

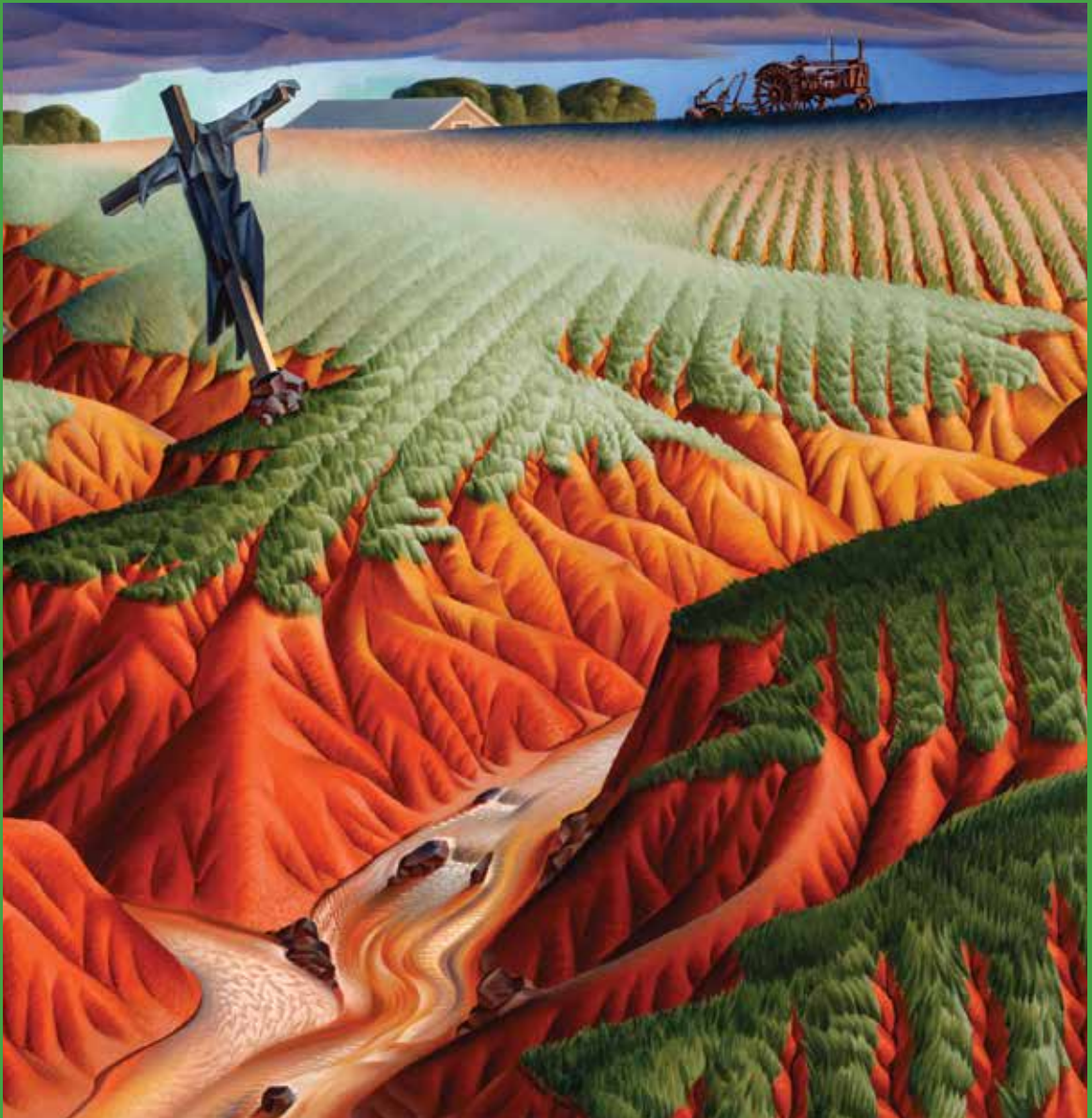
Spring 2019

# Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry

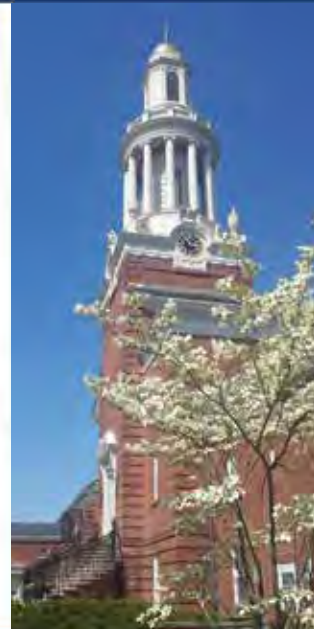
## Crucified Creation: A Green Faith Rising



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# Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

*a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry*

## COVER ART

*Crucified Land* (1939, oil on canvas)  
by Alexandre Hogue (1898-1994)  
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

## INSIDE PHOTOGRAPHY

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# From the Dean's Desk



Gregory E. Sterling  
The Reverend Henry L. Slack  
Dean of Yale Divinity School  
& Lillian Claus Professor  
of New Testament

Among the many challenges we face, one of them threatens every human on our planet: the unsustainability of our current ecological course. Some think this is a scientific and technological problem. It is true that it cannot be addressed without science and technology, yet science alone will not solve the crisis. Gus Speth, former dean of the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies at Yale, has been widely attributed to say: "I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse, and climate change. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy." Speth went on to say that "to deal with those issues we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists do not know how to do that." Speth was right.

Others view these challenges as a political issue: red versus blue. In a national study based on 1,278 respondents that the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication released in March 2018, 73 percent of registered voters agreed that climate change is occurring. But the extent to which they believed this was split along party lines: 95 percent of liberal Democrats and 88 percent of moderate/conservative Democrats believed that it is taking place, while only 68 percent of liberal/moderate Republicans and 40 percent of conservative Republicans thought so. The numbers were lower when voters were asked if they believed that climate change is primarily caused by human activity: 59 percent believed it is. These again break down along party lines. While most US voters may believe that humans are the principal cause of global warming, I do not think that a political solution is possible at present since we are the only major power to have pulled out of the Paris accord.

If we are not going to solve the issue of the environment solely by science and do not have the political will to address it as a country, what can be done? There is another dimension to address: the

ethical view. Pope Francis made this point in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'*. At least three factors suggest that climate change must be faced as an ethical issue.

First, for those of us who accept the Bible as an authoritative document, we must realize that we are part of creation and are charged with the stewardship of it. While humanity is presented as the apex of creation (Gen 1:26-30), we are charged with its care (Gen 2:4-10). We are not given carte blanche to treat creation with impunity, but are responsible for the care of it.

Second, we cannot misuse creation and leave our mess to subsequent generations: Intergenerational equity demands that we act in the present. Finally, the people who are most affected by climate change are the poor who lack the resources to respond. There are 55,000 homes along the Connecticut coastline that are now subject to flooding – especially in tidal surges – as a result of the rising waters of the Sound (it is rising by one-and-one-half inches every decade). A yacht club in Greenwich recently raised its building by six feet; the poor in Bridgeport and New Haven can do nothing. Social justice demands that we act on their behalf.

It is time that every minister challenge her or his congregation to act. Just as religion played an important role in the civil rights movement, so it must in the environmental crisis. We need to urge local action, action within our power despite the odds. I was in Lyon, France, last December and visited the Institut des Sources Chrétiennes that publishes Greek and Latin texts with French translations on facing pages. The Institut was founded in early 1940s by a group of French scholars living under Nazi occupation. The first volume they published was Philo of Alexandria's *De opificio mundi*. The selection of a Jewish author was no accident. These French scholars were saying to their Nazi overlords: You may occupy us, but you do not own us. Like these courageous scholars, we must take up the ethical issue of sustainability and act as we can.

This issue of *Reflections* is one way that Yale Divinity School is doing just that.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory E. Sterling".

Gregory E. Sterling, Dean



Protesters against climate-change deniers, Brussels  
© John Vink/Magnum Photos



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The rise of religious environmentalism has been welcome and helpful — but climate change is essentially a race, and at this point faith communities aren't pitching in fast enough or with sufficient heft to help change the outcome.

Thirty years ago it was understandable that churches didn't make climate change a priority. It was a new topic, appearing out of the blue — and in progressive denominations it at first seemed a bit of a luxury, to be addressed after hunger and war. (In conservative denominations environmentalism seemed — and in many tragic cases still does — like a waystation on the road to paganism.) That's shifted: From the pope's remarkable encyclical *Laudato si'* to the pastors willing to get arrested blocking pipelines, there's been serious commitment to change.

Still, given the scale of the challenge — which by any measure is the largest crisis human beings have yet stumbled into — it's not been the response we need. The world is on fire, but the church isn't. And

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**We've got to get outside our comfort zones. Because the planet is outside its comfort zone — way outside.**

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that's particularly strange since, as three decades of close and careful reading have revealed, the scriptures are full of the messages we need.

Actually, close and careful reading is barely required. The first page of the book is basically an environmental screed. God makes a beautiful world, pronounces it good, and turns it over to us to safeguard. We are told to dress it and to keep it. A few pages further on, when we screw up, God drowns the planet but makes sure to preserve a breeding pair of every creature on earth. It's Greenpeace on steroids.

And the gospel is just as clear. If our transcendent job is to love our neighbor, then what does it mean that we are drowning them, sickening them, turning their farms into desert and forest into ash? It means we are not doing what we have been called to do.

The "why" of our inaction hinges, I think, on questions of power. We've tended to do those things that we can do without confronting essential facts about our society. New insulation in the sanctuary? Solar panels atop the parsonage? Not a problem. But for at least some denominations and congregations, going further has meant an unacceptable level of tension. Episcopalians and Unitarians have

divested their holdings from fossil fuels; Presbyterians and Methodists have refused; the Vatican hasn't acted either, despite the pope's fine words. Even the fact that oil companies have lied for decades about the reality of climate change is not enough for us to confront them — the tension is too high.

But we've got to get outside our comfort zones. Because the planet is outside its comfort zone — way outside. We need bishops wearing collars going to jail to block fracking wells; we need parochial schools suspending classes to join the magnificent school strikes spreading across the globe. We need a relentless moral challenge to the powers and principalities currently taking our planet if not to hell then to someplace of a remarkably similar temperature. This is a social challenge, not an individual one: At this point we can't make the math of climate change work one household at a time. It's not the job of the sexton.

None of the good that we do adds up to the scale of the damage now occurring. Combine every animal that the Heifer Project ever sent overseas, and every irrigation pump and every hospital built by every church aid program, and it can't match the damage that comes from what we've done: There are whole nations now on the edge of disappearing beneath the waves.

If "normal" on earth is now disappearing, it's time for normal in the church to vanish too. This is the great challenge and emergency of our time on earth, just as the fight against fascism was the great challenge of the 20th century. We don't need to kill or be killed to meet this crisis, but we do need to be mobilized. We don't need bystanders.

And if we do — well, there's the chance for renewal that always comes with faithful witness. To let young people see the church at the forefront of the fight they care about the most would be to present them with fresh evidence that religion is not just what they've come to believe. Scientists have done their job and provided us with a warning. Engineers have done their job and provided us with the technologies that could conceivably rescue us — the solar panels and windmills that provide true hope. Time for the people of faith to do their particular job and fight like heck for the future.

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*Author and environmentalist Bill McKibben is a founder of 350.org, the first planet-wide, grassroots climate change movement, which has organized 20,000 rallies around the world. His 1989 book The End of Nature is regarded as the first book for a general audience about climate change. His latest book, Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out? (Henry Holt), was released in April.*

# Hopeful Signs in an Uncommon Alliance



By Mary Evelyn Tucker

*Amid all the alarming environmental news of our time we need cause for rejoicing, for renewing hope. And there is cause. The work of engaged scholars and theologians along with the emerging force of religious environmentalists is a large part of this tapestry of hope.*

Religions have been late in responding to environmental issues, yet they are now clearly gaining traction. The reason is they have the ability to change from within and to spark change beyond their doors. These are not static institutions. History has shown how religions have inspired social change – in the 19th century with the abolitionist movement, in the 20th century with civil rights, labor rights, and women's rights. In each case, religions pressed the moral dimension of a social issue, and shifts in political attitudes and individual behavior occurred.

## **Projects in Every Direction**

This is happening today in the environmental movement as it becomes clearer that human values are essential to creating pathways toward a sustainable future. Every major religion has made statements on

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**Religions have been late in responding to environmental issues, yet they are now clearly gaining traction. These are not static institutions.**

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the environment, eco-justice offices have been set up, both clergy and laity are becoming active, eco-theologians are publishing widely, the greening of seminaries is now a subject of planning and action, and a new field of study and teaching is appearing in colleges and universities.

Other religious organizations are turning attention to climate change. Interfaith Power and Light has sparked hundreds of congregations to change their light bulbs and reduce their carbon footprint.

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has organized international symposia to highlight water issues. The pope has written an important encyclical, *Laudato si'*, that brings together ecology, economy, equity, and ethics. His call for an “integral ecology” for the wellbeing of people and the planet is being heralded around the world. The United Nations along with the Norwegian government launched an unprecedented Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in 2017, with the aim of making the protection of rainforests an ethical priority for the world's faiths. The key spokespersons in this effort are the Indigenous peoples who live in these forests.

Religious environmentalism elsewhere ranges from river cleanup and tree planting to embracing clean energy and reducing waste. Participants endeavor to embody sustainability in their own lives, build eco-justice in communities, and link humans to the planet in mutually enhancing ways. Such projects are unfolding in all the world's religions.

## **Eco-religious Infusions**

Perhaps even more striking is the news that scientists and policy-makers are calling for the involvement of religious communities in environmental issues. Indeed, this has directly affected the field of study of religion and ecology. It was in this spirit that my husband, John Grim, and I were invited in 2006 by Gus Speth, then Dean of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, to come to Yale to teach in the joint degree program between F&ES and the Divinity School. After 40 years of experience in environmental law and policy, Dean Speth felt that new approaches were needed, especially an infusion



of moral voices from the world's religions. YDS later initiated a master's degree in religion and ecology, the first seminary to do so. There is a realization at Yale and beyond that religious values and scientific knowledge are indispensable partners in finding environmental solutions.

The academic field of religion and ecology is helping religious traditions reformulate their teachings and ethics to embrace human-Earth relations. For example, the biblical notion of human "dominion" over the planet is being reexamined by Jewish and Christian theologians so that stewardship becomes a central concept for environmental action. At YDS Willie Jennings is noting the absence of a doctrine of creation in Christian theology; Clifton Granby is calling for a move from an "ethic of owning" to an "ethic of belonging." Christian theologians are

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**What has happened to the environment in Asia in the last four decades is almost inconceivable. The Asia I traveled through in the 1970s was worlds apart from where it is today.**

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contributing understandings of incarnation as the Logos of the entire universe, of sacraments as vessels of sacred elements of nature, of ritual as a reflection of the great seasonal cycles, and of ethics as an embrace of eco-justice. Such formulations are expanding traditions and grounding practice. Creative rethinking is leading to environmental change.

### **A Journey Commences**

Coming to Yale is part of a longer personal journey into the conjunction of religion and ecology. For me it began some 45 years ago when I taught at a university in Japan. There I fell in love with Asia's varied cultural traditions and art – Zen gardens and flower arrangement, the spectacular beauty of the countryside, the agricultural cycles of rice growing, also the ancient city of Kyoto.

When I arrived in Japan in 1973, a few years after the first Earth Day, environmental problems were at the periphery of public awareness. In the US the liberation movements of the 1960s for civil rights and women's rights were still progressing. Vietnam bitterly divided the country. The Watergate scandal cast a long shadow over domestic politics. I needed distance from the upheavals of the war, having spent my college years in Washington, DC. For nearly two years I was immersed in a Japanese university in a southern provincial city that had very little exposure to foreigners. It changed my life forever as I tried to

understand the worldviews and values of Japanese society, culture, and religions, so different from the West.

On my way back to the US, I traveled through Southeast Asia and India. I stopped in Saigon to visit a friend who was working in an orphanage. This was my first encounter with the environmental effects of war: The devastation of Agent Orange was evident across the countryside, with its subsequent effect on people. The impact of seeing this war-ravaged country a few months before South Vietnam fell was almost too much to bear. This was only the beginning.

What has happened to the environment in Asia in the last four decades is almost inconceivable. The Asia I traveled through in the 1970s was worlds apart from where it is today. The cities of Taipei and Bangkok, Seoul and Delhi, while poor, were livable then, before rapid and relentless modernization hit like a great tidal wave, engulfing everything in its path. In many cities like Beijing and Bangalore the tsunami of modernization has wiped away whole sections of the metropolis, and the hasty reconstruction and increase in cars have unleashed relentless air pollution. The search for economic progress has dammed the Yangtze River in southern China and the Narmada River in western India in some of the largest engineering projects the world has ever seen – submerging ancient archaeological sites and uprooting millions of people. This "progress" has exacted a price on people and on the planet.

### **A Balancing Act**

This trauma of industrialization in India and China is putting enormous pressure on ecosystems everywhere. Two billion people living in poverty in these countries have struggled to gain the fruits of modernity and the promise of progress. Should not they too have electricity and cars, clean water and computers? How can one balance economic development and environmental protection under these circumstances? This is one of the most difficult issues of our crisis.

With a concern for both environmental degradation and its consequences for human flourishing, I asked myself, "How can I contribute to the discussions on the environment not being a scientist or a policy-maker but a historian of religions?" I realized the world's religions might be an entryway: Religious traditions that shape human-Earth relations could play a role in solving environmental problems. Moreover, it is clear that environmental ethics have a religious and cultural basis and will be formulated differently in Asia than in the US, differently in Africa than in Latin America, and certainly in China than in India.

This was the origin of the Harvard Conference Series on World Religions and Ecology from 1996-1998 that John Grim and I organized. We were especially fortunate to have studied with scholars who were deeply concerned with reformulating traditional religious values in modern contexts – Thomas Berry at Fordham, Theodore de Bary at Columbia, and Tu Weiming at Harvard.

