THE
BOISI CENTER INTERVIEWS

NO. 52: FEBRUARY 23, 2011

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OWENS: You have written before that "Environmental issues challenge theological traditions in ways unprecedented by debates over Christian attitudes toward war or sexuality or poverty." What are the challenges that are unique to environmental issues and why are they unlike other fundamental issues in Christian ethics?

JENKINS: I think that what makes environmental problems different from some of the perennial problems in Christian social ethics is that it is hard to explain how they are problems. Most people recognize that the issue of violence and war, no matter how an ethicist may come down on it, is a moral problem. People may recognize that poverty is a moral problem and that it is susceptible to a range of competing interpretations. Those are familiar interpretations and we can easily rehearse what the schools of thought are for how to imagine and frame this problem, what are the typical Christian social practices that carry ways of responding to them.

But so much of the work around environmental problems, at least for the last few decades, and the first decades of responding to it, have been about explaining how this is a problem that is intelligible to Christian traditions. That then goes beyond saying something like, there are this many species going extinct, or, there is this level of pervasive toxins in our water, which has an intuitive sense of harm to it, but, rather, explaining how this matters for received patterns of Christian life. On that, I think, the record in Christian theological ethics is rather mixed.

OWENS: Is it simply related to the anthropocentrism in Christian ethics or is it something else that makes this a problem that is different from sexuality, war, etc.?

JENKINS: I think a big part of it simply is the novelty. Only in the last few generations have humans had to consider themselves as ecological players in Earth's systems; they might symbolically think that, but not actually practically think about that. There are just simply new dimensions of moral agency for which traditions are not prepared because they probably did not anticipate them. That is the novelty aspect.

For post-industrial Western cultures, there certainly is an aspect of pervasive moral anthropocentrism, which is, I think, a kind of a laziness of thinking: you can just cut off most of the phenomenal world as morally insignificant and you do not have to think about it. Clearly that is a problem. But, I think, within environmental ethics, saying that anthropocentrism is the problem has been somewhat overplayed. Because defeating anthropocentrism has been the primary goal of environmental ethics for a while, other possibilities for an eco-centric ethic have not been given proper attention.

You have to say two things here. Outside the world of environmental ethics, I think it is absolutely the case that we live in a remarkably anthropocentric culture, and an unthinkingly anthropocentric church. That is the case, and that needs to be combated. Within the world of environmental ethics, this has been said so often that we do not get to a more helpful kind of ethics or even think about kinds of anthropocentrism. I am not always clear that saying that there are anthropo-

centric and non-anthropocentric ethics is the most helpful thing. There are ways of thinking about the human as a moral center, and some of those may see humanity at the absolute center, and some of those might think with the human as a kind of symbolic center, which is a different kind of thinking.

OWENS: Christian evangelicals in this country are frequently criticized for focusing more on individual, personal piety as opposed to social and environmental justice. Is this a fair characterization and criticism, and in any case, have non-evangelicals done any better on this front?

JENKINS: I am not sure that I am prepared to make sociological evaluations about who is doing more, but it is an important question, in that I think that there are clearly different public, theological strategies of dealing with environmental problems. What emerged in the 1990's among evangelical communities, I think, was them finding their own vocabulary and their own strategy that made sense, but which was within the moral framework in which American evangelical social ethics works. Insofar as that includes some real suspicion about social justice and a definite suspicion about calls for respect for the sacred value of nature, yes, I think that that is the case.

But insofar as American evangelicals have been effective on environmental issues, they have been able to interpret them within this more individual piety, as you say. For example, there is the "What Would Jesus Drive" campaign which, you know, people have sort of smiled at, and it has probably got more attention for the apparent humor of it than for its real effectiveness, but it showed something. It showed, OK, here is how to take a complex energy/transportation/climate issue and frame it within the kind of sense of a moral world in which the main way of thinking about life is in terms of personal responsibility to God. So that is good.

Those kinds of moves have gotten some traction among some parts of the evangelical church. I have seen surveys that show that young evangelicals are more likely to care about these kinds of justice and environmental issues than older generations. I think it is mainly because they see how they fit within an existing pattern of commitments, that they are not threats to those commitments themselves. It is rather a matter of finding how those commitments frame those problems.

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Now, whether they are more or less effective than other churches—say, mainline or Catholic, American churches—it is hard to say. Certainly, there is a lot of activity in mainline Protestant churches around environmental issues. Sometimes I get frustrated that that activity comes out in bland policy statements. So they do not do a much better job of showing how this is a theological problem. Insofar as they cannot say to their churches, this is how climate change matters for your experience of God, I think they do something unfair to both society and churches. They burden churches with an additional moral commitment without explaining how it hangs in with the world of other commitments.

