



# Mixology and Theology

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## Week Twelve: Bee's Knees and Ecotheology

### Mixology: Bee's Knees

This cocktail has its origins during Prohibition. The phrase “the bee’s knees” was already popular and meant “the best.” Prohibition led to the making of a lot of low quality spirits, or “bathtub gin.” The Bee’s Knees cocktail is thought to have been a way to make the gin taste better.

Honey syrup is easier to mix into drinks than plain honey. Similar to simple syrup, it is a mixture of half honey and half water, heated to dissolve the honey.

#### **Bee's Knees Cocktail**

2 oz	gin	3/4 oz	lemon juice
3/4 oz	honey syrup		lemon twist for garnish

Add ice to a martini or coupe glass to chill. Add gin, lemon juice, and honey syrup to a cocktail shaker with ice. Shake for 30 seconds. Discard ice from glass. Strain cocktail into glass and garnish with lemon twist.

#### **Bee's Knees Mocktail**

2 oz	tonic water	2 oz	club soda
3/4 oz	lemon juice	3/4 oz	honey syrup
2 to 4 dashes	orange bitters		lemon twist for garnish

Add ingredients to a highball glass with ice and stir. Garnish with lemon twist.

# Theology: Ecotheology

## **Introduction**

Ecotheology is a modern response to the environmental crisis (I'm speaking throughout this presentation about Christianity in particular). It emerged during the 1960's as the environmental movement grew in significance. However, much of the theological writing in ecotheology finds its source material in biblical and ancient Christian writings as they are re-read in the face of our needs today.

A large part of ecotheology has been focused on why and how Christianity seems to have played a role in justifying the degradation and abuse of the earth. Many have seen a need to re-think Christian assumptions about God, creation, and humanity. Some of the key issues that have been problems for Christian theology as it speaks to the environmental crisis include:

**Anthropocentrism:** Much of Christian theology has been centered on questions of humanity's relationship with God, apart from questions about the creation's relationship with God. The redeeming work of Christ is seen only in relationship to human salvation. The created world has been seen merely as a backdrop for the human story, rather than an integral part of God's story.

**Dominion over creation:** Much of Christian history has read the creation story of Genesis 1 as giving humanity complete power and control over creation:

*Genesis 1:26-31* <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> 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." <sup>29</sup> God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The use of the term "dominion" has often been read as "domination." It has been seen as a justification for an unlimited use and abuse of the environment for human "needs" or choices. The rise of capitalism and industrialization meant that "nature" was merely the realm where raw materials could be extracted for production and profit, without consideration for the impact on other life and ecosystems.

Some have responded to the misuse of Genesis 1 with an emphasis on "stewardship," emphasizing that God has given humanity the responsibility to care for creation on God's behalf, supporting and ensuring that the earth can sustain life abundantly. Others think a more radical change in thinking is needed.

**God above nature:** Some Christian theology has emphasized that God is above, or transcendent, and not present and known within creation. Some theologians emphasize God's revelation through Christ and Scripture, and claim that creation does not reveal who God is.

**Eschatology:** As we saw in the discussion on premillennialism, some Christians focus on escaping this world for the next, heavenly world. Therefore, care for creation has no meaning, and signs of the world dying might simply support their ideas about the "end of the world" scenario they are waiting for.

Eschatology in Christianity, however, has mostly focused on the goal of God's creation, and can be read within the unfolding of the universe, not outside and beyond it. This type of eschatology can strongly support an ecotheology concerned with environmental crises needing out urgent attention.

## **History**

Prior to the environmentalist movements, there were some Christian traditions theologians who gave early affirmation of creation.

**Incarnational theology** throughout Christianity has emphasized the goodness of creation in which God's Word became incarnate in Jesus.

**Orthodox Christianity** has been more open to "panentheism" (God is in all of creation, though distinct from it) and developed a deeper mystical tradition that emphasizes experiencing God in and through creation.

**Saint Francis Assisi:** "For Francis the entire universe – the self and the total environment to which the self belongs – is a theophany, a manifestation of God, a creative outpouring of the abundant goodness and love which is the life of the Blessed Trinity. God creates the world not out of necessity – there's nothing inevitable about creation – but rather out of love; everything that is – is pure gift."

Francis's famous "Canticle of the Sun" gives us a good feeling for his creation spirituality. He is an excerpt:

*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,  
especially through my lord Brother Sun,  
who brings the day; and you give light through him.  
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!  
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene,  
and every kind of weather through which  
You give sustenance to Your creatures.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful  
and playful and robust and strong.*

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains us and governs us and who produces  
varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.*

**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)** was a Jesuit priest and philosopher. He thought that the whole cosmos is developing toward a divine goal, or Omega Point, in which human consciousness and creation

reach their highest point.

**Joseph Sittler (1904—1987)** was a Lutheran pastor and theologian who taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School. He is seen by many as a pioneer in connecting Christian theology to ecological concerns. *“Nature is a theater of grace”* is one of Joseph Sittler’s most celebrated and influential ideas. His approach to environment and ecology is strikingly original in that he makes ecology a thoroughly theological issue and relates it to God’s grace. He spoke of grace as *“all that God does to crack nature open to its God, to restore it to his love and to its intended destiny”* (*Evocations of Grace*, 2000, page 35). *God cracks nature open in Trinitarian fullness: creation, redemption, and ongoing presence. Christ is central to all of Sittler’s thinking, and especially to his ideas about the environment. However, as he said in his influential address to the World Council of Churches in 1962, “redemption is meaningful only when it swings within the larger orbit of a doctrine of creation”* (*op. cit.*, page 40). In this area of his work as elsewhere, Sittler urged a radical reconceptualization in traditional theology. He did not propose a detailed agenda for action, but he cultivated the motivation and understanding that undergird all action.