### Slow Dawning

When we initially invited scholars of Confucianism and Buddhism to Harvard to explore the intersection of religion and ecology in the mid-1990s, this was a new idea. It took some lengthy phone conversations to bring people on board and overcome skepticism. After all, they were scholars of complex historical traditions, translators of ancient texts, and decoders of centuries-old commentaries. What could these specialized studies have to do with environmental problems in Asia where industrialization was beginning to erode ecosystems?

But the response was remarkable. Within a short period we had a full cadre of participants committed from both North America and Asia. However, there was a hitch – no foundations were interested

### The alliance of religion and ecology is both a field and a force – a field growing within academia and a force of empowerment on the ground.

in giving grants. It was a novel idea to them that religions might actually have an environmental role to play. Fortunately, with some persuasion, a few key foundations eventually supported the conference series and the ongoing work in this field.

With the collaboration of some 800 scholars of religion and environmentalists, the 10 conferences and volumes were completed from 1996 to 2004. In 1998 John and I founded the Forum on Religion and Ecology, which was brought to Yale in 2006. In addition, scholars have established vigorous groups in the American Academy of Religion on religion and ecology and on religion and animals.

I tell this story of the beginnings of religion and ecology to illustrate several things. First, support for this work has endured and expanded despite great odds and endless uncertainty. Second, collaboration between science and religion has been central from the start. Third, the alliance of academics and activists has proved synergistic beyond expectation, sparking new forms of scholarship and action.

Where does this leave us? With a sense of renewed hope. The alliance of religion and ecology is both a field and a force – a field growing within academia and a force of empowerment for religious leaders and laity alike. Some have called for an ecological reformation of religious traditions. This is already underway, but it will take time. Yet there is hope that our century's eco-justice needs will call us to ignite an even broader renaissance that will truly renew the face of the Earth.

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*Mary Evelyn Tucker is a senior lecturer and research scholar at Yale, where she teaches in the joint master's degree program between YDS and F&ES. She directs the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale with her husband, John Grim, a Yale senior lecturer and research scholar at YDS, F&ES, and the Department of Religious Studies. The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale is an international project that sponsors conferences, publications, and a website ([fore.yale.edu](http://fore.yale.edu)), all exploring religious worldviews, texts, and ethics in order to broaden understanding of contemporary environmental concerns. In 2011 they released a multi-media project called Journey of the Universe with evolutionary philosopher Brian Swimme, drawing on the work of historian of religions Thomas Berry. Journey of the Universe includes a book from Yale University Press, an Emmy-award winning film available on Netflix, and a series of 20 interviews with scientists, historians, and environmentalists. See info about upcoming events and online courses at [journeyoftheuniverse.org](http://journeyoftheuniverse.org).*

### A LIST OF SELECTED BOOKS

- *Thomas Berry: A Biography* by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal (Columbia, 2019)
- *The Dream of the Earth* by Thomas Berry (Sierra Club, 1988; reprinted, Counterpoint, 2016)
- *The Great Work* by Thomas Berry (Bell Tower, 1999)
- *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology* edited by Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim (Routledge, 2016)
- *Ecology and Religion* by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Island Press, 2014)
- *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Orbis, 2009)
- *The Sacred Universe* edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker (Columbia, 2009)
- *Journey of the Universe* by Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker (Yale, 2011)
- *Worldly Wonder: Religions Enter their Ecological Phase* by Mary Evelyn Tucker (Open Court, 2003)

## A PRAYER FOR OUR EARTH

By Pope Francis

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

✱ *This prayer is included in Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical Laudato si'*



We find our global situation fraught with irony. Over the past century, science has begun to weave together the historical story of a cosmos that

emerged some 14 billion years ago. The vast complexity of this universe story is beginning to dawn on us. At the same time, we are becoming conscious of the growing environmental crisis and the rapid destruction of species and habitat. We are recognizing just how late is our arrival in this stupendous evolution of the universe – and how quickly we are foreshortening its future flourishing. Living in the midst of an extinction period is one of the greatest challenges for the human spirit.

Clearly the nourishing of human imagination and spirit is at stake. Yet they shrivel with an anguish and confusion that is heart-wrenching to see. The destruction of living forms around us is diminishing our capacity to dream and hope. Without vibrant oceans and rivers, without lush quiet forests, or the movements and sounds of animals

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## Living in the midst of an extinction period is one of the greatest challenges for the human spirit.

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about us, we will create a silence – a silence of lament – even larger than the silent spring Rachel Carson predicted. This lament will not end soon, for we are just beginning to write the eulogies and sing the requiems for life that is disappearing. Climate change is increasing this loss.

We are groping, limping, struggling. But in this dark night we seek to return to who we are as children of the Earth – who feel the mysterious rhythms of life in the movement from sunrise to sunset, in the migrating patterns of birds and wild animals, the call of whales in the ocean depths, the change of seasons as the planet finds its way around the sun and back again.

Rediscovering our purpose to enhance life, not destroy it, is crucial. No longer are we citizens of nations alone but of the entire globe. There is no time for wavering. We need to become a beneficial planetary species.

Patience, courage, and endless endurance – with a dash of humor – will steer us through the whirlwind. The lights from the shore are there if we can only come up to the deck and be guided by them. In a dark moonless night this requires a new kind of learning of currents, winds, and stars for

navigation. Our Odyssey is at hand.

Chinese Confucian cosmology embeds the human in a series of concentric circles. They range outward from the person, to the family, the educational world, the larger society, the government, then on to nature and the cosmos itself. Humans are urged to see themselves not as isolated but profoundly interrelated. Nature is a dynamic entity with which humans can harmonize their lives.

Over the last two centuries, however, particularly in the West, the scientific paradigm has become dominant. Science tends to objectivize what it describes. Scientific and religious cosmologies have therefore co-existed uneasily. Some scientists and philosophers conclude that the universe is largely a random accretion of matter, with no larger purpose.

However, a more compelling evolutionary account of the universe is entering into human awareness. The opportunity of our time is to narrate this new empirically grounded story in a way that might help humans reorient themselves in the universe. That is, enlist the scientific facts into a larger inquiry about the perennial questions: Where do we come from? Why are we here? How do we belong?

Our interconnected global challenges are calling us to the next stage of evolutionary history. This requires a change of consciousness and values, moving us forward to a collective identity as a species with a common origin story and shared destiny. This is why we were inspired to create the *Journey of the Universe* multi-media project – an Emmy-award-winning film, a book, a series of conversations, and online courses. (See [journeyoftheuniverse.org](http://journeyoftheuniverse.org).)

We are still discovering our responsibility within the story. This story enhances the uniqueness of each human, deepens the sense of inner subjectivity, and affirms the eros, kinship, and friendship that enliven every life. But the human community has also the capacity now to realize our intrinsic unity amid enormous diversity.

So we have a staggering “great work” now before us, as Thomas Berry suggested, to renew the face of planet Earth. That is what is asked of us now. To renew our wetlands and restore our woodlands. To regenerate fisheries and restore mangroves. To reinhabit cities and countryside in a sustaining way. To participate in healthy cycles of carbon and nitrogen.

We have the opportunity to become worthy of our name *homo sapiens sapiens*. But we have to earn the name of sapiens – wisdom. *Journey of the Universe* connects the epic story of evolution with current ecological, economic, and social transformation. The awe and wonder that this great story evokes can be a source of nurturing resilience for the work ahead.





An Orca whale jumping in the Kenai Fjords, Alaska  
© Dennis Stock /Magnum Photos



# Eco-Theology and Zoning Meetings:

An Interview with Willie Jennings

*Willie Jennings is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Africana Studies at YDS. His research includes liberation theologies, cultural identities, and anthropology. A Baptist minister, he is the author of The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race (Yale, 2010). He was raised in Michigan by parents who were sharecroppers in the South before moving north. In Michigan, his family kept a garden, which helped them survive and gave them a healing connection to the earth and to each other. In a recent online YDS Quadcast called “What Does Theology Say About Ecology?”, he said: “There is a priesthood of the human creature in relation to other creatures, but that priesthood means we lead the other creatures in the worship of God, not that we are kings over the other creatures.” In a recent interview with Reflections, he spoke of the need for a richer doctrine of creation in church life.*

## **Regarding a lost sense of landscape ...**

The difficulty begins with our doctrine of creation – we don’t really have one. We Christians say God created the world, but after saying that we don’t have much to add. The result is we’ve contributed to the deepening split between our bodies and the world. By now we’re habituated to thinking our bodies are not only distinct from the earth but separate from the earth.

When early Europeans explored the rest of the world, they decided they had “come into possession” of the land. They adopted a particular idea about the land: The land was something that could be “owned” by individuals forever. The strangeness and absurdity of this notion – that the earth can be owned – got lost, and we got accustomed to looking at the earth as a thing. Then Christians re-baptized this view by saying God gave us dominion over the planet, the right to exploit it, extract from it. This has made us oblivious to a sense of place and landscape. We talk about the earth in the language of possession, property, real estate, price point, borders, the boundaries of my land versus yours.

## **How the logic of possession dominates debate ...**

This is a tragedy at many levels. It has impoverished our discussion about the environment, limiting the questions we ask. Because we’ve been shaped by the logic of possession, we primarily ask just three questions about the land, 1) “Who owns it?” 2) “How do I extract from it what I need?” And 3) “What piece of land should I possess – that is, where’s the best

place I can live?” I think of the quote from Vine Deloria Jr.: “Americans wanted to feel a natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness. Yet, in order to control the landscape, they had to destroy the original inhabitants.”

An attitude of separation is reflected in all Western education, which is built on the idea that the world is not animate or communicative but an ob-

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## **The God of creation joined the creation, willingly, joyfully. How do we live into that?**

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ject to be studied, an object that doesn’t interact with our psychological or spiritual lives.

## **Regarding the life of Jesus and the life of the earth ...**

The incarnation itself means God cares very much about the earth, not first in terms of possessing it but communing with it. When Jesus spoke, every anecdote and illustration he gave came out of a sense of place, an experience of responding to the land, animals, people. He showed deep communion with the world. Yes, he came out of an agrarian culture. But he chose to make himself present to Israel in this way, carrying something of the Creator’s grasp of the creation: The God of creation joined the creation, willingly, joyfully. How do we live into that? Could it be that we should use Jesus’ presence to let the land and animals speak through him?

A healthy doctrine of creation understands we are creatures with other creatures. We are made in the image of God, but this does not negate our connection with other creators. The image of God does not mean we are no longer creatures. It means we are the creatures who are called to respond to the word of God.

***On time, space, and place: a physical world waiting to be heard ...***

A common argument says time is more important to God than space – that redemption happens on a timeline, and space isn't a factor. In other traditions, the temporal and the spatial are not in competition. Jesus demonstrates this. When he spoke of the fu-

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**I want people of faith to crowd into those zoning meetings. You discover how segregation is built inside real estate policy, how violence is formed inside zoning policy.**

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ture, a favorite image he used was the seed. With a seed, the future arrives from the ground up, not as a force coming toward us.

Fortunately, an increasing number of people realize we need a better theological vision of our relations to the earth. An eco-theological vision starts with connectivity. The world is animate and communicative. It is not inert. It is a world that is speaking. It is semiotic. We forget that there was a time when people knew the world was connective, and it spoke through us. When we hear that message today, Christians very often don't know what to do with that!\*\*\*

***Relating eco-theology, segregation, and city zoning policy ...***

An eco-theological vision has all kinds of moral, pragmatic consequences. It prompts us to think very carefully about local building environments, the issue of the struggle for habitation – and who gets to choose. We've allowed the logic of capitalism to tell us what's possible – the way cities are configured, the condition of our streets, the specific layout of bus routes and sidewalks. But ideologies and politics drive those choices. All kinds of ethical decisions are made that are presented as market decisions. I tell churches to get to know the land, the landscape where they are, and how it works. We live

woefully ignorant of the geography we inhabit. People should be drawn together to ask, How should we live on this land? How are decisions made about where schools go, where goods and services and green spaces go?

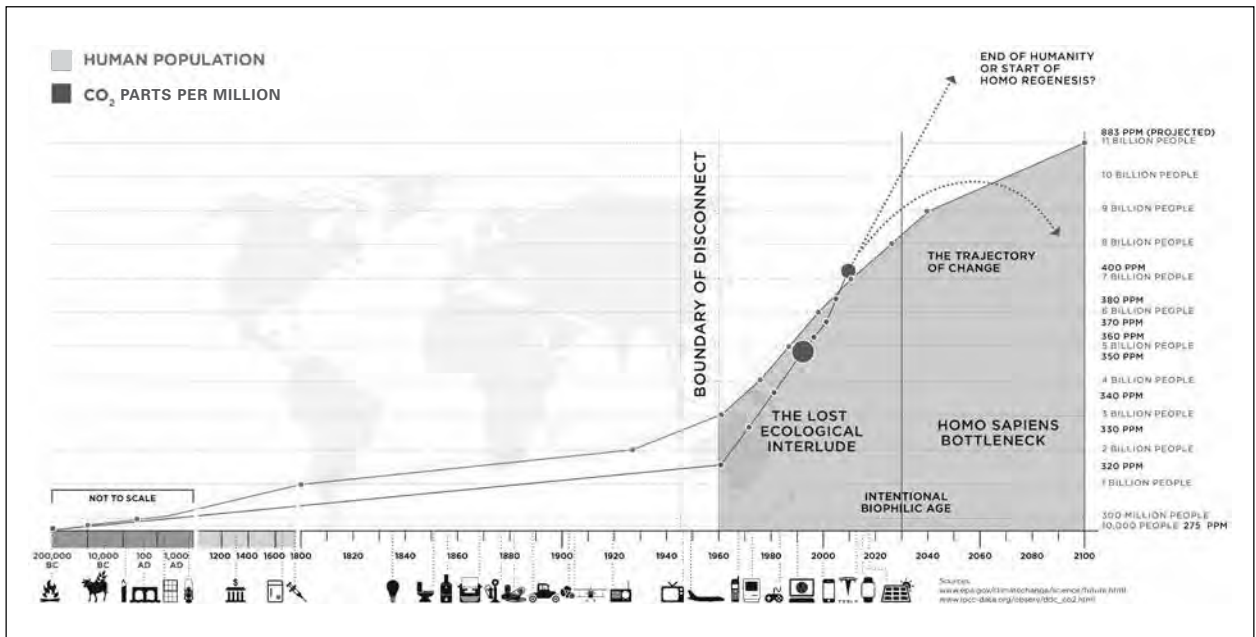
To learn about the use of the land is already to step into a deeply ethical space: You're learning who's making the decisions. You discover how segregation is built inside real estate policy, how violence is formed inside zoning policy. Policing practices always follow zoning practices. I want people of faith to crowd into those zoning meetings.

We come to understand that race and place are two sides of the same coin. Historically, there was a deep connection between place and personal identity. Bodies and land were one, and they were one with the animals on the land. To understand who they were, you had to understand *where* they were. Once they were stripped of their identity with the land, race became a way to identify people. That powerful connection with the land is difficult now for many of us to grasp. By now we can barely imagine it. But until we reckon with the fact that racial identity was substituted for place and place-centered identity, the power of race will remain an ever-renewing force with each generation of race-formed children.

**TO THE RAIN**  
By Ursula K. Le Guin

Mother rain, manifold, measureless,  
falling on fallow, on field and forest,  
on house-roof, low hovel, high tower,  
downwelling waters all-washing, wider  
than cities, softer than sisterhood, vaster  
than countrysides, calming, recalling:  
return to us, teaching our troubled  
souls in your ceaseless descent  
to fall, to be fellow, to feel the root,  
to sink in, to heal, to sweeten the sea.

\*\*\* For more, see the YDS Quadcast "What Does Theology Say About Ecology" at [soundcloud.com/yaleuniversity/the-quadcast-what-does-theology-say-about-ecology](https://soundcloud.com/yaleuniversity/the-quadcast-what-does-theology-say-about-ecology).



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In this graphic, created by Jason F. McLennan,

**Boundary of Disconnect** outlines the historic shift in technology that gave humans a nearly complete separation from nature in daily life.

**Lost Ecological Interlude** refers to the period of time where humanity had enough scientific evidence of the threat of climate change and other global environmental threats and yet did nothing about it.

**Homo Sapiens Bottleneck** predicts a period of upheaval, perhaps between 2030 and 2100, when civilization must come to grips with the ordeal of extreme weather, economic disruptions, and climate refugees on a huge scale.

**Intentional Biophilic Age** would represent a turning point of reconnection between civilization and the natural environment, through new forms of building design and energy consumption.

“With every passing month, year and decade of inactivity and denial, the consequences of our choices become more serious,” McLennan says.





I have long felt that the environmental crisis is also a crisis of faith and a deep manifestation of how society has lost touch with ways of living equitably and justly in community on this planet. For many years now, society's message on the environment has been that we need to change our ways in order to "save the planet" and "save future generations" from the excesses of our lifestyles and technological pursuits. Both framings have induced complacency, an unhealthy distance from the issues. The climate crisis was always something out there, just far off enough in the future to excuse us from immediate action – an abstract, distant threat competing with seemingly more urgent issues closer by.

But the global climactic disruptions we now see are so indisputable, backed by such unprecedented agreement of science, and so widespread in its threat, that further inaction is no longer morally permissible. The extreme weather effects of climate change are descending on all of us living today, not some future generation or far off cohort. The rates

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**"Good" can be defined as nothing less than all of humanity playing the active role of healer, looking for every opportunity for the regeneration of our planet.**

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of decline of global habitat and species counts are more than disturbing trends. Alarming, they are of immediate consequence to our entire food chain.

As an architect and urban planner, I have long grappled with the fact that it is our buildings and city designs that have the largest single impact on issues of climate, material extraction, and resource use broadly. Humanity's largest artifacts create significant negative upstream and downstream impacts, and yet, with just a few exceptions, we continue to build in the same ways we have for decades, with only modest, incremental improvements due to better codes and technologies. A green building movement has worked hard to minimize damage yet ultimately amounts to little more than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.