The same thing is the case for wider society, insofar as theological communities just affirm this is an important problem without specifying how there is a coherent pattern of action that fits in with other sets of commitments. It does a disservice, because then it looks to other parts of society to do that for us. It is lazy.

OWENS: How well have non-Western Christian communities done with regard to environmental ethics? I know you have spent time living and working abroad in such communities. What is different?

JENKINS: Right now—especially around climate change—you see a remarkable amount of social and theological activity in the global South and especially in South America, with a lot of activity within the churches around climate change. They are using climate change as an arena to think about global justice, to think about alternatives to globalization and to really reinvigorate what you might call the general social project of the characteristic of a Latin-American church and within that, you see indigenous peoples. So let me just restrict my comments here to indigenous peoples who are members of Christian churches.

I did a trip with some divinity students to meet with some [indigenous peoples] in Ecuador last year. It was very, very interesting the way that they are interpreting climate change and using it as an opportunity to reclaim the importance of, say, traditional cosmologies within a Christian account of creation. You just see this remarkable ferment in creativity that I think is somewhat lacking in the North American scene, in the depth of creativity and religious renovation. That may be because the North American scene has also inherited a sense of the environmental problem as being something separate and maybe even opposed to other social problems, and in Latin America, that is less the case. Some traditional communi-

ties in Sub-Saharan Africa would say they cannot even imagine what it would mean to frame an environmental problem, to do that separate from social issues. To do that, you have to take these other cultural assumptions that we have that do not fly.

OWENS: Does that say something about Americans or Westerners being disconnected from the land or the climate around them, or is that too huge of a generalization to make?

JENKINS: I do not think it is too bland, but yes, it is a huge generalization, and we should always hesitate over these great, large generalizations. But I would say that it is especially so in North American culture. European cultures have been on this land for not all that terribly long and maybe cultivated almost an indifference—a restlessness and a defensiveness—toward it. This is really different from what you see in Europe, and also in a Western industrial culture, where there is a lot more reflective, moral thought happening with landscapes.

OWENS: Your first book, *Ecologies of Grace*, takes, as I understand it, a relatively unusual approach to environmental ethics by focusing on theologies of salvation as opposed to creation. Could you say a bit about why you chose that approach and what the upshot is for your environmental ethics?

JENKINS: There are two things to say about this. One is that a common critique of Christianity in general is that it has been too anthropocentric and too salvation-focused. So my initial thought was, well, if salvation is the problem, maybe we ought to look at it directly. It is a remarkable thing that environmental theologians tended never to talk about salvation, even though these accounts of salvation—what it means to experience God or to grow with the life of God or to become friends with God—never appeared in works that try to explain how environmental problems matter for Christian life. My initial thought was, well, these environmental theologies are

destined to remain shallow, in terms of their connection to Christian life. If they can't connect with these bedrock patterns, why bother being Christian, or what does it mean to be in a relationship with God, or something like that?

Secondly, as I was prosecuting that argument, I found that, actually, environmental theologians were, left and right, borrowing metaphors of grace or drawing on implicit stories of salvation in precisely those moments when they wanted to make a connection to the heart of Christian life. So then I started showing how they were doing that: the gestures that they were making and the patterns that appear in environmental theologies as they draw on characteristic background patterns of grace. This helped explain some of the differences among them. Instead of Christianity and ecology, there are a number of Christianities pursuing different kinds of relationships to ecology, and they happen to conform to major background patterns of accounts of relationships with God.

OWENS: I was really taken with this weaving together of theological and secular approaches in this book, what you call practical strategies for approaching environmental ethics: eco-justice, stewardship and ecological spirituality. Could you say, just very briefly, how these three mesh with theological concepts of ecologies of grace that you work with?

JENKINS: Yes, so in environmental ethics, I see three very basic strategies for approaching environmental problems: one focused on nature, i.e. the intrinsic value of nature and so on; another often developed from a critique of that very strategy, i.e. that we can never know what nature is or that it is always socially constructed and that we ought to, instead, focus on patterns of responsible agency; and then another focused on the ecological dimensions of the human person.

I think you can see all three strategies adopted by Christian environmental ethics, or Christian environmental theologies. The interesting thing is how they use their theological resources to change those strategies or to make them better or to deepen them, especially when they try to connect them to some experience, to some bedrock pattern of experience. Then they map on to some large background traditions of Christian life. So talking about respect for nature is comfortable within sacramental views of Christian life in which nature has a role—well, God makes nature have a role—in growing us in the friendship with God.

