

Defining Environmental Theology:  
Content Analysis of Associated Literature

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## ABSTRACT

### Defining Environmental Theology: Content Analysis of Associated Literature

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Environmental theology is a term used often by religious communities describing theological doctrines concerning the relationship of deity and ethical conduct to the environment. After an extensive literature search, an operational or declarative definition for environmental theology was not discovered. The objectives of this study were to establish an explicit and scholarly definition of environmental theology and introduce deoview as a descriptor associated with the term. People have and will continue to act according to their belief systems: this paper has value in understanding beliefs, ethics, and behavior of people and people groups.

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To West Virginia University; Where Greatness is Learned!

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FIGURE

Figure. Scholarly Rating Distribution (N=35)

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## NOMENCLATURE

**Deity:** pertaining to God or gods.

**Deo:** comes from Latin, meaning pertaining to God.

**Deoview:** a worldview attribute that narrates the God-Cosmos relationship, for this paper deoview is operationally defined as the God-environmental relationship.

**Environmental theology:** a term used to describe the God-environment relationship and divine expectations of human behavior in relation to the environment.

**Scholarly rating:** an important measurement used to evaluate subject documents for merit. There are five criteria for a definition of environmental theology to be considered scholarly in this study. The definition needs to be included in a document that is (a) reviewed, (b) referenced, (c) formatted by literary style, (d) unbiased, and (e) archival. Archival documents are those that may be retrieved in the future.

**Worldview:** “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconscious, consistently or inconsistently) about the makeup of our world” Sire (1997).

**Vignette:** to describe briefly, a short descriptive literary sketch.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Environmental Theology is a term used often by religious communities describing theological doctrines concerning deity and ethical conduct in context to the environment. After a preliminary literature search, an operational or declarative definition for Environmental Theology was not discovered. The hypothesis (H) of this study is that there is no explicit, scholarly definition of Environmental Theology. The null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is there is an explicit, scholarly definition of Environmental Theology. The objectives of this study are to establish an explicit, scholarly definition of environmental theology and introduce deoview as a descriptor associated with environmental theology.

The United Methodist Church, West Virginia Conference passed a statewide resolution on the environment in June 1998 (Scott, 1998) and leaders in the Conference were very vocal about the mountain top mining issue. An individual United Methodist Church was very instrumental in stopping a timber salvage sale in the Kanawha State Forest in 1999 (Nyden, 1999). The Presbyterian Synod of West Virginia has declared global warming a religious issue (Mothershed, 2000). It will be important to understand the environmental worldview of ecclesiastic peoples as they enter into active participation in environmental policies and activities.

Religious and non-religious communities have identifiable beliefs regarding the relationship between deity and the environment, and ethical standards influenced by belief-value systems. A literature search using the key words, environmental theology, was conducted. Associated documents were examined for an explicit definition and analyzed for scholarly merit and deoview.

Deoview is operationally defined for this thesis as the spatial God-environment relationship. Deo comes from Latin, meaning pertaining to God (Marchant & Charles, 1953). This etymology of deo supports the use of deoview in identifying the deity to the physical environment relationship. A deoview may be theocentric (centered in a personal God), geocentric (centered in the earth's non-life form environment), ecocentric (centered in natural systems), biocentric (centered in life forms), or anthropocentric (centered in humanity).

Scholarly rating is an important measurement used to evaluate subject documents for merit. There are five criteria for a definition of environmental theology to be considered scholarly in this study. The definition needs to be included in a document that is (a) reviewed, (b) referenced, (c) formatted by literary style, (d) unbiased, and (e) archival. Archival documents are those that may be retrieved in the future.

Comprehensive overviews of environmental theology are not found when searching databases for the title, or subject. Many good solid theological treatises exist; however, they are usually biased because a single deoview is promoted or the validity of another belief systems is challenged. This study is appropriate for an Agriculture and Environmental Education Master's Thesis because it deals with an environmental issue and some writers point to the emergence of agriculture as the origin of the modern environmental crisis (McDainel, 1994; Nelson, 1990).

This study's title is designed for easy retrieval in research databases using title, subject and keyword searches. People have acted and will continue to act in relation to their belief systems; this paper has value in understanding beliefs, ethics and motivations of people and people groups.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

Sire (1997) operationally defines worldview as, “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the makeup of our world” (p.16). Lyotard (1984) uses the word metanarrative. By this definition a worldview is a polyview that is singular and forms a point of reference for belief and values. According to Sire, one sub-narrative in the worldview is one’s view of prime reality, encompassing God’s place in reality. Deity (God or gods) could be external to the cosmos (Timm, 1994), which is the material universe. Deity could be internal to the cosmos (McFague, 1993; Tobias, 1994), or there could be no deity at all. Environmental ethics is only a subpart of the prime reality attribute of a worldview (Coughlin, 1994) and a disclosure of God’s relationship to the world is essential to an environmental theology (Johnson, 1994; Rust, 1971). Tomsen and Disinger (1998) limited the term, worldview, to label one attribute of the polyview. The term worldview is a singular-pluralistic word whose limitations depend on the way it is used. In context to a schema (Anderson, 2000) constructed for worldviews, Sire’s definition refers to a superset while Tomsen and Disinger use the term for a subset.

Peacocke (2000) classifies theology as intellectual and religion as experience, or the first aspect is thought and the second is behavior. Environmental Theology exhibits those two partners, with faith-based ethics (reasons for behavior) a resulting offspring. Austin (1977, 1987, 1988, 1988) wrote four books dealing exclusively with Christian

ethics. Intellectually, the worldview of theism and deism embrace deity in the external to the environment view. Pantheism holds to the internal deity narrative, while naturalism and nihilism are the null deity belief school (Sire, 1997). Nelson (1990) offers evidence that some members of radical environmentalism movements embrace a belief-value system that has a deity internal to environment view.

