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Commentary from Design For Ministry™
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Stewardship as creation (part 1) 15 March 2006

In her 1999 novel, *Children of God*, Mary Doria Russell writes of Jesuit missionaries traveling to a newly discovered planet to establish a mission much as they once did in the Americas. A central character is a decadent poet-musician who kills his family in order to rule his world. Remarkably, even in his ill-lived life, the poet came to a realization one of his followers later described:

"We had always been careful stewards of our inheritance. Our honor was to pass down, undegraded, whatever legacy we ourselves had received. To bequeath more was dishonor; this implied theft. To bequeath less was dishonor: this implied profligacy. But [he] showed us all that there could be creation! Something, out of nothing! Poetry, wealth, music, ideas, dance: out of nothing! Stewardship could encompass increase! Everyone began to see this, and we all wondered—even I wondered—what we had been frightened of all these years." (p. 227)

The idea here is that the fullest expression of stewardship is creation. This is a deep theme of the Scriptures as well. There we find that humans are expected to increase and to grow

in faith, knowledge, wisdom and love. They are invited to understand the intricacies of this world and to assist a creating God in making it possible to enjoy the world to come.

Reading stewardship literature as a whole one does not find this idea readily expressed. Stewardship remains stuck in the language of this earth, of not wasting, of wise management.

Focusing on wise management is not a problem. It is simply incomplete. Thankfully, more writers and educators are beginning to grasp an understanding that stewardship goes beyond this material world to encompass eternity. They also know that awareness of eternity should influence a response of generosity.

Even with this improvement a gap remains. Even with eternity in mind stewardship can remain an act of preserving and funding program that already exists. So we would benefit from more fully grasping that we are participants with God in creation (more about this next time).

—mark l. vincent