That ethical strategy is going to be more awkward or difficult for a theological

strategy that is based around responsible obedience to God in a personal relationship. But the kind of ethic that emphasizes responsible agency is going to work quite well there. When we focus on an ethic of stewardship, what is the pattern of right action before some creator, master? A number of different kinds of eco-theologies are reflecting on the ecological dimensions of human personhood. While they do not all use Eastern Orthodox resources, I think that in an Eastern Orthodox account of the divinization of the cosmos and in human beings' embrace of the divinization of the cosmos, there is a confident pattern there to think with.

OWENS: Are these all resources available across the Christian tradition, or do you seek to adjudicate among them in some way that makes more true or more useful or more faithful for Christians as such?

JENKINS: I avoid that task. First of all, I would say that there are these several strategies, and then to invite people—insofar as they saw themselves sort of belonging to one way of thinking or, especially, at home in one way of interpreting environmental problems—to then identify the theological resources that would be most helpful or powerful or disturbing or provocative for them. That is why there are these readings of Aquinas, Barth and Bulgakov, because the thought is, if you are a stewardship theologian, you really do not care what Aquinas or anyone else has to say about the sacred status of nature. What you need to do is read Karl Barth, right? He can help you figure out how to talk about responsibility after the theological end of nature.

The most difficult questions for a stewardship ethic, the characteristic difficulties that it is going to face, are what role is there for the natural sciences? Then you ought to pose that question to a major theologian, like Barth, and see how it works within that system. That will show you where there are weaknesses, and maybe when you run up against the weaknesses, you might then look to other theological worlds, but knowing that, when you start looking to the resources of those other theological traditions, you are also then starting to move into a different account of what the experience of God is, a different salvation story. I think it is that dramatic. So that just says this is a great scene for ecumenical work.

Let me just say one coda to that. The leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church have shown remarkable fluency around ecological issues. The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I is known as the Green Patriarch, and he organizes these remarkable conferences around major bodies of water. He is a politically beleaguered figure; he has plenty of things to think about, in terms of religious persecution, and lots of other stuff for him to be worrying about, but here he is making these remarkable and quite compelling statements on environmental issues, and they seem to be second nature. He is not laboring in any way, he is not forced to rethink the concepts that he inherited, he is just making these statements, and it seems natural and fluid within his tradition. I think that shows, for whatever reason, that Eastern Orthodox theology has a moment with us now, as we are rethinking the human place on Earth.

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OWENS: Let me wrap up with a question about your new book. You suggested, earlier in our conversation, that theologians can get lazy by merely offering theological interpretations or analyses of a situation, and as I understand it, your new work is pushing theologians and all believers to move beyond that sort of work and into more on-the-ground sort of social work. Is that an accurate depiction of your project, and if so, could you elaborate?

JENKINS: Yes. As I said, when I came to the end of *Ecologies of Grace* and came to teach at the Yale Divinity School, where I have professional students in both the Divinity School and the School of Forestry, who are thinking about how concrete communities work on quite practical problems, I realized that you could read this whole book—you could work through these difficult reinterpretations of Aquinas and Barth—and really have no real practical resources for thinking through problems. From my kind of account, that is pragmatist in a way, saying, you need to figure out how problems become intelligible for specific concrete communities, that is a real problem. This made me think that this is a problem in eco-theology generally, that we eco-theologians have tended to devote our energies toward vindicating and elaborating an ecological world view on the assumption that the ecological world view would then have obvious consequences for particular problems.

But if I am claiming that environmental problems are unprecedented problems that confound our perceived patterns of moral agency, then I think I need to say that actively confronting those problems is where the real scene of creativity is, especially where there are particular concrete communities that are wrestling with some problem. That is the most

important scene of moral creativity for a Christian ethicist to be thinking about.

I could offer an example, one that is underplayed in *Ecologies of Grace*, namely environmental justice communities in the United States. For all the talk about how religious communities in the United States have been slow on environmental issues, what is missing is that one of the most profound and dramatic changes in environmental consciousness in the United States came about when a church-based movement and a church-funded report showed that the most statistically-significant indicator of toxic waste was race and then there was this movement around environmental racism. Well, that was organized and funded by churches.

That immediately made a connection with, obviously, civil rights concepts of justice, and it showed how those ideas of justice are now ecologically mediated, and that has forced environmental justice communities to start thinking about what are the ecological dimensions of justice? This has made them think about, how is human dignity ecologically vulnerable, which, in turn, has made them think about, how does liberation need to include a wider anthropology? And you begin to see this in the world of some womanist ethicists and Dwight Hopkins, in some of his recent work on black liberation theologies. Here is an example where, you know, a community's response to a set of problems has begun to cascade this interesting theological ferment. I think that that is under-noticed by Christian ethicists and that we ought to be more engaged with it. So I am trying to do that in the book.

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