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**In Theory: Trash planet Earth, or treasure it?**

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Q. An American evangelical group called the Cornwall Alliance has placed itself in the center of debate over the environment by taking a hard line against green groups. Using the Dominion Mandate — the verse in Genesis about God giving man dominion over all life on Earth — as its chief argument, the Cornwall Alliance is vehemently opposed to environmental groups, which it sees as being un-Christian and pagan, and which it has labeled the “Green Dragon.”

A book by the alliance, “Resisting the Green Dragon: Dominion not Death,” reads in part, “[s]o-called 'natural' or wilderness areas are not hospitable to man, and God does not consider this a good or natural state,” and, “Christians must resist Green overtures to recast true religion, nor allow themselves to be prey for teachers of pagan heresies.” The book is also highly critical of feminism, socialism, Democrats and President Obama.

On the other side of the religious/environmentalist debate is the so-called “Creation Care” movement, a loose band of groups from all religions that actively set out to protect the environment and believe that in doing so, they are saving God's creation. Creation Care has even attracted the attention and support of Lisa Jackson, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Do you believe the Dominion Mandate gives humans the right to do what they want to planet? Or should we be exercising more care and responsibility over God's creation?

Answer:

When I was in seminary in the mid-'90s, a world-renowned Hebrew Bible scholar who taught one of my earliest classes talked about the use of the word “dominion” in the first chapter of Genesis as it related to humans being given control over Earth and all her creatures.

What he said was that the Hebrew word that was used in this early text meant “responsibility for,” rather than “control over.” What the members of the Cornwall Alliance seem to be saying is that we can destroy Earth with impunity because biblical translators made an error in the intended meaning of a word.

I believe it to be the height of arrogance and pride to say that humans have carte blanche in their dealings with our environment, no matter how destructive that may be. And the Bible warns in a number of places about the sin of pride.

We have only to look at the Gulf Coast oil disaster to recognize the potential devastation such an attitude can have for human lives, as well as the lives of plants and animals. The results of that disaster will continue to have negative effects on the lives and livelihoods of many people and creatures for a long time to come.

One of the principles of Unitarian Universalism that I find most compelling is our covenant to “affirm and promote the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” What this statement means to me is that we are all connected to each other and our environment. We are not isolated beings whose actions have no effect on other people or the world beyond ourselves. If we do not take our responsibility for the future of the earth more seriously, we may well find that there is no more Earth left for us, or anything else. What will dominion mean then?

The Rev. Dr. Betty Stapleford  
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Verdugo Hills  
La Crescenta

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The Bible teaches us that “the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains” (1 Corinthians 10:26). God made it all — it's his. God's specific charge to Adam and Eve was: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:28). God has given humanity a stewardship of what belongs to him. That means we are to take care of Earth and its ecosystems in a manner that reflects respect for his property and love for others whose sustenance and well-being depend upon a properly working natural order. It also means that we are free to enjoy all the good benefits of the earth and its contents.

Wanton disregard for, and careless destruction of, another person's property is always wrong. We might even call it theft. And it is foolish to mistreat the good things that belong to us. We may rightly apply these principles to how we take care of the environment.

But we mustn't overly esteem creation, either. It's not “Mother Nature,” or “Gaia”, it's the handiwork of our father in heaven through his spirit and his son Jesus Christ. It's a collection of wonderful things that point us to a more wonderful creator. God has revealed that these current heavens and Earth “will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat” (2 Peter 3:12). But God has also promised to make “a new heaven and a new Earth” afterwards. So even if mankind does its worst to ruin God's great creation, his purposes will not be thwarted. “According to his promise, we are looking for new heavens and a new Earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

Pastor Jon Barta

Valley Baptist Church

Burbank

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Cornwall Alliance has apparently forgotten, or chooses to ignore, “The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.” Playing dueling quotes from the Bible is so easy that even an atheist can do it. This highlights the problem of trying to use a beautiful piece of literature, but one rife with internal contradictions, as a guide for the real world.

Creation Care is a better idea than rule by the Dominion Mandate if, like me, you prefer survival. But better still would be a full-court strategy using every bit of real science, policy, law and regulation we can muster, no matter whose faith it may offend or whose profits it may cut into.

Cornwall Alliance is an ultra-conservative little pocket of just one of the world's religions that claims its supreme being gives humans the right to destroy the planet.

