit degradation of the status and value of non-human creatures relative to human beings. Other creatures are less than us because they cannot reason, emote, relate, love, create, or speak. It becomes very important in this approach to delineate the many specific ways in which other creatures are indeed inferior to us in their capacities. Not made in the image of God, not destined for eternal life with God, they occupy an ambiguous and certainly less important role in the divine economy. They are not part of the ultimate drama of salvation, nor are they part of the penultimate drama of ethics. They are barely more than "scenery" on the stage of the divine-human drama.[16] Human uniqueness and status are bought at a high price here—the denigration of the status of each and every one of the other creatures on the planet.

Incidentally, this way of defining what it really means to be human, what it really means to be made in the image of God, has a dramatic unintended consequence—a weakening of the moral status of those human beings who lose or never have those distinctive capacities that we have identified as constituting the image of God. A child in the womb does not qualify as *imago Dei* material as defined by capacities. The best we can really say is that one day, if all goes well, this developing child will have those capacities. (Sometimes this is handled by drawing disturbing distinctions between personhood and human being, or between actual and potential personhood.[17]) A person in a persistent vegetative state lacks some or all of the capacities we have named. So does a person with grave mental illness or in the last stages of Alzheimer's disease. These weaknesses of a capacity-based defining of the image have been exploited ruthlessly by those who have had reason to do so, from the Nazis in their euthanasia campaign until today. How tragic, that the effort to buttress the elevation of what it means to be human has sometimes contributed to the degradation of lives that do not quite qualify by the definitions we have created.

Returning to our central concern in this essay, a review of our exalted definition of the sanctity of human life reveals huge implications for how human beings are to be treated by other human beings, but no ethical framework for human responsibility to other creatures and the creation itself. We can see that each and every human being is to be

16. *See* EMIL BRUNNER, REVELATION AND REASON: THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE 33–34 n.4 (Olive Wyon trans., Westminster Press 1946) (1941).

17. The distinction between "member of the human species" and "person" is made quite directly by, for example, PETER SINGER, PRACTICAL ETHICS 149–52 (2d ed. 1993).

viewed with reverence and respect, and to be treated in a manner that contributes to the preservation, protection, and flourishing of their lives. This is concise, challenging, and clear. But how are we to view and to treat the monkeys, rats, and dogs—or the roses, oceans, and air?

I think one could argue that in a world populated by millions of other species and billions of other non-human neighbors, it is impossible for human beings not to operate according to some kind of vision and ethic in relation to these creatures. Some of these are actually codified into law, as we were reminded here in Atlanta last year when our star quarterback, Michael Vick, went to jail for grossly mistreating and even murdering dogs. So the state does have laws related to how both animals and ecosystems must be treated. But it appears that the resources for such a legal or moral vision are not available in the Christian faith itself. Can that really be so?

Of course, in the history of Christian thought there has been at least one identifiable and consistently recurring vision for the moral relationship between human beings and the rest of creation—this is captured in the English word "dominion." The concept is rooted quite firmly in the soil of Genesis 1:26–30, in which human beings are charged with the responsibility to "rule" or "have dominion" over every kind of creature and apparently "over all the earth" itself.[18] Recent attempts to modify either the translation or the moral vision associated with Christian dominion theology have tended to shift the focus to service and stewardship.[19] If we "rule," it must be more like how Jesus taught us to rule—through humble service rather than lordly domination.

Somehow that point was lost on many generations of Christians, especially Western Christians influenced by cultural currents unleashed in the modern era, including technical rationality, expansionist capitalism, and imperial colonialism. The creation and its creatures became "natural resources" to be exploited and employed for the good of humanity, especially dominant human groups which engineered amazing feats involving the reworking of the "raw materials" of creation for the pleasure and advancement of humanity. Every one of us is the beneficiary to some extent of these developments, but looked at with a long view we see that the "thingification" of the creation and the creatures within it has proven to be spiritually damaging and environmentally and even economically unsustainable.

Whether it can be fairly traced to Genesis 1 or to the modern Western reading of Genesis 1 can be argued, but the cultural result in the

18. *Genesis* 1:26–30.

19. *See* CALVIN B. DEWITT, CARING FOR CREATION: RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF GOD'S HANDIWORK (James W. Skillen & Luis E. Lugo eds., 1998); FRED VAN DYKE ET AL., REDEEMING CREATION: THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP (1996).

Western world is undisputed—a human understanding of the world that abstracts one part of creation (human beings) from the rest. "Man" sits at the pinnacle of creation, lord of all he surveys, free to use it as he sees fit. There is "humanity" and then there is "the world," or humanity and "the environment," or humanity and "nature," or humanity and "the creation." Even the more biblical language of "creation" is not often employed to join us to that creation, but instead to abstract us from it.