Many of the biggest environmental laggards have been our churches and other religious institutions, owners of real estate worldwide. Why? Certainly, many lack funds to address issues like energy use, or they struggle to grasp the built environment's true impacts on people and health. But perhaps there also exists a real disconnect – an unhealthy separation of the expression of spiritual values from living in ways authentically aligned with

them. Without addressing our real impacts within the realms we directly control, our faith might at best look ineffectual and ungrounded, at worst hypocritical and dishonest.

When I launched the Living Building Challenge in 2006, it asked a simple yet profound question – "What does good look like?" How do we do good in the world while meeting our needs for shelter?

Surely this is a question of relevance for any faith tradition. The generally accepted idea that we just need to build buildings that are a little less bad than conventional – using less fossil fuel and recycling materials – is wholly inadequate to the grave global challenges facing us.

It is not acceptable to pollute more slowly, give cancer to just a smaller population and warm the planet just a little less, even though millions of people's lives are at stake. Yet this is the best that most "green buildings" achieve.

Living Buildings take a different approach, requiring buildings to have a net positive impact on an ecosystem, with no harmful emissions released through operations, and adapt themselves to place and climate just like trees and plants surrounding them. Given what we're facing, "good" can be defined as nothing less than all of humanity playing the active role of healer, looking for every opportunity for the regeneration of our planet.

Yale Divinity School has embraced these ideas as central to a 21st-century eco-theology and taken a position of leadership so that future students who live and learn at YDS are exposed to a new relationship with the planet marked by a stewardship ethic. These students will experience first-hand how it is possible to align values with architecture and inspire change as they go out into the world to lead congregations or pursue other callings and ministries.

With planning underway now, the Yale Living Village will replace aging residential facilities at YDS with affordable dorms and community spaces that are powered completely by renewable energy, use only rainwater for all water needs, and treat all water and waste onsite before recharging the aquifer. The village will be built with non-toxic materials and will showcase healthy interiors filled with daylight. Designed to last more than a century, possibly two, the village will signal a new hopeful era, demonstrating to the world how faith institutions can use their values to inform the architecture they own and manage.

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# After the Inferno, Again



By Elizabeth Herron

*It was still dark when I woke to an urgent knocking on the front door and someone calling out. I made my way down the dim hall tugging on my robe and found my neighbor on the porch. There's a fire, she said. You must be ready to evacuate.*

Behind her the Northern California sky glowed, not with sunrise but a reddish smoke, and the air was a pale flutter of ash already accumulating on the doorstep and the car like dirty snow. I started packing.

A mere spark probably started the blaze. Fanned by the Diablo wind, the fire raced west over 27 miles of the Mayacamas Mountains, down the canyons, jumping a six-lane freeway, burning a trailer park, a Kmart shopping center, and the densely populated

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**It is estimated that the committed participation of just 3.5 percent of the population can create cultural shift. I want to be part of that 3.5 percent.**

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area of Coffey Park where 1,500 homes burned to the ground overnight. My own small town, just four miles west, was spared when the wind changed. By morning, ashes had spread clear to the coast. For days you would find pieces of scorched paper out in the yard, a partially burned photograph, a scrap of burned clothing.

The Tubbs Fire that roared down on Coffey Park in October 2017 burned simultaneously with the Glen Ellen Fire and the Atlas Peak Fire in Napa. We now see more and more such fires merging, with blazes so massive they make their own weather, clouds of smoke sometimes billowing five miles high. Global Forest Watch ([globalforestwatch.org](http://globalforestwatch.org)) keeps a map showing the hundreds of fires burning over the earth at a given time, many in places where wildfire is historically rare – Siberia and Scandinavia. Visible from space, fires hug the planet in

long plumes of smoke by day and long red ruffles at night. New research tells us hotter drier air, not drought, is the most significant factor in the frequency and intensity of wildfire. Desiccated biomass is highly flammable even over moist soil.

My car remained packed for two weeks as the fires burned in an irregular semi-circle north, east and southeast. Of those who were burned out, the lucky ones stayed with friends or family. Though hotels offered huge discounts, few of the displaced could afford to stay long. Fire refugees struggled in makeshift shelters until the rains came and mud flowed in. Many joined an already significant homeless population. Where did they go? We have no official accommodation for such numbers of people.

## **“Fire a Colossus Now”**

The magic words *resilience* and *Sonoma Strong* appear now on bumper stickers and posters. They have a hollow ring to my ear. In 2015, while the Valley Fire raged in Lake County, my partner's brother, Justin, texted, *Up here in WalMart parking lot evacuee food line & crowd of displaced people ... fire a colossus now ... Red flag wind. Firefighters from New Zealand*. Two years later the Tubbs Fire burned Coffey Park. Then last November the two worst fires on record in California erupted, the second of which, the now-infamous Camp Fire, reached Paradise in under three hours to incinerate the entire town. People died fleeing the inferno in their cars.

*Paradise*. The irony is not lost on us, or on people in San Francisco where the fire's smoke and ash blanketed the Golden City, and residents warned against outside exercise wore masks on the street.

At the same time, expensive Malibu homes were going up in smoke. Money cannot protect us from climate disruption. The unimaginable has now become the expected, and as Gov. Jerry Brown said, the new normal is going to be expensive. Already, one insurance company has declared bankruptcy.

Oregon, Washington, New Mexico, Colorado, and British Columbia are enduring bigger, more frequent fires, too. Last fall, I got off the plane in Seattle to temperatures in the 90s and the highest air pollution on the globe that day – smoke from fires burning in Canada and Eastern Washington. As the global temperature goes up, California has seen its hottest weather on record the past three years. Fire season now begins earlier and persists longer. It's easier these days to imagine what it must be like in places that once seemed impossibly distant – Bangladesh where seawater is turning the rivers brackish, Inuit villages where the ice is melting.

### Meeting Climate Crisis at Scale

I can drive a zero emissions car, eat organic, and buy local (all privileged responses, it should be noted), but my personal choices are no longer enough. We must address the climate crisis at speed and scale with institutional change. As Bill McKibben and others warn, nothing less will be enough.

Yet somehow denial persists. Denial is an unconscious strategy to avoid feeling helpless, but it drains the imagination of energy. Acknowledging the crisis, we can begin to identify and amplify sources of hope that enable creative action. And every time

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we take action, our spirit is strengthened. According to political scientist Erica Chenoweth's research, the committed participation of just 3.5 percent of the population can create cultural shift. I want to be part of that 3.5 percent.<sup>1</sup>

For each of us the sources of hope may be different. My own awakes when I have drunk deep from the well of silence. It blooms when I spend time among the trees or in the wildness of a walk along the coast. These feed my soul and give it the rest out of which my poems come, out of which I craft these words, out of which I rediscover the stark beauty of the winter garden and the nourishment of love..

And let's remember the way geese fly. The lead goose wedges open the air, reducing resistance for the others. They honk in support of one another. And

when the lead goose gets tired, that goose falls to the rear to rest, letting the next take a turn in front. That means community. That means action.

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*Poet Elizabeth Herron writes on art and ecology, the role of art in society, and the importance of natural systems and biodiversity for the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and the planet. See [elizabethherron.net](http://elizabethherron.net).*

### Note

- 1 Erica Chenoweth, "My Talk at TEDxBoulder: Civil Resistance and the 3.5% Rule," [rationalinsurgent.com](http://rationalinsurgent.com).

## ON FIRE

By Elizabeth Herron

A deer catches fire, no –  
the fire catches her  
wicks up her body  
and she becomes the flame

for an instant her bones white  
then black and crumbling  
becoming ash then  
pure heat –

the exquisite bristling fur  
of the cinnamon bear glows  
from his rounded back  
his paws raised  
each claw a candle

the rabbit, bobcat and mouse  
their whiskers bright  
and fine as the lines of a web

the spiders are just sparks  
blown skyward –  
no separate existence  
one with the God of Fire

a hungry joyful roar  
leaping through trees  
racing the grasses  
utterly free and unforgiving



Julia Hill during her 738-day residence in a 200-foot-tall ancient redwood in California (from December 1997-December 1999) to prevent loggers from cutting it down.  
© Stuart Franklin/Magnum Photos





Close to where I live, a narrow footpath divides two divergent worlds: the open water of Long Island Sound and the congested interstate highway. As I walk, I turn my head to view the beauty of the tidal water and the coastal birds wading in it. I turn the other way and see the drifting garbage and fast-moving cars on an enormous traffic interchange. I am a pedestrian in a perilous place, walking an edge, looking into the thick, layered turbulence of human making.

As Christians waking up to the crisis of the earth, it can be easy to miss what is essential and most sustaining. Even while recognizing the calamities unfolding around us, we might not see as we are called to see. Whether we are working on a solution or uncertain of where to begin, the temptation is to divide our field of vision in two. We see what is beautiful, perhaps a pristine landscape, and

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**Amid the clatter of our concrete civilization, there are deeper melodies. The light of Christ is rising up through the ravaged earth.**

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what is not beautiful, such as a degraded wasteland. Alarmed by the contrast, we rush into action. We plan. We conserve. We recycle. Yet our vision remains divided, and burdened.

Does divine beauty shimmer only on one side, I wonder, as I look back over the water. Isn't it also part of the built environment? What if I can embrace the beautiful and, *in the same instant*, its opposite also, through my faith? Am I not called through Christ, the One in whom all things hold together (Col 1:17), to see a radiance that includes the world's wholeness *and* its fragmentation, its beauty *along with* its devastation? And compelled to imagine its potential healing? In *Hymn of the Universe*, Teilhard de Chardin describes the divine milieu as a place of inexhaustible potential where all matter is instilled with spiritual power.

The radiance of the resurrected life in Jesus Christ is more than an ephemeral experience of divine love. It is accessible in my daily, disconnected, wayward life. It regards the highway, supermarket, landfill, smokestack, and still sees beauty. It envelops the ugliness of my degradation of the planet and the suffering I have caused. It insists on my direct confrontation with God's love and presence in all things, no matter how much my ignorance

and self-interest have despoiled it. The good news of redemption reaches everywhere.

This is a vision radiant and practical: I see where I am and what I can do. I realize that the smallest of my actions matter. I uncover unexpected, concrete outcomes amid the vast scale of the ecological crisis. Turning off lights, avoiding disposable utensils, riding my bike – things I was doing before – take on greater clarity. I discover with zeal ever more things to conserve and limit.

Admittedly, in a society that values large-scale achievement, seeing in this way does not appear to solve anything. It seems inconsequential, as if I am just beholding, losing precious time. This practice of radiance, however, shifts my attention to the things in my reach. Waking up to them, I see that lesser actions, those overlooked in my hurried, perfectionist, more desperate efforts, become deeply significant. I become alert to the footprint I am making, especially to the distinctions between what is necessary, such as physical and spiritual nourishment, and what are the choices of a privileged lifestyle, such as the comfort of temperature control or the ease of auto transport.

Without this pursuit of radiance, I behave as if my visionary potential is depleted, my capacities are fixed, and my developmental journey is over. I feel a bit like the disciple Peter who, after Jesus describes how hard it is to attain the kingdom of God, complains that the disciples have already tried everything: "Look, we have left everything and followed you." (Mark 10:28) I think I am doing all I can.

As followers of the Christ, we dare to see the larger cosmic radiance in all places. We witness something immediate and intimate beneath the rushed and cursory way of seeing. Alongside a congested highway, there is a pathway into luminous terrain. Beneath the layers of industrial ruin and human habitation, there is ancestral bedrock infused with God's spirit. Amid the rumble of our world, there are deeper melodies. We are pilgrims in a civilization made of concrete, roadways, and human industry, immersed in our institutions of learning and productivity. Yet the light of Christ is rising up through the ravaged earth, offering us the vision to heal ourselves and our world in the smallest of ways.

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*The Rev. Catherine Amy Kropp, recently ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church in Maine, will graduate this year with a Master of Sacred Theology degree, focusing on the theme of the cosmic Christ and its applications for parish ministry.*



Workers checking petroleum pipelines at Abu Rudeis oil fields, Sinai  
© Micha Bar-Am/Magnum Photos

# Race, Trauma, and Climate Change



By Elizabeth Allison '03 M.A.R., '03 M.E.M.

*Since at least the 1950s, scientists, policymakers, and oil companies have understood the threats of climate change to human society and the future of life on Earth.<sup>1</sup> During this time, oil producers have engaged in obfuscation and disinformation campaigns to downplay the demonstrable hazards of continued fossil fuel production.<sup>2</sup>*

Meanwhile, policymakers have been unable to make significant headway in slowing the pace of climate disruption. Despite overwhelming scientific evidence – despite the fact that low-lying and coastal communities now experience flooding from rising seas, farmers battle intensified droughts and storms, and migrants flee from various countries in part because of worsening environmental conditions – many in the US remain resistant to the scientific consensus.

## **A History of Denial**

Beyond the disastrous effects of deliberate disinformation, the psychological dynamics of trauma offer another way of understanding this stubborn refusal.

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**Only by unpacking the historical foundations of collective trauma can we begin to understand the refusal to address ecological issues that are right in front of us.**

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Though a detour into psychology may appear to lead us away from the climate change debate, I argue that it is only by unpacking the historical foundations of collective trauma – and analyzing the role of denial in American history – that the dominant power structure can begin to understand the refusal to address ecological issues that are right in front of us.

The founding of the US involves at least two cataclysmic collective traumas that have yet to be fully addressed: 1) the genocide of Native Americans; and 2) the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans.

These monumental epochs of suffering are pushed into the past in the minds of many, yet they remain unresolved. Building on the calls for reparations by thinkers like Ta-Nehisi Coates<sup>3</sup>, and the insight into the intersectionality of oppressions of Kimberlé Crenshaw<sup>4</sup>, I suggest that the persistence of unaddressed historical trauma has prevented us from addressing climate change as creatively and forcefully as the crisis demands.

## **A Psychological Loop**

Psychological trauma theory explains how an individual who has experienced trauma continues to rehearse and repeat the trauma in the absence of psychological reckoning. The unconscious repetition of the trauma feels compelling and unavoidable to the individual caught in it. Like Freud's "return of the repressed," the individual gets caught in a loop of psychological repetition, playing out the trauma over and over again in an effort to find a way out of past harms.

New understandings of the effects of intergenerational trauma show how past wounds continue to influence present wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Individual trauma on a mass scale may give rise to collective historical trauma that wears on the psyches of both oppressed and oppressor. As a society, Americans are caught in a systemic cycle of colonialist oppression and domination, in which African Americans, Native Americans, and people of color more generally are controlled and exploited in different guises, from slavery, genocide, and dispossession, to contemporary mass incarceration and murders. These

repetitions keep us all – descendants of victims and perpetrators – mired in the horror and shame of historical traumas, preventing us from moving forward collectively on any number of urgent issues.

### **Deficits of Empathy**

The oppression of Native and Indigenous peoples and Africans has required a tremendous suppression of compassion over the centuries. Indigenous and African peoples were constructed as nonhuman, undeserving of compassion or concern. In cutting off this feeling of empathy, colonists suppressed their own humanity, and taught themselves and their descendants to ignore and suppress feelings: Emotions were understood to be misleading and unreliable, irrelevant for decision-making. Those who expressed emotion – children and women – were untrustworthy narrators of their own experience, and needed to be taught to adopt rational, emotionless, “objective” thinking.

The environmental historian Carolyn Merchant has traced the rise of Western science in Europe’s early modern era.<sup>6</sup> During this time, the earth itself, which had been viewed as a nurturing and beneficent being, came to be seen as insentient “dead”

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### **The shame of historical traumas prevents us from moving forward on other urgent issues.**

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matter that could be used for any purpose that humans desired. No longer was mining – invading Earth’s body – forbidden out of fear of injuring her or raising her wrath. Mining was now allowed because soil and minerals were only material with no purpose of their own, available to serve human ends. A new scientific sensibility emerged – disinterested, objective – that regarded the planet in a more detached or disconnected way. From this “death of nature,” it was a short intellectual step to see other humans in an instrumentalist, ultimately disposable manner in order to justify the economic aims of those in power, paving the way for slavery and genocide.

The suppression of empathy for others left a mark of trauma on both the oppressed, whose lives and families and trajectories were obliterated, and also on the oppressor, who had to actively suppress human connection. By denying the damage the instrumentalist worldview imposed on both the oppressed and the oppressors, white Americans<sup>7</sup> have failed to grapple with a core part of our identity and have remained mired in a cycle of shame and repression. The unspeakable acts of historical

trauma give shame immense power.<sup>8</sup>

With history walled off from daily life and consciousness, trauma claims too much unconscious attention and energy. American politics recapitulates the harms of the past in endless cycles of recrimination and denial. Intergenerational trauma gobbles up coping mechanisms, leaving little psychic energy for creative adaptation to new circumstances.

On the environmental front, the ongoing suppression of empathic emotion prevents descendants of oppressors from acknowledging – and truly *feeling* – the damage that our fossil fuel-intensive lifestyle imposes on all life. Adopting the stance of disinterested science and economic rationality hampers the capacity for empathy with others, human and nonhuman, hurt by climate change. Moving forward requires looking back, reckoning with the suffering inherent in the founding of the US, and investigating ways to bring about justice and reparations. This process will free up emotional and intellectual energy to face the fresh crises of the new century.

### **Voices of the Churches**

The church knows something about brokenness, repentance, and the healing that can come from seeking forgiveness. This is the time for churches to take a leadership role in bringing to light the ongoing injury caused by the colonialist mentality, and helping congregants reckon with their disparate positions in a society that values some lives more than others. A reckoning would begin to repair the fabric of American society.