Existentialism exploits worldviews to accomplish a cause, idea, or goal. Daneel (1999) advocates using the belief systems of the primal tribes and the African Christian Church to effect environmental change in Africa. Sagan, the scientist, acknowledged this religious dimension (Rasmussen, 1994).

Eastern mysticism is dualistic in prime reality view, the founders taught deity in nature and deity within the person. Over time the followers have deified the founders (Brown, 1994; Chapple, 1994; Tucker, 1994; Sire, 1997). Native American culture, much like other primal cultures, have environmental-deity views that exhibit both the ecodemonic, deity in the ecosystem, view and belief in an external Great Spirit, complete with the personal name Wakan Tanka, within their culture (Grim, 1994). Panentheism holds that deity is in all things yet independent of all things (Griffin, 1994; White, 1994).

Lynn White, Jr.'s (1967, 1968) essay identified Judeo-Christian ethics as the major contributor to the modern environmental crisis. This one paper, which emphasized dominion doctrine (sometimes called subjectionism), precipitated a great flurry of eco-theology and Christian stewardship ethic literature (Ball, 1997; Grizzle & Barrett, 1996; Katz, 1994; Livingstone, 1994; McDainel, 1994; Metzner, 1994; Nelson, 1990; Rasmussen, 1994; Sessions, 1994).

Another converging theology would be ecofeminism, which proposes an internal deity in environment view that is feminine (Grizzle & Barrett, 1996; Spretnak, 1994; Simpson, 1995; Scharper, 1997). Liberation ecotheology, free the environment from the exploitation of man, (Hoferer, 1999) is a spin-off of the old liberation theology, free the poor from the rich's exploitation, in reaction to the critique of dominion doctrine.

Deep ecology holds the environment in high esteem (Griffin, 1994; Irwin, 1996; Sessions, 1994; Spretnak, 1994; White, 1994). Some, but not all people associated with the deep ecology movement consider the environment a deity. A curious side issue, deep ecology proposes a human fall from nature narrative that is parallel to the Christian fall of man from God scenario (Nelson, 1990). Instead of sin being the reason for peoples being alienated from God, the deep ecologist believes that technology has alienated humans from nature. Deep ecology is prime reality in nature based so we have the internalist's reason for man's alienation from deity, or nature in other terms. Nelson reports the radical environmentalist's plan of salvation; they impale trees with metal spikes in order to keep those trees from being harvested. They spike trees in order to save trees. The Holy Bible narrative has humans spiking the human who is their god in order to save humans.

The previous documents are important to the substance of the content analysis, the following citations provide methodology direction and precedence. A multi-method approach was used to describe the worldview attribute in environmental education (Tomsen & Disinger, 1998). Bowen (1996) argues for integration of qualitative and quantitative methods to strengthen internal validity. Both of these papers refer to triangulation as a methodology for increasing internal validity. A triangulation method

applied to the literature review resulted in coverage of the non-belief in God deoview (Berry, 1994; Callicott, 1994; Swimme, 1994; Wei-ming, 1994). Most literature states that meta-analysis is a study of studies (McNamara, Morales, Kim, NcNamara, 1998; Moore, 1999). Grant (2000) features a content analysis (Babbie, 1983) method to define an academic culture. Grant's paper used associated literature to synthesize a meaningful and timely description of the American Naturalist. The quote, "so, then as the American Society of Naturalists, we are what we publish, because that is what we consume as readers" (p. 1) supports the use of document content to define a subject or field of study. Grant's paper had a quantitative data table to relate the frequency topics had been published in their journal and Grant's paper had acceptable literary style. Grant's journal article contributed much needed direction and precedence in support of methodology used for this study.

Additional format, style, and methodology contributions for this project came from several sources. The Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association (1998) provided the technical model for format and literary style. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows, version 9.0, (SPSS) generated statistics from data compiled in this project. The concept of vignettes can be attributed to Nichols (2000) work in evaluation. Hill (1997) wrote a document featuring inter-raters, some times called intercoders (Lacy & Riffe, 1996), which lends support to the reliability estimate methodology and analysis.

Three basic types of documents appear in this literature review. Type one papers are the documents used in the content analysis; they have environmental theology as a theme in common. The second type consists of documents that speak to the

environmental theology issue but were not part of the analysis (Irwin, 1994; Hessel, 1996; Mothershed, 2000; Nyden, 1999; Scott, 1998). The final group are reference (Marchant & Charles, 1953; Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1995)) and methodology support documents. A triangulation of literature is featured in both content analysis and the comprehensive literature review of this study.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

The presence or absence of a stated definition of environmental theology, document attributes, and scholarly ratings of documents reviewed by this study were considered in the content analysis. The scope of this study is limited to reporting and describing deoviews and ethical views of literature associated with environmental theology. Important trends, relationships, and implications will be discussed as suggested by data. This study only describes and reports environmental theology characteristics. It is beyond the scope of this study to express any conclusions regarding the validity of any belief systems found in study documents.

Bowen (1996) strongly argues that triangulation is an essential method to increase internal validity. Triangulation is an analysis approach that uses three perspectives. This study used three categorical document groups for triangulation. A triangulation of document categories served to increase the internal validity by ensuring a more complete coverage of subject content. Group one consisted of documents that were discovered in a data base title, subject, keyword search using the term environmental theology. Group two consisted of individual essays in an edited book (Tucker & Grim (Eds.), 1994) that surfaced in the keyword search. Group three are documents that were discovered by coincidence and primary citations from surveyed literature. Primary writings of world religions were not used in the content analysis.