Throughout Christian history scattered saints have modeled a different way of relating to the creation—one thinks of St. Francis. But for the most part Christians have both elevated humanity and separated humanity from the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the livestock that move along the ground—not to mention from the sea, the air, and the ground themselves.

We have been trained not to see ourselves as creatures, as part of creation, as dependent upon the well-being of other creatures and of the air, land, and water which we all share. Therefore we have been and remain vulnerable to the overexploitation of these fellow creatures and the gradual degradation of the creation which we share with them. We acted as if what we did to other creatures would have no negative effects on us, lords of creation, and as if what we did to creation itself would similarly bounce off of us, its masters. It was not until the late twentieth century with a number of developments—including severe environmental problems, the depletion of what had been treated as infinite "natural resources," the early environmental movement, the revival of nature religions, and the photos of our shared "terrestrial ball" from outer space—that *we finally came to understand that what we do to creation and to the other creatures we do to ourselves.* There is no escape, no place to hide, no pinnacle down from which we can benignly view a deteriorating creation. We depend on our particular ecosystems, and our shared planet, no less than the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the livestock that move along the ground.

One final concern seems called for before we move to a different aspect of this paper. It is possible to view this human-centered view of reality, this theologically validated human egocentrism, as a theological leftover, a vestige of a pre-scientific, pre-Darwinian, pre-ecological worldview in which the Earth was the center of the universe, human beings were the center of events on Earth, and God guaranteed the continued well-being of this planet made for humans. It is not difficult to recall how deeply threatened church leaders felt at the suggestion that the Earth orbits the sun and not the other way around. Then it was discovered that this is but one sun and one solar system among other suns and other solar systems. It became harder and harder to believe that the only thing God cared about in the whole universe was what was going on in this "third rock from the sun."

This same pre-scientific worldview suggested that not only was the Earth the center of the universe, but human beings were the center of (what matters on) the Earth. Darwin's is the name most associated not only with the idea that human beings are but one species among many on this Earth (which we knew) but also with the more radical notion that human beings are but one late-evolving species on this Earth and share an ancestry with other creatures and even the humblest life forms that exist here.

This latter move has been too much to swallow even today for large sections of the human family, especially religious believers, and not only Christians. It challenged nearly every element of the historic Christian worldview we have been discussing in this section, from the elevation of humanity, to the distinctions between human and non-human creatures, to the abstraction of human beings from the ecosystems and the Earth which we share with other creatures.

This is not a paper about Darwin or evolution, and I do not believe that Christians are dependent on a particular approach to evolution for a response to the ecological crisis. But I do think that what are often thought of as two separate "faith and science" issues—evolution and the environment—actually are best considered in conversation with one another. And I think that the discovery, through modern genetic research, of our considerable shared DNA with all living creatures on this planet confirms a central thesis I am pursuing here—that whatever else we may say about the special moral status of human beings before God, we must also say that we creatures of God and Earth, of spirit and humus, are somehow fellows, somehow kin, somehow morally related to and responsible to the other creatures of Earth with whom we share so much—including being beneficiaries of God's creative love.[20]

IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE THEOLOGICAL PARADIGMS

In a famous 1967 article called *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, scientist Lynn White, Jr. charged that "Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt" for the environmental problems afflicting Western society and now the whole world.[21] Probing many of the same issues discussed in the last section, White argued that the Bible desacralized nature, licensed human beings to dominate and overpopulate the Earth, and created an anthropocentric view of creation.[22] The Bible has also been charged with encouraging a dualistic view of reality that encouraged a contempt for this world and all things physical, and with nurturing an

20. LARRY L. RASMUSSEN, EARTH COMMUNITY, EARTH ETHICS (1996).

21. Lynn White, Jr., *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, 155 SCIENCE 1203, 1206 (1967).

22. *Id.* at 1203–07.

eschatological framework in which Christ's second coming distracts Christians from an ultimate commitment to the well-being of the one Earth on which we actually live.[23] While more recent scholarship has clearly demonstrated that ecological catastrophe is not a uniquely Western or Christian problem, the effects of White's thesis linger still.[24]

Many have found such contentions attractive—leading, or contributing, both to the explicit rejection of the Bible and/or Jewish and Christian faith, and also to the embrace of starkly different religious and philosophical worldviews viewed as more nature-friendly. This association of environmental concern with a rejection of orthodox biblical Christianity has had the disastrous effect of discrediting the environmental movement in the eyes of millions of traditional-minded Christian believers. Only recently have many serious Christians been willing to consider environmentalism, or "creation care," in any significant way, and they often find their efforts resisted fiercely on the basis of these fears.

Meanwhile, various Christian thinkers have attempted to offer more ecologically sensitive versions of Christian faith—sometimes with elements drawn from other religions or sometimes from a rethinking of biblical or theological resources. Some of these revised Christian theologies stray so far from biblical categories of thought that they basically constitute the abandonment of a recognizable Christian faith. Other times the reforms stay more carefully within Christian theological boundaries.