Such a reckoning, conducted alongside critical technological and policy innovations to reduce carbon emissions, would help work through some of the anger and shame that keeps so many locked away in isolated individualism. Recognizing and confronting the legacies of pain and shame would free up energy to address the climate crisis directly and fearlessly and connect ecological devastation to the original deficit of empathy. Greater recognition of the knowledge traditions of Indigenous and African societies could provide new insights about living with respect for the natural world.

The current moment requires the gifts of everyone on the planet. Addressing climate change without worsening social inequities is the largest challenge humanity has ever faced. We need to tap into every insight, try every experiment to find ways of living in greater harmony on a thriving planet. Five hundred years of colonialism, and 70 years of hyper-consumptive capitalism, have brought ruin to the planet. Rather than following the domina-

tor pathways of the colonialist mentality that have failed us again and again – a common definition of insanity – more inclusive thinking would reconceive existing power structures and honor suppressed insights about ecological resilience carried in cultures around the world. With action necessary on climate change, and just over a decade to decarbonize the global economy, dominant structures must recognize the urgent necessity of repenting past harms and seeking to make amends through reparations, and then moving forward collectively to co-create a flourishing future.

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## Notes

- 1 Nathaniel Rich, "Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change," *New York Times*, Aug. 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/08/01/magazine/climate-change-losing-earth.html>. Accessed 2/22/2019.
- 2 Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (Bloomsbury, 2010).
- 3 Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>. Accessed Feb. 26, 2019.
- 4 Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Issue 1, Article 8. <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>. Accessed Feb. 26, 2019.
- 5 Gabor Maté, *When the Body Says No: Understanding the Stress-Disease Connection* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003).
- 6 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (HarperCollins, 1980).
- 7 I write as a white, middle-class, academic woman who speaks, primarily, to similarly situated people.
- 8 Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (Avery, 2012).

1. Recruit at least three friends from your congregation who care about sustainability as an aspect of faith.
2. Meet with your pastoral leader(s) to get their endorsement.
3. Research your denomination's statements on creation care.
4. Become an officially recognized group in the congregation.
5. In your first Green Team meetings:
  - a. Craft a mission statement. If your tradition has a statement on sustainability, incorporate that.
  - b. Brainstorm about what you hope to accomplish as a team. Go wild with this list – don't hold back. Highlight up to three action items that can be accomplished within the first year.
  - c. Set a timeline of practical goals and a meeting schedule. Consider meeting once a month when getting started.
  - d. Issue news releases about Green Team initiatives in congregational media outlets.
6. Above all, pray together, learn together, and enjoy creation together!

## Some Beginning Entry Points

1. Plan one event in the first six months – perhaps a class, a documentary screening, establishing a community garden or a tree planting. Consider "greening" a congregational event already planned.
2. Ask pastoral leaders to include environmental stewardship themes within regular services or classes.

## Embracing Energy Efficiencies

1. Review the power bills for your buildings. Meet with the property staff to determine which energy efficiency projects to adopt.
2. Strive for a 25-percent energy reduction.

## Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rejoice

1. Establish a recycling program in your congregation. Or maximize the visibility of your current one.
2. Obtain reusable dishware to reduce waste.
3. Adopt a "No-Water-Bottles" policy for events. Single-use plastic creates a huge environmental footprint. Encourage people to bring water bottles to events or use pitchers of water and cups.

## Long-Term Goals

1. Participate in community conversations. Meet with local and state elected officials.
2. Plan interfaith or ecumenical eco-activities. Build relationships across congregations.
3. Contact a state affiliate of Interfaith Power and Light near you or the national office in San Francisco.

*Source: Georgia Interfaith Power and Light (gipl.org), part of the national network of Interfaith Power and Light initiatives (see [interfaithpowerandlight.org](http://interfaithpowerandlight.org)). IPL mobilizes congregational responses to global warming, monitors government action, and offers liturgies to revive ecological imagination.*





Standing Rock, North Dakota  
© Larry Towell/Magnum Photos

OUTSIDE  
By William Stafford

The least little sound sets the coyotes walking,  
walking the edge of our comfortable earth.  
We look inward, but all of them  
are looking toward us as they walk the earth.

We need to let animals loose in our houses,  
the wolf to escape with a pan in his teeth,  
and streams of animals toward the horizon  
racing with something silent in each mouth.

For all we have taken into our keeping  
and polished with our hands belongs to a truth  
greater than ours, in the animals' keeping.  
Coyotes are circling around our truth.



*Indy Burke is a biogeochemist, ecosystem ecologist, and, since 2016, the Carl W. Knobloch Jr. Dean at the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Founded in 1900, F&ES has nearly 400 students, and its alumni network of 5,000 graduates in some 80 countries work on environmental problems at multiple scales – urban, rural, landscapes and lands, managed and wild. Through field work and research projects, students address challenges ranging from lead-contaminated water in Flint to endangered species conservation in China. The F&ES mission is to “provide knowledge and leadership for a sustainable future.” A joint master’s degree with Yale Divinity School trains students who want professionally to integrate environmental issues and religious life, or study ethical dimensions of environmental problems. She spoke to Reflections last month.*

***Regarding knowledge and passion and F&ES ...***

Everything we do here aims to have impact on environmental sustainability. We do it both out of curiosity and with a will to have impact: Our students become leaders in sustainability all over the world because they bring their minds and hearts to this work. They come here to make a difference.

If people are going to work in this sphere, they need to bring not only passion but also knowledge and analytical rigor to support the values that infuse their environmental work. If we’re not accurate in

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**I find optimism in our students. Every student we launch will go out there and have impact. It’s also encouraging that so many leaders in sustainability are coming from business. If business is leading, we’re going to make progress.**

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our accounts about environmental change, causes, and consequences, it diminishes our credibility.

There’s a growing challenge for universities in this time of really partisan approaches to environmental solutions. As a School, we don’t take advocacy positions – even though many, or probably most of us, as individuals may. We are motivated to advance sustainable solutions, but we must do so as a School in such a way that we maintain our role as a trusted source of information. Distrust of American institutions has been growing; it’s ever more important for us to be trustworthy about the science and policy we analyze and report. We can show the impact of rolling back initiatives – ini-

tiatives this White House is trying to reverse – efforts that protect air and water and reduce carbon emissions. And it is true that these rollbacks have dramatic and negative consequences for humans and the environment.

***On tracking changes of mind about climate change ...***

Often, the data we report has the potential to affect public policy in significant ways. Our School’s Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, for instance, conducts research on the cultural factors that shape attitudes about climate change and engages with the public in climate science and solutions. Our recent survey, “Climate Change in the American Mind,” shows that the proportion of Americans is sharply increasing who think global warming is happening and are worried about it. Legislators endeavoring to represent their constituency will likely care about policy solutions based not only upon the climate change sciences, but also on the social science that identifies human priorities in their own districts.

***On the need for big ideas today ...***

One new program that we are launching is the Yale Environmental Dialogue. We invite thought leaders to bring big ideas about environmental solutions to public forums – solutions that involve stakeholders of all sorts: business, farmers, cities, states. We want to explore the role of private lands in conservation. We want to find good economic outcomes that also reduce material waste. And we have 38 more big ideas about energy, food, oceans, and much else. We hope to take this project on the road, presenting it at public forums across the country, start conversations, and generate practical ideas that will find a place in political platforms of 2020. Our goal is to listen, engage, and ultimately increase understanding. Environmental stewardship should serve everyone. We’re getting ideas out there. We can convene conversation, especially if we are looked on as reliable.

***Regarding the spirit of optimism and innovation ...***

Changes in the environment, and in US policies around environmental sustainability, can lead one to be pessimistic or even despair. I find optimism myself in our students. Every student we launch will go out there and make a difference and will teach others how to have impact as well. So the effect is exponential. It’s also encouraging to me that so many of the real leaders in sustainability are coming from business. Their thinking is entrepreneurial and innovative. If business is leading, we’re going to make progress.



Glacier melt around Mt. Kilimanjaro, Tanzania  
© Alex Majoli/Magnum Photos

# Cosmic Blessing: Healing All Things in Christ



By Gregory E. Sterling

*The biblical presentation of Christ as a cosmic Lord through whom God created all things has implications for the current crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and the sustainability of life on Earth. What does it mean for us to believe in a Lord who created all things? Does the cosmic Lord relate to more than humanity and, if so, does this have ethical implications for us? This essay will address these questions by examining one New Testament text in particular, Ephesians 1:9-10.*

Ancient Jewish sapiential traditions personified wisdom as the power of God that assisted God in creation (Prov 8:22-31). Later, Second Temple Jewish authors extended this personification and presented the Logos/Wisdom as an independent being or hypostasis that was God's agent in creation.<sup>1</sup> Early Christians found these wisdom traditions appealing as they began to express the significance of Christ for their faith.<sup>2</sup> They presented Christ as the agent of creation by using a form of prepositional metaphysics (using prepositions to denote causes) to present Christ as the instrument "through whom" God created all things (John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:2).<sup>3</sup>

## **Ephesian Blessings**

This is summarized and expanded in a metaphysical statement in Ephesians. The statement is embedded within an opening *berakah* (blessing) that celebrates what God has done for humanity (Eph 1:3-14). This is only one of three *berakoth* that open a letter in the New Testament (along with 2 Cor 1:3-7 and 1 Peter 1:3-12), but was a common form of prayer in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> Each New Testament *berakah* begins with "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who ..." The *berakah* in Ephesians is one long sentence in Greek!<sup>5</sup> While the structure of this sentence is debatable, the threefold repetition of the doxological formula, "to the praise of his glory," in verses 6, 12, and 14, suggests that the doxology

is a concluding refrain for subunits that accentuate different aspects of the all-powerful work of God.

The first subunit (verses 3-6) celebrates what God has done: God is the subject of the verbs with the exception of the subordinate clause in verse 4. The second subunit (verses 7-12) emphasizes what God has done for us or for the author and for those in the Pauline tradition. It uses clauses in the first-

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**What does it mean for us to believe in a Lord who created all things? Does the cosmic Lord relate to more than humanity and, if so, does this have ethical consequences for us?**

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person plural in verses 7 and 11 (cf. also verse 12) that bracket statements of what God has done in verses 8-10. The third subunit turns to the readers by using the second-person plural (verses 13-14). The prayer thus moves from what God has done to what God has done for the author and an earlier generation and finally for the readers.

## **Things of Heaven and of Earth**

We are interested in the section that is devoted to what God has done for the author and those in the Pauline tradition in verses 8-10 – specifically the passage saying "who revealed to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure that he purposed in him for the administration of the fullness



of the times – to sum up everything in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth in him” (Eph 1:9-10). God revealed the mystery that is explained by the subsequent clause “to sum up everything in Christ.” The author will later return to

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**Creation has suffered from sin just as humans have. We can be agents bringing about God’s summation of all things in Christ or we can be instruments that leave them scattered and broken.**

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the mystery and explain it in detail in 3:1-13 (cf. also 2:11-22), but for the moment the author leaves the statement at the broadest possible level.

What does it mean “to sum up everything in Christ”? The infinitive “to sum up” is only used twice in the New Testament. In rhetoric the term referred to the summation or recapitulation of an argument.<sup>6</sup> In Rom 13:8-10, especially 9, the other New Testament example, Paul used it to refer to love that sums up the entire law. It appears to have a similar meaning here: God has summed up all things in heaven and earth in Christ. But how can “all things” be summed up?

**“All Things” in Christ**

The author was a disciple of Paul who used Paul’s letters in order to universalize Paul’s thought at the end of the first century.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the author drew on Colossians: More than one-third of the vocabulary in Colossians appears in Ephesians.<sup>8</sup> In this case, the author drew from the Christ hymn in Col 1:15-20, which declares:

- 15 *He is the Image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;*  
16 *for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,*  
*things visible and invisible –*  
*whether thrones or lordships, whether rulers or authorities –*  
*all things were created through him and for him.*  
17 *He is before all things*  
*and in him all things subsist.*  
18 *He is the head of the body, the church;*  
*he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead*  
*so that he might have precedence in all things.*  
19 *For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell*  
20 *and through him to reconcile all things to himself –*  
*whether on the earth or in heaven –*  
*by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Thus “for in him all things in heaven and on the earth were created” (Col 1:16); “all things were created through him and for him” (Col 1:16); “in him all

things subsist” (Col 1:17); and “through him to reconcile all things to himself” (Col 1:20). The *berakah* in Ephesians has brought the language of creation (Col 1:16-17) and salvation (Col 1:20) together by suggesting that in Christ God will bring about a summation of all created things. Christ is the agent of creation, the sustainer of creation, and the reconciler of creation. In other words, God summed up all things in him.

**Cosmological Claims**

But what are “all things”? In Ephesians, does it refer only to the union of Jew and Gentile in Christ as described in 3:1-13 (and 2:11-22) or is it broader? The explanatory statement that follows – “the things in the heavens and the things on the earth in him” – cannot be restricted to ethnic unity since the summing up is of things both in heaven and on earth.<sup>9</sup> But again we ask: Does “all things” extend to the heavenly powers in Eph 1:20-23 or go beyond them? I think that we have to take it in the broadest sense. The text is drawing on the language of Colossians where the language is explicitly cosmological. The liturgical nature of the language of the *berakah* suggests that we would be amiss to constrict the language.

When will this summing up take place? Unlike the authentic letters of Paul where such a vision would be future (e.g., Rom 8:18-25), the author of Ephesians has a realized eschatology. What is future in Paul is typically in present time in Ephesians, e.g., Christ already rules over the powers (1:20-23 versus 1 Cor 15:20-28) and we have already been raised and sit enthroned with Christ (2:6 versus Rom 6:1-11). The statement in Eph 1:9-10 suggests that God has brought about a restoration or summation of all things in Christ now. This clearly does not mean that all is perfect – just as we are not perfect. It does mean that just as ethnic and racial union are possible in Christ so is cosmic harmony. The text does not deny the presence of evil or discord, but offers a possible way out of it.

We have typically ignored or restricted statements like this in Scripture. While we have understandably focused on the human implications, we should not ignore the implications that such statements have for us towards the non-human cosmos. Social justice is not only about human relationships, it is also about cosmic relationships.

The art on the cover of this issue of *Reflections* conveys this well. Creation has suffered from sin just as humans have. It is fitting to symbolize this by the greatest sign of sin we know: the cross. The cross is also the greatest hope of victory over the disruption in our lives and world. We can be agents bringing

about God's summation of all things in Christ or we can be instruments that leave them scattered and broken. The challenge of sustainability is as much a part of our moral obligation as any other mandate of reconciliation.

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## Notes

- 1 Philo, *Creation*, 15-25, esp. 20, 24-25. Cf. Sir 24 that identifies personified wisdom with the law (v. 23), but does not make Wisdom a hypostasis.
- 2 For details see Gregory E. Sterling, "'The Image of God': Becoming Like God in Philo, Paul, and Early Christianity," in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*. Festschrift for Harold W. Attridge, edited by Susan Myers; WUNT 2.321 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 157-173.
- 3 On prepositional metaphysics see Gregory E. Sterling, "Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christological Liturgical Texts." *The Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1997): 219-38.
- 4 For other examples see Gen 24:27; 1 Sam 25:39; 1 Kings 1:48; 1 Chron 29:10-19, a second person example in which David addresses God; Ps 144:1-14; Tob 11:14-15.
- 5 Modern editions of the Greek like the Nestle-Aland text break it up into four sentences (vv. 3-6, 7-10, 11-12, 13-14), but this is for the sake of intelligibility rather than the syntax.
- 6 E.g., Quintilian 6.1, who cites the Greek word. Cf. also Aristotle, *frag.* 123.
- 7 On the pseudonymous nature of Ephesians and the author's dependence on Paul's letters see C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Authorship, Origin, and Purpose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) and Michael Gese, *Das Vermächtnis des Apostels: Die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie im Epheserbrief*, WUNT 2.99 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997). The most important treatment of the relationship between Ephesians and Colossians remains Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe*, Skrifter utgivna av Kungl. Humanistiska I Lund 39 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946).
- 8 The most famous parallel is Col 4:7-8//Eph 6:21-22. Cf. also Col 1:22//Eph 1:4; Col 1:14//Eph 1:7; Col 2:13//Eph 2:5; Col 1:25//Eph 3:2; Col 3:12-13a//Eph 4:2.
- 9 The striking similarity between the language of Colossians and Ephesians is worth noting: in heaven and on earth.

## WHAT GETS AWAY

By William Stafford

Little things hide. Sometimes they  
scuttle away like dry leaves in a sudden  
wind. Tidepools are full of these  
panicky creatures, and rock slides  
have jittery populations hidden from the world  
and even from each other.

Herodotus tells about the shyest  
animal there is. It's the one even  
Alexander the Great and his whole  
conquering army had never seen, and people  
— no matter how hard they try —  
will never see.



*"This matter of admitting the true nature of a problem before setting about rectifying it, or even pretending to, is of utmost importance."*  
— Lorraine Hansberry

Collective refusal to acknowledge the scope and scale of our ecological crisis is a familiar issue. Continued moral evasion in the face of such urgency almost ensures our demise. So much depends on the quality of our willingness to confront this challenge.

But as soon as we examine some of the causes of climate denial and indifference, of environmental apathy and ignorance, the larger mechanics and forces that have contributed to the earth's undoing quickly come into view.

The powers and interests which brought settler colonialists to the New World involved the violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their land — a fact too often denied or rendered insignificant in the stories and myths America tells about itself. To ignore that history is to refuse to take seriously

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**What is needed now is a reimagining of the terms of survival and cooperation, a new grammar of power.**

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what has already been done to the land and to the peoples who inhabited it. Climate evasion is just an extension of a much longer pattern of denial.

What also marks our contemporary moment is the sense that we are constantly in a state of crisis. There is the crisis that's presently unfolding, the crisis that was narrowly avoided, and the crisis that is always to come: the doom that would've happened if the banks didn't receive bailouts, the danger of not prioritizing the Pentagon's budget proposals, and the crisis of constitutional democracy that continues to be — shall we say — ongoing.