#### Procedure

Content and scholarly analyses were conducted of literature associated with environmental theology using title, subject, and keyword searches from various

databases. A standardized content analysis survey (Appendix A) was used on each document cited as a subject article. Some books are cited but not used the content analysis because they were collections of associated documents. They either contributed an individual article for the analysis or were examined for possible environmental theology definitions.

Content-scholarly analysis instrument. The presence of an environmental theology definition was recorded as yes, no, or don't know. The scholarly evaluation was conducted on a five point Likert type scale. One is low and five is considered a high scholarly rating. Each document received a point for each of the following attributes, (a) reviewed, (b) citations use, (c) accredited format, (d) unbiased, and (e) archival. The Kruskal-Wallis test (SPSS, 9.0) was used for data analysis of the three document categories because the normal distribution assumption was violated.

Additional information about deoview and ethics was recorded in a standardized manner on the content-scholarly analysis instrument. Three interrelated questions, with multiple-choice answers, were asked of each document concerning deoview on this instrument. These questions were revised in accordance to changes in the reliability instrument. Should more than one deoview or ethic be acknowledged in a document, the bias of the author was recorded on the analysis survey. This instrument was predominately quantitative; however, a qualitative remark attribute was incorporated to record any relative comments that might suggest trends, issues to compare, concerns, or other information important to the analysis and conclusions of this study. A qualitative information is subjective and not always discovered by hard, empirical data collection.

Documents cited for the purpose of method, style, or other reasons were not analyzed. For reliability purposes, the primary researcher completed the coding of all documents.

Reliability estimates. Due to the subjective nature of theology analysis, reliability is a major concern. For reliability estimates, a prototype instrument (Appendix B) was developed from significant theological passages from four study documents. These four documents represent 11.4% of the articles used for this analysis. Survey documents from the research proposal were numbered in alphabetical order then randomly selected. The standard questions and with multiple-choice answers from the content analysis were then asked of each passage. A pilot test of the reliability instrument was conducted with the participation of an education research class. Students who agreed to complete the pilot test were instructed not to sign or print their names on the instruments for non-disclosure sake.

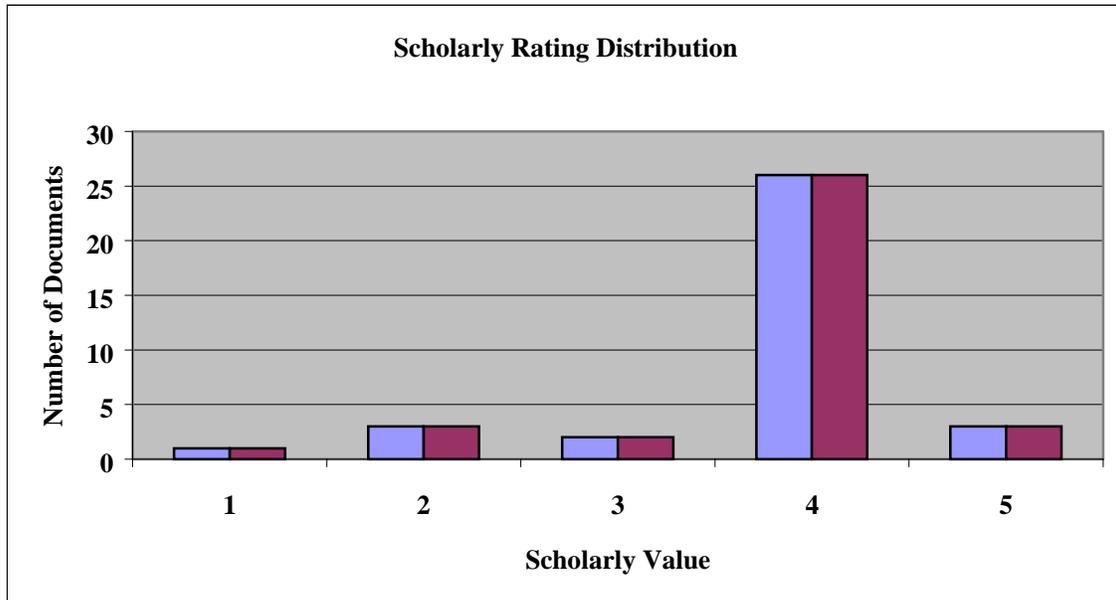
After revision, the content analysis reliability instrument (Appendix C) was administered to four individuals. Selected cooperators agreed to complete the reliability survey. These participants did not sign or attach their names to the reliability instrument. Non-theologians were selected; this decision was based on the consideration that professional bias could influence and adversely affect data collected by the reliability instrument. The cooperators had some personal interests in theology and environmental issues; however, their vocations were in other fields. Statistical analysis for grand inter-rater reliability was computed manually.

### Scholarly Style

A conscious and deliberate decision to maintain scholarly style was important for internal and external validity support. This study was designed to meet five criteria set

forth for scholarly rating. It (a) was reviewed by a graduate committee, (b) used citations, (c) used APA format, (d) was unbiased, and (e) it was archival. In addition, this paper is unique to environmental theology literature because it contains data, statistical analyses, and the study process can be duplicated.

Figure. Scholarly Rating Distribution (N=35). 1 is low; 5 is high.



