

Perspectives on Nature and Environmental Ethics in the Hebrew Bible

Edited by
JOHANNES UNSOK RO
MARI JOERSTAD
KEVIN CHAU
WILLIAM R. STEWART

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Corinna Körting (Hamburg) · Konrad Schmid (Zürich)
Mark S. Smith (Princeton) · Andrew Teeter (Harvard)

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Preface

This volume, *Perspectives on Nature and Environmental Ethics in the Hebrew Bible*, emerged from an international symposium held at International Christian University in Tokyo from September 29 to October 1, 2023, under the same title. The symposium brought together scholars from various academic and cultural backgrounds to explore how the Hebrew Bible engages questions of nature, creation, and our ethical responsibilities toward the environment.

The majority of contributions in this volume were originally presented at that symposium. To further broaden the scope of dialogue, several additional papers were subsequently invited and included. Collectively, these essays represent a robust international collaboration, intertwining diverse perspectives and deep scholarly engagement with ecological ethics through the lens of Hebrew biblical texts.

As editors and contributors, we also wish to extend our sincere gratitude to the series editors of the *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II (FAT II)* series, Corinna Körting, Konrad Schmid, Mark S. Smith, and Andrew Teeter for accepting our volume into their distinguished series. It was a great joy to work with the publishing team of Mohr Siebeck, in particular Matthias Spitzner, Markus Kirchner, and Tobias Stäbler. Their guidance and editorial support have been deeply appreciated.

It is our hope that the discussions gathered here will inspire further research and encourage meaningful reflection on how ancient biblical writings can inform contemporary environmental ethics.

We gratefully acknowledge that the symposium and the publication of this volume were supported by the JSPS KAKENHI research grant (22K00080).

August 2025

Johannes Unsok Ro,
Mari Joerstad,
Kevin Chau,
and William R. Stewart

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List of Abbreviations

General abbreviations and sigla follow *The SBL Handbook of Style for Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), except where otherwise stated.

AB	Anchor Bible
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AcT	<i>Acta Theologica</i>
AEM	<i>Archives épistolaires de Mari</i>
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AIL	Ancient Israel and Its Literature
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANEM	Ancient Near Eastern Monographs
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AoF	<i>Altorientalische Forschungen</i>
ApOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary
ARM	Archives royales de Mari
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
AuOr	<i>Aula Orientalis</i>
AUSTR	American University Studies, Series 7: Theology and Religion
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZ	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . Edited by Ignace J. Gelb et al. 21 vols. Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1956–2010
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CC	Continental Commentaries
CCTC	Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
<i>ChrCent</i>	<i>Christian Century</i>
CM	Cuneiform Monographs
<i>Colloq</i>	<i>Colloquium</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
DMOA	Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
ER	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i> . Edited by Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. 15 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005
<i>EuroJTh</i>	<i>European Journal of Theology</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>ExpT</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literature des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GAT	Grundrisse zum Alten Testament
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited by Emil Kautzsch. Translated by Arthur E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
HAL	<i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgarten, and Johann J. Stamm. 3rd ed. Leiden: Brill, 1995, 2004
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgarten, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HBAI	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IECOT	International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament
IRT	Issues in Religion and Theology
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JANESCU	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>

JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JHNES	The Johns Hopkins Near Eastern Studies
JISMOR	<i>Journal of the Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JR	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
JSem	<i>Journal of Semitics</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAR	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling. Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1919–1923
KTU	<i>Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013. 3rd enl. ed. of <i>KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places</i> . Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.
LAPO	Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LD	Lectio Divina
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
MdB	Le Monde de la Bible
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
Or	<i>Orientalia</i> (NS)
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies (= <i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>)
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
R&T	<i>Religion and Theology</i>
RA	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>

RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
REJ	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
RHR	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
RIME	The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early periods
RIA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie</i> . Edited by Erich Ebeling et al. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1928–
RTP	<i>Revue de théologie et de philosophie</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SBAB	Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände
SBLSymS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions (supplements to <i>Numen</i>)
SSN	Studia Semitica Neerlandica
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang)
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
TLOT	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni, with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>Transeu</i>	<i>Transeuphratène</i>
TWNT	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1932–1979
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
UUA	Uppsala Universitetsårskrift
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplement to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WO	<i>Die Welt des Orients</i>
YNER	Yale Near Eastern Researches
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZABR	<i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>
ZAH	<i>Zeitschrift für Althebraistik</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Introduction: Perspectives on Nature and Environmental Ethics in the Hebrew Bible

JOHANNES UNSOK RO, MARI JOERSTAD,
KEVIN CHAU, AND WILLIAM R. STEWART

1. The Hebrew Bible and Our Ecological Crisis

In March 1967, in an article in the journal *Science* a mere five pages in length entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,”¹ Lynn White Jr. (1907–1987), a historian of medieval technology at the University of California, articulated a thesis which was to have an “immediate and long lasting”² impact on both scholarship in the sciences and humanities and increasing public and political environmental concern. White sought to establish environmental exploitation as a theological issue, arguing that the ecologic crisis could be traced to an “exploitative”³ anthropocentric Judeo-Christian worldview, according to which “God planned all this [i. e., light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, the earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes] explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.... Christianity ... not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.”⁴ Although the current ecological crisis is a product of the modern scientific and industrial revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, White asserted that the impetus for those movements may be traced to developments in medieval Europe and ultimately to the Judeo-Christian doctrine of creation.⁵

White’s article is widely acknowledged as the major landmark in the emergence of environmental theology and ethics as a discourse in biblical studies and theology.⁶ From then onwards we have witnessed a rapidly expanding body of

¹ Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (10 March 1967): 1202–07, doi:10.1126/science.155.3767.1203.

² Elspeth Whitney, “White, Lynn (1907–1987) – Thesis of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor, 2 vols. (London; New York: Continuum, 2005), 1735–37, here 1736.

³ White, “Historical Roots,” 1205.

⁴ White, “Historical Roots,” 1205.

⁵ See White, “Historical Roots,” 1204–06.

⁶ For a recent discussion, see Jeremy H. Kidwell, “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, ed. Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 9–18, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190606732.013.15.

writings on environmental theology and ethics in theological studies in general and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies in particular.⁷ However, the impact of

⁷ A short introduction to the history of research with references is available in Panu Pihkala, *Early Ecotheology and Joseph Sittler*, Studies in Religion and the Environment 12 (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2017), 36–41. For greater detail, see Ernst M. Conradie, *Christianity and Ecological Theology: Resources for Further Study*, Study Guides in Religion and Theology 11 (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2006) and subsequent publications by the same author, most recently, idem, “Eco-theology,” *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (2023), <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Ecotheology>. A selection of books published since 2000 (excluding those cited elsewhere in this essay, such as The Earth Bible publications and those related to the Exeter project) suffice to provide a broad sample of scholarship in biblical and theological studies: Louk A. Andrianos and Tom Sverre Tomren et. al., eds., *Contemporary Eco-theology, Climate Justice and Environmental Stewardship in World Religions*, Ecothee Volume 6th-Orthodox Academy of Crete Publication (Steinkjer: Embla Akademisk, 2021); Richard J. Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); R. J. Berry, ed., *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives – Past and Present* (London: T&T Clark International, 2006); Jan J. Boersema, *The Torah and the Stoics on Humankind and Nature: A Contribution to the Debate on Sustainability and Quality* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010); Daniel P. Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology*, Ecology and Justice (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019); Ernst M. Conradie, ed., *Creation and Salvation*, vol. 1: A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies, Studies in the Religion and Environment 5 (Zürich: LIT, 2011); idem, ed., *Creation and Salvation*, vol. 2: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements, Studies in the Religion and Environment 6 (Zürich: LIT, 2012); Ernst M. Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond, and Denis Edwards, eds., *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014); Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth*, Cascade Companions 37 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017); Denis Edwards, ed., *Earth Revealing – Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001); Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005); Hans-Günter Heimbrock and Jörg Persch, eds., *Eco-Theology: Essays in Honor of Sigurd Bergmann* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2021); Dieter T. Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*, Religions of the World and Ecology (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Daniel Hillel, *The Natural History of the Bible: An Environmental Exploration of the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds., *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010); Ailsa Hunt and Hilary Marlow, eds., *Ecology and Theology in the Ancient World: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); Maricel Ibita, “Micah 6:1–8: Rereading the Metaphors for YHWH, Israel and Non-Human Creation” (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/3932256>; Larry Rasmussen, *Earth-honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert N. Wennberg, *God, Humans, and Other Animals: An Invitation to Enlarge Our Moral Universe* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Robert S. White, ed., *Creation in Crisis: Christian Perspectives on Sustainability* (London: SPCK, 2009); Norman Wirzba, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Numerous other books, as well as chapters, articles, and reviews have also been published, many of them cited in these publications or elsewhere in this volume.