A variety of worldviews and theological moves have been made to create or retrieve a more environmentally friendly stance. I will name just a few of these here.

For those who believe that biblical faith's primary sin was in desacralizing nature, robbing it of the felt sense of the divine presence, one option is to retrieve or create nature religions that redivinize nature in its individual parts or as a whole. Just as once the ancients experienced and worshipped the divine in the air, land, and sea, in the various creatures, and in the mysterious processes of nature on which all life depends, such as rain, sunshine, and harvest, even today some have returned to various forms of such beliefs.

Another possibility, especially appealing to some in view of the growing appreciation of the creation as a single intricate entity, a vast ecosystem that sustains all life (the "Gaia hypothesis"), has been a retrieval of a kind of pantheism in which God is all and all is God, or a

23. See YOUNG, *supra* note 13, for a careful analysis and response.

24. See generally JARED DIAMOND, COLLAPSE (2005), an immensely important book, which tells the story of numerous societies that collapsed ecologically for a variety of reasons.

panentheism in which God is to be identified with or experienced directly in everything that exists.[25]

A third move is toward a kind of feminist nature religion. Here the critique of biblical thought categories is further specified as a critique of the patriarchy or androcentrism which has distorted all of these thought categories, such as the dualism that diminishes the female in favor of the male, the natural in favor of the spiritual, the body in favor of the soul, and this life in favor of the next one.[26] In one version of this approach, the Earth is personified as our divine Mother, who must be loved as a whole and in her constituent elements—every tree, river, and frog. Some who are attracted to this approach seek to retrieve ancient matriarchal religions which, they argue, contained elements of this kind of mysticism and spirituality and were displaced centuries ago in most of the world by the violent patriarchal religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.[27]

The full embrace of evolutionary approaches to life on Earth has been embraced by some who then weave an eco-spirituality around evolution. One approach is to find a kind of life-force spirituality at work in the multi-billion-year process by which life has unfolded on this planet and presumably elsewhere. All life is related to all other life, all life seeks to extend itself, and in the development and infinite elaboration of life forms on this planet one has much material for religious awe and wonder, as well as the basis of an ethic of reverence and respect and even "sacredness of life" in all its forms.[28]

One influential philosophical (rather than theological) move has been the embrace of a kind of eco-utilitarianism by the philosopher Peter Singer. Singer offers a new kind of moral universalism in which at least some non-human creatures are valued equally to human beings and thus become the bearers of moral claims that must be respected by human beings. Unfortunately, Singer grounds his elevation of the moral status of the higher mammals by establishing a consciousness-based or capacity-based evaluation of that status. This simultaneously elevates the moral status of the higher mammals that have been shown to be near or equal to human beings in their capacities and consciousness, but at the same time demotes human beings who lack such capacities and consciousness. This move lies at the root of Singer's horrifying proposal that infanticide and euthanasia should be permitted. For Singer, the capacities of an infant or an Alzheimer's patient fall below those of a fully functioning gorilla, and their respective rights should be treated correspondingly.[29]

25. The concept began as a scientific hypothesis and developed in a metaphysical/religious direction. *See* J.E. LOVELOCK, GAIA: A NEW LOOK AT LIFE ON EARTH (1979).

26. PETERSON, *supra* note 14, at 28–50.

27. *See, e.g.*, RIANE EISLER, THE CHALICE AND THE BLADE: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE (1987).

28. THOMAS BERRY, THE DREAM OF THE EARTH 123–37 (1988).

29. PETER SINGER, PRACTICAL ETHICS, *supra* note 17, at 175–217.

Another move suggested in recent literature has been more explicitly political. It involves a rethinking of political community to include all creatures. If one thinks of modern history as involving a gradual recognition of the moral and thus political status of all human beings, and not just some categories of human beings (men, landowners, white people), then the extension of this status to non-human creatures can be seen as the next logical step. Animals join humans in the kingdom of ends, to reframe Immanuel Kant. In an extension of the categorical imperative, they must count as among those who are viewed as ends also and not merely as means to someone else's ends. This ultimately leads to a reframing of the concept of citizenship, with animals included in a kind of global-earth community with rights that must be respected even if they cannot speak for themselves.[30]

I have already suggested that a number of Christian theologians have attempted to reframe Christian theology in radical ways that, in my view, essentially introduce elements of nature religions into Christian faith. While this is not the place to offer an introduction to all of these approaches, what they have in common is generally the explicit abandonment of core doctrinal elements of Christian faith and often the introduction of theological concepts and images that have little precedent in biblical or historical theology. Two examples of this are the mystical panentheism of Matthew Fox's creation spirituality,[31] and the feminist embrace of a kind of Mother Earth theology, such as Sallie McFague's suggestion that the Earth should be viewed as God's body.[32]

Perhaps it is easy for evangelicals to dismiss all of the foregoing moves as dangerous or hysterical overreactions. They should instead be viewed as relevant evidence of the Earth's distress and of culture's responses to that distress—and some of our Christian brothers' and sisters' responses. Some represent the retrieval of centuries of wisdom about sustainable human living on this planet. Even those that go too far should speak to us about our own need as perhaps more carefully orthodox Christians to respond far better than we have done.