External validity is high for several reasons because it has practical applications in outside this research project. This study provides a standardized definition to a field of discourse that has been especially active for thirty years. A consistent definition will be useful for both researchers and casual inquirers. The title is very descriptive and should improve research accessibility to information on the subject. This paper is written with intentions to be submitted to an education type journal for publication. Publication in the target journal will increase the external validity of this work substantially because of increased public accessibility.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

Environmental theology is highly conceptual; authors studied in this content analysis have relied on the context of their papers to define the term. In every case environmental theology is descriptive of a religious view of God's relationship with nature or the demands of the belief system on human conduct regarding nature. Belief systems that have no god were considered religious because they are null hypotheses, non-beliefs of beliefs. The data compiled in this study suggests the term environmental theology has been used exclusively to describe human beliefs or views concerning God's relationship with nature and divine demands of human conduct regarding the environment.

#### Nonparametric Test

The Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test was conducted using the document categories (N=35) and two document attributes, presence of an environmental theology and definition and scholarly rating. There was no statistical significant difference between the category groups for either attribute. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) confirmed the rationale for use, violation of normal distribution. There was no statistical significant difference between the category groups for either attribute. Kruskal-Wallis ranked values for the presence of environmental theology definition were  $H$ ,  $X^2(2) = 2.889$ ,  $p = .263$ . Ranked values for scholarly rating were  $H$ ,  $X^2(2) = 1.638(2)$ ,  $p = .441$ . Alpha was set at the .05 level for both tests.

## Reliability Test

Some concerns with instrument design became apparent in the pilot test. The document vignettes and questions used technical and cultural language customary to scholars in the field. Unsolicited comments indicated this language was somewhat foreign to the reliability cooperators.

Five options were considered for reliability instrument revision. (a) A wording change in the vignettes for simplicity. (b) Religious scholars could be used for the reliability test. (c) Simplify the language used in the reliability instrument's questions. (d) Change the order of vignettes, starting with the least difficult and concluding with the most difficult. (e) Develop an environmental theology schema for cooperators by providing vocabulary lists with each vignette. The first two, (a) and (b), were not considered viable options. It would be fundamentally wrong to change words of a document for a reliability instrument, and there is an inherent danger of bias with a stratified coder group who bring their expertise to the project. It was acceptable to (c) simplify questions, (d) change order, and (e) vocabulary lists were used to revise the instrument (Appendix C).

Reliability instrument revision. Changes in questions and vocabulary lists may be examined in Appendix B and C. Questions were simplified, using less theological language. All words that the pilot test participants suggested were added to the vocabulary lists. A less apparent revision that may point to a trend would be question sequencing. In the pilot test there was 1.000 (100%) agreement on passage number four. This vignette was moved to the first position in the reliability test and inter-rater

agreement for that passage dropped to .766. This finding suggests that raters could have acquired coding skills in the process of completing the reliability instrument.

The primary coding of vignettes corresponds with document coding except for passage one. This passage was chosen because it added diversity to the instrument; however, it is from a book describing many worldviews and is not the bias of the author. Coding the vignette identical to the total document would cause an inaccurate reliability estimate.

Grand inter-rater reliability estimate. The reliability instrument provided .833 as the grand inter-rater reliability estimate for overall agreement concerning questions on deoview.

### Environmental Theology

The hypothesis (H) of this study is there is no explicit, scholarly definition of environmental theology. Many have written about the theology-environment relationship in the last three decades of the Twentieth Century; however, content analysis suggests there is no formal definition of the field. The abstract to the Nelson (1990) paper stated, “environmental theology is eco-theology.” The definition for eco-theology was not explicit but inherent in the document. Nelson’s article did not meet this study’s five point criteria for scholarly definition because the archive did not include a reference list and the paper was biased. Irwin (1996) said, “Environmental theology can be understood as deep ecology in mainstream Roman Catholic theology.” This paper relied on internal content to define deep ecology. The Irwin statement is considered an analogy, not a definition. Another interesting observation, deep ecology is inconsistent with Roman Catholic Canon (accepted scriptures).

Creation theology, eco-theology, and natural theology exist as literary terms used in close association with environmental theology; however, they should not be considered synonymous without formal study. All documents examined in this content analysis omitted an operational definition of the term environmental theology. No acceptable definitions were found and documents with environmental theology themes are predominately biased. The term has been associated with two basic ideas: (a) God's spacial relation to nature, and (b) environmental ethics influenced by theology.

One point should be strongly emphasized; environmental theology was not contextually used as the study of God's relationship to nature. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1995) contains no entry for environmental theology but defines theology as; (a) "Study of religious faith, practice, and expression, especially the study of God and of God's relation to the world, (b) a theological theory or system, or (c) a distinctive body of theological opinion." Environmental theology is distinct in that the term has been associated with theology limited to or specializing in environmental issues.

The Sire (1997) definition of worldview should be repeated, "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconscious, consistently or inconsistently) about the makeup of our world." The religious view of God's relation to nature and environmental ethics are in reality two presuppositions (subset) that make a comprehensive worldview (superset). Sire's definition is applicable for both supersets and subsets, so it may be generalized as an accurate description of environmental theology.

Deoview. Johnson (1994), Griffin (1994), and Rust (1971) state that an environmental theology must disclose the God-environment relationship. Deoview is a

worldview attribute that narrates the God-Cosmos relationship, for this paper deoview is operationally defined as the God-environmental relationship. Archival environmental theology literature indicates three basic views of God's spacial relation to nature. One is a Creator-God, able to exist externally to the physical world. Transcendence is used to describe this characteristic. The second view is an internal (in nature) existence view of God. The third basic view, there is no God, is the null hypothesis. Three variations of the basic types were also identified in this study; (a) God, as one entity, is transcendent (external to nature) and essentially immanent (existing as nature), (b) God and nature exist as separate deities, and (c) God does not exist and nature is deity. The combinations are inconsistent internally; this finding supports the deoview relationship with worldview in light of Sire's (1997) definition. The distinction between deoview of a Creator-God and the transcendent-essentially immanent variation is subtle. The Creator-God interfaces with the environment in the sense of a separate entity while the environment is part of God in the transcendent-essentially immanent perspective.