White's thesis was by no means limited to Christian theology, even though White wrote as an internal critic "with unwavering belief in the power of his own faith, Christianity, to shape society toward more humane and egalitarian forms ..."⁸ As Matthew T. Riley observed in a 2014 article:

In time, the "Lynn White thesis," as the argument in "Historical Roots" came to be known, has been quoted before [United States] Congress, summarized in *Time Magazine* and *The New York Times*, and has been repeated so often that it has been deemed "a virtual cliché" and declared a "cultural given". Several fields of study emerged from the ensuing academic debate including environmental ethics, ecotheology, the multifaceted field of religion and ecology, and the philosophy known as deep ecology.⁹

Ernst M. Conradie points out that White's article appeared in the wake of various "secular prompts" and "theological precursors".¹⁰ Among the secular prompts he notes the detonation of atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 and the ensuing nuclear arms race as a major factor.¹¹ White's essay also closely followed the publication in September 1962 of the American marine biologist Rachel Carson's (1907–1964) best-selling book *Silent Spring*,¹² which ignited a controversy over pesticide use and environmental pollution, and was described in a 2012 retrospective exhibition as "a Book that Changed the World."¹³ Numerous other developments shortly after the publication of "Historical Roots" either highlighted matters of environmental concern: for example, the publication of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology study *Man's Impact on the Global Environment* in 1970¹⁴ and the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* in 1972;¹⁵ or signaled the emergence of an environmental movement, such as the establishment of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth in 1971.¹⁶ In terms of "theological precursors," environmental theologian Panu Pihkala argues that the roots of Christian environmental thought and action are to be found in the works of theologians reflecting on the impact of technological development

⁸ See Matthew T. Riley, "The Democratic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis: Lynn White, Bio-democracy, and the Earth Charter," *Zygon* 49 (2014): 938–48, here 940.

⁹ Riley, "Democratic Roots," 939 (see this article for the sources Riley cites in-text).

¹⁰ Conradie, "Ecotheology."

¹¹ Conradie, "Ecotheology."

¹² Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962). For an account of early reactions to Carson's book, see Frank Graham, Jr., *Since Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1970).

¹³ Mark Stoll, "Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a Book that Changed the World," Environment & Society Portal, *Virtual Exhibitions* 2012, no. 1 (Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society), doi:10.5282/rcc/3517.

¹⁴ Study of Critical Environmental Problems, *Man's Impact on the Global Environment: Assessment and Recommendations for Action* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).

¹⁵ Donella H. Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (New York: Universe Books, 1972).

