

## Appendix N Eco-theology

### Eco-theology and Eco-justice Ministries

#### A presentation for the Stewardship of the Environment

The prefix, Eco, is derived from the Greek word, *oikos* which means “household, house, or a family”. And, whereas the term's root meaning is the same as for Economy and Ecology, its connotation within an eco-justice ministry is "action to wholeness for God's household," that is, all of creation. Therefore, Eco-theology and its action corollary, Eco-justice Ministry, speak to the interrelatedness of all beings, as it advocates for world peace, social justice for all creatures, and environmental sustainability.

"The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature."(Walter Brueggemann, 1990)

Contrary to popular understanding, Eco-theology is much broader than just addressing ecological issues; for, although environmental sustainability is its incentive; social justice is its momentum. These are not competing agendas but are interdependent elements of how humans are to relate to God's creation. Within an eco-theological perspective, everyone and everything belong to God's Family and are members of God's Household throughout the cosmos. *Cosmos* being the Greek word for either a harmonious system or a divinely created universe. That is to say, God created all things to be in harmony. Every creature, inorganic as well as living, and every natural system exist only in relationship to every other. There is total interdependence. No part of creation, including humanity, can separate itself from the whole. Furthermore, God's loving intention encompasses all that God has created, all plants, all animals, and all natural systems, even to the apparently least significant. God is in all creation and all things are of the divine.

These precepts, while very old, have come into heightened recognition and prominence in response to the global environmental crisis of the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Theologians and scientists have come to recognize the need for a redefined ethic. To wit, humans with our superior intelligence, language, and manual dexterity are given heightened responsibility to protect creation, not exploit it. Exploitation of any kind is an injustice that jeopardizes the harmony of the cosmos. Conversely, stewardship is seen as a way of expressing how humans might interact gently and responsibly with the rest of creation, rejecting concepts of domination and management. Dominion is no longer understood as a hierarchical model of God-Man-Nature but is now being articulated in terms of interdependence and responsibility. An excellent model of this paradigm shift can be extrapolated from the Jewish theologian, Martin Buber's seminal work, “I and Thou”. For nearly two millennia the Western World has viewed Nature as "It." The line of reasoning went something like this: "Man was created in the image of God; therefore, nature was created for the benefit of man who exercised complete control over it." Proponents of Eco-justice are now relating to Nature as "Thou." Creation is not a thing but a life giving and sustaining being, not an object to be used solely for

humanity's benefit, but a person (*Gaia*) to be revered and celebrated. Being created in God's image now means servant -- loving and nurturing all of creation -- the cosmos, the household.

Interdependence is the operant dynamic within this renewed paradigm of stewardship. Environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing human justice, and social justice cannot be achieved within a milieu of ecological chaos. So long as it remains profitable for the powerful to exploit the environment, there will be injustice against weaker members of the household and so long as injustice prevails, there will be profitability in exploitation. At the same time, survival of life on Earth is dependent on unity with God, with Nature, and with each other. However, there can be no unity without justice, nor can there be justice without unity.

Every creature, inorganic as well as living, is entitled to a life of freedom from coercion, in unity with every other creature throughout the cosmos. This is not how the world works, but is how the Bible describes God's Will. And, the Good News of the Gospel is that it can be -- "The Kingdom is near." The role of the Church is to bring this about. The Catechism (1979) states: "The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members." Therefore, an eco-justice ministry is any action that challenges mistreatment of anyone or anything, enhances others' sense of wholeness, promotes rapport between disparate groups, or sustains the environment. Peace (unity), Justice, and Environmental Sustainability are inextricably linked and must be addressed simultaneously in order to achieve Harmony.

Walter Brueggemann has carried this concept of harmony further in his interpretation of Shalom. Harmony is Shalom where Shalom is God's vision for the family, a life of freedom from exploitation with unity among all creatures, and Jesus is its incarnation. Shalom is both Exodus and Resurrection, the escape from the tyranny of coercion to the dance of a new life of willing conscientiousness.

St Aidan's is fully active in eco-justice ministries. Our support of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, the Delonis Center food program, Rotating Men's Overflow Shelter, Food Gatherers, Bread for the World, Interfaith Roundtable, and CROP constitute eco-justice ministries. Whenever we restore and sustain the woods, thereby enhancing a wildlife habitat, and then offer its natural resources as a nurturing milieu to persons seeking spiritual sustenance such as the retreat center, we are engaged in eco-justice ministry.

John P Board, Jr. MD

SHALOM: may all of creation exist in peace, justice, and harmony