Environmental views corresponding with basic deoviews would be; (a) the environment is created, (b) the environment is divine, and (c) the environment is emergent. God-environment belief systems may be dichotomously classified as (a) external-created or God exists eternally and the environment is God's creation, (b) internal-divine or the environment is God, and (c) nonexistence-emergent or God does not exist and the environment came into existence from an unknown condition.

Environmental ethics. Data from this study suggests motivation for an environmental ethic is consistent with a basic concept of God's relation with nature. Motivation is operationally defined as the stimulus, influence, or incentive that drives or

empowers action. Dominion and stewardship are words associated with a Creator-God deoview. Documents expressing a God internal to nature model use reverence, respect, and sacred relations as they articulate their environmental ethic. Articles on environmental ethics that embrace null hypotheses of God described ethic motivations as symbiosis, reciprocity, and eco-consciousness. Believers of a Creator-God are motivated to take care of God's possession, internal-God in nature devotees are motivated by a direct relationship, and adherents to the null perspective simply want to care for an asset, their home. One point became apparent, regardless of deoview and regardless of ethical motivation, the outcome is the same: people who have considered the environment are concerned and want to protect it to some degree. Daneel's (1999) existential term, earthkeeping, best represents a common environmental ethic.

White's (1967) paper motivated much writing in the environmental theology arena and may be considered a historical milestone in the field. His thesis blamed the Bible doctrine of dominion as the basis of human environmental exploitation. Theologians responded that dominion, in the context of the Holy Bible, implies God not only gave humans use of the world, but also charged them with the responsibility and authority to look after a divine possession. Dominion, according to experts on scripture, is not a divine license to exploit. Theists refer to the perversion of the dominion doctrine as the domination ethic.

Belief systems motivate ethics. If people use a belief system to justify, not motivate, their actions then those actions are not ethically based. For example, if a person or groups of people use the dominion doctrine to justify blatant exploitation of a natural resource they are operating in self-interest and not ethical motivation. People of the West,

predominately of the external-created school, are not the only guilty humans of environmental degradation. Regions where the internal-divine view dominates, such as India and China, experienced environmental problems due to natural resource exploitation before being influenced by the West (Livingstone, 1994). There are many that share the null view that have no environmental ethic at all. A single religion does not cause the environmental problem, the lack of a conscientious, sincere value-belief system does. Indulgent consumption is the anti-type of environmental ethics.

Wise use, anthropocentric stewardship, caring management, and servant stewardship (Scharper, 1997) were recognized as four categories in the dominion-stewardship ethic; however, parallel categories in other ethics probably exist. This would make a good topic for another study. McDaniel (1994) and Nelson (1990) articulate a very foreboding view; humanity is destined to a new domination-dominion ethic. They argue, baring catastrophic events, the human population will never be reduced to pre-industrial age levels where other ethics are practical. Humans will have to practice efficient use of the environment and exclusive rule of all life forms not for consumption, but for survival in the Twenty-First Century.

Other observations. Some belief systems include subordinate spirits. These spiritual entities normally are not perceived as all-powerful and are treated more like human authorities opposed to being worshiped. White (1967) calls them guardians and narrates humans paying tribute to them. An analogy would be making payment to a tax collector, but not to a king. In these belief systems there is a layering of authority and power. It should be noted that these entities are not acknowledged or implied as deity.

Other belief systems have subordinate deities; again there is a stratification of power and authority.

Theology proposed by some authors did not exhibit consistency with their belief statements. Many offered a “Christian view” that in reality was a modified pantheistic (everything is God) model. Several suggested that internal-divine concepts such as Gaia, deep ecology, eco-feminist, and process theology are mainstream Christian theology. Intellectually their claims are challenged by the deoview expressed in the Holy Bible. The perspective of that literary artifact is; God created the environment and the creatures therein, humans in the image of God. God then entered into creation via the body of a creature that was created in his image, created in God’s image so he could behave like God. God experienced creation in human terms so humans could experience God on God’s terms. Six documents implied or expressed the traditional Christian view while eight offered a “new” pseudo-Christian perspective. The point being, one cannot depend on traditional religious group names to correctly identify value-belief systems.

Religious language is quite popular in all types of literature cited in this study. Grant uses a religious punch line to make the point; we are what we read, in an article defining the American Naturalist. The naturalist’s basic philosophy is based on the null hypothesis that God does not exist. Bowen uses the religious phrase, sin of omission, in the title of a very good paper on triangulation as a research method. It is important to distinguish between ideas that are belief-value based or just popular language.

## Chapter 5

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Environmental theology is a term that has been active since 1970 in both dialogue and literature. An explicit and scholarly definition of the term is not provided in associated archival literature. Authors did not state or operationally define environmental theology, they assumed a definition inherent in their documents. Due to the variability of those documents there are no standards.

The Nelson (1990) abstract did state, “environmental theology is eco-theology”; however, he did not provide an operational definition of eco-theology. Like environmental theology, the definition of eco-theology was inherent to the document and not explicit. Johnson (1994) and Rust (1971) flirted with an explicit definition, but they only offered the requirement, “An environmental theology must have a disclosure of the God-environment relationship.” Irwin (1996) understands environment theology as deep ecology, but did not make a distinction between the inconsistency of his belief statement and belief tradition. The four articles mentioned in this paragraph did not satisfy the five requirements to be considered scholarly. The H, there are no explicit, scholarly definitions of environmental theology, is not discredited by the findings of this study.