¹⁶ H. Ferreira and L. Sutton, "Ecological Hermeneutics as a Current Trend in Old Testament Research in the Book of Psalms," *AcT* 44 (2024): 306–21, here 308, doi:10.38140/at.v44i1.8309.

in the early twentieth century, especially in Great Britain and the United States of America.¹⁷ He draws particular attention to the work of the American theologian Joseph Sittler (1904–1987) but identifies many others, including Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), Charles E. Raven (1885–1964), Paul Tillich (1886–1965), Walter Marshall Horton (1895–1966) and Bernard E. Meland (1899–1993).

Writing in 2023, Ernst Conradie concluded that “the subsequent developments [are] now virtually impossible to survey.”¹⁸ What may be said with confidence is that in the ensuing decades there has been an increasing recognition that “humans now operate as a geological force, both intentionally and inadvertently imposing change on a planetary scale.”¹⁹ In their introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim conclude: “The explosion of population from 3 billion in 1960 to more than 7 billion currently [2017, exceeding 8 billion in November 2022] and the subsequent demands on the natural world seem to be on an unsustainable course.”²⁰ Earlier, in 2004, in an overview of the “environmental crisis,” Roger S. Gottlieb identified eight “areas of acute concern”: global climate/atmospheric change, toxic wastes, loss of land, loss of species, loss of wilderness, devastation of indigenous peoples, human patterns and quantities of consumption, and genetic engineering.²¹ In the two decades since then the specter of global climate/atmospheric change has emerged as arguably the foremost environmental issue in the public consciousness.²² At the time of writing, the entry on “Climate Change” in the “Global Issues” section of the United Nations website opens with the following statement: “Climate change is the defining issue of our time and we are at a defining moment.”²³

From this wider context we may now focus on the impact of White’s thesis on biblical scholarship. Two major contributing factors may be highlighted

¹⁷ See Pihkala, *Early Ecotheology*; idem, “Rediscovery of Early Twentieth-Century Ecotheology,” *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 268–85, doi:10.1515/opth-2016-0023.

¹⁸ Conradie, “Ecotheology.”

¹⁹ Ellen F. Davis, “Ecology and Postcolonial Biblical Criticism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023 [essay published online 2019]), 577–97, here 577, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190888459.013.5.

²⁰ Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, “The Movement of Religion and Ecology: Emerging Field and Dynamic Force,” in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (New York: Routledge, 2017), 3–12, here 3.

²¹ See Roger S. Gottlieb, “Introduction: Religion in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2004), 3–15, here 6–8.

²² See Ernst M. Conradie and Hilda P. Koster, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Christian Theology and Climate Change* (London: T&T Clark, 2020); Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007); Michael S. Northcott and Peter M. Scott, eds., *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2014).

²³ United Nations, “Global Issues: Climate Change,” <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change> (accessed 25 October 2024).

here. First and foremost was his accusation that Judeo-Christian tradition and the Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament had served as a theological sanction for the human exploitation of nature. Subsequently, the “dominion” text of Gen 1:26–28 (“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and *let them have dominion* [or “rule”] ... God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and *subdue it*; and *have dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” [NRSV]; cf. Pss 8:6–8; 115:16) in the creation narrative were particularly singled out for allegedly advocating abusive human dominance of the earth and its resources.²⁴ A second factor may be that White’s thesis effectively reversed the relationship between religion and science and technology often espoused in the modern era, and again to the detriment of religion. This reversal was evocatively captured in the words of Richard H. Hiers writing in retrospect in 1984: “since at least the eighteenth century, the cultured among the despisers had been telling the world that religion was the great enemy of science and human progress [which were a Good Thing].... Then, when it suddenly turned out that science and technology were a Bad Thing, along came White blaming religion for spawning them.”²⁵ Although White’s thesis focused particularly on Western Christianity, his criticism of the Judeo-Christian worldview necessarily also implicated Judaism in the “historical roots” of the ecological crisis.²⁶ Jewish responses did not emerge as immediately as they did in Christian scholarship. Nevertheless, Jewish biblical scholarship from the 1970s onwards has increasingly been concerned with reading the Bible in the light of ecological concerns and determining human environmental responsibilities from a Jewish perspective.²⁷ So, however White’s thesis is evaluated, its

²⁴ For historical studies of later Jewish and Christian reception of the contested passages in Genesis 1, see Jeremy Cohen, “*Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It*”: *The Ancient and Medieval Career of a Biblical Text* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Peter Harrison, “Subduing the Earth: Genesis 1, Early Modern Science, and the Exploitation of Nature,” *JR* 79 (1999): 86–109.