This nagging sense of emergency makes it difficult to widen our sphere of moral concern beyond what is immediate, proximate, and near. It nourishes a vague awareness of urgent problems yet never manages to lead to change — neither in habits and attitudes, nor in policies and collective practices. Focusing on the spectacles of the crisis industry also distracts from slower, less visible forms of violence that happen at different rates, such as hog waste seeping into crops and water supplies long after flood waters have receded. Our challenge includes moving beyond this fixation with spectacle, learning to focus our capacities of attentiveness and cultivating a kind of sensitivity that pierces through the noise. The land, like the spirit, cannot breathe without rest. And there is no healing without rest.

The idea that each of us occupies some other, more pressing position of vulnerability is not by accident. It's the very thing that fortifies the status quo by shifting attention away from the communities and ecosystems that have always been in peril for lack of education, health care, food security, and so forth. Seriously focusing on climate change means that these wider causes of racial and economic vulnerability must also be addressed. Otherwise, we do well to expect more evasions.

Part of what is needed, then, is a mode of ethical and historical reckoning that acknowledges the underside of industrialization, the darkness of unfettered capitalism, and the ugliness of any morality that is more sensitive to the market than to the earth. We'll have to devise better ways to hold elites accountable for their racist and patriarchal designs, practices, and aspirations. But we also have to devise ways for persons to earn a living wage, preferably alongside caring for the earth, and this will require organizing our lives around common goods. Not profit margins. Not competition. But genuinely shared goods held in common. What is needed now is a reimagining of the terms of survival and cooperation. It may be that we need a new grammar of power, less sullied by quests for sovereignty and invulnerability, more capacious in its demand for well-placed trust and accountability.

This will require us to tell different stories — about ourselves, about the earth, and about what flourishing in ecological community looks like. We'll need stories that help us reimagine the terms of vulnerability and interconnectedness.

We'll also have to make room for lament, because there is too much to grieve. Our task will inevitably involve learning how to inhabit the unfixable. There are no easy solutions here, since loss of sacred life isn't the sort of thing that can be replaced. But there are more responsible and sensible ways to live, more ways to organize and imagine the commons anew.

So I take hope in the uncertain course of history's ordinary and unlikely agitators — the unfinished work of freedom struggles and movements already begun but not quite past, and the people who labored and struggled for a vision of the world that they themselves wouldn't see but one that their children's children might live. I take hope in the faith traditions that inspire and sustain such visionary work. I take hope in their calls for agitation and rest, their sense of life and time.

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# Sweat, Soil, and Salvation:

An Interview with Norman Wirzba

*Norman Wirzba '88 M.A.R. teaches theology at Duke Divinity School, working at the intersection of philosophy, ecology, and agrarian studies. He grew up on a farm in Canada. That experience of working the land, the sweat of physical labor, and a sense of divine blessing on creation infuses his writing. His recent books include *Way of Love: Recovering the Heart of Christianity* (HarperOne, 2016) and *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge, 2011; 2nd edition, 2019). "What God most wants is for us to learn to live more responsibly and more charitably wherever we are," he writes in *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World* (Baker Academic, 2015). "The point of faith is not to help us escape this life. It is, rather, to lead us more deeply into the movements of love that nurture and heal and celebrate the gifts of God." He spoke to Reflections earlier this year.*

## **Regarding the fraught relations between churches and climate change ...**

More churches need to be involved at the level of policy and economics. Right now that's precisely where their energy does not go, and there are a couple of reasons for that. One of them, to speak bluntly, is gnosticism: In so many churches, the main purpose of life is to get your soul into heaven.

## **Christians have been virtually silent about the destruction of the planet. What kind of theology embraces God the creator but not God's creation?**

The dominant notion is that salvation is only about people, whose destination is somewhere beyond the blue. But that's a distorted, defunct view of what God is doing in the world and doing in the Bible. God's redeeming work embraces heaven and earth – the earth that is God's daily concern and delight. Colossians 1:23 says the gospel should be preached to every creature. According to Genesis 9:15, God's abiding covenant is with all people and "every living creature of all flesh." Yet it's embarrassing to read that. Preach to the wetlands? To chickens? We're embarrassed because we're not thinking big enough about God's divine economy.

A second reason for this lack of energy around policy is the very structure of our daily life. A primary mode of engaging the world now is shopping. We do it by laptop or phone – screens. But screens

insulate us. The experience isn't attuned to the real world. We don't feel directly affected by volatile weather, drought conditions, an unexpected frost. The world "outside" doesn't seem to matter much. But if you're a grain farmer and there's a hailstorm, you must pay attention. If you're an apple grower and there's a late frost jeopardizing the orchard, you have to pay attention. Fewer and fewer people in the cities and suburbs have an embodied, nurturing experience of the world.

## **On the greening of church property ...**

Churches today have all the reasons they need to become advocates of a just land policy – practices that repair the soil, improve farming, protect forests, fight hunger. Think the Farm Bill. That's part of the solution. Another part is to realize that most churches sit on land – the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Sweden, or the big neighborhood church all come to mind. It adds up to a lot of land. What if churches agreed to become better stewards, encourage the organic life of the soil, put it under cultivation – flowers, fruits, vegetables – and bring healing to the earth and food to communities on their particular patch of earth?

We've developed an aesthetic that favors low-maintenance grass and ornamental shrubs that don't need much pruning. This is a demonstration to everyone that we want to live in the world without taking care of it. If we grew gardens of fruits or vegetables, we'd be part of the solution to food insecurity and also reflect a message that the church wants to be part of the healing of the whole of creation.

### ***On care of the soil and care of the soul ...***

When churches start a garden, they learn that growing plants is hard. There's lots of failure. But you don't walk away, because great lessons are learned about the vulnerability, mystery, and hope of life.

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**I teach a class where the students are told to grow a plant. They learn what farmers have to ask every day – not “What do I want to do today?” but “What does the land need today?”**

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Working with the land, people come to understand the importance of the practices of attention and care. Without a commitment to care for the soil and all its creatures, the prospect of a flourishing human life comes to an end.\*\*\*

I teach a class where the students are told to grow a plant – they pick the plant they want to grow, get seeds and soil, work at it, and write about the experience. The point is to understand what it's like to put your life in relationship with another living thing. They come to realize they knew nothing about planting – how deep to plant the seeds, how much watering to do, how much labor is involved. It's not a cerebral exercise. They get an embodied glimpse of what it means to be dependent on plants that provide us food, and they discover how dependent the plant is on them. They learn what farmers have to ask every day – not “What do I want to do today?” but “What does the land need today?”

### ***On the hazards of theological abstraction ...***

Regard for the earth is deeply theological. Yet “theology” has become an abstract thing, divorced from real-life issues – and as a result theology is very boring to many people. This abstraction reflects an attitude toward the physical labor that care of the earth requires. We've been raised to despise it. The online shopping experience is similarly abstract: We see highly stylized products on a screen, then we click and they arrive at our doorstep and we've learned nothing about the sweat and friction and labor of real bodies sacrificed in the consumer economy.

More and more we hear of futuristic scenarios that seek to escape the pain of this world by reducing the human being to an information pattern that can be uploaded into a machine. It's an odd sort of progress – the hope of escaping our bodies and the planet. But it's a dangerous fantasy, this notion of techno-immortality. Our lives only make sense in sympathy with other lives in this particular ecosys-

tem with its weather and dynamic relationships with plants and animals. We couldn't live without them.

### ***Regarding “dominion” and toxic ideology ...***

It's time to read the Bible again and see what it really says. What does “dominion” mean in Gen. 1:25-28? Does it really advocate what we're actually doing to the planet – disastrous exploitation? Show me anywhere in the Bible where God favors exploitation – the abuse of migrant workers, the suffering of animals, the despoiling of land. These things can't be justified in Scripture. The Bible is an agrarian book that's being interpreted by people who have no agrarian experience or sympathies.

Christians have been virtually silent about the destruction of the planet. What kind of theology embraces God the creator but not God's creation? Such a faith is no different from a toxic ideology.

I speak to many ministers who worry that the gospel message they convey on Sundays isn't enough to counteract what people hear the rest of the week – what they hear on talk radio to form their daily values. People do so out of fear – the understandable fear of losing their comforts and conveniences if, for instance, we take the threat of climate change seriously. I believe church is supposed to be a place where people come to trust each other and feel free to admit these fears and ask why we behave according to such ideologies and not by the teachings of Jesus.

### **ZONA**

By Jim Harrison

**My work piles up,  
I falter with disease.  
Time rushes toward me –  
it has no brakes. Still,  
the radishes are good this year.  
Run them through butter,  
add a little salt.**

\*\*\* See Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation*, p. 99.





US soldiers surveying oil fields on fire, Iraq, 2003  
© Alex Majoli/Magnum Photos



I grew up tending gardens, growing food, caring for animals, visiting state parks, and learning about the earth's natural energy sources. Living in California gave me particular insight into the costly effects of climate disruption on everyday life as I witnessed horrific mudslides, devastating fires, and severe droughts. At school I attended assemblies where furry mascots taught us how to “recycle-reduce-reuse.” In college I watched *An Inconvenient Truth*, read *Silent Spring*, and even took a course called “The Joy of Garbage” where we spent one class session donning what resembled plastic space suits so we could safely sort through several bins of the school's trash. Following undergrad I pursued a master of public policy where environmental policy was viewed as its own specialization area.

Yet the problems of climate change looked so huge, it seemed that the only way to bring change and healing was on a modest micro-level, and the rest was out of our hands. Then, years later, I found myself embarking on a new search to combine my

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Consequences of ecological injustice are everywhere. Pollution is responsible for nine million premature deaths worldwide. Between 1998-2017, US pipelines suffered 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures.

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passions for ministry and policy. During my first year at YDS I attended a discussion with Prof. Willie Jennings and the Rev. William J. Barber II that not only affirmed my sense of call to serve at the nexus of faith and policy but also sparked my involvement in a social movement to revitalize the original Poor People's Campaign. The Poor People's Campaign of 1967-68 was spearheaded by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others to bring forth a national “revolution of values” against what King called America's “triplets of evil” – militarism, racism, and economic injustice. Today's movement, known as the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, focuses on “ecological devastation and the nation's distorted morality” as well as systemic racism, poverty, and the war economy.<sup>2</sup> Last year, the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call to Moral Revival launched a 40-day campaign to address some of humanity's greatest threats. It has spread to more than 30 states.

Fighting ecological devastation requires that we go beyond a merely scientific understanding of the crisis. When we give the facts a human face – casting a light on the experiences of those afflicted daily

– we can't help but recognize these consequences as a tangible injustice. Pollution is responsible for nine million premature deaths worldwide.<sup>3</sup> In the US, 13.8 million people can't afford their water bill, and some 1.5 million people don't have access to piped water and sewage systems. Our military operations accounted for 72 percent of the US government's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2016.<sup>4</sup> Between 1998-2017, US pipelines suffered 5,712 significant oil and gas leaks or ruptures, posing a threat to fresh-water sources. Between 1964-2015, there were 2,441 oil spills from offshore drilling in US territorial waters, releasing some 218 million gallons of oil.<sup>5</sup> Ecological devastation remains deeply connected to racial, economic, and militaristic injustices. People of color are disproportionately affected. It is imperative that we acknowledge the interconnectedness of social injustices, and seek collective efforts of change.

“The truth is that our policies have not fundamentally valued human life or the ecological systems in which we live,” the Poor People's Campaign declares. “... We have a fundamental right to clean water, air, and a healthy environment and public resources to monitor, penalize, and reverse the polluting impacts of fossil fuel industries.”

My involvement with the Poor People's Campaign is fueled by my Christian faith: I believe we are morally obliged to care for God's creation – people, animals, land, water, air. We must know both the facts surrounding an issue and the stories of those who suffer most because of it. We can equip ourselves with knowledge and empathy and inspire others to do the same. Solutions to ameliorating our world's injustices are within reach, and everyone has a part to play: “Forward Together, Not One Step Back.”

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*A. Kazimir Brown '19 M.Div. has worked in a variety of public policy roles, including as a budget analyst for San Francisco's Office of the City Administrator and as a political appointee in the Obama-Biden Administration. Currently in the ordination process with the A.M.E. Church, after graduation she'll seek to combine her passions for faith, social justice, and public policy.*

## Notes

- 1 “Forward Together, Not One Step Back” is a call and response phrase used in the Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival as a way to express encouragement, solidarity, and a communal focus.
- 2 See [www.poorpeoplescampaign.org](http://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org).
- 3 “The Souls of Poor Folk,” an April 2018 report on conditions and trends of poverty in past 50 years in the US, Institute for Policy Studies, p. 12. See [ips-dc.org/souls-of-poor-folk](http://ips-dc.org/souls-of-poor-folk).
- 4 “The Souls of Poor Folk,” pp. 12-13.
- 5 “The Souls of Poor Folk,” p. 13.

## A CENTO OF SCIENTISTS

By Ursula K. Le Guin

*Alternating lines from Charles Darwin,  
Galileo Galilei, and Giordano Bruno*

There is grandeur  
The sun with all the circling planets it sustains  
God is glorified and the greatness of his kingdom made manifest  
in this view of life  
the sun with all the circling planets yet  
glorified not in one but in countless suns  
from so simple a beginning endless forms  
the sun with all the planets it sustains yet can ripen a bunch  
of grapes  
not in a single earth, a single world, but in a thousand thousand  
endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful  
the sun can ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in  
the universe to do  
not in a single world but in a thousand thousand, an infinity  
of worlds  
endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been  
and are being evolved  
as if it had nothing else in the universe to do  
All things are in the universe, and the universe is in all things,  
we in it and it in us  
There is grandeur in this view of life

# A Sacred Assembly of Pines, Plants, and People Too



By Stephen Blackmer '12 M.A.R., '83 M.F.

*For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. (Isaiah 55:12)*

*Out the window, to my left, a magnificent sugar maple, its gnarled branches reaching wide to capture photons, claps leafy hands as it shouts for joy. Aged and tough, roots deep in the earth, it pulls living water up into woody bones.*

To the right, a glossy white pine stretches five-fingered needles toward the heavens, arms raised in praise. Smooth-skinned and vital, its greenness breaths youthful energy and new life into the world.

Here indoors, all around me, people are singing, listening to the Word, attending to the preacher, taking fruits of the earth into their own bodies, going forth in service.

The scene remains clear in my mind's eye, each body a revelation and manifestation of divine energy. One God, one world, many bodies praying. One creation. Yet separated by species, kept apart by walls that divide indoors from out.

## A Church Seedling

I had arrived at Yale Divinity School following a call to become a priest. Never mind that I hadn't ever attended church, read the Bible, or been part of a Christian (or any other religious) community. "My church is in the mountains, the forests, the river," I said.

I was a church neophyte, a seedling. But God works in mysterious ways, calling who God calls, so there I was at YDS, sitting in Marquand Chapel, following along in the service, gazing out the windows, befriending the trees, brother Maple and sister Pine.

"In the beginning ... It was good ... It was good ... It was very good."

During worship that day, I wanted to be outside with the trees, rejoicing together in the beauty and wonder of the whole earth. But that, I was already realizing, is something a divinity school doesn't know how to do.

Christian practice and teaching have lost the art of connecting with God's first self-revelation, outside our buildings, rituals, 'ologies, and texts. The creation as original temple.

Is it any wonder that, often unwitting, humans are tearing it down?

The sixth mass extinction now underway – the only one with humans on board, witnessing it, accelerating it. Climate change, toxic blooms, artificial everything, screen time, fire and drought, blazing

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**The earliest spirituality must have been something like this: simply marveling at the extraordinary pattern of nature, stars, the entire universe. Feeling at one with all that is around and within. Simply resting in God.**

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heat and freezing cold, oceans rising, forests dying, nature deficit disorder. The ecological world is filled with heartbreak, battles to fight, righteous anger to express, activism to live. The creation has become an "issue," a set of problems to be addressed through policy, economics, technology, action.

If we are paying attention, anxiety, fear, and grief are our constant companions.

How do we learn again to love the messy, muddy, not-so-human but eternally beautiful earthy reality that we are part of?

What if we don't learn? What if we continue to turn our backs?

Can we love what we do not know? Can we grieve what we do not see? Can we heal what we never touch? Can we be healed without being touched?

Can we, again, engage with the land and her creatures as a revelation and encounter with God? As a way to healing?

### The Fleishy Earth Around Us

When I was called into the church, my work changed from that of activist to that of priest. Now, I am charged with lifting up the sacred presence so that all may see and partake. To invite people into the joy, wonder, awe, delight, humility, peace of the created world. To reveal the fleshy earth around us as a bearer of the sacred.

Barred owl, pileated woodpecker, short-tailed ermine.  
 Bracken fern, sphagnum moss, princess pine.  
 White pine, black birch, red maple, beech.  
 Blueberry, winterberry, blackberry.  
 Dragonfly, ant, mosquito, mayfly.  
 Vernal pool and trickling stream.  
 British soldier moss.  
 Quartz and gneiss.  
 Mud.

I can see or touch all of these within a few feet of where I am sitting. They're all on the congregational roll call. Full members. The sun is shining, the air is cool and dry, the trees are leafing out, the birds are singing. We are all rejoicing in this day that God has made. All in all, it's a gorgeous day to be ... in church?

Well, actually, yes.

There's no printed text, no procession, no altar, no prayer book. Just miracles in every direction. And me, the lone human being this morning, as witness and reporter, liturgist and priest.

### Prayer, Presence, Attention

I am here to pray. And be present. And pay attention. These are all the same things, of course – prayer, being present, and paying attention.

I find that true prayer is an act more of listening than speaking, of being present to what is rather than clamoring for what I want. And of course, of giving thanks for the blessed fact that everything around me *is* – and that I am. Which, of course, is the name of God.

The earliest spirituality must have been something like this. Simply marveling at the existence of the world around us. Just being in the company of the extraordinary, rich, diverse, shifting pattern of nature, of the world, of the stars, of the entire

Church of the Woods meets on 106 acres of woods and wetlands in Canterbury, NH, about 90 minutes north of Boston.