According to evidence of past practice and common literary use, environmental theology are views expressed of Gods relationship to the environment and the divine expectations of human behavior in regards to the environment. There are diverse environmental theology views.

### Explicit, Scholarly Definition

Environmental theology is a term used to describe the God-environment relationship and divine expectations of human behavior in relation to the environment. This definition is supported by data, analysis, and scholarly methodology.

### Recommendations

The content of this paper provides foundational information for a disciplined field of study, Systematic Environmental Theology. Standardized deoview classifications, articulated in this project, have the potential to overcome the inconsistencies in dialogue that currently occur in archival environmental theology literature and within religious belief systems. Listing beliefs according to deoview provides a standardized terminology and parameters that promote scholarly study.

The formal development of systematic environmental theology should be undertaken by a group of theologians. This cohort should include representatives from the various faith groups, and sects within those groups. Deoview classifications, as presented in this paper, should be evaluated for merit then confirmed or revised. Primary religious literature should also be consulted and analyzed for deoview. Identifying variable ethics patterns within groups that parallel other groups would be a major component of a systematic approach.

The vignettes found in the reliability instrument have potential as models for measurement instruments for other scholarly disciplines. Cognition Studies could be designed for sequencing and schema development using vocabulary. The reliability instrument model would also be useful in evaluation research concerning the usefulness of vignettes as a measurement tool.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
CONTENT ANALYSIS SURVEY

## CONTENT ANALYSIS SURVEY

Reference Information (APA style)

### Document Category Type

1. stratified
2. cluster
3. coincidental

### Deoview

yes/no/?      manifest/latent

### In your best judgement, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non existent
4. don't know

### In your best judgement, does this passage declare or imply a belief that a human may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?

1. yes
2. no
3. don't know

### In your best judgement, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don't know.

### Theoethics

yes/no/?      manifest/latent      significant passages

### Environmental Theology Defined

Yes/no/?      If yes record;

### Scholarly Rating

peer reviewed      citations      format      unbiased      archival      total

## APPENDIX B

### CONTENT ANALYSIS RELIABILITY INSTRUMENT (pilot)

## **Content Analysis Reliability Instrument (pilot)**

A content analysis is being conducted of literature associated with title, subject, and keyword searches of the term, Environmental Theology. A primary researcher will code all documents according to specific attributes. Your participation in this pilot test is important in the development of a valid instrument to establish reliability estimates of the primary coding. Please read the following vignettes. After each passage there is a set of standardized questions, please mark the best answer in relation to the vignette on that page. It is not the intent of this instrument to be burdensome, being overly analytical is not necessary. Face value is good enough.

The study is not designed to promote one belief over another. On occasion the vignette will claim and declare truth, please remember that the passages are verbatim from existing documents that are often opinionated. Identifying these diverse belief statements is a basic objective of this content analysis.

Definitions for selected words are at the bottom of each page. Please add to this list any difficult words you find in the vignettes.

**vignette:** to describe briefly; a short descriptive literary sketch.

## Sample Passage

“The idea of care implicit in stewardship is, however, based on a more fundamental concept: the proper ownership of the entity under care. From a mere analysis of the meaning of concepts, the difference between dominion and stewardship is that the former includes an unrestricted ownership and total power over the subordinate entity, while the latter strictly limits power because it denies ownership. Humanity does not own the natural world in a theocentric belief system. The divine ownership of nature is most clearly and directly stated in Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” Humanity cannot have an unrestricted dominion over the natural world because the world was created and belongs to God: humanity is merely the divinely appointed guardian or steward of what belongs to God.” (Katz, 1994)

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is**

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non-existent
4. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that humans may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests**

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don’t know.

**entity:** being, existence, independent, separate, or self-contained existence.

Answers: (1) 1; (2) 1; (3) A.

## Passage 1

“Out of the anger and emptiness I experienced every time I saw those ravaged, fruitless slopes grew a new ecological awareness, The missiologist in me could no longer confine empirical research mainly to religious beliefs and ceremonies; no longer could I maintain the Western dualism of spiritual as opposed to physical reality. African holism became the hermeneutic for theological reorientation. Soul salvation remained an important part of the gospel message, I thought—but never at the expense of the salvation of all creation. For the first time I really experienced myself as part of an abusing and abused creation which was reaching out for liberation. The biblical concept of a new heaven and new earth increasingly appeared as a challenge to be realized here and now, even if only by way of human ‘signpost activity.’ The myth of my childhood mountain fortress had to make way for a new myth – a myth born of vulnerability, but emerging from the unknown recesses of our common African subconscious. In this myth the Christian Mwari (Shona name for God) is his or her African guise as the true muridzi venyika (guardian of the land) is calling all of us to heal the wounded country.” (Daneel, 1999)

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is**

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non-existent
4. don't know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that a human may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don't know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests**

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don't know.

**hermeneutic:** an interpretation using methodological principals of interpretation.

**Shona:** an African Tribe.

## Passage 2

“At the center of the difference between Whitehead’s God and that of traditional theism is his dictum that “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principals,” but as “their chief exemplification” (PR, 343). On the one hand, God enters into all other actualities: “The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself” (RM, 149). On the other hand, all other actualities enter into God; “It is true to say the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World” (PR, 348). Because of this mutual influence, Whitehead’s doctrine of God is not simply identical with the world. God is essentially the soul of the world. God’s power is not coercive but persuasive, which means that God cannot unilaterally determine what happens in the world. The idea of God’s goodness and love for the world is, accordingly, not undermined by the problem of evil. This idea of divine power, furthermore, does not support the complacent belief that, if things get bad enough, God can intervene to save us.” (Griffin, 1994)

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is**

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non-existent
4. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that a human may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests**

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don’t know.