²⁵ Richard H. Hiers, “Ecology, Biblical Theology, and Methodology: Biblical Perspectives on the Environment,” *Zygon* 19 (1984): 43–59, here 44.

²⁶ Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Nature in the Sources of Judaism,” *Daedalus* 130.4: Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change? (2001): 99–124, here 99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20027720>.

²⁷ For anthologies of twentieth-century Jewish writings on the environment, see Ellen Bernstein, ed., *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Sacred Meet* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1998); and Martin D. Yaffe, ed., *Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001). On the interaction of Judaism and modern environmentalism in the twentieth Century, see M. Gerstenfeld’s PhD thesis, *Judaism, Environmentalism and the Environment: Mapping and Analysis* (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies; Rubin Mass, 1999), <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.159613>. For overviews of Jewish environmental studies, see Eilon Schwartz, “Judaism and Nature: Theological and Moral Issues to Consider while Renegotiating a Jewish Relationship to the Natural World,” *Judaism* 44 (1995): 437–48; Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, “Judaism,” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and*

legacy must be acknowledged.²⁸ As Hava Tirosh-Samuelson, a scholar of Jewish intellectual history, wrote in an introduction to Jewish environmental theology and practice in 2017:

A lay Presbyterian, White intended the charge as prophetic self-criticism that will generate self-examination (Santmire 1984), and indeed he was exceedingly successful: his short essay (White 1967) compelled Jews and Christians to examine the Bible anew in light of the ecological crisis. Is the Bible an “inconvenient text” (Habel 2009) or is the Bible a text whose ecological wisdom has been ignored or misinterpreted? Does the Bible authorize human domination and exploitation of the Earth or rather does the Bible set clear limits on human interaction with the non-human world and commands humans to care responsibly for the Earth and all its non-human inhabitants?²⁹

During the 1970s and 1980s examination of the Bible in light of the ecological crisis was predominantly focused on creation theology (esp. in Gen 1), often in response, directly or indirectly, to White’s thesis. Biblical scholar Gene Tucker would later refer to defending Christianity against the charge of environmental hostility as a “cottage industry.”³⁰ One notable early response was a published lecture entitled “Man and Nature – The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament” (1972) by biblical scholar James Barr who concluded that “the biblical foundations of that doctrine would tend in the opposite direction, away from a license to exploit and towards a duty to respect and to protect.”³¹ Barr attributed the modern exploitation of nature to a liberal humanism according to which human self-understanding no longer included accountability to a creator. His lecture was one of a flurry of publications in the early 1970s, including books by Frederick Elder, Hugh Montefiore, H. Paul Santmire, and Joseph Sittler in 1970, and John Cobb Jr., Francis Schaeffer, and another by Sittler in 1972.³² On

Ecology, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 25–64; idem, *Judaism*,” in Jenkins, Tucker, and Grim, *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, 60–69; and see further the bibliography cited in these works.

²⁸ On the legacy of White’s thesis, see Elspeth Whitney, *The Lynn White Thesis: Reception and Legacy*, *Environmental Ethics* 35 (2013): 313–31, doi:10.5840/enviroethics201335328; and the extensive collection of essays by leading scholars in a variety of disciplines in Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson, eds., *Religion and the Ecological Crisis: The ‘Lynn White Thesis’ at Fifty*, Routledge Studies in Religion 50 (New York: Abingdon; Oxford: Routledge, 2017).