We gather in the woods, or in our small barn during cold or wet weather. The service opens with silence, song, and prayer, followed by readings from the Bible and other texts. After a brief homily, people fan into the forest for 20 minutes of reflection, listening to the woods, allowing human bodies and words to encounter forest bodies and words.

We take seriously the repeated Gospel observation that "Jesus went alone up the mountain to pray." (Matthew 14:23)

Drawn back by bells, participants share reflections, observations, questions, and prayers. The service continues with the Eucharist, offering bread and wine to the land as well as to the human worshipers.

Church of the Woods (see [kairosearth.org](http://kairosearth.org) for more information, including a Church of the Woods liturgy) meets weekly. Visitors and groups are warmly welcome. Church of the Woods is part of the Wild Church Network, a growing community of churches in North America that are reconnecting Christian practice with the natural world. (See [wildchurchnetwork.com](http://wildchurchnetwork.com).)

In our weekly liturgy we pray this to God: "We ask that you restore us when we lose the way of oneness with you and your creation. Be with us as we wander in that lonely wilderness, strengthen us as we return, renew us in the awareness of your ever-present love, and return us to your ways of love, compassion, and service."

– Stephen Blackmer

universe. Feeling at one with all that is around and within. Simply resting in God.

With our scientific knowledge, we can know that we are privileged to live – so far as we know – in the only place ever, anywhere, where life exists. How amazing is that?! God from whom all blessings flow, indeed.

On a lovely spring morning, I experience God as beneficent provider. I smell the fertile soil, listen to the birds calling their morning song, watch the saplings reach toward the sun.

If I were here on a January night or during a September hurricane, I might feel differently.

Is our God a tame God or a wild God? Does the world need me, or need people at all? What do we add to this beautiful, sacred creation?

I know well what we destroy – we destroy much of this very abundance and beauty. I see signs of



this, too, around me. A pile of discarded metal from a logging truck. Empty plastic bottles that held lubricating oil for chainsaws. Piles of dead trees, heaped up and pushed to the margins. Dry bones. I want them to live again.

### **Moose and Mea Culpa**

I am surrounded by the immediacy of life and of death, in every moment and every square centimeter of ground.

Where does a moose go when it dies? I haven't seen any fresh sign of moose this spring – I wonder if he (I know it was a he because I picked up a discarded antler) succumbed to the warming temperatures and last year's abundance of ticks. Happily for

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### **Is our God a tame God or a wild God? Does the world need me, or need people at all? What do we add to this beautiful, sacred creation?**

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me, there are fewer ticks this year. But, so far, no moose. A victim of global warming?

With this thought, I come face to face with the question of sin. What does it mean that people are the cause of one of the six great extinctions of species in the history of life? *Mea culpa*. Forgive me, for I have sinned.

What does forgiveness look and feel like in the face of destroying entire forms of life? What can possibly atone for this sin? I don't know.

And yet, sitting here this morning, I know there is nothing that can keep me from the love of God. The sun rises every day and the moon at night.

In return, what do we do?

We care for others, for all those who need love and help. We pray. We make music and art and ritual. We speak the names of all those things that are created – and those that are being destroyed.

We remember our rightful place in the order of things. In the woods, it is easier to remember that we are not the center of all things – that we are but keepers and servers of a creativity vastly greater than our own. That our great calling is to enhance, to elaborate, to create little riffs on great themes written long before time. To make more, not less, of what God has given us. To leave the world a better place.

Above all, we celebrate! We give thanks, we rejoice, we bring to full consciousness – or as close as we can get – the gift of simply being.

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*The Rev. Stephen Blackmer is pastor of Church of the Woods in Canterbury, NH, and executive director of Kairos Earth, a non-profit organization that renews understanding of the natural world as a bearer of the sacred and spreads practices for living accordingly. Before his ordination as an Episcopal priest in 2013, he worked for 25 years to conserve forests, mountains, and rivers in northern New England and New York. He graduated from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies with a Master of Forestry degree in 1983 and from YDS with a Master of Arts in Religion and Ecology degree in 2012.*

### **POEM XIV**

By Pablo Neruda

Rolling from lake or mountain ridge,  
the stone, round volcanic  
daughter, snow dove,  
left its shape behind  
tumbling toward the sea,  
its fury spent along the way.  
The boulder lost its sharp-peaked,  
short-lived landmark  
that like a cosmic egg  
was swept into the river where  
between other stones, it kept on rolling,  
its ancestor forgotten,  
far from the hellish landslide.

This is how, sky-smoothed, it arrives  
at the sea: perfect, worn down,  
renewed, renowned:  
purity.



Destruction from Hurricane Katrina, Brandon, Mississippi  
© Larry Towell/Magnum Photos

# Sacred Blood, Transformation, and Ecowomanism



By Melanie L. Harris

*The sacred blood of enslaved Africans poured deeply into the soil during the height of the lynching periods of the 19th and 20th centuries in America (and, many would argue, in the 21st).*

As picturesque as are the scenes of budding magnolias and bees buzzing in open-faced southern flowers, the lynching of black bodies by white mobs is also a part of the eco-memory that many of us carry into our environmental justice work and ministry.

## Earth Maps of Freedom

Eco-memory refers to the collective and individual memory of the earth and speaks to our continuing relationship with the planet. The agricultural knowledge developed by enslaved Africans over generations of planting cotton, rice, tobacco, and other crops on southern plantations is an example

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**The sacred blood flowing from the lynching tree is not just an atrocity from the past. It is at this moment soaked into the rings of age-old trees.**

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of eco-memory. Another is the knowledge of the natural environment gathered by Harriet Tubman and shared among those brave souls trying to escape north along the Underground Railroad. They got their northward directional bearings – their compass of hope – by the guiding light of the North Star, as well as by observing that tree moss grows on the northern side of the tree. These earth maps – these whispers of the ancestors described in slave narratives about surviving the trek and staying focused on freedom – continue to inspire many to stay “in the struggle until the end.”<sup>1</sup>

According to ecowomanism, these searing eco-memories hold spiritual and physical significance for African Americans. The sacred blood flowing

from the lynching tree is not just an atrocity from the past. It is at this moment soaked into the rings of age-old trees. This blood, this sacred blood, is mingled with the root systems of countless “hanging” trees that stand as witness to eco-terror in America and testify that lynching was used as a weapon of white supremacy. Indeed it reflects the violent, ecologically ruthless Anthropocene itself.

## Languishing Beneath

From an ecowomanist perspective, the trees stand as living witness. But so too does the earth. Exploited by countless industries in the name of industrialization and globalization, the earth today is crying out – storming, flooding, forcing us all to see the uncanny resemblance between the logic of domination in the oppressive system of slavery and sharecropping, and the logic of domination at work in anthropocentric attitudes that reduce all other beings to unimportant “other.” In some cases, on the very lots of churches, underneath the historic places of worship, the worst ecological sins languish and mingle. Here are buried the remains of slaves, molested children, and yes, toxic waste and landfills. Where does your church rest?

This is where you and I stand – on the earth’s surface – as witnesses to the history of the rise of multilayered systems of oppression designed to chain the bodies, hearts, and minds of black and brown peoples as well as other disenfranchised groups and non-human beings. We humans are witnesses to the cruelties done in the name of planetary progress, imperialist practice, and economic gain.

Ecowomanism is an approach to environmental justice that helps us see where our faith communi-

ties are complicit in environmental degradation – and where we might be spaces of grace and hope. It is a lens that foregrounds the voices of the earth, as well as the herstories of women of African descent and their communities, centering their perspectives and contributions to the environmental justice movement.

Methodologically, ecowomanism insists on race-class-gender analysis to examine climate injustice, expose environmental racism, and explore ecological reparations. It deploys eco-theologies for their candor about interconnected justice issues. It creates and honors eco-spiritualities that spring from traditional theologies as well as from cosmologies emerging from people of color, African and Indigenous peoples, voices too often left out of Eurocentric environmental frameworks.

### Strange Fruit

Ecowomanism seeks a salvific eco-wisdom for our time. This eco-wisdom sheds new light on old biblical hermeneutical frames, inviting fresh directions in Bible study that include story, poetry, and song as well as scripture. For example, alongside the biblical story of Shifrah and Puah who grounded themselves in a spirit of resistance and refused to take life in order to maintain empire, the poetry of Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, and James Weldon Johnson can also serve as sacred texts fusing together African and African-American religious cosmologies to reshape our understanding of the earth's partnership with human hands. Billie Holiday's social protest song "Strange Fruit" becomes a contemplative congregational hymn. It highlights the connection between the colonialization of the earth and the colonialization of brown and black peoples. Sung in the eerie, sometimes crackling voice of Lady Day, "Strange Fruit" as sermonic text challenges us to recognize the ancestral blood that was shed and soaked into the earth from which we all bloom and find ourselves rooted.

If we are to devise new and holy directions of faith-inspired activism – and burst into new eco-theological conversations about climate change, ecological reparations, and creation care – then a change, a transformation within us, must take place. Ecowomanism helps to midwife this transformation. It charts a path, one methodological step at a time, by 1) honoring one's eco-story or experience, 2) critically reflecting on this experience, 3) engaging womanist intersectional analysis, 4) critically engaging our traditions, 5) with an open heart, staying open to transformation, 6) sharing dialogue, and 7) taking courageous action for environmental justice.

And this work does require courage – even in the face of the difficult or, yes, the impossible.

### Shedding Hatred

How does one love the lynching tree and accept its presence in the earth community? What charge do we have as faith communities to love radically in this time, shedding the hatred that this tree has come to represent? How does one repent for the actions of the white mob – the white mob that forced the tree to join the heinous and violent act of lynching, all the while looking on, gnawing on their corn pipes, watching the grotesque burning of holy flesh for sport? For many of us, these perpetrators were our grandfathers, great uncles, cousins. However distant we would like to make them now, we must claim them. If we are honest with ourselves, our familial connection to our very names makes us reflect upon the fact that these are related to us.

And what of the deep healing from historical trauma that we seek, we who are direct descendants of the thousands upon thousands of enslaved Africans and African-American slave and free persons who were lynched? Where shall we find this healing? If this healing is not informed by our faith, imprinted on our hearts, and interwoven in our eco-theologies, then where else can we go?

Calling the names of these "overlooked" is important, a witness to the quiet hanging graves that maintain dignity in memorials such as the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Alabama. So is the act of remembering the earth and working for its wholeness and holiness, of which we are all part. This is crucial, empowering, and religious. Engaging the difficult work of environmental justice is our call. Ecowomanism helps us take a first step, together.<sup>3</sup>

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Melanie L. Harris is Founding Director of African American and Africana Studies and Professor of Religion and Ethics at TCU. Her research areas include womanist ethics and ecology. She is ordained in the AME Church and is the author of *Gifts of Virtue: Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics* (Palgrave, 2010) and *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Orbis, 2017).

### Notes

- 1 Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop" Speech in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* edited by James M. Washington (Harper Collins, 1991).
- 2 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/obituaries/overlooked.html>
- 3 Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism: African American Women and Earth-Honoring Faiths* (Orbis, 2017).



*Tiokasin Ghosthorse is host of First Voices Radio, which explores the cultures of Indigenous peoples and the threats they face. With native ancestry in the Cheyenne River Lakota (Sioux) Nation of South Dakota, he has long been involved in Indigenous rights and advocacy. As a musician he performs worldwide on the ancient red cedar Lakota flute and other instruments. At the website [firstvoicesindigenusradio.org](http://firstvoicesindigenusradio.org), he says: “We have to stop with the idea of creating peace on earth and begin with creating peace with Mother Earth. We’ve tried the first alternative for thousands of years, but look where that has led us; now is the time of the Original Ways, the Native ways ... We all must make peace with Mother Earth.” He talked to Reflections earlier this year.*

***On the folly of “saving the earth” ...***

It's strange to say we can “save the earth.” The arrogance of that! We can't save it. It's about allowing Mother Nature to save us. I often wonder what people mean when they say “nature.” People say nature is beautiful, or needs to be healed, but

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**Mother Earth gets to make the ultimate decision about who is fittest. Species that respect balance and consciousness will survive.**

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it's always out there, over there, separate. We build parks and take the wildness out of them, making them good for golf and picnics. On a smartphone we see glaciers melting, but not the species dying because of the melt. It's hard to know empathy.

I come from outside the anthropocentric view. We see an egalitarianism in nature. Everything in nature has consciousness, everything is in balance. The Western view ignores this. The concept of “domination” isn't even in the original Lakota language.

***Regarding the meaning of survival of the fittest ...***

This attitude of separation from nature is everywhere. It's in the idea that the “fittest survive,” which creates a predatory energy: By now we've hunted everything to death, exploited and extracted everything we can. We're addicted to being in control. We think we're the supreme species, with our intellectualism. We can't accept that we're not in charge. We can't get away from a basic truth: Mother Nature gets to make the ultimate decision about who is fittest. Species that respect balance and consciousness will survive.

We can sound benevolent and say we need to wake people up. But you can't awaken anyone who pretends to be awake already and uses all the right language about doing the right thing, like recycling, as if that's enough. Mother Earth won't lie to us. So why are we lying to her and to ourselves? A form of pareidolia is at work – the tendency to project human value onto nature, seeing Elvis's face in a tree. If we see no human value in nature, we destroy it.

***Seeking a language of the heart ...***

I work with young environmentalists who are fed up with the system. They know something is going wrong – our connection with the earth is broken – but they don't know how to express it in language other than the technical vocabulary that educated them. I ask them to write 500 words about themselves. Then I ask them to circle all the times that “I” and “me” and “my” show up. Usually it's a lot. They see how caught up they are in becoming a particular kind of person, an expert, an “environmentalist.” They realize a language of relationship with nature is missing – a language of abundance, gratitude. Instead of asking them to turn over the next rock anxiously and save the earth, I say try something else: breathing, alertness, consciousness. I want them to see “I” as a verb.

***Bringing the truths of Native peoples to light ...***

So many cultures have things to say, and they haven't been allowed to step up to the podium. How responsible are we journalists to purport the truth to our audiences? Is there a way to present the truth and still maintain that Indigenous people are not of the past, not second-class citizens, and show that our lives are of interest to the general populace? Of course! But where can we find the everyday truths concerning worldwide Indigenous issues? Not just from a Western hegemony of writers but from the people living, doing, and relating themselves to terra firma with intact culture, languages, and perspective. The experience of the Native person who lives the voice of Mother Earth is a different paradigm than Western reasoning, which is based in denial of Indigenous thinking.\*\*\*

***Doing what's required now ...***

It's not enough anymore to “do our best.” We have to do what's required – a new way of thinking. Some people are ready for this. For others, I don't think showing them the data will matter. You have to change the heart. If you can do that, you can change the body and the way people think about nature. It's not sentimentalism. The earth moves for them.

\*\*\* See [firstvoicesindigenusradio.org](http://firstvoicesindigenusradio.org).



# The Body of Christ: Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner



By Julia Johnson '18 M.Div.

*Last summer, I visited a farm in Georgia where a seasoned southern farmer recalled the years when his animals were confined to feedlots and the land was soaked with pesticides. Instead of muffled oinks and wind rustling through the leaves, he heard the roaring fans and generators of CAFOs – Confined Animal Feeding Operations.*

Since converting back to regenerative agriculture, which returns animals to the land and renews the local ecology, he has been reorienting himself to a healthier ecosystem. His new favorite activity is watching sparrows return to the land. For him, it is an everyday epiphany to see ecological healing take place in his lifetime by changing his farming practices. And that gives him hope. I can't help but think how Jesus explained that God cares for the smallest sparrow, even these ones in southern Georgia.

As Christ modeled it, food is a central part of the Christian faith. By becoming the bread of life, he was enacting his part in the great food chain of being, becoming food for us to consume. Communion at church is not the only time to honor God's presence. If John's prologue is true, then Christ was at the beginning of creation – and is within all of creation *now*. Every time we eat, each bite is a sacred element, a sacrament. We are part of the crucifixion and resurrection at every meal.

## Scalded Alive

If this is the case, are we not dishonoring the Logos when we ignore where our food comes from? Instead of those serene sparrows, consider the broiler chicken bred for our consumption. Because of our demand for white meat, the chicken is grown to such proportions that it cannot stand on its own legs. Then it is thrown in the air to be transported and soon electrocuted and scalded alive. How are we honoring God by eating a piece of cheese from a dairy cow that is continually impregnated, only to be

separated from her calf the moment it is born? Her body is converted into a commodity for us to eat and drink her milk, only to be slaughtered in two years, which is 18 years earlier than her expected life span.

## Burdens of Consumption

The land itself is deeply wounded by such practices. Over 70 billion animals are raised each year for human consumption. Modern animal agriculture is a leading cause of deforestation, water and air pollution, and biodiversity loss. Sites where trees would normally absorb emissions are destroyed. Think of

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**We are in touch with reverence at Sunday worship, yet we forget it just moments later at Sunday brunch.**

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the vast resources that go into these feeding operations – the corn or soy required for feed, the emissions from tractors and transport, the energy to run these concrete houses, the manure placed in lagoons and released into the air or waterways, the removal of carcasses. Neighboring residents, often people of color, fall victim to the surrounding pollution, with respiratory problems and contaminated water. This burdensome form of animal agriculture is now the second largest contributor to human-made greenhouse gasses. By 2050, consumption of meat and dairy products will likely almost double.<sup>2</sup>

So why aren't we talking more about our food?

This was made apparent at the most recent United Nations Climate Conference in December

2018. Even while world climate leaders focused on urgent matters of clean energy and transportation, they were fed a meat-heavy menu. As nonprofits such as Biological Diversity, Farm Forward, and Brighter Green pointed out, the conference's food choices emitted the equivalent of burning 500,000 gallons of gasoline. If these climate champions are not willing to change their eating habits, how do we expect theological leaders and their congregations to do so?