As the environmental movement gained attention in the 1960’s, Lynn White, professor of history at UCLA, published a paper called *“The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis.”* In it he claimed that our problem is not merely the rise of industrialization and technology, but our Western world view, largely shaped by Christian theological assumptions about dominion over creation. While the paper faced criticism, it stirred up the conversation among Christian thinkers on what our tradition says in both positive and negative ways.

**John B Cobb (1925)** is an American theologian and philosopher, and a leading figure in process theology, influenced by the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. A unifying theme of Cobb’s work is his emphasis on ecological interdependence—the idea that every part of the ecosystem is reliant on all the other parts. Cobb has argued that humanity’s most urgent task is to preserve the world on which it lives and depends, an idea which his primary influence, Whitehead, described as *“world-loyalty”*

**Matthew Fox (1940)** is a leading voice in what he calls Creation Spirituality. He was a Dominican priest, but was removed from the order because of his unorthodox theology, which then Cardinal Ratzinger criticized. Creation Spirituality considers itself a *“green”* theology, emphasizing a holy relationship between humanity and nature. Accordingly, the sacredness of nature is considered a sacrament and creation is considered an expression of God and the *“Cosmic Christ”*.

**Ecofeminism** is a branch of feminism that sees environmentalism, and the relationship between women and the earth, as foundational to its analysis and practice. Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, religion, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels include but are not limited to seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes that both women and nature must be respected. Some leading theologians of ecofeminism include Rosemary Radford Ruther, Catherine Keller, and Sally McFague.

**Sally McFague (1933-2019)** developed the metaphor of the world (or cosmos) as God’s body. McFague elaborated this metaphor at length in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. The purpose of using it is to *‘cause us to see differently’*, to *‘think and act as if bodies matter’*, and to *‘change what we value’*. If we imagine the cosmos as God’s body, then *‘we never meet God unembodied’*. This is to take God in that cosmos seriously, for *‘creation is God’s self-expression’*. Equally we must take seriously our own embodiment

(and that of other bodies): all that is has a common beginning and history (as McFague put it ‘we are all made of the ashes of dead stars’), and so salvation is about salvation of all earthly bodies (not just human ones) and first and foremost about living better on the earth, not in the hereafter. Elaborating further, McFague argued that sin, on this view, is a matter of offence against other parts of the ‘body’ (other species or parts of the creation) and in that sense only against God, while eschatology is about a better bodily future (‘creation is the place of salvation, salvation is the direction of creation’), rather than a more disembodied spiritual one. In this metaphor, God is not a distant being but being-itself, a characterization that has led some to suggest McFague's theology was a form of monism. She defended her views as not monist but panentheist. The world seen as God's body chimes strongly with a feminist and panentheist stress on God as the source of all relationship, while McFague's understanding of sin (as essentially a failure of relationality, of letting other parts of the created order flourish free of our control) is also typically panentheist.

**Black and Womanist Ecotheologies** speak to environmental concerns from the perspective of black oppression. Environmental racism is of central concern. Many black ecotheologians criticize the emphasis in other ecotheologies on non-human life, and see it as a marginalizing of their experience and voices. **Melanie Harris** is Associate Professor of Religion at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, TX where she teaches and conducts research in the areas of Religious Social Ethics, Environmental Justice, Womanist Ethics, and African American Religious Thought. Her recent book is *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths*.

**Native American Christian** voices have always spoken out about the spiritual connection between creation, God, and humans. While there are many diverse Native American belief systems, there are strong connections to creation in many. For those looking for non-Western voices within Christianity, these views can be helpful in overcoming the limitations of Western theology. I've taken the following quote from this article: <https://www.amacad.org/publication/indigenous-americans-spirituality-and-ecos>

*Perhaps the most important aspect of indigenous cosmic visions is the conception of creation as a living process, resulting in a living universe in which a kinship exists between all things. Thus the Creators are our family, our Grandparents or Parents, and all of their creations are children who, of necessity, are also our relations.*

An ancient Ashiwi (Zuñi) prayer-song states:

*That our earth mother may wrap herself  
In a four-fold robe of white meal [snow]; . . .  
When our earth mother is replete with living waters,  
When spring comes,  
The source of our flesh,  
All the different kinds of corn  
We shall lay to rest in the ground with the earth mother's living waters,  
They will be made into new beings,  
Coming out standing into the daylight of their Sun father, to all sides  
They will stretch out their hands. . . .*

*Thus the Mother Earth is a living being, as are the waters and the Sun.*

## **Ecotheology Areas of Emphasis**

1. Divine presence in all creation. Panentheism.
2. Relational partnership of humans with creation and God. Stewardship as responsible care for and with, rather than dominion over.
3. Incarnational theology and sacramental theology: affirming of goodness of creation as the realm of God's activity and life.
4. Cosmic Christ: God's redeeming work is cosmic and not merely human-centered.
5. Environmental Justice: Ecotheology cannot replicate the marginalization of particular groups, but must address environmental issues through the lens of racism and oppression.
6. Eschatology: The future of humanity and of God's vision is wrapped up in the future of creation. Healing and restoration of the environment is human participation in God's future known in Christ.

## **A Few Resources for Further Exploration**

A web page with good summaries of various books on ecotheology: <http://aquakerstew.blogspot.com/2017/01/some-themes-in-contemporary-christian.html>

A paper by David Rhoads and Barbara Rossing on Christian mission in an ecological age: <https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository>  
[A\\_Beloved\\_Earth\\_Community\\_Christian\\_Mission\\_in.doc](#)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America resources on care of creation, including a link to the social statement *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements/Caring-for-Creation>

