

Towards a Christian Approach to the Environment

Caring for the planet is undoubtedly a legitimate ethical concern for the Christian, but discerning the most important issues that merit our attention and action is not as straightforward as is sometimes thought. The Christian doctrine of 'stewardship' has a firm scriptural basis, although not always acknowledged either by the church historically or by some sections of the church today. The doctrine has been critiqued by secular humanists as having led to the despoilment and exploitation of the planet's resources, but this is unjustified since that unwelcome outcome owes more to attitudes to nature that arose in the Enlightenment rather than to Christianity. As with any scientific or ethical matter, a truly Christian approach to the environment will not simply endorse so-called 'consensus' views uncritically, but will be scrupulous in assessing the evidence while carefully weighing up different policy options in the search for a solution. Otherwise a simplistic 'fix' to one problem may lead to other pressing environmental issues being overlooked, and may also damage the livelihoods and prospects of poor people by misdirecting significant economic resources. Two environmental case studies will be compared and contrasted: acid rain in the 1980s and climate change today.

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I. Introduction: an important but sometimes controversial issue

II. Basis of Christian Care for the Environment

A. Biblical Doctrine of 'Stewardship' or 'Dominion'

B. Historical Theology: Church Fathers, Luther, Calvin, etc.

III. Ideologies of Exploitation

A. Enlightenment Domination of Nature

B. Marxism

C. Modern Capitalism

IV. Case Studies

A. Acid Rain / Acid Waters

B. Global Warming

V. Conclusions

Suggested Readings:

Alister McGrath *The Re-Enchantment of Nature* Hodder & Stoughton, 2002.

Philip J Sampson Chapter 3, 'The Environment' in *6 Modern Myths about Christianity and Western Civilization* IVP, 2001.

Briefing Papers of the Global Warming Policy Foundation www.thegwpf.org/ and news items in the Global Warming Policy Forum www.thegwpf.com/.