It is true that a number of evangelical/orthodox Christian theologians and ethicists have attempted to offer a more modest reframing of Christian ethics to shift and improve our moral paradigms, and thus improve Christian approaches to the environment. One move is to tackle the "dominion mandate" and to redefine it with language such as

30. For an example of how this can be framed philosophically as an expansion of Kant, see PAUL W. TAYLOR, RESPECT FOR NATURE (1986) (or as an expansion of Mill, see SINGER, UNSANCTIFYING HUMAN LIFE, *supra* note 8). For an example of how it can be framed theologically, see RASMUSSEN, *supra* note 20.

31. MATTHEW FOX, ORIGINAL BLESSING: A PRIMER IN CREATION SPIRITUALITY PRESENTED IN FOUR PATHS, TWENTY-SIX THEMES, AND TWO QUESTIONS (1983).

32. SALLIE MCFAGUE, MODELS OF GOD: THEOLOGY FOR AN ECOLOGICAL, NUCLEAR AGE (1987).

stewardship, earth-keeping, or creation care. The focus remains Genesis 1–2, and the goal is to pull Christians away from a reading of dominion as domination and toward dominion as a more humble stewardship, care, or earth-keeping. This move also nudges Christians to pay more attention to non-human creatures and the creation itself, as an aspect of proper obedience to the "dominion mandate." Cal DeWitt, working in the Reformed tradition, has been a pioneer in these efforts.[33]

I think it has become clear recently that, at least for most evangelicals, our theology and ethic of creation are too weak to bear this added pressure. In other words, we would have to really care about a theology and ethic of creation in the first place for this revision of that theology to get our attention. But, focused as we have been on soteriology, on God's saving relationship to the human, and the human response to the divine, it would require a deep revolution in our working theology to move us toward any kind of deep concern with a theology or ethic related to creation. This helps explain why some recent theological work has moved closer to the core of classic Protestant theology, trying to take account of ecological concerns when thinking about the meaning of Jesus Christ, sin, salvation, and eschatology. A full-blown ecological theology will involve serious work in these areas. Some of the needed elements will be suggested in the next section.

V. Toward a Broadened Christian Sanctity-of-Life Ethic

Let me situate this sketch of theological resources for ecological concern by treating it as the potential contribution of a broadened Christian sanctity-of-life ethic. Perhaps if properly modified, the sanctity of life still can be the organizing framework or paradigm that we need for an era of ecological crisis. If this effort is successful, concern for God's creation can be, at least in part, anchored in a moral commitment that is already widely shared in the churches, which is a considerable advantage for those trying to affect the beliefs and behaviors of the average Christian today.

As suggested earlier, and developed more fully in my book on the sanctity of life,[34] in biblical thought the majesty and holiness of God, together with the free decision of God simply to decide and declare the immeasurable value of human life, entirely grounds any ascription of sanctity to humanity. Therefore it is wrong to say that human beings and their lives are somehow intrinsically sacred, if we are not at the same time saying that what makes human lives sacred is God's action and declaration toward them. Perhaps a more precise way to say it is that in the theocentric perspective all value is *derived value*, in that God the Creator is the one who authoritatively declares the value of all things that he has

33. *E.g.*, DeWitt, *supra* note 19.

34. *See* Gushee, The Sanctity of Life, *supra* note 12.

made. Only after we are clear about this can we then venture to say that an entity has *intrinsic value*, which means that God has already and permanently made his valuation of that entity clear. (Modern attempts to speak of intrinsic or inalienable human rights without reference to the God who is the source of such rights is both politically and morally crucial to human well-being and theologically deficient.)

In the critically important Psalm 8, for example, it is God's name that is "majestic in all the earth."[35] It is God's decision to choose to "be mindful" of humanity amidst all of God's other majestic creations.[36] It is God who made us "a little lower than the heavenly beings,"[37] and "crowned [us] with glory and honor."[38] It is God who chose to make us "ruler over the works of [his] hands."[39] Human life can be described as sacred insofar as the majesty, holiness, presence, love, and care of God touch it, are related to it, and are directed toward it. To honor human life and treat it with reverence is an appropriate theological, spiritual, and ethical response to God.

