

A Christian care for the Earth is rooted in maintaining and thoughtfully engaging the world as *oikos*, the Greek word for ‘house’, from which we derive the English words *ecology* and *economics*. Finding the ability or pathos to be moved by anything outside of oneself—let alone the natural world—requires shifts in perspective and a change in the vantage point from which one sees the world. Rather than experiencing others and the non-human world as disconnected strangers, a Christian perspective exhorts followers of Jesus to enter the world as a sister or brother.

Larry Rasmussen suggests that to envision the Earth as *oikos* is to understand life as “a single public household.”¹ The *oikos*, or *household/home* metaphor for Christian Earthkeeping implies that all life is part of the same family, living under a single atmospheric roof that covers all of life. It necessarily carries with it intricacies of being and living together in Earth community. Mustering all of the hopeful idealism surrounding the family unit as is possible, we infer that this single household vision of Earth and its inhabitants requires a particularly familial care, dependability, hospitality and mutuality. This metaphor roots itself in the Apostle Paul’s words to the believers in Ephesus:

You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.²

The erasing of the categories *foreigner* and *stranger* exhort the non-Jewish followers of Jesus into full inclusion within the family of God. This household of God metaphor extends beyond the spiritual relationality of persons united by Christ and counts all life as members of

¹ Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 16.

² Ephesians 2:20-22, *New International Version* (2011).

the one family in God's *oikos*. This brings us to a point of reconsidering the ways in which we treat our family. How do the lines of kinship affect the way we treat another? This sort of familial relationship is how Rasmussen defines ecology: "knowing, from inside, the interrelated dynamics that make up the total of the household and the requirements for living together."³

This presents two challenges to the Christian tradition. The first challenge is a reorienting of hierarchies that are based upon the acceptance of a *great chain of being* which dualistically orders all life from top to bottom. As long as this way of ordering reality and life based on the concept of human dominion and exceptionalism—conferred by Genesis 1—undergirds Christian faith and praxis, there will be sustained inequality within the human species and across species; there will be those who are deemed less worthy, and thus, justifiably excluded. The second challenge to Christianity is to resist escapist religion that views the Earth as the vehicle which will deliver humankind to an otherworldly heaven. Rather, Christians must engage the *oikos*-Earth as the place in which we "live and move and have our being" through God, and the place which God wills for creation to live in *shalom*. Further, Christians must come to experience our earthbound existence as that which reveals the Divine to us alongside biblical revelation.

The Earth as *oikos* is no soft sentimentality, but a subversive shift in one's engagement with the world. Continents and borders are no longer lines of isolation or division, but rooms and doorways in another section of our great house. The Earth as *oikos* establishes a deep relationality and care amongst life and recognizes that family unity rather than competition and hierarchy are at the center of establishing justice for the Earth and all its inhabitants. Sallie McFague emphasizes the important dictum that "'everyone is invited' to the table of household

³Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, 93.

Earth—including not just needy human beings, but the air, the water, the land, and each and every creature, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant.”⁴ This is the way of seeing that Jesus invites his followers into through parables and action. There is no thing or anyone who is left out of the kingdom that Jesus envisions, and therefore, no thing or person (human or otherwise) that is beyond the scope of our *oikos*–Earth.

⁴ Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 93.