

"STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION"

What this Thinksheet is **not**: (1) A sketch construct of biotheology (environmental theology). I hope the 1,100 or so of us will move toward that, together. (2) An outline of workshop-topics. I'm not even sure the workshops should be specialized, the delegates moving toward their special interests. Rather, this Thinksheet **is** what it claims to be, a fistful of heuristic propositions shaped to stimulate discussion toward responsible Christian action on the Assembly's topic.

1. Christians should compost all they can, creating good earth to enrich God's Good Earth. Urban venue is no excuse: technology now lets us think small (in addition to big) about recycling (not just glass & metals, but "earth[is products back] to earth"). The ancestors' goal to "leave the world a better place" upon dying means all it used to mean, plus leaving the earth-water-air better. This will require more than doing something we haven't been doing; we shall need also, & this more difficult, to stop doing much of what we have been doing in this throwaway, wasteful society. (See the 27 Nov 89 NEWSWEEK coverstory, "Buried Alive: The Garbage Glut: An Environmental Crisis Reaches Our Doorstep.")
2. Even though it may "ruin the economy," Christians should buy less "goods" (as opposed to "services"--in the eyes of the biosphere, "goods" being "bads"). One recent Sunday, I weighed the Sunday papers brought in by various guests: 12½ lbs.! Paper accounts for ca.66% of U.S. garbage. Buy less, but don't stop reading my Thinksheets.
3. Christians should make more. No, silly, not more money! Nor more unnecessary things from irreplaceable raw materials. Rather, make more of the necessities rather than buying them readymade in packaging meant to do to your eyeballs what flowers do to bees. Make more meals from basics (eg, processed oats cost you up to ten times unprocessed, which take little more time to prepare).
4. Christians should save more. Yes, money. But I was thinking ecologically. Save more of what the ancestors had to, such as string, rubberbands, paperclips, sacks. It's fun, it gives you inner satisfaction, to take used sacks to the healthfood store & fill them with grains you yourself scoop up out of the bins. Label boxes "rope," "plastic," "steel," "other metals," etc., & squirrel away much of what you'd otherwise label "junk" & throw away. For the proverbial rainy day, save both money & things.
5. Christians should give away, for others' use, what they themselves have dim prospect of using. (For the upper-middle class, this means more than ½ their clothes.) It isn't just that those others may not be able to buy what you, in/directly, give them. It's also that in giving, you prevent their buying some things they can & would--& thus vote for the surfeit of "goods" burdening the earth. (Yes, this advice is subversive of unfettered capitalism. But we're ruining the earth: wouldn't it be preferable to ruin the economy? A ruined economy can be fixed. But a ruined earth?)
6. Christians should encourage nonmarital chastity, marital faithfulness, & abortions, all three militating against excess tonnage of human flesh on our fragile planet. For me, this sequence is important: I'm for abortion only as the last resort. But I'm appalled at the illogic of those who claim the the first two, + contraception (which I'm more for than I'm for abortion), can solve the problem. For whom? How--by cultural imperialism at home & abroad? Of course there are cogent &, I believe, compelling humane arguments for abortion; but this Thinksheet is thinking only ecologically, & in earth's eyes every human abortion is a victory for the biosphere (for every unaborted human living to age 70 produces a lake of effluvia & a mountain of detritus [the latter, higher in the U.S. than anywhere else on earth]). We should rub our neighbors' noses in the fact that in addition to being fallen creatures (to whom the word of Redemption is spoken), we humans are earth's filthiest animals (to whom the word of Creation, the Good Earth, needs to be once again, & from a fresh angle, spoken).
7. Christians should pay more attention to the inner life, whose activities (prayer, meditation, devotional study & writing) are nonpolluting (of the biosphere, though the sin component of the inner life pollutes the cosmosphere). In encouraging this, churches can sop up some hours of folks some of whom would otherwise go to shopping

malls. (Am I saying that the main good of prayer is that it diverts people from consumerism? Of course not. But in the biosphere's eyes, that's its good.)