**coercive:** to dominate by force

**immanent:** remaining or operating within a domain of reality or realm of disclosure; having existence or effect only within the mind or consciousness.

**incarnation:** the physical embodiment of a spiritual entity or concept.

### Passage 3

“Similarly providentialist, though decidedly more rationalist, was the contribution of the Swedish botanist Linnaeus (1707-78), arguably the greatest natural historian of the Enlightenment. To Linnaeus, the classification of life was nothing less than a tool for uncovering the very order of God’s creation. Linnaeus even saw himself as a second Adam, the namer extraordinaire. Divine design lay at the heart of the Linnaean project. And nowhere is this more clearly evident than in an essay he penned in 1749 on “The Oeconomy of Nature” in which he readily detected the hand of God in nature’s order. Because God was the Supreme Economist and Divine Housekeeper, the study of nature’s economy could, at once, confute atheism, justify the social order, and help humans see their creaturely position as continuous with, yet separate from nature.” (Livingstone, 1994)

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is**

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non existent
4. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that a human may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don’t know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests**

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don’t know.

**providentialist:** one who believes in divine intervention.

#### Passage 4

“This brings us, then, to the first proposition defining naturalism.

1. *Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.* As in theism and deism, the prime proposition concerns the nature of basic existence. In the former two the nature of God was the key factor. In naturalism it is the nature of the cosmos which is primary, for now, with an eternal creator-God out of the picture, the cosmos itself becomes eternal—always there though not necessarily in its present form, in fact, certainly not in its present form. Carl Sagan, astrophysicist and popularizer of science, has said it as clearly as possible: “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” (Sire, 1997)

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God is**

1. creator of the natural world and can exist external to the physical environment.
2. not an exclusive being apart from the natural world and exists internal to the physical environment.
3. non-existent
4. don't know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that a human may know God as an individual, similar as knowing another person?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don't know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare or imply a belief that God manifests**

- A. as an exclusive individual. (theocentric)
- B. as the environment or part of the non-living physical world. (ecocentric)
- C. as plant or animal other than human. (biocentric)
- D. as a human. (anthropocentric)
- E. does not manifest because does not exist.
- F. don't know.

**cosmos:** an orderly harmonious systematic universe.

**eternally:** forever, having infinite duration.

APPENDIX C  
CONTENT ANALYSIS RELIABILITY INSTRUMENT

## Content Analysis Reliability Instrument

A content analysis is being conducted of literature associated with title, subject, and keyword searches of the term, Environmental Theology. The primary researcher will code all documents according to specific attributes. Your participation in this pilot test is important in the development of a valid instrument to establish reliability estimates of the primary coding.

Please read the following vignettes. After each passage there is a set of standardized questions, please mark the best answer in relation to the vignette on that page. Some of the passages will be difficult. This is because of the language of the discipline being studied, and in one case, the author belongs to a different country-culture. The questions have been simplified in order to compensate for difficulties. If there are two answers ( as in a description by contrast) choose the author's bias.

The study is not designed to promote one belief over another. On occasion the vignette will claim and declare truth, please remember that the passages are verbatim from existing documents that are often opinionated. Identifying these diverse belief statements is a basic objective of this content analysis.

Definitions for selected words follow each narrative. This list was developed with the help of an university graduate research class.

**vignette:** to describe briefly; a short descriptive literary sketch.

## Sample Passage

“The idea of care implicit in stewardship is, however, based on a more fundamental concept: the proper ownership of the entity under care. From a mere analysis of the meaning of concepts, the difference between dominion and stewardship is that the former includes an unrestricted ownership and total power over the subordinate entity, while the latter strictly limits power because it denies ownership. Humanity does not own the natural world in a theocentric belief system. The divine ownership of nature is most clearly and directly stated in Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” Humanity cannot have an unrestricted dominion over the natural world because the world was created and belongs to God: humanity is merely the divinely appointed guardian or steward of what belongs to God.” (Katz, 1994)

**entity:** being, existence, independent, separate, or self-contained existence.

**manifests:** appear as an object or thing; reveal itself.

**stewardship:** caretaker, given authority to manage on behalf of the owner.

**theocentric:** God centered.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief**

1. in a Creator-God.
2. that nature is the primary creator.
3. that God is non-existent.
4. no answer.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that nature is deity?**

1. yes.
2. no.
3. don’t know.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that God**

1. is an individual existing apart from the natural world. (theocentric)
2. manifests as the non-living physical world. (geocentric)
3. is the environment or ecosystems. (ecocentric)
4. takes the form of a plant or animal. (biocentric)
5. takes the form of a human. (anthropocentric)
6. does not manifest because does not exist.
7. no answer.

Answers: (1) 1; (2) 2; (3) 1.

## Passage 1

“This brings us, then, to the first proposition defining naturalism.

1. *Matter exists eternally and is all there is. God does not exist.* As in theism and deism, the prime proposition concerns the nature of basic existence. In the former two the nature of God was the key factor. In naturalism it is the nature of the cosmos which is primary, for now, with an eternal creator-God out of the picture, the cosmos itself becomes eternal—always there though not necessarily in its present form, in fact, certainly not in its present form. Sagan, astrophysicist and popularizer of science, has said it as clearly as possible: “The Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be.” (Sire, 1997)

**cosmos:** an orderly harmonious systematic universe.

**deism:** belief in a transcendent God who is not active in the affairs of the natural world.

**eternally:** forever, having infinite duration.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief**

1. in a Creator-God.
2. that nature is the primary creator.
3. that God is non-existent
4. no answer.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that nature is deity?**

1. yes.
2. no.
3. don't know.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that God**

1. is an individual existing apart from the natural world. (theocentric)
2. manifests as the non-living physical world. (geocentric)
3. is the environment or ecosystems. (ecocentric)
4. takes the form of a plant or animal. (biocentric)
5. takes the form of a human. (anthropocentric)
6. does not manifest because does not exist.
7. no answer.

