

Panel Presentation – Yale Divinity School  
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I could tell you about the things the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network of CT is doing around the state related to climate change, energy conservation and reducing toxins; things like the This Old House of Worship classes to learn how to do energy audits in places of worship or our just launched Cool Congregations program for individuals to reduce their carbon footprint in their own homes and lives, or the legislative advocacy we've been engaged in around getting toxins out of baby bottles and food and toys. But there's something else I'd like to share with you in the seven minutes I have. And that is a reminder that the most significant, deepest and lasting thing that religious communities do for individuals and the larger culture is to help shape a worldview. By worldview, I mean, how we see and understand life and how we approach answers to questions like, "Where do we come from? How did we come to be? Where are we going? What is the human place and purpose in life – my role? What is our relationship to others, to all the rest of life and to the Mystery of existence?" These are all the "meaning" questions, the spiritual questions, questions we in local congregations wrestle with all the time, and whatever answers we give to these questions, however tenuous

those answers may be, will shape how we “see” life and our human place and purpose in it.

We do this all the time in congregations. Through preaching and teaching, in our forms of worship and prayer, in our writing, scriptural interpretation, our mission work, what we promote and exclude, and all the other ways of being together, religious communities along with the family, educational institutions and the advertizing industry are one of the major shapers of our worldview in America (yes, advertising; and that may be the most profound shaper of our worldview today!). And it is out of one’s worldview that one lives because we can only see and know what our worldviews allow us to see and know.

And so, religious leaders, “on the ground,” “in the trenches,” in congregations, have a critical role in these times of monumental change to be constantly re-thinking our theologies, our images of God and prayer, in light of what is happening today in this age of ecological crises and what science has been telling us for about a hundred years about how the world really is!

I say this because quite often we jump over this, assuming that our particular cosmological is just fine because we want to get right to the “practical,” the “OK, thanks for the sermon, now what can we **DO** about it.” And yes, the hands on, boots on the ground, active response is critical and is part of the shaping of the worldview but please let us not neglect our fundamental responsibility for

intentionally shaping a worldview because if we do neglect this, what we end up doing in our congregations is some good work but with the same foundational understanding of life, the same worldview we've got now – with God up there or out there and us down here (separated from God, of course), and we humans (separate individuals, as well) from everything else down here (from which we are distinctly separated) and we people are the ones “in charge” primarily so that we take care of our needs. That's why the work of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm and Brian Swimme and Miriam MacGillis and others, and films like “The Journey of the Universe,” and what's happening with the Green Seminary Initiative and other stuff all over the place is so critical: all of these point to the truth that life is one and that the Universe has a story, a story we are part of, we belong to this story, and that whatever our particular religious/spiritual understanding of existence emerges from this story. Our religious symbols, mythologies, biblical stories and their interpretations need to be seen through a new lens and that is the most significant contemporary challenge of the church today (I can't speak for any other religious community): to 1) see the underlying reality of the biblical story of Jesus while reinterpreting that story through the lens of the emerging universe, and, 2) to see the work of the Divine in the new story and articulate that Presence in language and images that both embrace the tradition

and transcend it by evolving. The Spirit is calling us to evolve in the context of this evolving world.

I close by telling you about a place that I love in New Hampshire. It's in the White Mountains, part of the Sandwich Mountain Wilderness and it's bisected by a hiking trail that was originally worn down by deer and Moose and is now cared for with grace and skill by the Appalachian Mountain Club. The trail runs alongside a mountain stream which falls and dances, roars and sings on her way down the mountain side over boulders and fallen trees; always she's going down – down, down, down - as water always does seeking out the lowest places. The frigid white water pushes cool air over my usually sweat-soaked body as I pause to listen to the water on my way up the rather steep trail, taking in the songs and calls of half a dozen variety of birds. If it's spring or summer and you look up the mountain you'll see red and white, purple and blue wild flowers in bloom amidst grasses and pine, oak, maple, beech and birch trees; and if you keep looking, you'll see a sky so blue that it literally hurts your eyes. But keep looking and you may see Hawk, a red-tail usually, circling, gliding, usually without a beat of her wings on the updraft that takes her higher and higher.

This is a place that makes my heart sing and I pray there without words because words only diminish the sense of the Sacred Mystery I know there when I pause and pay attention. I'm in love with this place.

Jacques Cousteau said “You save what you love.” What do we love? Do we love what God loves? The first verse I memorized in the Bible was, “For God so loved the world.” The Greek word we translate “world” is cosmos. Of course it is. When we consider God, what else could it be: unlimited, unconditional inclusive love of all life, all life.

Our calling as religious leaders is to help people fall in love with life again, with ALL life - not with a world view or power, not with an ideology or political party, and not with a theology, church, doctrine or creed, but with life – to fall in love with life. And in the falling in love again, we can fall in love with the Creator of life and work together to restore and heal the world that God so loves.