Insofar as ecological degradation and catastrophe hurt human beings, those creatures toward whom God's actions and declarations reveal such exalted value, then Christians are duty bound to respond with steps to ease the suffering of their human neighbors. Therefore one of the best things that concerned Christian environmentalists can do to advance their commitments is to a) remind our brothers and sisters of our obligations toward our human neighbors, whom God loves so dearly, and b) show concretely how ecological degradation is already sickening and killing those neighbors. This is not hard to do. Far from setting up environmental concern as a conflict of interests between babies and whales, we must instead show the ways in which the same problems hurt both babies and whales. This would be a huge step forward.

But then we must also find ways to demonstrate biblically that these whales themselves, as well as the other creatures, and the creation as a whole, are also in a sense sacred. They may not be sacred to the same degree[40] or in the same way that human beings are, especially if we tie sacredness in any strong way to the *imago Dei*, and if we preserve some species' uniqueness as part of that divine image. But they are indeed sacred—if we understand sacred, again, to mean sacred as a result of God's action and declaration toward them and relationship with them. When we then re-open the text of the Bible and look especially for God's relationship to other creatures and the creation, we find a God who cre-

35. *Psalms* 8:1.
36. *Id.* 8:4.
37. *Id.* 8:5.
38. *Id.*
39. *Id.* 8:6.
40. *Cf. Matthew* 6:26.

ates other creatures and the creation,[41] who declares them good,[42] who feeds and sustains them,[43] who takes delight in them,[44] who makes covenants with them,[45] who protects them in his laws,[46] who hears their groaning,[47] and who promises their ultimate liberation from bondage to decay[48] and the renewal of all things.[49] We have ample biblical grounds for looking upon them and treating them with reverence and respect.

It is not too much to say that to the extent Christians have failed to acknowledge God's sacred relationship to other creatures and the creation, we have failed God, we have sinned against him, against other creatures, and against the creation we share with them. Our failures call for repentance, which includes both grief over sin and a new commitment to a different way of relating. We must learn to perceive our moral obligations as God's people to those other creatures loved and valued by God. This is the starting point for a fresh look at the particular resources found in the scriptures that are relevant to ecological concern.

Once we open ourselves to seeing and sensing God's immense valuing of his creation and his creatures, a whole new range of biblical resources becomes available to us. Significant work has already been done and more is needed to mine these extensive biblical resources that teach us in various ways a high valuing of the creation, its ecosystems, and its creatures. These can be of especially great value in church settings precisely because they do not rely on esoteric theological moves but can simply be read in the biblical texts. Let me at least suggest a few places to look.

We should pay more attention to Genesis 1–2, and to developing a more robust theology of creation (and fall, in Genesis 3). We should work harder at "seeing" non-human life and the creation itself as they appear in Genesis, populating our Christian moral imagination with creatures other than human beings that matter to God. We must learn to read, and to tell, the primal biblical story differently.

We should spend much more time in Genesis 6–9, not arguing about whether the flood was literal or where the Ark landed, but instead paying attention to the terrible suffering that befell the creation due to human sin—a paradigmatic pattern that continues today. The Ark itself has become something of a symbol of human-animal community—there

41. *Genesis* 1–2.
42. *Id.* 1:31.
43. *Psalms* 104; *Matthew* 6:26.
44. Implicit in the declarations of the goodness of creation in *Genesis* 1; *cf. Proverbs* 8:29–31.
45. *Genesis* 9.
46. *Leviticus* 25; *Deuteronomy* 6:14.
47. *Romans* 8:22.
48. *Id.* 8:20–21.
49. *Matthew* 19:28.

creaturely life survived together. In one sense the entire Earth is an Ark—either we survive together or probably none of us will survive at all. The Noahide Covenant is rich with theological significance, for nowhere is divine-human-animal-creation community more clearly suggested. Most breathtakingly, God makes a covenant through Noah and "every living creature that was with you" to and with all human beings and "every living creature . . . for all generations to come."[50] This means that yesterday, today, and tomorrow God chooses to stand in an ongoing covenant relationship with every creature. This suggests a creaturely status before God that is not contingent on their status before or with humans. It also reminds us that when we mistreat any creature, we mistreat one who stands in covenant relation to God. And when our actions contribute to the destruction of all members of a species and therefore its total extinction, one might fairly say that we are reversing the obedient work of Noah and destroying a species-family with which God intended to remain in a covenant relationship in perpetuity.

Strangely and suggestively, even animals are in a sense treated as moral agents when the text says that there will be accountability of both people and animals for the shedding of blood on the Earth.[51] Can it be that before God even the animals have a kind of moral responsibility? Certainly it is clear in Old Testament law that human beings bear responsibility for the negligent care of their animals and any harm that comes to others as a result of such negligence.[52] But in this same case, the animal is put to death for its killing of a human even if its owner is not found negligent.[53] Surely this provision aims at the protection of human life, but it also raises the interesting possibility of a kind of moral accountability for animals.[54] This is important because it is precisely moral agency that is often specified as a key demarcation point between human beings and other species.

