

# 생태학적 위기와 청지기직

Ecological Crisis and  
the Christian Stewardship

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1956년 생으로 경북대 사대를 졸업하고 한국과학기술원에서 반도체 물리학으로 이학석사와 박사학위를 받았다. 일년 동안 한국과학재단 post doc.으로 시카고대학에서 연수하였고 경북대학교 물리교육과 부교수로 재직하면서 기독교대학설립동역회 기획담당으로 일한 바 있으며 미국 위스콘신 대학에서 과학사를 공부하였고 현재는 휘튼대학에서 신학을 공부하고 있다. 저서로는 「기독교적 세계관」, 「기독교적 학문연구」, 「자연과학과 기독교 신앙」, 「현대과학정신과 기독교인의 대응」, 「기독교 세계관의 이해와 적용」 등이 있고, 수필집 「낮은자의 평강」이 있다.

## 초록

본고에서는 기독교 신앙과 생태계 보호와의 관계를 간단히 제시한다. 특히 기독교가 지배적 종교였던 서구의 과학문명에 의해 환경 오염이 일어난 사실에 주시하여 유대·기독교 정신이 환경파괴에 책임이 있다고 주장한 린 화이트 교수의 견해를 비판하면서 성경이 보여주는 자연보호 정신은 곧 청지기 정신임을 논의한다. 청지기는 자연을 마음대로 파괴하지도 않지만 신격화 하거나 섬겨야 할 대상으로도 보지 않는다. 오히려 자연을 가꾸고 다스리며 관리한다.

I.

Since the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, rapid industrialization has been accompanied by all sorts of pollutions and artificial destructions of nature. Even in the early development of the Industrial Revolution, there were always environmental problems but their scale was minuscule when measured against the size and resiliency of nature. Nature could absorb a lot of abuse and restore itself; basic mechanisms were not irrevocably damaged. During the last quarter of this century, however, there is no longer such confidence in the self-restorative powers of nature. The state of affairs has radically changed.<sup>1)</sup>

As a feasible alternative to the ecological concern, J. L. Simon, an economist, proposes to keep going ahead with new technological knowledge to deal with environmental problems.<sup>2)</sup> But I doubt that disastrous ecologic backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science and more technology. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we get a right idea on nature, because what we do about the ecosystem depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. Only when we understand the basic idea from which environmental demolition occurs, can we get the right perspectives on the ecological crisis.

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1. Phillip C. Cato, "The Management of the Biosphere: Ethical and Theological Issues," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 56, Nov. 1, 1989, p. 54.
  2. Julian L. Simon, "Now (I Think) I Understand the Ecologists Better," *The Futurist*, Sep. - Oct., 1987, pp. 18-19.

## II.

There have been a few attempts to find the philosophical roots of ecological crisis. Some try to trace the origin of ecological crisis back an antinature streak of Western thought back to the spirit of the Enlightenment characterized by infinite confidence upon human reason or the Platonic doctrine of the split between the corruptible body and the transcendent, immortal soul.<sup>3)</sup> Lynn White, a medieval historian in UCLA, said that the Bible gives humans license to exploit nature because it sets man above nature.<sup>4)</sup> This paper will discuss the Christian view and its implications for ecological crisis, particularly focusing on critical discussion of the White's arguments.

According to White, the Christian dogma of creation has a significant implication for our comprehension of today's ecological crisis. He said, "modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology. The dynamism of religious devotion, shaped by the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation, gave it impetus."<sup>5)</sup> He argued that modern science was an extrapolation of natural theology, the religious study of nature for the better understanding of God, and that modern technology was at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. If so, he said, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt for ecological crisis.

However, the most undeveloped and misunderstood teaching of Scripture relevant to White's article is the mandate given to Adam by

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3. Reijer Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmann, 1972, Ch. 1.

4. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science*, 155, Mar. 10, 1967, pp. 1203-1207.

God. The biblical teaching on the man-nature relationship is found in Genesis 1 : 26 and 28.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness : and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth ... Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

An above passage is usually called "the cultural mandate", "the Adamic mandate" or "the first Great Commission".<sup>6)</sup> The cultural mandate was transmitted by their Creator to the very first man and woman and, through them, to every man and woman who have descended from them. It has never been withdrawn, and all indications are that it will continue to be applicable forever, since it involves the purpose of God in creation.

Man's "dominion," of course, is as God's steward, not as one that is given license to "destroy the earth".<sup>7)</sup> As the Bible said, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof ; the world, and they that dwell therein."<sup>8)</sup> Nevertheless, although God retains ownership, man as a

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5. White, p. 1206.

6. Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, Grand Rapids, Michigan : Baker Book House, 1984, pp. 41~42.

7. "The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth."(*Revelation* 11 : 18).

8. *Psalms* 24 : 1.

steward has been placed in charge of the earth and all its system, living and nonliving. The cultural mandate makes man the responsible steward of the universe, not its spoiler and looter. Responsible stewardship of the universe is the keynote of biblical teaching.

The command to “subdue the earth,” although couched in military terminology, should be understood to mean bringing all earth’s systems and processes into a state of optimum productivity and utility. As steward of the universe, man is challenged to develop natural resources to benefit all creatures, aesthetically and materially, and by so doing to honor his Creator and Redeemer.

In relation to stewardship, Genesis 2:15 is another passage showing the commandment that instructs humans to preserve and serve creation: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” What human should do as steward is to “work” and “take care of” nature.

As D. N. Freeman, a theologian, indicates, a steward accepts that humans are separate from and above nature, but that is not a license to exploit the natural world.<sup>9</sup> That is, such Christian stewardship of natural resources does not include exploitation for selfish gain at the expense of natural environment and human society, nor pollution of land, air and water.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, when we see from this philosophy of stewardship, the status of humans in nature is marked more by responsibility to care for creation than by superiority to nature.

The Christian understanding dealing with nature is profoundly insightful and potentially transformative of modern ways of addressing

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9. Besty Carpenter, “The Greening of the Church,” *U. S. News & World Report*, Nov. 27, 1989, pp. 66–67.

10. Ernest S. Feenstra, “Christian Impact on Ecology,” *Science*, 156, May 12, 1967, p. 737.

the crisis of the ecosystem. The needed transformation lies at the level of our deep mentality, our world view. The mentality of consumerism, the myth of progress, and our technological mind-set are all problematic in regard to the environment. If our environmental sensitivity is to change, the transformation must take place at the root of the problem. But the transformation is more convoluted than might first appear.

### III.

In conclusion, though it is not easy to find a specific philosophical root from which all artificial alterations of nature resulted, it seems to be evident that the ecological crisis stemmed from the illusion of human being that they are the owner of the earth and thus can exploit it as they please. Therefore, I believe, throwing out the arrogant ownership of nature and accepting the humble stewardship to the creation, we could find more fundamental way to deal with environmental problems. It is not certain where the human's arrogant ownership about nature came from. But different from the argument of White, I believe that it was not originated from the spirit of the Bible. The Christian traditions put before us a world view in which human is not an expoliter of nature but a steward of it. One of the constructive tasks is to illustrate how the resources of the Christian heritage can be used in promoting ecological wisdom.<sup>11)</sup>

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11. Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "The Sacrament of Creation," *Commonweal*, Jan. 26, 1990, p. 43.