## Passage 2

“At the center of the difference between Whitehead’s God and that of traditional theism is his dictum that “God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principals,” but as “their chief exemplification” (PR, 343). On the one hand, God enters into all other actualities: “The world lives by its incarnation of God in itself” (RM, 149). On the other hand, all other actualities enter into God; “It is true to say the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World” (PR, 348). Because of this mutual influence, Whitehead’s doctrine of God is not simply identical with the world. God is essentially the soul of the world. God’s power is not coercive but persuasive, which means that God cannot unilaterally determine what happens in the world. The idea of God’s goodness and love for the world is, accordingly, not undermined by the problem of evil. This idea of divine power, furthermore, does not support the complacent belief that, if things get bad enough, God can intervene to save us.” (Griffin, 1994)

**coercive:** to dominate by force.

**immanent:** remaining or operating within a domain of reality or realm of disclosure.

**incarnation:** the physical embodiment of a spiritual entity or concept.

**metaphysical:** incorporeal: supernatural.

**theism:** belief in transcendent God who is active in the affairs of the physical world.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief**

1. in a Creator-God.
2. that nature is the primary creator.
3. that God is non-existent.
4. no answer.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that nature is deity?**

1. yes.
2. no.
3. don’t know.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that God**

1. is an individual existing apart from the natural world. (theocentric)
2. manifests as the non-living physical world. (geocentric)
3. is the environment or ecosystems. (ecocentric)
4. takes the form of a plant or animal. (biocentric)
5. takes the form of a human. (anthropocentric)
6. does not manifest because does not exist.
7. no answer.

### Passage 3

“Similarly providentialist, though decidedly more rationalist, was the contribution of the Swedish botanist Linnaeus (1707-78), arguably the greatest natural historian of the Enlightenment. To Linnaeus, the classification of life was nothing less than a tool for uncovering the very order of God’s creation. Linnaeus even saw himself as a second Adam, the namer extraordinaire. Divine design lay at the heart of the Linnaean project. And nowhere is this more clearly evident than in an essay he penned in 1749 on “The Oeconomy of Nature” in which he readily detected the hand of God in nature’s order. Because God was the Supreme Economist and Divine Housekeeper, the study of nature’s economy could, at once, confute atheism, justify the social order, and help humans see their creaturely position as continuous with, yet separate from nature.” (Livingstone, 1994)

**confute:** argue, to oppose.

**Oeconomy:** ecology.

**providentialist:** one who believes in divine intervention.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief**

1. in a Creator-God.
2. that nature is the primary creator.
3. that God is non-existent.
4. no answer.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that nature is deity?**

1. yes.
2. no.
3. don’t know.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that God**

1. is an individual existing apart from the natural world. (theocentric)
2. manifests as the non-living physical world. (geocentric)
3. is the environment or ecosystems. (ecocentric)
4. takes the form of a plant or animal. (biocentric)
5. takes the form of a human. (anthropocentric)
6. does not manifest because does not exist.
7. no answer.

#### Passage 4

“Out of the anger and emptiness I experienced every time I saw those ravaged, fruitless slopes grew a new ecological awareness, the missiologist in me could no longer confine empirical research mainly to religious beliefs and ceremonies; no longer could I maintain the Western dualism of spiritual as opposed to physical reality. African holism became the hermeneutic for theological reorientation. Soul salvation remained an important part of the gospel message, I thought—but never at the expense of the salvation of all creation. For the first time I really experienced myself as part of an abusing and abused creation which was reaching out for liberation. The biblical concept of a new heaven and new earth increasingly appeared as a challenge to be realized here and now, even if only by way of human ‘signpost activity.’ The myth of my childhood mountain fortress had to make way for a new myth – a myth born of vulnerability, but emerging from the unknown recesses of our common African subconscious. In this myth the Christian Mwari (Shona name for God) is his or her African guise as the true muridzi venyika (guardian of the land) is calling all of us to heal the wounded country.” (Daneel, 1999)

**hermeneutic:** an interpretation using methodological principals of interpretation.

**guise:** an assumed appearance; a pretense, an external appearance.

**missiologist:** practitioner of mission development and implementation.

**Muridzi venyika:** a supernatural entity, which inhabits a human.

**Mwari:** defined as Creator-God in other passages.

**myth:** a belief, often-in narrative forms. **Shona:** an African Tribe.

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief**

1. in a Creator-God.
2. that nature is the primary creator.
3. that God is non-existent.
4. no answer

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that nature is deity?**

1. yes
2. no
3. don't know

**In your best judgment, does this passage declare, imply, or acknowledge a belief that God**

1. is an individual existing apart from the natural world. (theocentric)
2. manifests as the non-living physical world. (geocentric)
3. is the environment or ecosystems. (ecocentric)
4. takes the form of a plant or animal. (biocentric)
5. takes the form of a human. (anthropocentric)
6. does not manifest because does not exist.
7. no answer.

## VITA

### Robert J Jacobus

#### Education:

West Virginia University. Master of Science; Agriculture and Environmental Education.  
Liberty Bible College, Pensacola, Florida. Master of Theology.  
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#### Vocations:

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