The Torah contains several provisions protecting both land and animals. This is especially clear in Deuteronomy's version of Sabbath law. Here rest is entirely democratized and universalized, extending not just to every human member of the household (including servants and aliens) but also to the household's oxen, donkeys, and other animals.[55] If all of these are resting, the land must rest as well, a point made explicit in the instructions for Sabbath years and the Jubilee Year;[56] in both cases, "the land is to have a Sabbath of rest, a Sabbath to the Lord. . . . The land is

50. *Genesis* 9:8–12.
51. *Id.* 9:5.
52. *Cf. Exodus* 21:29–32.
53. *Id.*
54. *See, e.g., Genesis* 9.
55. *Deuteronomy* 5:12.
56. *Leviticus* 25.

to have a year of rest."[57] Even the holy war regulations—deeply problematic texts indeed—contain surprising provisions sparing fruit-bearing trees from being cut down during city sieges.[58] Note that there are good human reasons for these laws, and that in the end they protect the long-term sustainability of the land and therefore human well-being. But the texts are explicit in protecting animals and the land, apparently for their own sake as well.

The psalms are notable for their celebration of God-as-Creator and for their sometimes quite detailed descriptive celebrations of God's care for creation. A particular favorite of Christian environmentalists is Psalm 104, which like Psalm 8 begins with a celebration of God's majesty, splendor, and greatness.[59] This is particularized through careful descriptions of the phenomena of the heavens and the Earth, the waters and the air.[60] The Psalm notes and celebrates the dependence of the creatures on God's continual provisions for them in creation, including the springs from which the beasts drink; the grass eaten by the cattle; the plants, bread, and wine that God provides and men and women eat and drink; the carefully described niches in which the various particular named creatures dwell; the cycles of day and night and the seasons.[61] Our commonality with other creatures is marked as the Psalm ends, for "all look to you to give them their food at the proper time" and for all creatures, "when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust."[62] "[M]ay the Lord rejoice in his works," says the psalmist, and those works are all of us, all creatures, entirely dependent on God's creation, provision, and care, in a fundamental sense a democracy of creaturely gratitude and need, a fact so often forgotten by proud human image-bearers.[63] A similarly detailed and awe-inspiring text of this sort is Job 38–41, in which God takes the questioning Job on a detailed tour of creation. These are profound, passionate, loving depictions of the details of creaturely existence and the created world. They reflect a sense of sacredness.

Constructive resources for an ecologically friendly ethic extend to the wisdom sayings of both the Old Testament and the New. These regularly refer to the created order, its regularities and moral structure established from the beginning of creation,[64] and the behaviors of other creatures which in various ways teach human beings lessons for the living

57. *Id.* 25:2–5.
58. *Deuteronomy* 20:19.
59. *Psalms* 104:1.
60. *Id.* 104:2–9.
61. *Id.* 104:10–23.
62. *Id.* 104:27–29.
63. *Id.* 104:31.
64. *Proverbs* 8.

of our lives.[65] One text even describes the character of a righteous person as one who "cares for the needs of his animal,"[66] reminiscent of a similar saying by St. Francis: "If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men."[67] These observations and exhortations can broaden our sense of the way God stands in relationship to the entirety of the creation, as well as our sense of sharing a kind of moral community with other creatures whose lives are also governed by the loving and just God of the universe.

The sorrowful brokenness of the creation, despite God's ongoing care, becomes a theme in the prophetic writings—along with promises of the renewal of the whole creation, and the healing of the conflicts and fears that separate not just humans from each other but animals from humans as well. So indeed at the end, in that blessed Day of the Lord, predators will no longer kill, animals will live in community with each other, and neither children nor their parents need fear animals any longer—"[t]hey will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain."[68]

When "the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,"[69] the creation will be renewed. Deserts will become fertile ground, peace will prevail in human community, the land will be fruitful, and both people and animals shall dwell in safety.[70] The later prophetic writings mix warnings of a fierce coming judgment on God's enemies with promises of the glorious transformation that will then come upon both Israel and the world. First there will be a purgative judgment, then a holistic planetary renewal leading to secure, joyful existence for all creatures.[71] How often does our treatment of biblical eschatology address these themes? Does our love and hope extend this far?

Jesus reflects this thoroughly Jewish and prophetic eschatology when he speaks in passing of the restoration[72] and "the renewal of all things,"[73] and there are certainly far worse summaries of his ministry. Along with Glen Stassen and others, I have sought to contribute to a recovery of understanding of the centrality of the kingdom or reign of God in the ministry of Jesus, and here would only add that part of that

65. *Id.* 17:12; 25:13–14, 25–26; 26:1–3, 11, 17; 27:8; 28:3, 15; 30:17–19, 24–31.

