

**ABSTRACT**  
BEYOND STEWARDSHIP: TOWARD AN AGAPEIC  
ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

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One of the unfortunate implications of industrialization and the rapid expansion of global commerce is the magnification of the impact that humans have on their environment. Exponential population growth, along with growing technological capabilities, has allowed human societies to alter their terrain in unprecedented and destructive ways. The cumulative effect has been significant to the point that the blame for widespread environmental degradation must be pinned squarely on human shoulders. Because of our dependence on these systems for survival, the threat to the environment is a threat to human life.

It is not hard to see that the root of the ecological crisis is found in human attitudes and behaviors. In the late 1960's it was suggested that Christianity was a key source of the problem because it promoted the idea of human "dominion" over creation. This spurred a variety of responses designed to show that Christian faith was compatible with environmental care. A key theme emerging from this debate was the image of humans as Stewards of God's creation. Since then, environmental Stewardship has assumed a prominent place in the church and theology as a model of normative human behavior toward nature. And yet the crisis remains.

In recent years Stewardship has been subject to severe critique on a number of fronts. In this dissertation, I focus exclusively on the assumptions of human nature and responsibility implicit in the paradigm, particularly notions of separation from and control over non-human species. These assumption are critically assessed in light of insights derived from contemporary ecological science and found wanting. The nature of ecosystems and human embeddedness within them renders managerial control impossible.

In light of this, I offer an alternative Christian response to environmental problems rooted in *agape* love, following Christ's command to love God and others. A robust interpretation of *agape* serves as a conceptual bridge between an ecologically sensible relational anthropology and a theologically faithful environmental ethic. My purpose is not to build a new environmental ethic, but to present a new and better theological understanding of Christian love, self, and *phronesis* in environmental ethics.