So by the same sort of imaginary power vested in me by me, I hereby declare myself to be the one true spokesperson for Earth, and on her behalf I holler, “Uncle!”

Really, mission accomplished. Without radical reversal soon, climate change and profligate use of resources has us on an inexorably downward spiral of increasingly severe floods, droughts, storms, habitat destruction, critical shortages and mass extinctions.

Anti-environmental warriors, Christian and otherwise, you can stand down. Good work.

Roberta Medford

Atheist

Montrose

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What a pile of horse hockey the Cornwall Alliance believes! May I call them the “Cornball Alliance”? So many, many whackos throughout the history of religion have taken one small word from holy scripture and then built an entire theology on it, and I believe that's what is happening here.

First of all, what does “dominion” mean? You can look it up. Next, what does the Cornball Alliance do with the verse, “The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof”? That's from Psalm 24. Does any thinking person, religious or not, doubt that we must be good stewards of this beautiful planet?

We don't own it; it's God's. And we aren't the only living things on this terrestrial ball, either. Also, we'll eventually leave this beautiful planet, and I've always sort of thought that as a good human being, religious or not, it was my duty, maybe even my patriotic duty, to leave the place better than I found it. And if not, I certainly have not been given the right to trash the place of my birth.

Historically, ideas that were declared “heresies” (and therefore invalid) actually had some good and valid points — but the problem was the other good and valid points that were left out of the thought process. So a heresy is partially right, but only partially. This whacko idea isn't even as good as a heresy because there is nothing valid in it.

The Rev. Skip Lindeman

La Cañada Congregational Church

La Cañada

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The Bible does indeed give human beings dominion over the earth, but — contrary to the incorrect assumptions of the Cornwall Alliance — this unique status bestowed upon man makes us ever more responsible for our natural surroundings and the diverse creatures living beside us.

Dominion does not grant man a license to act recklessly and endanger nature or other beings. Instead, we are intended to serve as thoughtful stewards.

When Adam is placed in the Garden of Eden — understood to be a physical location on this planet — he is given clear direction in the book of Genesis 2:15 to guard and preserve it. Further emphasizing our unique relationship with nature, the book of Deuteronomy, in chapter 20, verse 19, states that “man is like a tree in the field.” Although we hold a very prominent place, humankind is ultimately one thread woven through nature's intricate tapestry.

Human beings are by far the most intelligent creatures on this planet, and therefore we have a unique ability to affect the rest of the world. By acting responsibly and protecting our environment, we set the tone for the rest of creation and maintain conditions that enable all of us to live in peace and harmony upon this glorious world which God so graciously gave us.

Rabbi Simcha Backman

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As with anything else, there are extremes at either end of the environmental issue, and as with anything important in this world, religious perspective will inform everyone's approach.

Biblically, God gave man dominion over the earth, to control it, use it, and to serve as the primary beneficiary of its abundance (Gen 1:28) but he reminds us that the "whole Earth" is his (Exodus 19:5) and that he will hold us to account for its stewardship. God gave rules of use, ensuring land's rest from over-harvesting, and he gave us animals for food but he holds us responsible for their use. Scripture reiterates that creation is God's, and for us, a trust.

If I had guests and said, "Make yourselves at home," I would not expect them to raid my refrigerator bare, tear out my air-conditioning, strip my flooring, and otherwise destroy what I graciously made available for their temporary stay. Neither does God intend for us to engage a scorched-Earth approach to the Dominion Mandate.

On the flipside, there are some who literally worship the Earth, calling it "Mother," placing man no higher than mud on their value scale. And what about stories of citizens painstakingly saving the necessary funds to purchase property upon which to farm or build their family domicile, only to be financially devastated when it's discovered that some "endangered" parasite is living there in a puddle, thus legally rendering the whole a useless insect habitat?

Then there's the constant implication that everything we do is questionable, immoral, and should be governmentally regulated, like; how many children we may have, what foods we are allowed to eat, what transportation options we should be limited to, etc.

If we can do some things to help, let's; but don't destroy our nation by prohibiting the collection of our own resources, or by imposing subjective regulations regarding our standard of living. We'd all be more green-favorable if it likewise saved us some green, so with that in mind, I'm leaving now to recycle my bottles, then I'll recycle the money to buy some gas and meat.

Just doing my part.

The Rev. Bryan Griem

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