66. *Id.* 12:10.

67. St. Francis of Assisi (attributed); *see* Francis of Assisi: Wikiquote, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Francis_of_Assisi (last visited Apr. 1, 2009).

68. *Isaiah* 11:9.

69. *Id.* 32:15.

70. *Id.* 32:16–20.

71. *Cf. id.* 65:1–25.

72. *Matthew* 17:11.

73. *Id.* 19:28.

reign was and is the renewal and healing of the broken creation and broken creatures.[74] Not only did Jesus heal the sick and raise the dead, he also calmed the threatening storm and pointed to the future renewal of all things—a renewal gloriously depicted in Revelation in the same words used by Isaiah. One day there shall be no more hurting or destroying, no more suffering or crying or mourning or pain.[75] Is it too much to wonder whether this end of suffering, crying, and pain extends to our non-human neighbors who also suffer and die? Can that be what Paul refers to when he speaks of the liberation of creation from its bondage to decay?[76]

These themes take us right into the heart of our theology of salvation, which is logically interconnected with our theology of creation, sin, covenant, and eschatology. Here we are well beyond tweaking an ethic of dominion.

A thoroughgoing concern for God's creation is today contributing to a discovery or rediscovery of a planetary or cosmic rather than human-centered biblical narrative. The whole biblical story is being reframed, moving away from the divine-human drama of creation, fall, and redemption toward a planetary drama involving all God's creatures. Admittedly, staying close to the biblical text entails a special place for humanity—in creation, in sin (and in evoking a divine judgment that sweeps up all creatures into its effects), in redemption, and in the final eschatological drama. But the rest of the created order has begun to reappear in Christian theological treatments of soteriology and eschatology.[77]

In this more cosmic vision, as we have already seen, from the beginning a theology of creation is much more attentive to the full range of God's creatures. While sin is (apparently) a possibility only for human beings (and higher beings, such as the angels?), all creation and its creatures are affected. God's long march of redemption begins with Noah and a covenant made with all creatures.

As for the decisive covenant that centers in Jesus Christ, more and more attention is being paid to grand texts like John 1 and Colossians 1. Together, these texts do several profound things:

- position the Word as the One through whom all things were made and as the source of "life," apparently both physical and spiritual life, if the distinction is relevant;[78]

74. STASSEN & GUSHEE, *supra* note 10. *Cf. Isaiah* 35; *Luke* 4:16–20.

75. *Revelation* 21:1–5; *see Isaiah* 65:17–25.

76. *Romans* 8:21.

77. For a recent treatment, see N.T. WRIGHT, SURPRISED BY HOPE: RETHINKING HEAVEN, THE RESURRECTION, AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH (2008).

78. *John* 1:3; *Colossians* 1:16.

- describe the Word as "bec[oming] flesh"[79] in Jesus Christ, forever elevating the value of fleshly life through the reality of the incarnation;
- describe Christ as the "image of the invisible God"[80] and thus present him as the source and beginning of a renewal of human nature;[81]
- list a mysterious and extensive array of entities and creatures created by Christ;[82]
- assert that all of these were not only created by him but also for him—he is their source, their purpose, and their destiny;[83]
- state that "in him all things hold together,"[84] which suggests that Christ is somehow the sustaining and centering power of the universe in an ongoing way;
- assert that by being "before all things" and "the firstborn from among the dead,"[85] Christ has supremacy in everything—he is Lord of all who exist, all that exists; and
- assert that God's purpose through Christ is to reconcile to himself "all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven."[86]

These are exalted themes, high points of biblical revelation. They offer a much bigger story than the relationship between God and humanity. Jesus Christ becomes the hinge and pivot of the entire planetary drama from beginning to end; no creature came into existence or stays in existence apart from him; and no creature is unaffected by the gospel, the good news that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.[87]

Paul's treatment of these themes in Romans 8 seems to suggest a relationship between the salvation of humans and the rest of creation in which just as human sin brought creation's groaning, so the salvation of human beings in Christ brings creation's reclamation. That is why a (personified) creation can be depicted as "wait[ing] in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed."[88] In Adam, humans sinned and creation suffered; in Christ, redemption begins and creation rejoices. We are the God-designated servant-leaders of the rest of creation[89] but we are forever connected to that creation as well. When God sent Christ into

79. *John* 1:14.
80. *Colossians* 1:15.
81. *Id.* 1:15–20.
82. *John* 1:3; *Colossians* 1:16.
83. *Colossians* 1:16.
84. *Id.* 1:17.
85. *Id.* 1:17–18.
86. *Id.* 1:20.
87. 2 *Corinthians* 5:19; *cf. Mark* 16:15.
88. *Romans* 8:19.
89. *See Genesis* 1:26–28.

the world, Paul seems to be saying, his central purpose was to reclaim humanity, but in so doing he acted to reclaim the entirety of the created order, which of course only needed to be reclaimed because human sin brought it low. When we see this, when we see that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, every creature included, we see the ultimate evidence of God's immense valuing of a universe made sacred by his design, decision, and declaration.