²⁹ Tirosh-Samuelson, “Judaism,” in Jenkins, Tucker, and Grim, *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, 61–62. In-text citations are to H. Paul Santmire, “The Liberation of Nature: Lynn White’s Challenge Anew,” *ChrCent* 102.18 (22 May 1985): 530–33 [incorrectly dated to 1984]; and Norman C. Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009).

³⁰ Gene M. Tucker, “Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 3–7, here 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3266743>.

³¹ James Barr, “Man and Nature – The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament,” *BJRL* 55 (1972): 9–32, here 30, doi:10.7227/BJRL.55.1.2.

³² See John Cobb Jr. *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills: Bruce Books, 1972); Frederick Elder, *Crisis in Eden: A Religious Study of Man and Environment* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970); Hugh Montefiore, *Can Man Survive?* (London: Collins, 1970); H. Paul

this basis Ernst Conradie makes the reasonable claim that, although there were earlier theological precursors, Christian ecotheology as a scholarly discourse may be dated to 1970.³³ Furthermore this discourse was not only apologetic. In 1973 theologian Jack Rogers was able survey a dozen recent studies which he identified with the search for “an appropriate theological model” of the relationship between God, humans, and nature in the biblical literature.³⁴

Following the initial flurry there has been a steady stream of publications on the Bible and the environment.³⁵ A feature of several of the early Christian environmental studies was the contention that the biblical worldview is not anthropocentric but theocentric. Arguably the most significant contribution was Jürgen Moltmann’s 1985 monograph *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*³⁶ which has been labelled “the first full-orbed ecological theology.”³⁷ Addressing what he terms “The Crisis of Domination,”³⁸ Moltmann seeks to refute the conclusion that the Christian doctrine of creation legitimates the subjugation of nature. He argues that “here [Gen 1:26] ‘having dominion’ is linked

Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970); Francis A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: A Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1972); Joseph A. Sittler, *The Ecology of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); idem, *Essays on Nature and Grace* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972).

³³ Conradie, “Ecotheology.” Andrew J. Spenser argues that Joseph Sittler’s 1954 essay “A Theology for Earth,” marks the beginning of Christian ecotheology (“Beyond Christian Environmentalism: Ecotheology as an Over-Contextualized Theology,” *Them* 40 [2015]: 414–28, here 422. Pikhala identifies Sittler’s essay as “seminal” (*Early Ecotheology*, 12). See Joseph Sittler, “A Theology for Earth,” in *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, edited by Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter Bakken (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 20–31.

³⁴ See Jack Rogers, “Ecological Theology: The Search for an Appropriate Theological Model,” in *Septuagesimo anno: Theologische opstellen aangeboden aan G. C. Berkouwer*, ed. J. T. Bakker et al. (Kampen: Kok, 1973), 180–202. For reference to this essay, we are indebted to Mark Stanton and Dennis Guernsey, “Christians’ Ecological Responsibility: A Theological Introduction and Challenge,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 45 (1993): 2–7, here 3–4.

³⁵ Important subsequent works not cited elsewhere in this introduction include Bernhard W. Anderson, ed., *Creation in the Old Testament*, IRT 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1984); idem, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, eds., *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, CBQMS 24 (Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992); Norman C. Habel, *The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist’s Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Odil Hannes Steck, *World and Environment* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980).

³⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation: The Gifford Lectures 1984–1985*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1985), 31–32. For an analysis and critique of *God in Creation* and later contributions to the field, see Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Ecology in Jürgen Moltmann’s Theology* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1997; repr. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

³⁷ Stanton and Guernsey, “Christians’ Ecological Responsibility,” 4.