8. Christians should be self-critically careful of what morals they draw from myths (world-formative stories, such as creation [in my opinion, a good one] & spontaneous generation [in my opinion, a bad one]). Humans have experiences, make observations, theorize ("see" relationships among the experiences/observations), understand their theories (abstractions, paradigms) as disclosures (as surmises &/or revelations), deduce middle propositions therefrom, infer "truths" therefrom, &--in light of the whole swirling, spiraling process, decide what to do, then act. Faith & reason are integral to the whole progression. So let's take the world-stories the Bible begins with (Gn.1f). Here are a few possible derivative propositions: (1) We are to have dominion over our fellowcreatures not only because God tells us to but also because it's implicit in our being stewards in God's garden, an assignment he's given us. Yes, that's a circular proposition. What I'm attacking is the notion that stewardship is good & having dominion is bad. It's a fact that we do dominate: how could we impoverish & pollute the biosphere if we didn't dominate it? It's a question of how, not whether, we dominate. Here I'm resisting the irruption of Rousseauian "noble savage" romanticism, now making its appearance in "creation spirituality" & a panorama of New Age cults....(2) Christians should relate to the Good Earth by tending plants. Even the planting of a single seed in a small pot. Watching a plant grow is, in action, the prayer "Slow me down, Lord." Besides, it's a way of obeying "Be holy, for I am holy." One aspect of God's holiness, & a point of his modeling for us, is his being a gardener: he made a garden to put us in, then (deism, if you please) turned its management over to us. You're a gardener, with all the spiritual benefits pertaining thereto, if you seriously plant & cultivate only a single seed with prayer. (You don't believe in praying to plants, like some folks? Good for you: it's idolatry. But pray for yourself & the plant, & the earth, all together.) (In our text, Gn.1f, the only other role-model of God is as sculptor, making us of--what else?--the Good Earth, clay.)....(3) There are no "things," only "creatures," some of them Creator-made "without our aid," some with.. This fact of creaturiness is the fundamental note, the tonic, in the music of "the integrity of creation."....(4) The point of it all, of (as the Greeks said "the universe") "all things," is communion with God in his garden. In Vienna, Loree & I emerged from an immaculate garden into an I-don't-give-a-damn garden, a total mess. The change in our mood was dramatic, from a garden that was an upper to a garden that was a downer. Where is God when we suffer? Suffering with us. Where is God when his garden suffers? Suffering with his garden. And where are we, now, in God's suffering garden? What actions are we taking, do we intend to take, of our fellowsuffering with God in & with his garden? The relational-devotional is, for biblical folk, the center of any theology of ecology that's biblical. ... (4) The separators of the primordial Creator-creation-creatures ontological continuity are sin (by ego revolt against God) & science (by Aristotle's categorial fragmentation of reality). Modernity taught that sin (in that sense) was not entirely a bad idea, & postmodernity is now teaching that science (in that sense) has not been entirely a good idea (its implementation, technology, including medical "advances," overpopulating-raping-devastating-polluting earth). (A current instance of the mindlessness of applied science: Since we could save, medicinally/nutritionally, 40,000 under-age-5 children now dying each day, we should (without facing the fact that their surviving siblings are themselves sufficient to insure the NONsurvival of the ecosystems where the deaths are occurring, or the fact that the 40,000 should not have been conceived, or if conceived should not have been born). Religion was not entirely wrong in being suspicious of science, & the suspicion now appears justified. The project now is to convert science-technology from being mainly enemy, to being mainly friend, of the environment & humanity. The argument that its ill effects are not science's fault won't wash: it's just another instance of fragmentation)....(5) Earth is under a curse requiring our repentance for its lifting. The curse has been less painful than repentance. Hopeful fact: While repentance isn't becoming more painful, the curse is....(6) Spiritual decisions have consequences for nature, a truth the reverse of Augustine's truth that natural processes have spiritual purposes.

9. Yes, many other scriptures suggest many additional ecological inferences.