This, finally, is the theological reason why it cannot be that God's ultimate intention for this planet is its destruction by fire. It is hard to overstate how much damage has been done by this particular interpretation of the events of the end, and especially of 2 Peter 3. I call on our biblical scholars and theologians to work hard on this text in light of the eschatology of the rest of the scriptures. It seems clear that 2 Peter 3 is much better interpreted as a purgative judgment preliminary to the final renewal of all things. That coheres better with the rest of scriptures in which warnings of ultimate judgment at the Day of the Lord are coupled with promises of the final "renewal of all things." The "new heaven and the new earth" of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21 is actually a renewed heaven and renewed Earth, where God's intention for this planet at the creation is at last fulfilled. It is hard to see how a God who cares so profoundly for the creatures and all creation could end the planetary drama with raw destruction rather than renewal.

CONCLUSION

I began this essay by describing the sanctity-of-human-life ethic as it has emerged as an "old new" theme in Christian ethics. I discussed its profound power and appeal for addressing the perennial problem of how human beings should view and treat one another under the majestic and loving sovereignty of God.

But then I asked whether it can serve as an adequate ethic for an age of ecological degradation and possible catastrophe. I named a number of very serious objections to even a strong and holistic articulation of this kind of Christian ethic, and surveyed various theological and philosophical alternatives that essentially abandon it and the biblical framework that undergirds it.

I turned to the question of whether a modified sanctity-of-life ethic is possible that does not sacrifice the exalted moral valuation of the human person but can stretch to include non-human creatures and the creation itself. I turned to the scriptures to see whether there were legitimate resources there for an eco-friendly sanctity-of-life ethic.

My happy discovery is that the scriptures very clearly reveal "a wideness in God's mercy," and that the Bible is full of evidence that God has revealed his profound care for non-human creatures and the creation in ways that, to our shame, Christians often miss. It is fair to say from

scripture that a sanctity-of-created-life ethic can be found that includes but is not limited to the sanctity of human life. Human beings occupy a special leadership role in creation, but as scripture consistently teaches, leadership roles entail disproportionate responsibility and not unique status or special privileges. Human failures before God, neighbor, and fellow creatures damaged relationships at every level. The good news is that Christ's redeeming love is big enough to include the entire created order, which was, after all, made by him, through him, and for him.

It turns out that a sanctity-of-human-life ethic can be (must be) expanded to include other creaturely neighbors. As Helen Fein wrote in relation to the sad history of indifference to the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust, what is needed is an *expansion* (not abandonment) of a sacred universe of moral obligation.[90] Christians who turned away from Jews when the Nazis were trying to kill them believed that certain lives were sacred, but just not Jewish lives. They would lay down their lives for their own family members, but not for Jewish strangers. This may be understandable at a human level but did not reflect the teaching of Jesus. He taught that the stranger and even the enemy must be treated as falling within that sacred universe of moral obligation, and he proved it by dying for them—for us.

I do not believe that we must abandon a biblically based sanctity-of-human-life ethic in order to care adequately for God's creation. To the contrary, having recovered the majestic worth of the human person, we can also discover the extraordinary value of God's other creatures—and the foundation of both in the majesty and love of God. Indeed, we can make the argument more strongly to say that to recover the true roots of the sanctity of human life in God is also to recover the true roots of the sanctity of all created life. This is at least as much a spiritual experience as it is a theological move. Those who tremble in loving awe before the God of all creation will in turn love all of God's creatures. One might say that worship of God is the ultimate origin of a true appreciation for life's sanctity in any of its forms.

As we fall on our knees before God, may we also (re)discover the God-given connectedness of all created life. The evidence is clear all around us that as we care for God's creation well, we care for each other well, and, sadly, the reverse is also true. Human beings are permanently and inextricably connected to other creatures and the rest of the creation. We may be the planetary servant-leaders, but our story is the story of those whom we lead, our destiny intertwined with theirs, from creation to eschaton. We are as dependent on the rest of creation as it is on us, with the whole dependent on God-in-Christ. The astonishing discovery from scripture is that God revealed this long ago, through the Word

90. HELEN FEIN, ACCOUNTING FOR GENOCIDE: NATIONAL RESPONSES AND JEWISH VICTIMIZATION DURING THE HOLOCAUST 33 (1979).

Written and the Word made flesh. We lost track of it for a long while under the impact of many factors. May we Christians recover, internalize, and be transformed by these truths without further delay, taking an appropriate role in the global effort to restore God's good yet damaged creation.