### Everyday Ethical Decisions

Every choice we make has morally, ethically charged consequences. To choose to ignore what we consume three or more times a day is to be complicit in an extremely broken system. We hurt people who reside near CAFOs. We hurt our bodies by overconsuming this meat. We hurt the animals who are the ultimate victims of these meat-producing machines. And we hurt the earth. As inhabitants of this planet, we need to think of ourselves as members of one body instead of individual beings.

This is where Christ can help us fix the food system, which is such a large part of our climate crisis. For those like me who continue to consume animal products, it's time to begin thinking differently about the meat, dairy, and eggs we choose to buy. Recognize Christ's body as more than just a wafer on Sunday mornings – his body is within each steak, each egg, each slice of cheese. If the Logos resides within all of creation, we can treat each bite with the same reverence we bring to kneeling at the altar. Sacrifices were made for our cheeseburger or our mac and cheese. When Jesus broke bread, he modeled reverence for bodily sacrifice.

### Saving the Planet?

Some would like to believe that simply eliminating red meat is enough to "save the planet." But the challenge is bigger than steaks and hamburgers. A white-meat alternative – replacing a Hardy's cheeseburger with a Chick-fil-A chicken sandwich – is not fixing the bigger issue. We have reduced animal bodies to mere consumption commodities and forgotten what it means to eat with reverence. We are in touch with reverence at Sunday worship, yet we forget just moments later at Sunday brunch.

Change is possible every time we pick up a fork. Eating fewer animal products and more plant-based options is the first step. Our overconsumption of meat, dairy, and eggs has given rise to a horrific food system. Replacing beef with plants would reduce CO<sub>2</sub>e (greenhouse gases that are considered carbon dioxide equivalents) by 96 percent. Agricultural

emissions can be limited through smarter livestock handling, technologies that monitor fertilizer and antibiotic use, and an overall commitment to more efficient agricultural techniques.

Consider purchasing local and pasture-based meat and dairy. These practices decrease industrial waste, carbon and methane emissions, transportation emissions, animal suffering, and the pitiless influence of corporate capitalism. Animal welfare, job security, grasslands, land sustainability, even *rejuvenation*, and ultimately the sacredness of bodies – animal and human – are all enhanced by supporting certain types of farming. Regenerative agriculture is an essential step to reviving our relationship with the land.

### Defying Peer Pressure

For some, it will be an easy decision to embrace these changes. For others who, like myself, succumb to peer pressure when dining out or lack available local options, it can take longer. I still make mistakes trying to do my best. But recognizing shortcomings while making one small change at a time can establish long-term habits. Programs like the ASPCA's Shop With Your Heart show how consumers have the power to change the fate of the planet three times a day. They promote farmers and brands that are making responsible farming central to their business. If we as Christians believe climate change is an ethical crisis in need of moral reform, let's learn to shop with our hearts. Supporting farmers who not only care about the food animals but also the sparrows and all wildlife is a necessary step to reconnecting with our food and reconnecting with our faith.

I now think about rituals differently. Sacraments are everyday embodiments of the Logos. Church includes an open field with the summer sun beaming down, with cattle and pigs in the distance, and sparrows catching their dinner in midair. Once we realize our actions are spiritually charged, we can honor the Logos with every decision we make, striving to heal all of planet Earth.

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*Julia Johnson '18 M.Div. is studying for an M.S. degree in Anthrozoology from Canisius College and works as Manager of the Farm Animal Welfare Department for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.*

### Notes

- 1 See "Animal Agriculture Impact on Climate Change," [climatenexus.org](http://climatenexus.org).
- 2 Ibid.



USSR-era oil derricks, Azerbaijan  
© A. Abbas/Magnum Photos

Barreling down interstate the other day, I winced at the irony and self-defeat: I was motoring to the recycle center, a 16-mile round trip, burning gas all the way. I was going 60 MPH, keeping up with the heavy traffic, all of us hurtling at lethal speeds, starting straight ahead, just trying to get from point A to B without incident. Half of us were on our phones.

At such moments it's plain to see our plan for meeting climate change. It looks like we're just going to take our chances, keep buying big cars and ride out the storms, wildfires, and supernova heat. If we keep moving fast enough, maybe catastrophe will just happen vaguely somewhere else.

Last year a Gallup Poll said most Americans don't think climate change will pose a serious threat in their lifetime. Discussion is now ritually partisan, a Democrat vs. GOP spectacle.

We treat climate denialism as a problem to be solved by coolly presenting the hard data until the skeptic finally sees reason. But the clash over climate goes deeper than evidence. Many people hear "climate change" as a euphemism for broader government control – new layers of regulation, a campaign to restrain individual freedom, a threat to the American way of life in the carbon economy. Scientists underestimate this perception – the "political claims implicit in climate change," says theologian

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**At the recycling bins, people looked happy. We were all citizens again, doing something positive together. It's not enough. It's just a start.**

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Michael Northcott. Political conservatives regard the findings of scientists to be not impartial but politically charged, hostile to consumption culture, an attack on a national faith in individual preferences.<sup>1</sup>

The problem extends beyond cultural politics of left versus right. The arc of Western culture itself reflects an inability to take collective action, because the climate change challenge (so far) is at cross-purposes with a central concept of the modern era: the idea of freedom and liberation, according to writer Amitav Ghosh.<sup>2</sup> The world of nature has little relevance to this calculus. Hence the paucity of literary efforts that grapple with global warming, he argues. For a century, the mainstream of novels, art, and pop culture has cared more about the intricacies of personal consciousness, inner journeys, and self-discovery than planetary healing.<sup>3</sup>

By now our "Great Derangement" is well advanced. The focus on the personal – on authenticity, relatability, celebrity – has spread to politics. Street-wise mobilization yields to social media, a universe

of opinionated individuals. Partisanship looks like a new version of pollution: profitable for its producers, poison to the rest of us. The resulting paralysis suits our elites; their power consolidates. Yet these same



Greta Thunberg

powerful elites appear unable to face a transnational climate crisis. Rational self-interest looks inadequate. A rock-solid assumption of the last 400 years – the pursuit of individual interest always leads to the general good – may not be enough to meet such a collective problem.<sup>4</sup>

But impatience is pushing change. Sweden's unstoppable Greta Thunberg, age 16, has triggered a global protest by young people who are tired of the adults' dithering. See her TedxStockholm talk, where she declares: "Yes we do need hope. Of course we do. But the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere."

Nobel economics laureate Paul Romer of NYU talks of "conditional optimism": We have the power to reduce emissions, starting with an emissions tax. Dozens of US cities and states have pledged to abide by the Paris climate agreement.

Ghosh finds hope especially in religious communities. Their worldviews are larger than the blinkered imperatives of the nation-state. They're capable of rallying millions to a cause larger than the individual. Standing by the light of the sacred, they teach the acceptance of human limits. This will take some doing, of course. Religions can be as internally divided and embattled as a political party.

To more and more people, it's obvious that individual habits aren't enough. Extreme weather is waking earthlings up. We have to start electing politicians who care about green policies. And support renewable-energy businesses. And stop wasting food. We need more efficient power grids and higher fuel efficiency standards – right now.

When I got to the recycling bins, lots of people were there. They looked happy. For a few minutes we were all citizens again, doing something positive together. It's not enough. It's just a start, maybe the prelude to a new start. The future is waiting to see what that will look like, and when.

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*Ray Waddle is editor of Reflections.*

## Notes

- 1 Michael Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (Eerdmans, 2013), p. 20.
- 2 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago, 2016), p. 119.
- 3 Ghosh, p. 120.
- 4 Ghosh, pp. 130-136.

## NAMING THE HEARTBEATS

By Aimee Nezhukumatathil

I've become the person who says Darling, who says Sugarpie, Honeybunch, Snugglebear – and that's just for my children. What I call my husband is unprintable. You're welcome. I am his sweetheart, and finally, finally – I answer to his call and his alone. Animals are named for people, places, or perhaps a little Latin. Plants invite names for colors or plant-parts. When you get a group of heartbeats *together* you get names that call out into the evening's first radiance of planets: a quiver of cobras, a maelstrom of salamanders, an audience of squid, or an ostentation of peacocks. But what is it called when creatures on this earth curl and sleep, when shadows of moons we don't yet know brush across our faces? And what is the name for the movement we make when we wake, swiping hand or claw or wing across our face, like trying to remember a path or a river we've only visited in our dreams?





On a sweltering morning last summer, I found myself at a weekly staff meeting of an urban land trust. We convened around a conference table in a windowless room, shivering as arctic air blasted throughout the building. After reporting on the city's nature preserves and community gardens, we turned to an upcoming event on climate change. In the middle of our brainstorming session, the question was raised: "How we can get religious communities on board with climate change? Anna, you're at the Divinity School, right?"

My summer internship was tied to the forestry side of the joint degree program – YDS and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies – so I usually brought ideas on land management or ecosystem science. This was the first time I drew upon the divinity side. Without forethought, the words shot out of my mouth: "Easy! Just replace 'environment' with 'creation' and that should do it."

My response was met with blank stares and questions about the meaning of creation.

For me, incredulity at the intersection of religion and environment is not unusual. This is the point of getting two such master's degrees at the same time. Before coming to Yale, I had visions of poring over books in its many libraries and pursuing a quiet life of research on the environmental ethics of world religions. What a dream! Over these past two and a half years, however, those types of moments are rare. Instead, I'm called on to be the theologian in environmental spaces, and the environmentalist in religious ones. This plays out in the ways my divinity and forestry classmates discreetly approach me:

- "I'm in the military, so you know who my boss is, right? So it goes against my job description to believe in global warming. But I was living on an island this summer and saw the sea level rise before my eyes. I can't deny what I see. What do you recommend I do?"
- "Hey Anna, can you help me here? That speaker seemed to say that animals and plants are equal to people, and that goes fundamentally against my theology."
- "You know, I've always felt a spiritual connection to nature, but I'm not necessarily religious. Do you study anything about that?"
- "Wait, you're a divinity student? What does that mean? What do you study? I guess I can tell you that I'm religious, but I don't really talk about it here."

Though my answers vary depending on the situation, without fail the conversations that follow include me clarifying and explaining terminology. The

use of language, of specific word choice, carries an immense power in the ways we understand each other. The value of vocabulary – of choosing words carefully, whether it be *environment* or *creation* – is at the core of my lived research as a joint degree student. Many words or phrases are synonymous, yet people tend to interpret phrases differently depending on their background.

While I officially study how the environment intersects with religious worldviews, I socially experience how people react when religion (or ecology) enters a conversation – with FES classmates who admit religious belief or YDS students who confess environmental uncertainty. I don't have the remedy to get everyone on the same page, but I'm practicing how to help people get there. So, if you're the lone eco-conscious individual in your religious community, or if you're the only religiously conscious member of a team doing environmental work, here are some tips that have helped me:

When talking to religious people about the **environment**:

1. Anywhere you'd say *environment*, swap it out for the word *creation*.
2. Instead of saying *natural resource use* or *land stewardship*, say *creation care* or *caring for creation*.
3. Start using these words and phrases interchangeably. "Taking care of the environment, or creation, is crucial for future generations."

When talking to environmental people about **religion**:

1. Anywhere you'd say *religion*, swap it out for the word *worldview*. (This emphasizes spiritual ways of thinking within and beyond religious institutions.)
2. Instead of saying *sacraments* or *liturgy*, say *practices* or *rituals*.
3. Start using these words and phrases interchangeably. "Many opinions on caring for the earth are influenced by religions, or worldviews."

These adjustments might seem insignificant, but even small changes in our vocabulary incite powerful change. One of my siblings has resorted to telling people I go to Hogwarts; where else could "forestry" and "divinity" exist in the same sentence, if not in fiction? I'll tell you where: My joint degree not only exists but is necessary in a world where "belief" and "climate change" play out daily in national headlines. Whether I use the words *environment* or *creation*, however, depends on which hat I decide to wear.

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*Born in Sandy, Utah, Anna Thurston will graduate with a Yale joint degree in religion and ecology in May 2019. She plans to pursue a vocation at the intersection of religion, environmental science, and the arts..*



Sioux protest camp, Cannon Ball, North Dakota  
© Larry Towell/Magnum Photos



As the Catholic priest Richard Rohr has said, “We do not think ourselves into a new way of living, but we live ourselves into a new way of thinking.”<sup>1</sup> I will soon be re-entering the world as a minister, and I have many questions for Father Rohr about how I will live my way into that new way of thinking.

I spend a lot of time contemplating how to do the work of living out my faith authentically in my day-to-day existence. Beyond creed and doctrine, what do I do each day to live out the teachings of Jesus

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**Nature is not suffering alone. We’re suffering too. This is precisely the moment when faith should step in.**

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in the world? I continually pray to God for God’s blessings and mercy on the suffering in my midst.

Nowhere is this work more urgent for me than in my interaction with the natural world. My deep love for God’s creation and my anger-filled despair over humanity’s damage to it fuel my desire to live out a faithful love of nature in my ministry. To that end, I strive to do the practical things one might expect: I follow a mostly plant-based diet, I buy local produce, I recycle and compost my waste and I use only cruelty-free (i.e. no animal testing) beauty and cleaning products. At YDS, I co-lead the student environmental group FERNs (Faith, Environment, Religion, Nature and Spirituality) and have purposefully spent the last three years helping to organize conferences, producing a journal on religion and ecology, hosting guest speakers and film screenings, leading trash pickups and more, all in the effort to inspire my fellow students to care more about God’s gift of creation and to defend it from the forces that seem intent on its destruction.

All of that is valuable. All of that is good. And yet, for me, there is a void in this work that remains to be filled. We agonize over the biodiversity loss, the fracking damage, and the rising sea levels. But then, all too often, we sigh and shake our heads, turning back to the work in front of us. We manage to push away the anxiety we feel in our hearts over the seemingly distant environmental ruin. This is the moment when that void exists for me – when we disengage and leave nature to suffer alone. But the truth is, nature is not suffering alone. We’re suffering too. This is precisely the moment when faith should step in. This is the place where I hope my ministry will provide a bridge.

In my faith tradition, Unitarian-Universalism, one of our seven principles affirms a “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”<sup>2</sup> When we shake our heads at the climate crisis and turn away, we are denying that interdependence and shirking our responsibility. I do not question the legitimate anger, fear, and overwhelming despair that many feel, but we are letting that fear win when we do not acknowledge our capacity to protect the other members of our interdependent web. I am just as guilty when it comes to this pattern. But we cannot afford to keep our backs turned. We need to live ourselves into a new way of thinking about our relationship to the world around us.

I am lucky to live close to the mountainous ridge of East Rock Park in New Haven. When I walk that park, as I try to do frequently, I find the calm presence of God among the trees and the rocks and the birds. The late Mary Oliver wrote in her magnificent poem “Wild Geese” that the world “calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”<sup>3</sup>

I feel that calling so strongly there, a calling that tells me that the *practice* of my faith is what matters most – that my ministry is meant to help fill that void left by our climate change despair. One practical way I hope to do this is to one day open a retreat center, with a working farm and animal sanctuary, to help my fellow humans rediscover *their* place in the family of things. I want my ministry to invite others to contemplate the reality that our God is a God of *every living thing*. The more we can live ourselves into this way of thinking, in partnership with this planet, the better we are able to repair the damage we have wrought on creation.

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*A native of New Orleans, Emily Bruce came to YDS after a 20-year career in the theatre industry. After graduation in May, her vocational plans include a congregational internship, ordination, college interfaith chaplaincy, and an environmental ministry.*

## Notes

- 1 This is one of eight core principle of the Center for Action and Contemplation, an organization based in Albuquerque and founded by Rohr. See [cac.org](http://cac.org).
- 2 See [www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles](http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles).
- 3 Mary Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poetry of Mary Oliver* (Penguin, 2017), p. 347.

# A Worship Space of Earthly Connection



By Dennis Patrick O'Hara

*Given the influence of Passionist priest Thomas Berry (1914-2009) on the leadership of St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish in Toronto, it was not surprising that his call for mutually enhancing Earth-human relationships that honor the sacredness of creation would inspire the green design of that parish's church, resulting in a new church building and a fresh theological witness.*

Built in 1952-53, the previous church was well past its prime by 1998 – both structurally with the rise of energy costs and liturgically with the changes brought by the Second Vatican Council. Architect Roberto Chiotti, a St. Gabriel's parishioner who studied theology through the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at the University of St. Michael's College, was hired to design a church that would demonstrate the link between the sacredness of the gathered faith community and the sacredness of the rest of creation. Following consultations with

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**As Lent gives way to Easter, the sun's ascending arc brings richer colors into the worship space, until the full riotous collage of colors reaches down the walls and onto the floors in a joyous celebration.**

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the parish community and with Berry himself – who inspired so many in the ecological movement worldwide – Chiotti shepherded the building of an award-winning, environmentally sensitive green church that opened in 2006.

By locating most of the parking spaces below ground and giving preference to car-pooling, alternative energy vehicles, and cyclists, St. Gabriel's could build its new church on a much smaller urban lot – and allow gardens to predominate rather than paved asphalt. When parishioners ascend from the parking garage into the narthex via a sun-filled

staircase, they are met by a living wall of plants who filter the air of impurities year-round while serving as humidifiers in the winter and dehumidifiers in summer months. The sound of water trickling over the plants' roots reminds the parishioners of their baptism, their entrance into the faith community.

## **That Other Book of Revelation**

In the worship space, the parishioners take their places in the antiphonal seating, and when turning to hear the Scripture readings, they also look through the argon-filled glass panes along the entire south wall and gaze on that other book of revelation – creation. The enormous southern window permits the winter sun with its low arc to provide most of the heat during the cold months, while a large southern overhang from the roof furnishes cooling shade when the summer sun arcs higher in the sky.

The other three walls are made of exposed architectural concrete, framed at their summit by stained-glass skylights in the roof. As the sun ascends in the sky, light passing through colored glass panels projects rich hues of yellow, green, red, blue, and purple. These colors gradually move down the bare walls and eventually onto the floor, in sync with Earth's rotation. The sun's presence creates the liturgical space with the faithful and reminds them of their profound connection with the rest of the sacred Earth community.