³⁸ See Moltmann, *God*, 23–32.

with the correspondence between human beings and God the Creator and Preserver of the world – the correspondence which is meant when the human being is described as being the image of God. Because human beings and animals are to live from the fruits of the earth, the rule of human beings over the animals can only be a rule of peace.”³⁹ Moltmann then contrasts his theocentric conception of the biblical view with the anthropocentric view of the world he attributes to modern scientific and technological civilization and its desire for knowledge providing power over nature. This was exemplified in the natural philosophers Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and especially René Descartes (1596–1650) whose distinction between mind/soul and body naturally led to a dualism of subject and object in the relationship between humans and nature. “This *theocentric* biblical world picture,” Moltmann writes, “gives the human being, with his special position in the cosmos, the chance to understand himself as a member of the community of creation. So if Christian theology wants to find the wisdom in dealing with creation which accords with belief in creation, it must free itself of the modern anthropocentric view of the world.”⁴⁰ As the title *God in Creation* suggests, Moltmann emphasizes God’s immanence in creation through the Spirit (citing Ps 104:29–30; Prov 8:22–31; Acts 17:28) as a “guiding idea” for an ecological doctrine of creation today.⁴¹

Ronald A. Simkins, who has written extensively on environmental issues and the Bible since the late 1980s, also identifies the Bible’s ecology as theocentric.⁴² He concludes, however, that this is not necessarily a sufficient corrective. In his earliest publications, Simkins identified a conceptual dichotomy between the primary role attributed to human activity and the minimal instrumental role attributed to nature in modern interpretations of Israel’s religion. Rather, he contends, “In biblical thought the division is, instead, between the creator and the creation. Humans are indelibly linked to the natural world in which they live. According to this biblical ecology, Yahweh’s activity in human history cannot be divorced from his activity in the natural world. Yahweh acts in the totality of the natural world in order to achieve his purposes in the history of creation.”⁴³

³⁹ Moltmann, *God*, 30–31, cf. 224–25.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *God*, 31 (emphasis original).

⁴¹ Moltmann, *God*, esp. 1–19.

⁴² See Ronald A. Simkins, “Anthropocentrism and the Place of Humans in the Biblical Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Society* Supplement Series 9: The Greening of the Papacy, ed. Ronald A. Simkins and John J. O’Keefe (2013): 16–29, <http://moses.creighton.edu/jrs/toc/SS09.html>. For another major theocentric approach with a focus in Christian environmental ethics, see, James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine: The Natural Environment from a Theocentric Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994; repr. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1996).

⁴³ Ronald A. Simkins, “God, History, and the Natural World in the Book of Joel,” *CBQ* 55 (1993): 435–52, here 435–36, with reference to his detailed argument in idem, *Yahweh’s Activity in History and Nature in the Book of Joel*, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies* 10 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1991), 3–75.

Simkins describes this biblical ecology more fully, as the title suggests, in his *Creator and Creation* (1994).⁴⁴

2. The Search for a Hermeneutical Model

The scholarly discourse which emerged in the late twentieth century, especially in the wake of White's thesis, has been variously termed "environmental" or "ecological theology" (often abbreviated to "ecotheology"). The term "environment" has the advantage of being the most internationally recognized term with an established political usage.⁴⁵ "Ecotheology" is often associated with methods of biblical hermeneutics that approach the biblical text with suspicion and is consequently not representative of all scholars involved in this discourse (see further below).⁴⁶ The term "environmental" has therefore been adopted in the title of this volume, although the contributors have used various terms at their discretion. Celia Deane-Drummond defines eco-theology as "that reflection on different facets of theology in as much as they take their bearings from cultural concerns about the environment and humanity's relationship with the natural world."⁴⁷ From the 1990s onwards research into environmental theology and the ethical questions raised by human interaction with the nonhuman environment has increasingly been focused on the search for an appropriate hermeneutical model to facilitate transformative ecologically orientated reading of the Bible to address the ecological crisis. In the process, as Conradie recently observed, "ecotheology has become an increasingly amorphous discourse".⁴⁸ Only a broad overview of the major hermeneutical approaches employed in environmental theology and ethics and some recent developments in this scholarly discourse may be offered here.

