ENVIRONMENTAL THEOLOGIES

Nicole Newell
God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Genesis 1:28

- “Dominion over,” “subdue”
- God transcends nature, humans transcend nature
- Indigenous peoples are heathens and barbarians
- Disorderly chaotic wild

THE ECOLOGICAL COMPLAINT AGAINST CHRISTIANITY
THEOLOGY AS THREAT?

- Protestant Reformation
- Meaning of dominion has changed throughout the ages
- Anthropocentricity really emerges in 1500s
- Dominion over the life and death forces of nature has become dominion over the very structure and function of nature itself
  - Massive pressures of urbanization, industrialization
  - Technology of mining, pesticides, genetic modification
  - The economist’s zealous faith in the great god of growth
- Meaning of dominion as a human right to use resources to our own desired ends

But also:
- Rich resources in Christian scripture and tradition
- Creation as good
VARIATIONS OF ACTIVISM

- Christian Stewardship
  - Evangelical and bible-centric theology
  - Anthropocentric, humans as stewards with responsibilities to promote ecological justice

- Eco-justice
  - Liberal and mainstream church
  - Just relations, the coming of God’s kingdom or kindom is to be worked out on earth by righting social wrongs

- Creation spirituality
  - Focus on the wonder of the universe, humans a tiny part of the cosmological story
  - Incorporates multiple religious traditions
  - Deep ecology, mysticism, feminist ecologies, indigenous religions,

- Rejects approach of dominion from Genesis
- “love is the integrating center of the whole Christian faith and ethics”
- Love and justice intertwined
- Rights and responsibilities
- Biotic Bill of Rights
- Politics: responsible use of power to bring about ethical goals
- Concept of sin must be expanded to cover

- Arises in the widespread consciousness that an environmental crisis threatens the future of the earth
- Anthropocentrism in the modern world and way of life
- Immanence of God in world – panentheism
- Radically different understanding of the world
- Relationship between God, world, and human as ecological rather than hierarchical
- Reinterpretation of dominion as partnership with nature
- Commitment to justice for all creatures and the created world
- Move towards individual accountability for corporate sin
ECOFEMINISTS

- Connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of the environment
- Shared history of oppression
- Connection between femininity and nature
  - Reciprocity, nurturing, cooperation
  - Menstruation and moon cycles
  - Childbirth and creation
- Criticized as essentialist, reinforcing patriarchal dominance
LARRY RASMUSSEN

- Environmental ethicist, St. Olaf grad
- Spiritual and ecological ethic for all creation
- Drawing on various religious traditions
- “A moral universe limited to the human universe will not, under present circumstances, even understand life, much less serve it. Earth community requires a biocentric or a geocentric knowledge, ethic, and faith.”
CHALLENGES

- Deep seated dualism of human/nature
- Population
  - Religious limitation of birth control
- Consumption
  - A measure of happiness and success
  - The capitalist economic system – nature has economic or NO value
  - Quarterly profit margins do not favor the environment
  - Waste
- Coordinated response to climate change
  - Apocalyptic overtones
  - Religion provides meaning in the face of impending chaos
- Placelessness, transitory view of life of earth