Reflecting the links between the cosmic and liturgical seasons, the sun's low arc across the winter sky results in muted light through the stained glass, emphasizing the darkness of the winter solstice in

contrast to the new light of hope offered by the birth of Christ. Similarly, as the Lenten season gives way to Easter, the gradual ascent of the sun's skyward arc brings richer colors into the worship space, until the full riotous collage of colors once again reaches down the walls and onto the floors in a joyous celebration.

### **Eco-theology in Action**

In addition to reawakening the parishioners to the cosmological sensibilities of their Catholic faith, the design of the new church has reduced the ecological footprint of their building (63 percent less energy and 47 percent less water consumed, with 13 percent

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**The new church design has reduced the ecological footprint of the building, using 63 percent less energy and 47 percent less water consumed.**

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of the building's materials salvaged from the old church). Parishioners sit in pews recycled from the previous church, and face a baptismal font, pulpit and altar made of reclaimed marble from the old building.

Yet even before the new green church, the congregation explored themes of eco-theology, eco-spirituality, and eco-justice for years through homilies, pastoral programs, and monthly EcoSabbath Gatherings (eco-theological reflections on the lectionary readings for that Sunday). After decades of such ministry, the promulgation of Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato si'*, in 2015 seemed to validate the foresight and focus of Thomas Berry and St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish.

### **Back to the Garden**

One example of how the spirit of this deepening eco-praxis shapes the parish is the work of the Garden Ministry. By allowing plants to grow as they wished for several years, the members of the garden ministry learned about the various types of soils and micro-ecosystems that covered the church grounds. They were then able to plant specific types of vegetation to rehabilitate and enhance the biodynamics of different sections of the gardens. Finally, after a couple of years of repair and rejuvenation, they replanted the gardens yet again, using the permaculture principles of Hügelskultur to encourage moisture retention and natural fertilization from organic decomposition in the soils.

This latest version of the gardens includes a north garden that borders on a residential street, creating an interactive urban orchard. Not only has the garden-orchard increased parishioners' aware-

## **PEONIES**

By Jim Harrison

The peonies, too heavy with their beauty,  
slump to the ground. I had hoped  
they would live forever but ever so slowly  
day by day they're becoming the soil of their birth  
with a faint tang of deliquescence around them.  
Next June they'll somehow remember to come alive again,  
a little trick we have or have not learned.

ness of their bioregion and their appreciation for the sacredness and beauty of creation, it has nurtured a sense of community among the gardeners in our midst, stirred the interest of the parish youth group, and welcomed unexpected interactions with our neighbors, both human and otherwise, including residences for the latter and food for both. In a busy urban neighborhood, the garden-orchard provides a peaceful sensory space of sight, smell, and touch where people can simply be, or be with other members of Earth's communities, or spend time reflecting and renewing. The principles of integral ecology promoted in *Laudato si'* are flourishing throughout the parish land and its pastoral works.

### **Distress and Renewal**

Even as the homilies and EcoSabbath Gatherings explore the complexities of our ecological challenges from theological, spiritual, and justice perspectives, providing both insight and hope, the building and the gardens witness to the same without spoken words. They situate the parishioners and our neighbors within a larger Earth community that is both distressed and renewing, just like the humans who share this plot of land known as St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish. They remind us that we are part of a sacred and purposeful universe that continues to inform and nurture, despite our missteps, always welcoming our efforts to act in ways that are mutually enhancing for us and the rest of God's good creation.

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*Dennis Patrick O'Hara, a member of St. Gabriel's Passionist Parish in Toronto, is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Michael's College and director of the Elliott Allen Institute of Theology & Ecology at the University of Toronto. See [stgabrielsparish.ca](http://stgabrielsparish.ca) for more information.*





Brighton, England  
© Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos

## ANNUNCIATION

By Tracy K. Smith

I feel ashamed, finally,  
Of our magnificent paved roads,  
Our bridges slung with steel,  
Our vivid glass, our tantalizing lights,  
Everything enhanced, rehearsed,  
A trick. I've turned old. I ache most  
To be confronted by the real,  
By the cold, the pitiless, the bleak.  
By the red fox crossing a field  
After snow, by the broad shadow  
Scraping past overhead.  
My young son, eyes set  
At an indeterminate distance,  
Ears locked, tuned inward, caught  
In some music only he has ever heard.  
Not our cars, our electronic haze.  
Not the piddling bleats and pings  
That cause some hearts to race.  
Ashamed. Like a pebble, hard  
And small, hoping only to be ground to dust  
By something large and strange and cruel.



It is abundantly clear that the environmental crisis is ecumenical in the sense that it is relevant to the quality of life for everyone alive today – rich and poor. Yet it is dwarfed by the implications for future generations: Our rapidly degrading environment – if unchecked – will be the greatest environmental injustice issue of all time.

So how can we lift our eyes from our handheld devices, and the tyranny of instant response expected in our cyber-dominated world, to understand, confront, and properly address the environmental challenge with collective benefit for all? How might we embrace the wonders of nature – the creation – in the spirit of Pope Francis's *Laudato si'*? How might we regain a sense of frugality, a sense of community with all people and the rest of life on Earth?

We should not think about the story of Noah in the Abrahamic faiths as some quaint or improbable tale. Rather we should recall that when the flood was abated, and Noah and the animals were able to

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**As the environmental drumbeat gets more insistent and overcomes skepticism, I believe we are edging closer to a tectonic shift toward sustainability.**

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leave the Ark, God promised Noah *and* the animals that he would never inflict such an action again. He sent a rainbow – which in modern terms might be thought of as representing the diversity of life on Earth – as evidence of his Covenant.

Sir David Attenborough said memorably at Davos in January: “The Garden of Eden is no more.” But he also held out hope with a menu of positive actions we can all pursue for a better future for all of life on the planet.

This is a complex challenge. The choice before us is not whether we affect the environment or not. Just by drawing a breath we do. The problem, of course, is that no organism, human or otherwise, can exist without affecting its environment. Rather, we face a more sophisticated and highly intricate challenge of how we affect it, in what ways, and to what extent. It is an illusion to think of ourselves as apart.

Our challenge is laid out with great clarity by the “Planetary Boundaries” (proposed by a group of earth scientists in 2009) that show how we are exceeding the conditions that nurtured the rise of human civilization – in climate change, the use of nitrogen, and soaring rates of extinction, among

others. The only sensible conclusion is to withdraw – while we still can – to the “safe operating space” for humanity.

The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals – whatever their inadequacies – are an attempt to guide humanity in that direction. On one level they have been a success because following on the heels of the Millennium Development Goals, huge numbers of people have been lifted above the poverty level. At the same time we need to recognize the increasing pressures on the environment and the living natural resource base (the planet's vast genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity) in particular.

If anything, our increasingly crowded planet should make us value it more. Whatever our adventures in space, it is impossible for more than a few humans to escape to another planetary body. And why should we even want to when we have a planet that is inhabited and modulated by a vast number of other life forms all wondrous and each capable of making more of themselves and giving rise to new ones? In that sense we still are on a Garden Planet and should care for it appropriately.

Much as environmental destruction is partly a consequence of our cleverness and fixation on one another as social primates (to the exclusion of the larger environment), so too is our ability to rise above that commonplace and produce works of great art, science, and the human spirit. I believe the key to that “better side” resides within each one of us, awaiting to be awakened to a higher calling. This is all more likely to emerge to the extent we engage with the magic of other living things and the world of nature.

The years since the triumph of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement – as a key first concrete global step toward sustainability – have been difficult, hindered by selfish politics and deliberate strategies of denial. Some of that may be partly self-inflicted by progressive governments having taken the rest of human society for granted – an important lesson for all.

Yet as the environmental drumbeat gets louder and more insistent, and overcomes skepticism and denial, I believe we are edging closer to a tectonic shift toward sustainability. For that to succeed, we will need to embrace all sectors of society, to listen and learn extensively, and form solutions that bring benefit to all. Institutions of faith should have a central role and provide strong and caring leadership.

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*Thomas Lovejoy is a professor in the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at George Mason University and a senior fellow at the United Nations Foundation. He was Yale's annual Dwight H. Terry Lecturer in 2018.*



Wind farm generating renewable energy, Brandenburg, Germany  
© Chien-Chi Chang/Magnum Photos

## CREDITS

### Reflections Spring 2019 Yale Divinity School

#### COVER ARTWORK

*Crucified Land* (1939, oil on canvas)  
by Alexandre Hogue (1898-1994)  
Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK

#### POETRY

**Jim Harrison** (1937-2016) was the author of more than 30 books, including the novella *Legends of the Fall*. His collections of poetry include *The Shape of the Journey: New and Collected Poems* (2000), *In Search of Small Gods* (2009), and *Dead Man's Float* (2016), all published by Copper Canyon Press.

"Peonies" from *In Search of Small Gods*. Copyright © 2009 by Jim Harrison. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press. See [coppercanyonpress.org](http://coppercanyonpress.org). "Zona" from *Dead Man's Float*. Copyright © 2016 by Jim Harrison. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press. See [coppercanyonpress.org](http://coppercanyonpress.org).

**Elizabeth Herron** is the author of four poetry chapbooks and a collection of short fiction. She contributed to a new anthology called *Fire and Rain: Ecopoetry of California*, edited by Lucille Land Day and Ruth Nolan (Scarlet Tanager, 2018).

"On Fire" Copyright © 2019 by Elizabeth Herron. Reprinted with permission of the poet.

**Pablo Neruda** (1904-1973) was a Nobel-prize winning Chilean poet who also held diplomatic posts for his nation in Europe and East Asia. His poetry includes *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* (Penguin Classics, 2006), *Residence on Earth* (New Directions, 2004), and *The Heights of Macchu Picchu* (Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1967). Collections published by Copper Canyon Press include *The Book of Questions*, *The Yellow Heart*, and *The Separate Rose*.

Poem "XIV" from *Stones of the Sky*. Copyright © 1970 by Pablo Neruda. Translation Copyright © 1987, 2002 by James Nolan. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press. See [coppercanyonpress.org](http://coppercanyonpress.org).

**Aimee Nezhukumatathil** is the author of four collections of poetry, most recently *Oceanic* (Copper Canyon Press, 2018). Her writing has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry*, *New England Review*, and the *Best American Poetry* series. She is poetry editor at *Orion* magazine and teaches at the University of Mississippi.

"Naming the Heartbeats" from *Oceanic*. Copyright © 2018 by Aimee Nezhukumatathil. Reprinted by permission of Copper Canyon Press. See [coppercanyonpress.org](http://coppercanyonpress.org).

**Tracy K. Smith** is the author of four volumes of poetry, including *Life on Mars* (Graywolf, 2011), which won the Pulitzer Prize. Her latest is *Wade in the Water* (Graywolf, 2018). She is Poet Laureate of the United States.

Tracy K. Smith, "Annunciation" from *Wade in the Water*. Copyright © 2018 by Tracy K. Smith. Reprinted with permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, MN, [graywolfpress.org](http://graywolfpress.org).

**William Stafford** (1914-1993) was the author of more than 50 books of poetry. He was also a Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress and served as poet laureate of Oregon. His memoir *Down in My Heart: Peace Witness in War Time* (1947) recounts his experiences as a World War II conscientious objector.

William Stafford, "Outside" from *The Way It Is: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1960, 1998 by William Stafford and the Estate of William Stafford. Reprinted with permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, MN, [graywolfpress.org](http://graywolfpress.org). William Stafford, "What Gets Away" from *Even in Quiet Places*. Copyright © 1996 by The Estate of William Stafford. Reprinted with permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, MN, [graywolfpress.org](http://graywolfpress.org).



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Lecture II – Thursday, Oct. 17, 10:30 a.m.

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•

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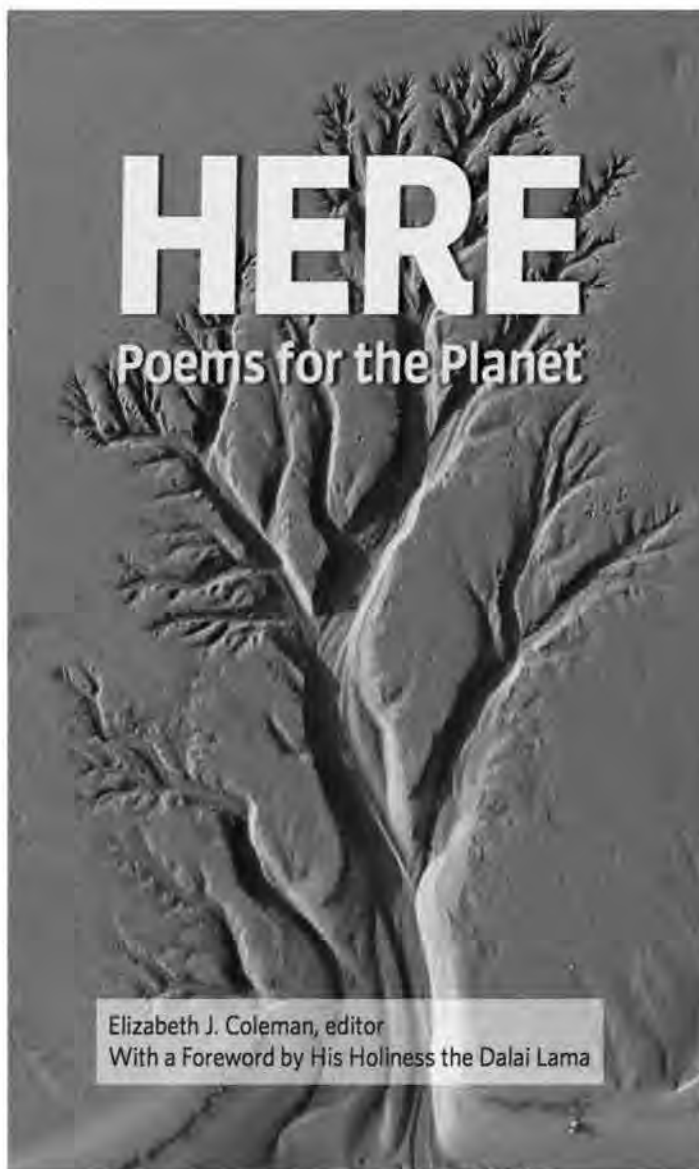
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# From the Editor: Earth Days

By Ray Waddle



April 1970 was a momentous month. The Beatles broke up. The White House secretly ordered bombing in Cambodia that escalated the Vietnam War. Apollo 13's crippled moonshot mission improvised heroic measures to get safely home. And, on the 22nd, the first Earth Day was organized to revive real affection for the planet.

In streets and parks, some 20 million people showed up for that initial earth celebration to protest oil spills, toxic dumps, and other never-punished environmental sins. The festivities broke into the national psyche. Republicans and Democrats – both sides paid attention. By the end of the year, just seven months later, the US had an Environmental Protection Agency, a Clean Air Act, a Clean Water Act, and an Endangered Species Act.

By now Earth Day activism is stirring in 190 countries, focusing on climate disruption and green energy. See [earthday.org](http://earthday.org) for ambitious plans afoot for Earth Day 2020, the 50-year anniversary.

Over that same five-decade span, churches have been doing their own soul-searching about God's green earth. Early on, though – almost immediately – theological momentum got derailed over whether love of the planet clashed with Christian beliefs. In Genesis, God created a world and called it good. Yet that cosmic charter statement wasn't enough for believers who claimed to worry that environmentalism endorsed nature worship and devalued human prerogatives.

An essay in 1967 drew up a more sweeping accusation against Christian doctrine. Historian Lynn White Jr. (a churchgoer) argued that the ecological crisis – plain to see in 1967 – came out of Western Christian attitudes of conquest of nature that were 700 years old. The dynamism of science and technology itself reflected a Christian assumption that humans are the rightful masters of nature. In earlier centuries, a rainbow was an impressive symbol of hope, reverberating back to Noah. The age of science turned it into a disenchanting affair of optics and meteorology. The whole concept of the sacred grove, White wrote, became alien to the ethos of the West.

But White proposed a corrective, and found it within Christian tradition: St. Francis of Assisi. Francis thought everything was created to the glory of the Creator. “The key to an understanding of Francis is his belief in the virtue of humility – not merely for the

individual but for man as a species,” White wrote. “Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures.”<sup>1</sup>

Francis died in 1220, a pious revolutionary. His views didn't prevail, or haven't yet. It's a sign of hope to many that the current pope, inspired by his namesake, has produced a powerful encyclical on environmental stewardship calling for principles of the common good, dialogue with science, new life routines, a sacramental regard for creation – an ecological conversion. He declares: “In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God ... Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.”<sup>2</sup>

Is this argument making its way to the center? There's lots of innovation going on at the edges. But what's happening in the middle range, where we drive and work and make dinner and go to church? We're entering an era of crisis decision, but scant pragmatic progress will be made unless people are moved existentially and theologically. We need not just an Earth Day but an Earth Decade, probably an Earth Century.

Big-picture policies are required for this, and poetry too. There are many policy solutions to pursue: Put a price on emissions (with fees or taxes), invest public money in clean energy and research, improve water management and power infrastructure, construct 100-percent clean-energy buildings, repair long patterns of injustice and cruelty. And poetry? A poem helps a reader step out of the crushing partisan loop, slow down time, sharpen observation, find resistance, reset one's coordinates. “I test the thickness of the universe, its resilience to carry us further than any of us wish to go,” Jim Harrison says in his poem “Cabbage.”

The writers of this *Reflections* issue are bearing news, pushing further, testing the thickness of this moment's potential to meet a crisis and its solutions. The health of future earth days is at stake.

## Notes

1. Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” March 10, 1967, *Science* magazine, pp. 1203-07.
2. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home*, May 24, 2015. See [w2.vatican.va](http://w2.vatican.va).



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