Various studies have sought to categorize Christian approaches to environmental theology and ethics, and it is beyond the scope of this overview to discuss these in detail here.⁴⁹ An early 1996 study by the sociologist of religion Laurel Kearns focused on both theological and sociological aspects. Kearns pro-

⁴⁴ Ronald A. Simkins, *Creator and Creation: Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), cited in this essay from the online edition which does not reproduce the original pagination: https://www.academia.edu/1531038/Creator_and_Creation_Nature_in_the_Worldview_of_Ancient_Israel.

⁴⁵ See Markus Vogt, *Christian Environmental Ethics: Foundations and Central Challenges*, trans. Gary Slater (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2023), xxvii–xxviii.

⁴⁶ See Spencer, "Christian Environmentalism," 418.

⁴⁷ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Ecotheology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), x.

⁴⁸ Ernst M. Conradie, "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting the Current Debate," *Scriptura* 119 (2020): 1–13, here 2, doi:10.7833/119-1-1566.

⁴⁹ See Conradie, *Christianity*, 121–37; Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31–60.

posed three models or “ethics” ranging from a biblically oriented “stewardship” ethic, a social justice/liberation-oriented “eco-justice” ethic, and a more radical nature-oriented “creation spirituality” ethic which also incorporated ideas from religions other than Christianity, and she acknowledged a possible fourth “eco-feminism” ethic.⁵⁰ For our purposes here a useful approach to categorization has focused on the appeal scholars make to the Bible as a source and to its status as an authority. A typology articulated in the Exeter Project directed by David G. Horrell (see below) is orientated around two modes of biblical interpretation identified by theologian Francis Watson in a hermeneutical study of Gen 1–3 and its reception: *recovery* and *resistance*.⁵¹ Two major environmental hermeneutical approaches are accordingly identified. Readings of “recovery” or “rediscovery,” exemplified by Richard J. Bauckham’s *The Bible and Ecology* (2010),⁵² assume that a positive environmental message can be re(dis)covered from the Bible when it is correctly interpreted.⁵³ Two types of readings of “resistance” are identified: one which is characterized by critical resistance against the biblical text, from which a positive environmental message must be retrieved or reconstructed, and another which resists a contemporary environmental ethical agenda perceived to conflict with the Bible. Resistance against the Bible is exemplified by the Earth Bible Project (see below) and Norman C. Habel’s *An Inconvenient Text* (2009). As readings of resistance against the contemporary environmental ethical agenda are not “engaged hermeneutics,”⁵⁴ they will not be considered further here. To these approaches the authors associated with the Exeter Project add their own hermeneutic which attempts to be both critical and constructive in

⁵⁰ Laurel Kearns, “Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States,” *Sociology of Religion* 57 (1996): 55–70, and see, esp., Table 1 on p. 56. “Creation spirituality” may be perhaps considered a radical reading of reconstruction (see below) which rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in association with theologian Matthew Fox whose best known books include *Original Blessing: A Primer of Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear, 1983) and *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988). The foundational conviction of creation spirituality according to Fox is that original blessing precedes original sin and creation is therefore prioritized over redemption. For a brief introduction and critique, see John A. Saliba, *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement: A Critical Assessment* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), 126–27, 167–69. Theological writings which may be associated with creation spirituality and eco-feminism include Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

⁵¹ Francis Watson, “Strategies of Recovery and Resistance: Hermeneutical Reflections on Genesis 1–3 and Its Pauline Reception,” *JSNT* 45 (1992): 79–103.

⁵² Richard J. Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, Sarum Theological Lectures (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010).

⁵³ See also Jonathan A. Moo and Robert S. White, *Let Creation Rejoice: Biblical Hope and Ecological Crisis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

⁵⁴ Elaine M. Wainwright, “‘Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future’ by David G. Horrell: A Response,” *Colloq* 46 (2014): 166–69, here 166.

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